

Community Center Task Force

August 29, 2023

Before the meeting was called to order Elizabeth Varner addressed the audience. She explained that because of the way the members were set up in the room that there were no microphones. She announced that the next meeting would be held at the library. She also explained that the meeting would be run by the new Chair Tony Franklin because the Chairman elect, John Polillo resigned from the task force for personal reasons, so he now assumes the role as the Chairman.

Tony Franklin had the two members who did not attend the first meeting introduce themselves. Sharon Custer and Carl Dortch each gave a brief introduction.

Tony Franklin called the meeting to order at 6:04. Present were Cassie Crimotich, Sharon Custer, Connie Dennis, Carl Dortch, Tony Franklin, Dave Hix, Ted Hoffman, Darla Krejci, Anthony Law, Grael Mulata, Maria Salsman, Adam Sampson and Jaclyn Smith-Esters.

A motion was made by Cassie Crimotich to approve the minutes from the August 17, 2023 meeting. Seconded by Adam Sampson. Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Tony Franklin reviewed the agenda for the task force. He brought attention to Item 4 - Community Center Concepts and stated that the Task Force should be thinking about the top five components of a Community Center because we would be brainstorming on those concepts. He mentioned we would also be looking at Item 5 - Community Partners and thinking about what groups might be good partners in a community center. Mr. Franklin mentioned public comment would be 3 minutes and reminded everyone to be respectful.

Chair Franklin then referred to the page 7 of the Executive Summary He reviewed the five sites and estimated costs already looked at by the Farnsworth Group. The Vault was mentioned as a 6th potential temporary site.

Chair Franklin then had the group refer to questions 21 - 26 from the Community Satisfaction Survey. Chair Franklin suggested we take into consideration the results of the survey as we move forward. He suggested we use this data to determine community needs and gaps in services. He explained that he would like the group to make decisions based on data and not on personal opinion.

Maria Salsman asked if these were the results from the 433 survey answers received. She was answered affirmatively.

Question 24 concerned the maximum amount of funding Galesburg should invest in a Community Center. Elizabeth Varner pointed out that while 32% responded the limit should be 2 million or less, there were 37% of respondents were in favor of spending 5 million or more. She stated there is a soft cap of 2.5 million with an additional 1 million from Dick Durbin, the amount could increase. She also explained that the cost estimates might not fit the Task Force scope of the project the same way, so things can change. She mentioned the Task Force has a great opportunity here.

Tony Franklin asked us to think about how important is a community center?

Maria Salman questioned the 2.5 million cap. She asked for clarification on the term "soft cap." She asked if it was a rule. Jacklyn Smith-Esters said it is direction and when you are given a direction sometimes you find out it is not going to work. She stated she believes the city council wants to direct us to what the community wants and if we move towards that goal, the 2.5 million isn't enough. She believes we should go back to the 5 million that was originally bonded.

Tony Franklin referred to page 7 of the executive summary and how the cost of all five of the sights was more than 2.5 million.

Elizabeth Varner stated that the numbers the firm came up with was based on a scope of projects, which might be different than what the Task Force comes up with, so those numbers can change. Connie Dennis stated that if we've been given an amount that the City Council wants us to stay under, then the focus should be to meet that goal, because the Task Force must present this to the city council. She cautioned that if the Task Force can't present something the City Council will approve we are just wasting our time.

Tony Franklin referred to the data which showed constituents want more spent on a Community Center and said, "why did we bother gathering data if we aren't going to look at it".

Connie Dennis suggested the survey results are based on a very small number.

Cassie Crimotich asked about the survey; when it was done, how many surveys were sent out, and how it was sent out. She wanted to know how the data was captured. This led to a discussion on how the survey was conducted and the validity of the survey results.

Elizabeth Varner explained that the survey was done in July of 2022 by a firm hired by the city. It was a Community Satisfaction survey covering topics beyond the questions of a Community Center. It was done as a benchmark based on the strategic goals set by the council at that time. The survey covered city program, services and quality of life. Their goal was to receive 400 responses, and they exceeded that goal having received 433 responses. The respondents were deemed a good sample based on demographics. Wayne Carl concurred that the firm based the number of surveys sent out on census reports. The firm felt the numbers showed a proven sample. When asked how the survey results were collected Mr. Carl explained the surveys were mailed and results could be mailed in, but could also be fill out online on a computer or a phone.

It was mentioned that the complete survey results were available on-line.

Maria Salsman questioned whether the 80% white respondents were an accurate representation. Tony Law said it was an accurate representation of the demographics of the city.

Maria Salsman stated that she is not a financial person, and most people don't know the cost of things. She suggested that just because the people who responded said they want something, it doesn't mean it's doable.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters agreed that most people don't know the cost of things. Referring to pg. 7 she stated that is why a firm was hired to give us numbers. They do know the cost of things, and these are the numbers they came up with the information they were given. She said these numbers are more realistic of what a Community Center is going to cost and that 2.5 million is not going to get us much. Ms. Smith-Esters stated she believes the city does have the money to build a Community Center. The city is in good financial shape but needs to decide where they are going to spend the money. And Dick Durbin's office would not be offering money if they didn't believe we could do the project.

Adam Sampson asked if the Task Force needs to stick to the 2.5-million-dollar cap. Elizabeth Varner said the 2.5 is what the City Council felt comfortable with, but there is also the potential 1 million from Dick Durbin, which could increase the amount.

Tony Law suggested looking at the reality of the situation. This could be something that cost 50 million and realistically the council will not approve that. The 2.5 million is a guideline that the current council feels comfortable with, but they do want to hear what the Task Force has to say. With that said, if the Task Force comes back with a proposal that costs 15 million, it may fall on deaf ears. Mr. Law suggests that along with the cost of building a community center, we should also take into consideration the sustainability and operating costs of whatever building we decide on.

Ted Hoffman suggested moving the meeting along to determine what the Task Force wants before being able to determine the costs.

Maria Salsman asked if we could have two scenarios? One that stays within the 2.5 million cap and one that could be a dream project.

Tony Franklin said yes, or it could be a starting point, and here's what we would like to see down the line. He says there is always the chance that more money will become available. He states he wants the task force to have vision and not to limit ourselves based on financial concerns.

It was asked if teens were included in the survey. As they were sent to homeowners, the reality is they were not.

Chair Franklin referred the group to the response to question 26 -programs that should receive the most emphasis at a community/activity center. He suggested we should look at the data and identify gaps and where collaborations could be made. The group discussed the survey results. The need for daycare was pointed out. Tony Law said the need was there, but that finding workers was a problem. Cassie Crimotich added that the regulatory requirements were also a deterrent to childcare centers being able to operate. It was asked if King School still had childcare. It was reported that they do not. Adam Sampson reported that the YMCA had a licensed daycare and afterschool care.

Using this data, the task force members were asked to list their top five priorities. They could come from the list, or they could suggest their own. Before the activity started Maria Salsman suggested, and Connie Dennis concurred, that the data should be reviewed using only the top three priorities. Their reasoning was that the respondents had to rank all eight options, so looking at the total could be misleading.

Tony Law volunteered to tally the results on a whiteboard.

While results were being tallied conversation continued. Tony Franklin said he believes Task Force members all want to see a Community Center, otherwise we wouldn't be here. Maria Salsman reiterated that she believes we need to ask the kids. Since our focus seems to be on the kids, we need to see what they want. She suggested a survey done at the high school during their advisory or study hall time. Connie Dennis said she called the High School and was told small groups could come in during the lunch hours to talk to the kids. Sharon Custer said she's had a number of foster kids, some with ADHD. Those kids were only interested in when their checks came in. She said the Carver Center had a great program when they were in operation. Tony Law said the Youth Commission had done a survey of over 500 students and wondered if the data was still available. He also suggested that if a survey was to be done that students should be used to collect the data. He felt the students would "buy into it" more and take ownership if the surveys were student run. Tony Franklin said if Task Force collects data we need to listen to the data, look at "who's at the table" and who is not and bring those who are not to the table.

From the tallied results the top five priorities were:

Teen center, Stem classes, specialized classes, senior center, daycare.

Tony Franklin moved the group to item 6 on the agenda where breaking the group up into smaller groups to further research these ideas as they relate to a Community Center. This was somewhat confusing to some task force members.

Cassie Crimotich said she did research and the city has a lot of services already. She mentioned that a new one was opening soon.

Adam was concerned about duplicating services. He said the new library was going to offer stem classes, a teen area, etc. He believes the money would be better spent accentuating what is already there. That the Task Force needs to look at what is already offered and how it could be accentuated. He gave the example that if it is a lack of transportation, then that should be considered.

Marie Salsman and Connie Dennis both stated we are getting too far ahead of ourselves.

Tony Franklin brought the group's attention back to the task of group assignments. He asked everyone to pick a topic they were interested in. The groups assignments are:

Core amenities – Marie Salsman, Connie Dennis, Sharon Custer

Youth/Teens – Graef Mulata, Adam Sampson, Carl Dortch

Adults/Seniors – Ted Hoffman, Tony Franklin

Community services – Jackie Smith-Esters, Darla Krejci

City facilities – Anthony Law, Dave Hix, Cassie Crimotich

It was asked who should be contacted if data collected by city is needed. We are to ask Elizabeth Varner, as she is the City Liaison.

Reports are due at the next meeting. Each group should select a spokesperson to present their report.

Adam Sampson reported on the library tour. He said it is a beautiful facility the city should be proud of.

Marie suggested that the GHS Curriculum should be looked at also. For example, she looked and saw that a woodworking class was offered, but she did not know the class limitations.

Public Comment –

Carolyn Grinder commented it's great the high school offers woodworking, but if she tried to take the class she doubts she would be let in, as she is beyond high school age. She would really like to take a woodworking class.

John Peterson said money is only going to go to something that is thought to be a priority or a necessity. Teens want something to do and the space to do it in. There is also a need for indoor space as Illinois climate does not allow for outdoor activity in the winter. There are spaces in town already, like the Y, but these spaces are controlled as to who can use them. A kid can't use the Y if their family doesn't have a membership. He understands not wanting to saturate the city with the same kinds of spaces, but spaces for kids to do things that are fun look like gyms and courts and rooms.

Demarcus Medley – thanked the task force for their time, but is afraid some people don't want a Community Center and all this is a means to delay the process. The fact is Galesburg needs a Community Center. and he read some statistics from a report that supports the need. Every additional 10 non-profits in a community of 100,000 resulted in a 12% reduction in the homicide rate, a 10% reduction in violent crimes and 7% reduction in the property crime rate. He asked, based on these statistics what is the dollar amount you are willing to put on your or your family's safety? He talked about growing up in the west side of Chicago in an area with high homicide and unemployment rates. He credits the Community Center for saving his life. He attended the Community Center as a child and then worked at them as a teen and young adult. He thinks of a Community Center as a place where we pool our resources to pull each other up. Galesburg has no central location like this. He believes the Y is great, but it is a country club. They have strict rules and kids get kicked out before they gain the maturity needed to be allowed in the Y. In response to those who say a Community Center is only going to be a babysitter for kids, he says, he says that might be true, but if we don't do it, who is going to be watching the kids. The hours between 3:30 and 6:30 is the time most kids get in trouble, either through violence or unprotected sex. He told a story about a friend who was kicked out of a program and was shot and paralyzed the next week. If he hadn't been kicked out of the program, he would be walking today.

Bonnie Harris asked if any of the Task Force members had visited any Community Centers. If not, she suggests we should. She said the monetary cap should not keep us from a community center. She suggested there is grant money available, and if there isn't someone on the task force who knows how to find grant money, we should find someone who can. She said we shouldn't have to rely on money to do good for the whole community.

Linda Miller said that what we want in a Community Center is to unite the community. It is not about the money. It is about bringing together the young, the old and everyone in between. It's about volunteers

willing to work with kids and letting these kids know they are loved. Some don't get it at home, and some can't see it. She believes the 2.5-million-dollar cap is ridiculous. The former council approved a 5-million-dollar bond for the community center and the additional 1 million from the government means the cap should be 6 million. She said she hoped the task force members were there because they wanted a community center and not because they were doing the work of someone who doesn't. She reiterated the need for a community center. The kids need it, the adults need it.

Yannick Kapita said a Community Center should focus on the young in the city; that it should focus on education and technology so kids can learn all the things they don't know.

Gabriel Winecoop requested parenting classes. He stated he is a stay at home dad and would love some help parenting. He suggested a Community Center is a place for education and educating how to support each other. He likened it to an incubator to help anyone with a bright idea to get the resources and empowerment to achieve those ideas. Some suggestions include a recording studio, music studio, climbing wall and mentorships as possible Community Center programing.

Champ Coleman said non-profits don't need to be protected if they are doing their job well. The YMCA is not going to go away if we open a community center. If the lack of daycare is due to a worker shortage, then we need steer kids into programs that teach people how to be daycare providers. He says he knows daycare workers who make a lot of money. Mr. Coleman pointed out that at the last task force meeting the members were charged with defining a Community Center and at the end of meeting two this has still not been done. This is a failure on the part of the Task Force.

Diane Crock brought up the previous night's city council work session on the warming shelter and how some council members' minds were blown by the idea of homeless teenagers. She thought a lot of tonight's conversations didn't make sense. The 2.5-million-dollar cap was not a Community Center issue, but a political issue. It is also a "No Churchill" issue. The current council is set on making sure Churchill is not an option. She suggests we present what we can get for 5 million, what we can get for 6 million and what we can get for 2.5 million and let the community decide. She believes that the Task Force itself was a political issue, to make everybody feel warm and fuzzy, like we are still moving forward with a community center. She thinks there are conflicts of interest, particularly regarding the police and fireman pensions. She suggests that there is political motivation to put the money for a Community Center into pensions instead. The pensions are behind, but why should the kids have to pay the price for previous bad management.

Ted Hoffman made the motion to adjourn/seconded by Adam. The meeting was adjourned. Next meeting will be September 12, 2023 at 6:00pm at the Galesburg Public Library.

**Respectfully submitted,
Darla L. Krejci**