

Community Center Task Force
October 10, 2023

Vice-Chair Anthony Law called the meeting to order at 6:07. Roll was taken. Present were Sharon Custer, Connie Dennis, Dave Hix, Ted Hoffman Darla Krejci, Anthony Law, Demarkius Medley, Maria Salsman, Adam Sampson and Jaclyn Smith-Esters. Missing was Debbie Clague, Cassie Crimotich, Carl Dortch, Tony Franklin and Grael Mulata.

A motion was made by Jaclyn Smith-Esters to approve the amended minutes from the September 26, 2023 meeting. Seconded by Maria Salsman. Motion passed unanimously.

The task force sub-committees gave their reports.

Core Amenities Committee (Maria Salsman, Connie Dennis & Sharon Custer). Maria Salsman reported that she had visited the YMCA, Recharge (the Teen Center in Monmouth), Lakeside Recreation Center and Hawthorne Gym. There was no other report given.

Youth/Teen Committee (Adam Sampson, Carl Dortch & Grael Mulata.) No report

Adult/Senior Committee (Tony Franklin, Ted Hoffman & Demarkius Medley). Ted Hoffman reported that he had visited the YMCA and was impressed with the activities available there for youth, seniors, adults and children. He said there is a lot of potential there down the road with the indoor playground. He also attended a scotch tasting at the new Symphony building. He reported they have space for many things there such as learning to play an instrument and voice lessons. Ted concluded by reporting that when he speaks to folks about a community center they often ask "Who's going to pay for it?" and "What is it going to cost?"

Non-profits/Service Organizations Committee (Jaclyn Smith-Esters and Darla Krejci). Jaclyn Smith-Esters reported on a meeting they had with Ann Ehler, Moderator at Central Congregational Church regarding how the city and the church might collaborate on a community center at the church. They reported the church is open to the conversation. Jaclyn and Darla reported they took a full tour of the church and there is a lot of available space, including a fully operational kitchen. The building does need repair, including a roof (which likely would cost \$500,000).

Galesburg City Facilities Committee (Tony Franklin, Cassie Crimotich and Dave Hix) Anthony Law reported that he had a conversation with Michael Spinks of All Sports Academy and Skate Palace. He commended Michael for taking a look at the needs of the community and acting on them by opening the Skate Palace and now adding a miniature golf course and plans for a sports facility. Anthony reported that Michael feels like he is standing alone in his efforts. Michael offers a lot of programs there besides the skating. Michael wants to know if he is going to be included, or left behind? Anthony reminded the task force that they needed to be inclusive in their plans. He stated that the city has invested in Michael's business venture, and it is only going to benefit the community.

Anthony Law continues by saying he has been hearing from people on the south side. They thought the new community center was going to be coming to the south side and that it could help rejuvenate the south side of the city. Tony went on to say we should also consider facilities the city already owns such as Lakeside, which has a lot of square footage and potential for growth. He remembers the excitement around it when it was built, but it has not been renovated for over 15 years. He reported that some of the employees at the rec center are concerned that if something new was built, the rec center would be left to deteriorate. Anthony summed it up by saying "Galesburg needs a lot of things, but Galesburg has a lot of things."

Adam Sampson asked if Michael Spinks had a business plan that he could share with the task force. Anthony Law said yes, but then amended his statement to say he has given Michael the resources to write a business plan.

New Business – Members of the task force were asked to share their vision of a community center. Maria Salsman shared some sketches she had made of her vision. She said she remembered someone talking about multi-generational learning, so she incorporated that into her sketches. Her sketches included a room with tables and chairs where people could gather and have meetings, a second room was a computer lab with computers, a white board and study areas, a third room was a game room with games including ping-pong and shuffleboard, and finally there was a room that included a kitchenette, picnic tables and an area for arts & crafts. She suggested the Galesburg Vocational Arts classes could build the picnic tables. She also suggested a room that could be rented out or used as needed by rotating programs. She also wanted to have showers and washers & driers installed somewhere (probably near the bathrooms.)

Connie Dennis presented her vision. For adults she envisioned a rental place for private events like birthday and anniversary parties. An area for adults to play cards, play games or do crafts. For the youth she envisions rental space, study space, a game room, space to hang out, room to have classes. She suggested classes in life skills, cooking, painting, budgeting, babysitting and that they could also have movie nights and trivia nights or music. She believes the community center should start “scaled down” but can grow as interest and needs and money allow. She suggests the community can help with the expenses. She agreed with Anthony Laws statement that the city has available facilities and she hopes we can all reach a consensus to present to the City Council.

Ted Hoffman said he toured the city owned property on Main Street where the Downtown Depot operates. He says it is centrally located, has several stories and could be renovated. He thinks the fact that the only place the task force could find to meet with enough space and a sound system was at Carl Sandburg College is a good example of the need for a community center. He clarified, that Sandburg is a great facility, but the community center needs to be in a more central location, and maybe a building the city already owns. Going on about the Main St. building, Ted said there is parking behind and there is potential for more parking when they tear down the two nearby buildings. He added that the bus route drops people off nearby. He believes having the community center in the center of town has the potential to bring the two sides of the community together.

Darla Krejci read her vision of a community center, which included possible locations (Central Congregational Church, St. Patrick's Church, the old ELKS building on the corner of E Ferris and N Prairie and the Wells Fargo building on the corner of E Main and S Cherry.) The report also included potential square footage for a new facility which could include community space, recreation space, a small kitchen, office space and classroom space. She estimated all this could be included in 6,000-7,500 square feet building which (based on the building cost of \$550/sq ft suggested by Adam Sampson at the last meeting) would cost between \$3,300,000 - \$4,132,700. A copy of Darla's report will be added to the google drive.

DeMarkius Medley said he believed we are all on the same page, we just need to find out what road to take. He believes writing a business plan is in order, where we can propose possible partnerships such as the YMCA, Lakeside and Michael Spinks. He suggests that perhaps the Y can take care of the needs of the teens and Michael Spinks' facility can address the need for sports. One need that needs to be addressed is childcare. DeMarkius referred to the letter we received from the Village Early Childhood Collaboration regarding the need for childcare and how we might work with them on this issue.

DeMarkius once again brought up the \$2.5 million cap. He questions if this cap is for everything or only a cap from the bond money. He reiterated that there are other fund available including money from ARPA funds, from Senator Halpin's office and Dick Durbin's office. He believes we should keep those numbers in mind, especially if we are going to be partnering with other organizations. He stressed the importance of coming up with a business plan.

DeMarkius mentioned a community center in Maywood, Illinois that has operated for over 50 years. He said they opened small and then grew. They were able to do this because they had a strong foundation. He believes we can come put together a plan and be an example to the city council on how we are ready

to compromise and make this community center happen. He would like to solve the problem of childcare, so people can get back to work.

Adam Sampson stated that he and DeMarkius had met and they both want the best outcomes for our families and kids. Adam said want to serve the youth, teens and seniors and we need to get together on this. We should ask "Who can deliver what?" He strongly believes it is all about the programming. Programming will have measurable outcomes. He wants us to consider how we can include Michael Spinks and the new library to achieve the best outcomes.

DeMarkius brought up the Oaks Senior Center and how they need to renovate. He mentioned how they claim they don't want to be around kids, but he also knows older people like to talk to him. He mentioned an older neighbor who loves to talk to him. These interactions are important. We need to reach out to these groups, even though we are not going to please everyone.

DeMarkius referred to the recent article about the task force which was very discouraging. He believes we can still come together.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters suggested it might be a good idea to step away from the issue of money. She stated the \$2.5 million is just the bond money; there is also the ARPA money, federal money, sales tax money. She went on to say that from what she's hearing now we could end up with "centers" all over town. She believes there should still be a "center." She equated it to the foyer of a house. When you come in a house the foyer is the center point from which you can go to other parts of the house depending on what you want to do. The community center can act as the Headquarters from which we can direct folks to where they need to go to reach the desired outcomes. She suggests the community center should be run by a 501(c)(3), which would keep us on task, because you are not going to make money unless you are reaching these outcomes. That we need to not duplicate but compliment and that transportation is going to have to come into play and staffing to run programs. She says there are grants available. She mentioned a Community Block grant.

Maria Salsman shared her concern about childcare. She wondered what happened to the various childcare programs that no longer exist. Anthony Law reported that Sandburg's childcare program closed due to a lack of student participants who staffed the facility. He said he is with a group called Birth to 5 and this is a statewide problem that they and the state are trying to address. The cost of becoming certified in childcare is not matched by the pay so people are not going into the field of childcare. He reported the state does have an action plan in place and that they are looking for answers.

Anthony Law shared his vision of a community center. He reported that he has looked at a lot of community centers and many of them are located in former schools. He believes Churchill is a good location, but it was presented incorrectly. He suggested we look at each room and designated it with a purpose. He continued by stating we wouldn't have to start with the whole school, but as we can show the success rate the community center could grow.

Anthony Law reiterated the importance of staffing and programming. He spoke about growing up in the community center. He said he can't tell you much about the building, but he could tell you about the staff. The custodian who told him he believed in him, the cook who made sure he was fed and the woman who helped him with his homework.

He went on to say that partnerships are a good idea. We cannot solve all the problems and not everyone is going to come to a community center. He understands the sentiment behind the people at the Oaks. He admits he is getting older and is set in his ways. It is hard to change mindsets. He asked how we can develop a plan so that there are "spiderwebs of support."

He brought up again that something needs to be put on the south side of town, or we won't be as inclusive as we want to be. He understands that this is not popular with some people, but he doesn't care. He care about the community.

Anthony Law suggested that we look at how we can tie into everything. We need to reach out to the experts in the community and ask them how we can enhance what they are doing, how we can serve them. He repeated how he got offended by first thing suggested was a gym. He believes in STEM, but he also understands that people need to be comfortable enough to learn. Having clean clothes, feeling safe makes folks feel comfortable enough to make connections. He's noticed there are videos on YouTube teaching basic life skills. We have a place to do this and it is Churchill. As for putting seniors and youth together, he sees that it can happen. They might not be best friends, but it offers the opportunity to start a discussion.

Maria Salsman admits she believes Churchill is too big.

Anthony Law suggests we look at the floorplans of all the buildings suggested and see what they have to offer. That if we designate a purpose for the space, easier for folks to imagine it.

DeMarkius Medley suggested that to keep the ball rolling he and Adam could put together a business plan. He believes the two of them are qualified to do so: Adam, as the CEO of the Y, and himself as someone with the reputation of being able to make things happen with the resources provided. He believes we should put together numbers and have a plan that shows what can be done in the various buildings that have been mentioned. He does want all our input but wonders how this can be done without violating the Open Meetings Act.

It was confirmed that up to four of us can meet without violating the OMA. E-mails were tricky because if you add in more than four in a thread, it does become a violation.

Ted Hoffman stated again that we need to do something centrally located. He suggests we make a list of what we want to see in a community center. He went on to say that it was not his responsibility to raise your children and it shouldn't be the city's responsibility either. He said it was not his responsibility to serve food to people. He says a list is what he wants to see and we can narrow it down. What he sees as a community center is a room, or maybe a couple of rooms where some services can be provided. He doesn't want to cut out the facilities the city already has. He admitted that Churchill could be open and used tomorrow, that the kitchen was left in excellent condition and that the building has a lot of potential. He just doesn't think that is what the community is looking at, and definitely the current City Council doesn't want Churchill.

Adam Sampson suggests we all work separately at what we believe are the top 10 amenities or programs we want in a community center.

Maria Salsman said we need to know what people want and vote on that. And everyone will need to compromise. She would like to look at St. Patrick's, and that she also liked the old library as a location. She agrees we should start small because we don't know what the needs will be in five years. She also said she heard from a teen that we should fundraise for the community center. She believes this is a good idea because it will then give people "ownership." She brought up the growing French Congolese population and what their needs might be.

Anthony Law stated that it is not about us individually, but about the community. He tasked us to look at the Community Survey that was done and find the top 10 things and then look at the various buildings available and see what spaces these buildings have to accommodate these needs. Think about the impact of serving the community. He suggests if we look at it this way we may end up eating our own words.

Maria Salsman stated that a building does not have to have everything. She went on to say that when she looks at the curriculum of the schools they are not offering what the kids are looking for. They don't want to be graded on things like cooking. They just want to learn how to cook so they can survive in their homes. The old library has no kitchen, so she asked about the Health Department's temporary license to do cooking classes. Would it be possible to rent out a kitchen to teach cooking classes. She suggests

that it was not that important to have everything in the beginning because it is possible to meet these needs by using other locations.

DeMarkius suggested that these questions could be answered in a business plan. DeMarkius went on to say he did not like what Ted said about it not being his job to raise your kids. DeMarkius said he was of the belief that it takes a village to raise a child. We have to help the community as a whole and if you don't believe this you shouldn't be on this task force.

This led to a discussion of childcare and whether it should be included in the community center. It is clearly a need of the community. It was suggested that childcare option could be in the business plan. That the business plan should be for the "dream" center and we can remove things as necessary. A suggested possibility is that the community center could dedicate space to childcare, but that it should be run by some other organization. Connie Dennis said this would be a wonderful opportunity for some entrepreneur to start a childcare service. It is desperately needed.

Tasks for next meeting – We are all to look at the Community Survey for top 10 needs and see how each of the suggested buildings can meet those needs. The floorplans of the various buildings will be put on the google drive. Adam and DeMarkius will work on business plan. We can reach out individually to either DeMarkius or Adam with our ideas.

Public Comment

Linda Miller said she is feeling very frustrated. She suggests we all need to actually go physically into the buildings and not just look at floorplans. She is very concerned with the idea of public money going to private organizations (such as the Y or Skate Palace). She says there is a problem with money going to a private entity to run something for you. She is okay with the city sponsoring programs that use these facilities, to go to the Y, or go skating. Her reason for saying this stems from the \$50,000 the city gave to the Carver Center for a new boiler and then when the facility burned down, that money did not come back to the city. We should be given a card with a list of all the money that has been set aside for a community center. As a committee we can say the \$2.5 million isn't enough to do what this community needs. She pleaded that we don't throw just chairs in a room and call it a community center.

Carolyn Grinder appreciates the meeting being in one location, but wonders why meetings cannot happen in City Council chambers where there is equipment to record and stream the meeting. The city owns the equipment, and we wouldn't have to pass a microphone around. She attests that there is enough room as the County Board uses is every month. Many people lack mobility to come to meetings and they would appreciate them being streamed or at least recorded and released.

Sam Cohen encouraged us to not discount ourselves. It is a valid concern that the Council won't pass something that some on the task force are suggesting, but he also thinks we were all placed on the task force because they trust us and value our opinions.

Jeannette Chernin agrees with some of what she heard tonight. That the center should be centrally located or on the southside. She agrees not everyone will come. She asked how many of task force members had actually been inside of Churchill. However, she disagrees with concern about replicating services as she believes right now we cannot give enough to kids. What the kids need is not on their Chromebooks, what they need is positive interactions. She wonders when we will realize that there is more than \$2.5 million available. She said she realizes she is ticking off some people, but she doesn't really care. It's all our responsibility to help raise each other's children. If you are rich, you have the money and resources to provide your children with opportunities. When you are poor, it is a different story. We all had help raising our kids. Unless you homeschooled and your child was not in sports or you coached every team they were on you had help raising your kids. No one raised their kids alone. She is afraid many on the task force have no idea what they are talking about when it comes to kids.

Mayor Schwartzman invited everyone to the Orpheum on Saturday, Oct. 21 at 1:00 for a screening of the movie Mully. He says it is a very inspiring movie and may help us formulate our thoughts about necessity of a community center.

Molly Miller asked where to access the top 10 list. She was answered it was the city survey and the results are available online. She said she is coming from the prospective of being a mother of 4. She also feels frustrated by what she is hearing at these meetings. She said the issue of childcare is important. Her youngest is four and in Headstart, but Headstart has not opened yet this year. Being a parent today is hard, especially after Covid and being home with her children all the time. She is someone who can provide for her children. She says there are many parents who do not have support in raising their children, no family and no childcare. Parents do not have a lot of options, and this is something we need to look at as a community. She takes her kids to parks and she sees a lot of kids roaming the parks without parent supervision. She said we as a community need to step up and be there for the kids who need us the most.

Willard Gatlin says he watches the City Council meetings on channel 7. He adamantly states that we need things for young people to do. We have the money, we have the places, the only thing stopping us is us. He is a product of the Carver Center; it was a big part of his growing up along with the church and his family. He is a product of Galesburg. He has been all over the country and Galesburg did a good job making him. We need to provide this opportunity and help the people.

Maria Salsman made the motion to adjourn. Seconded by Connie Dennis. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Darla Krejci

**The next meeting of the Community Center Task Force will be Tuesday, October 24 at 6:00.
Location to be announced.**