

Community Center Task Force

September 26, 2023

Chair Tony Franklin called the meeting to order at 6:00.

Present were Cassie Crimotich, Sharon Custer, Connie Dennis, Tony Franklin, Dave Hix, Ted Hoffman, Darla Krejci, Anthony Law, Demarkius Medley, Maria Salsman, Adam Sampson and Jaclyn Smith-Esters. Ted Hoffman arrived late. Missing was Carl Dortch and Graef Mulata.

Tony Franklin pointed out that in the minutes from the Sept. 12 meeting in the section on city facilities his name was listed instead of Anthony Law. A motion was made by Tony Franklin to amend the minutes, seconded by Jaclyn Smith-Esters. The motion to amend the minutes was passed.

A motion was made by Adam Sampson to approve the amended minutes from the September 12, 2023 meeting. Seconded by Connie Dennis. Motion passed unanimously.

Community Center Task Force Reports:

The task force sub-committees gave their reports.

Core Amenities Committee (Maria Salsman, Connie Dennis & Sharon Custer). Maria Salsman reported they ended up receiving 306 responses to their survey. She explained how they had looked specifically at the teens who responded to their survey that they participated in no extracurricular activities outside of school. There were 99 respondents (approx. 33% of the total respondents.) For convenience they rounded the number up to 100 when reviewing results.

Maria Salsman said take-aways that 42-46% would need transportation to or from a community center. 84 respondents said if transportation was not an issue they would utilize a community center and 70 said they would share center with other ages or that they didn't care (vs 30 that wanted a space for teens only.)

The report will be added to the google drive.

Youth/Teen Committee (Adam Sampson, Carl Dortch & Graef Mulata.) Adam Sampson read an email received from Carl Dortch who could not attend the meeting. Carl reported that he is working with a teen parole officer to get feedback from more teens who are having trouble in life. He also talked additionally to athletes and high schoolers who showed interest in field trips, clubs and programs. High schoolers were interested in trips to visit colleges. Parents he talked to want stability in their lives and a place where their kids can learn amazing things. They were also interested in their children learning life skills.

Chair Franklin reminded task force members that they could talk to groups outside of their assigned committee.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters spoke on importance of knowing basic life skills like cooking and cleaning. She feels they are becoming lost skills. In her work with Veterans she runs into this issue a lot. Budgeting is also a life skill she finds lacking in her clients. For example, being able to make their money last through the month. She quoted the statistic that if you are born into poverty you are 32 times more likely to repeat the cycle of poverty. She mentioned a program called Pathway of Hope that helps people break this cycle. She explained many people suffer hardships because they do not have these life skills.

Adult/Senior Committee (Tony Franklin, Ted Hoffman & Demarkius Medley). Ted Hoffman reported that he and some other task force members attended a Mexican Fiesta at St. Pat's Catholic Church where he saw seniors and parents having a great time. He said it was a great example of what a community can do. He also went to the VNA (which he states provides wonderful services to the senior community), to the Center for Youth and Family Solutions and to the Downtown Community Partnership's Café in the

Park. He also talks to other seniors he runs into around town. He says he looked at the events listed in The Burg and is amazed at the number of things there are to do in town. He talks to seniors whenever he can. The overwhelming response is that they would not utilize a community center, but they see the need for one. He believes through conversations that if they were provided a community center of value they would "fall in line." He knows there are seniors who are very lonely.

Demarkius Medley agreed there are a lot of things to do in town, but as a youth he never knew about them. It's only been as an adult with a family that he has looked for things to do with his family. Demarkius reported that he was working with Kim Sibley of the Knox County Housing Authority and they plan on going door-to-door to gather input from the housing residents. He says people fall through the cracks and there is need for a lot of social work to be done.

Maria Salsman suggested DeMarkius ask the housing residents if they know about the resources available or how to access these resources.

Cassie Crimotich asked if there was a community resource navigation system or someone to navigate people to services.

It was reported by a number of task force members that United Way has their 211 system. Jaclyn Smith-Esters also mentioned that Bridgeway has an adult service coordinator who works out of the library twice a week.

It is agreed that a community navigation system needs to be accessible and up to date to be effective.

Adam Sampson said (in response to Ted's statement about lonely seniors) that he hears "You may be the only person I talk to today" a lot from seniors at the Y.

Cassie Crimotich asked if we could meet at the Y.

Ted Hoffman reported on his annual bus ride which he found very enlightening. He was impressed by the number of people who used the bus. He witnessed several women get off at St. Mary's going to doctor appointments who very stressed and concerned about their doctor being there and on time because they needed to get someplace else at a certain time. He was surprised by the people who had suitcases on the bus until he realized it was what they used to bring home their groceries. In his opinion kids don't know how to navigate the bus system so they don't use it.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters said part of the bus issue stems from the fact that the money for buses come from programs set up for urban atmosphere, which does not work in Galesburg or any rural community.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters then spoke to Cassie's question about a centralized navigation system for services. She mentioned the program she uses for work called Unite Us. She also mentions the Knox County Social Service Council which meets once a month and is a good network for referring clients to the services they need. Still people fall through the cracks.

Cassie stated the system needs to be formalized.

Ted continued with his report on riding the bus. He said he wants to know where on the south side of town there is an ATM or a grocery store. This lead to a discussion about the many things lacking on the southside.

Tony Franklin stated that those with the least opportunity have the hardest time getting places. That having a car is a luxury and that a family without a car is going to have a very difficult time getting the things they need. He reminded us to put our personal opinions aside and really listen to what people are telling us.

Non-profits/Service Organizations Committee (Jaclyn Smith-Esters and Darla Krejci). Jaclyn Smith-Esters reported on her meeting with Jodi Scott, regional superintendent of ROE 33. The lack of sufficient childcare was the main topic. ROE not in position to provide childcare. It's hard to find people to do childcare because the educational requirements are so high. However, two area agencies, the Jamison Center in Monmouth and Skip Along in the QC were suggested as organizations who might be interested in opening a satellite facility in Galesburg.

Darla Krejci reviewed a document where she took the amenities suggested by local organizations during their interviews with the city in March 2023. Some of the facilities included classroom/meeting space, community room, office, kitchen, gym and outdoor space. Her purpose was to help the group visualize the required space for some of these amenities. The report gives several versions of the amenities and the required square footage and lists some potential equipment for each. (See report) Darla suggested other groups might look at the amenities requested by teens or seniors, and see what spaces can be combined. Connie Dennis asked what non-profits were included in this report. Darla read from the report which was met with much scorn. Representatives from some of the organizations reported these results were false. Adam Sampson said the Y would not have said that and Cassie Crimotich said Bridgeway may have said they would use the facility, but they would never pay to use it. Sharon Custer said the only organization listed who might pay to use the facility would be All That Dance. Jaclyn Smith-Esters defended Darla by stating the information was provided to her by the city. Adam, Cassie and Connie Dennis reiterated that the information was faulty.

Adam Sampson pointed out that there is a difference between licensed childcare and an after-school program. Building a new licensed childcare would cost between \$700-750 per square foot. Regular construction is \$550 per square feet.

There was discussion on the expense of childcare. It can be \$300-400/week. The Y's daycare has 44 spots, 43 which are not paid by participant. The facility loses approximately \$30,000 a year.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters brought up need for drop-in childcare. Her example was a mom who cannot take her child to her mental health appointment, so she doesn't go because she has no childcare. She said there is a lot of facets and variable when we consider the need for childcare.

Connie Dennis reported that she, Sharon and Cassie went to visit the MLK Center in Rock Island. She said it was a top-notch facility with great programs for the kids. They serve approximately 70 kids in five rooms, separated by age. There are one or two teachers in each classroom. She was very impressed until they asked about the costs. The City of Rock Island pays \$150,000 a year to run the facility. They have a community room that can be rented. They serve 7000 meals at Thanksgiving and that is the only time they use volunteers because of liability issues. They receive approximately \$175,000 in Federal funding and the rest is through grants. The yearly budget is \$2,000,000.

Connie says if there is someone in the city that writes grants, she wishes they would step forward. Adam Sampson says grants are very competitive.

Cassie Crimotich reported on notes she took during visit. The programs only run from 3-6 pm on school days. They have busses to get the kids there and have a contract with Metra. Only through grades 8 or 9. United Way helps with meals and snacks. They do a lot of fundraising and grant writing. They have an executive director and it is run by non-profit. The building is owned by city, and they give them money which probably covers the utilities. They recently lost a staff member because the grant money ran out. Riverbend Foodbank drops off food weekly. Kids are separated by age and each room is staffed by 1-2 people. They are building a room for STEAM activities. They do not use volunteers. They do art with kids and stem activity once a week. Is in impoverished part of the city. Lots of partnerships for programming.

Statement said to her was "if it's for everybody, than it is for nobody." Point is we have to target a group to be most efficient. We cannot force people to use a facility. People at the Kensington do activities provided for them there. They are not going to drive across town. We have to come up with what is

going to make the most sense. Who can we partner with? We have to come up with something the council is going to approve otherwise our time will have been wasted.

Adam mentioned that when it comes to many grants the city would not be able to apply for the grants.

Maria Salsman referred to the 100 kids who they used in her report. She said the kids just want a space, to feel safe, to hang out or to study. She doesn't think it would have to cost that much money.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters mentioned the teen center in Monmouth and wondered if anyone else had ever visited it. She said they have a kitchen and they look at food donations and make something from the donations. She says the kids hang out and work together. She recommends everyone go visit.

Tony Franklin spoke briefly about his work with the MLK Center. He agrees it is a great facility, but he urged task force members to look at more than one point of reference.

Galesburg City Facilities Committee (Tony Franklin, Cassie Crimotich and Dave Hix) Cassie Crimotich said she was unable to upload the list she compiled. Anthony Law talked about Lakeside Recreation Center and how it is underutilized. It is 10,000 sq feet but needs to be updated. The problem he feels is that people don't know what is available. He reiterated how we need to keep in mind the sustainability of whatever we decide. He admitted he is not a fan of gyms because as a black man when you hand a young black man a basketball and tell him this is way out, that is a false narrative. We overlook their intellect. A gym can be used as an incentive to get homework done. Best athletes he know growing up are now located in prison.

Tony Franklin says we need to work on the entire person, both physical and mental, the emotional and the spiritual. We need to listen to the kids and what they are saying in the survey.

Maria Salsman asked if we can ask the city what they are going to be willing to spend a year to sustain the community center.

DeMarkius says 2.5 million is a lot of money, but not when you are talking about kids.

Tony Franklin says we were supposed to be thinking about the benefits of a community center because the benefits are going to outweigh the cost, especially when you consider the long-term benefits.

Anthony Law handed out information from three community centers. He pointed out that each have a mission statement and a vision. These are key to the success and sustainability of a community center. Needs change. Kids five years ago are now adults and the kids now have much different needs.

We can't do everything. We should ask what we can do now, in five years and in ten years.

Tony Franklin said the city did not give us much guidance. Our task was to decide whether we need a center and what do we need in the center. Right now, he doesn't see us coming up with an answer by November.

Maria says we are closer than we think. What she hears is that we don't want to repeat services already provided. She feels our vision is to serve those whose needs are not being met.

Anthony Law said Monmouth program is not huge, but it is providing a service. They are now looking to expand.

Adam Sampson suggests we take the 2.5 million and offer it to District 205 to hire staff and rent space there and call it a community center.

DeMarkius suggested we need a business plan. He is willing to pay for this himself. No one wants to spend money on something they can't see. Professional business plan could model after other cities our

size. The report we submit to the city can be a business plan. He sees the need for a centralized location. He admits he is super passionate because a community center saved his life. He wants to see a community center happen regardless of price.

Adam Sampson said we should consider that 58% of all students are at the high school. He hears how transportation is an issue. If it is kids we are targeting we should go where they are. The Y cost 2.7 million to operate yearly. There are 500 kids in their before and after school programs and they lose money. They offset costs through memberships and donations. The concept is complicated. It is not just a building, it is programming. He repeated that 50% students are at high school 73% time. The Y has 16 acres and their property joins the school districts. There is a sidewalk between the high school and the Y. Adam in full disclosure reported that the Y has held off on a capital campaign until he had time to talk to all the city council members because they are building an indoor playground from 6 weeks to 11 years old. It is a \$1.3 million, 2000 square feet project. Old child watch area will become teen center, which is about a 1600 sq feet area.

Chair Tony Franklin brought up the time kids are most likely to be unsupervised which is between after school and the time a parent arrives home. He brought up a newspaper article from 2018 when the city was ready to spend up to \$30 for a rec center. Kelli Bennewitz confirmed it was suggested in the Master Plan.

It was asked who will run center? Adam Sampson said ideally a non-profit and not the city.

DeMarkius brought up the idea of a business plan again. Ask city manager about business plan. Chair Franklin asked Kelli Bennewitz what the city's manager's role in this would be? Would that be under his job description? Kelli said she wasn't sure about a business plan, but the city has developed high level plans before. It is something we could bring up. Chair Franklin likes the idea but doesn't want to spend the time to do it only to have the city throw it to the side.

Connie Dennis says we all want different things, but we need to reach a consensus. She suggests we find out what each of us want.

Ted said a business plan was outside our duties. We should decide what do we want in a community center is and where do we want a community center.

Adam asked if we have to stick to original parameters. After discussion it was decided no, we should allow for several options.

DeMarkius asked about the business plan. Tony Franklin said we would put it on the agenda for the next meeting.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters thought Connie's suggestion was good. Each of us should come up with our vision of a community center, what we think it looks like and where we want it. Then we can meet somewhere in the middle. She brought to our attention the city's 2022 strategic plan that says under community and youth engagement that by 2025 a percentage of residents and youth would have access to participate and opportunities to connect as an inclusive community engaged with others in a place where they feel safe, welcome and respected.

New Business – Chair Tony Franklin said he would like to organize trips to other community centers, so we don't have to do it at our own cost. These will be arranged for probably next week. When asked how we can all go and not violate the open meetings act it was explained that as long as tours we don't have to worry about how many of us can go. One possibility is a trip to visit centers in both Washington and Peoria on the same day.

Public Comment

Carolyn Grinder stated that there are many people who would like to attend the meetings but cannot and that streaming or recording the meetings to be aired later would be appreciated. She also stated that moving the meeting to a different location each time was confusing to many people.

Amanda Larson suggested the task force look at Cedar Creek Hall which is for sale. It is 12,000 sq feet and for sale for \$600,000. She reported she has been talking to kids at Kiwanis Park and some of the things they would like to see at a community center. These things included a snack bar, to place to hang out, homework help, someone to talk to, summer camp, with fishing and hunting, baking and gardening. Definitely need something for kids.

Connie Dennis motioned for adjournment and Cassie Crimotich seconded. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Darla Krejci

**The next meeting of the Community Center Task Force will be Tuesday, October 10 at 6:00.
Location to be announced.**