

Community Center Task Force
October 24, 2023

Chair Tony Franklin called the meeting to order. Present were Debbie Clague, 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. Missing was Carl Dortch and Graef Mulata.

Chair Tony Franklin read a poem called "Listen." He asked that we all agree to abide by its suggestion of respectful listening.

A motion was made by Adam Sampson to approve the amended minutes from the October 10, 2023 meeting. Seconded by Ted Hoffman. Cassie Crimotich and Tony Franklin abstained because they had not attended the Oct. 10 meeting. Motion passed.

The task force sub-committees gave their reports.

Core Amenities Committee (Maria Salsman, Connie Dennis & Sharon Custer). No Report.

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

Adult/Senior Committee (Tony Franklin, Ted Hoffman & Demarkius Medley). Tony Franklin spoke on about conversations he's had about a community center. Many he has spoken to use the previous community center and are looking forward to using a new community center. They are interested in both the opportunity to learn and the opportunity to teach. People recognize that many youth do not have a significant adult in their lives willing to invest in them. He's seen it in the 4-H, the importance of development of youth and making them feel like they belong. He says the community has to come together, break down the barriers that have plagued the community since the days of the separate Lake Storey. (Referring to the time when there was a "white" Lake Storey and a "black" Lake Storey.) He says we are beyond that now and we are working towards the future, not today.

DeMarkius reported that he and Kim Sibley had gone door-to-door in the housing formerly known as Iowa Courts. He read a list of things the people were wanting in a community center. This included, after school program, mentoring and tutoring, snacks and/or meals, affordable summer camps, (which he was very much in favor of as in his youth the summer was the most dangerous time), programs for adults, writing business plans, GED classes, a clothing pantry, on-site daycare (especially for those interested in furthering their education). They also requested things like "free day" at Discovery Depot and more accessibility. Tech center for gaming and STEM. Support for the Skate Palace.

Non-profits/Service Organizations Committee (Jaclyn Smith-Esters and Darla Krejci). Jaclyn Smith-Esters spoke about how there are lots of service organizations and many non-profits are struggling and count on the community for support. She would really like to see a non-profit co-op in the community center to help these small non-profits who struggle to afford office space.

Galesburg City Facilities Committee (Anthony Law, Cassie Crimotich and Dave Hix) Anthony Law spoke on the prospect of the current library as a community center. He mentioned it's central location and proximity to the new library as assets. He said the Downtown Community Partnership would embrace this idea as it would help revitalize the downtown area. It is on the southside and close to other places. It will be available in March.

Ted Hoffman reported that he had talked to the library director Noelle Thompson. He found out that the utilities at the current library run about \$75,000 annually and that other maintenance and overhead run about \$70,000 annually. He said he had toured the building at 120 E Main and it is out of the running in his opinions. It has too many structural issues

Jaclyn Smith-Esters agreed reporting that when the Art Center was looking at new locations they had looked at that building and their engineers had estimated the refurbishment costs to be \$7.5 million.

Anthony Law reported that the current library's floor plan was on the google drive. In his mind the current library is a doable option.

New Business - Adam Sampson and DeMarkius Medley reviewed a proposal they had written. It recommends 1) money be given to the Oaks or the VNA to improve their buildings and revitalize their programming to serve the community's senior population; 2) build a small 1400 sq. ft building at H.T. Custer park to be used as a community center; 3) money be given to the YMCA to help finance their new indoor play area and teen center; 4) money be used to improve targeted transportation to get people to these facilities; and 5) money be granted to organizations (such as the Skate Palace) who provide entertainment and programming for children. Report will be placed in google drive for review.

DeMarkius spoke on the conflict of interest of giving money to the Y because of Adam's association with the Y. He said just because there is a conflict it doesn't mean it's not the right idea. He said what he believes for the community center to be successful and sustainable, it needs strong leadership and money.

He talked about the Carver Center and how it was run by the Boys & Girls Club. He thinks the community needs something similar. He believes the Y can do the same thing. He believes the Council will trust the Y to use the money wisely.

Adam spoke on how through research done if you really listened, people were not talking about bricks and mortar, but about programs. He and DeMarkius' intentions are to execute something for the community. Their recommendations could be for any entity, as long as it is able to execute. The proposal may not be financially beneficial to the Y, but it falls within their mission. Whoever the city partners with, make sure they are experts in what they do.

DeMarkius addressed the importance of the position of Director. He spoke of the Director at the community center he grew up in and her importance in his life. He also made a plea for more money. It could come from ARPA or from grants. He says Churchill has become a trigger word and so has the bond money. He referred to the document Elizabeth Varner had put together regarding a community center and the goals it set forth for a community center.

Adam finished his presentation with some thoughts on daycare. He thought it was something the city should help childcare providers to apply for grants.

DeMarkius spoke about the financial sustainability of the community center. He spoke about the movie "Mully" which had been shown at the Orpheum over the weekend. He said it inspired him. He spoke about a section of the movie when the ecosystem of the area had changed because of the agriculture. They grew food to feed the children and were able to sell the excess for funding. He thinks this can be done locally, especially since he is a minority farmer, and the government has grants and programs for minority farmers. He thinks this is an opportunity for the city to make money which can be used to keep the community center sustainable.

Anthony Law thanked Adam and DeMarkius for their work on this proposal. He said he felt compelled to speak about the Carver Center because he is tired of people talking about it as if it was done in partnership with the city. It was not, and because it was only being funded through private donations it was going to fail. He chastised those who spoke fondly about the Carver Center, but never gave money. He felt that to be disrespectful. He warned that what was being discussed was real partnerships, which is going to require a commitment.

Tony Franklin also commented on the movie "Mully." He said what it showed him was what can happen when we put others' needs above ourselves. There is no limit if we work together. He said Adam and

DeMarkius' proposal was a good start to get us to the end. His concern was that he envisioned one facility, where people could come together. He thought this proposal was only going to keep people apart.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters commented on the proposal. She prefaced her statements with her impression of the movie "Mully." She said her take away was that when he started everyone thought Mully was crazy. Nonetheless, Mully persisted and succeeded.

Her questions/comments regarding the proposal included: What role is the city going to play moving forward? Where did the 2.5 million soft cap come from? There are other entities in the community that are doing good, why are they not being allocated money? Regarding the 1400 sq foot facility at H.T. Custer, by her estimate that would only accommodate 38 people.

Adam answered that they estimated it could hold up to 50. He justified their choice by pointing out the new library would have room for 500.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters says the library can't take on anymore. They are stretched thin enough, as are most non-profits.

Adam said that is why the Y and United Way were good partners. They have long established records and have the ability to execute.

She was asked if the teen center at the Y would be free? Adam said it would have to generate funding, but there would be scholarships available. Those who can pay should pay.

She asked about the hours only being 3-6pm and what about the summers? Adam said that was something the board would have to figure out.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters final question was to Adam. She asked how he was going to answer the question when people say this seems like this is more of a Y deal and not a community center?

Adam replied that when he asked what is a community center, the answer was programming. He said this is what the Y does. He asked, "If not us, than who? Who else can execute better than the Y?" He went on to state that the Y already serves 17% of the population and provides over 500 kids before and after school care. He admitted that they do kick kids out, but that is because it is not fair to the other 99 others if the kids won't follow the rules. They want to hold them accountable.

DeMarkius said other organizations could apply to the city if they want to be the community center. He explained that he believed there should be a barrier between the Y and the Community Center and that would be the position of Director. The Director would decide if a child should be kicked out, not the Y. Whoever runs the community center is going to need direction. He believes the Y has a proven track record that the city councilors are going to trust. He spoke at length about how he personally came to the conclusion that we were not going to get a community center unless the city council approves the plan and even though some might be happy with his decision, he was willing to go to Adam and find a way they could work together.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters mentioned that the WIRC which just opened an office in town is a Community Action Agency which would be able to ask for grants and open a Boys & Girls Club. She thinks they should be invited to the Task Force meetings as well as other non-profits and possibly an engineer.

Sharon Custer asked which Y facility would be used. Adam said that 50% of students are at the Jr/Sr High School 73% weeks out of the year, so it would be the one on Carl Sandburg Drive due to its proximity to the Jr/Sr high school. Sharon said she likes the idea of a facility at the H. T Custer Park.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters said we can't forget the alternative school at Lincoln school and Galesburg Christian Schools.

Adam said he and Demarkius discussed this and that is why they put included transportation in their proposal.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters suggested that the director of transportation and Steve Gugliotta come to the next Task Force meeting.

Anthony Law wondered if the city was going to provide everything at the community center for free. It cannot sustain itself if that is the expectation.

Adam said those who have the capacity to pay should and those who don't have the capacity to pay can get a scholarship.

DeMarkius said it would be up to the city what things cost. That is outside the scope of what we were asked to do.

Tony Franklin said we are not here to take it to the finish line, but to make recommendations.

Ted Hoffman asked if he could read his top ten list. It included: being available to everyone of all ages, provide educational development programs, promote wellness, promote personal growth, include cross-generational and multi-ethnic programming, "maker" space to promote creativity, incubator kitchen, community training events (CPR, tax preparation, etc.), safe space to gather.

Maria Salsman reported that she and Connie had toured the current library. She referred to a handout she prepared that included their top ten list based on the survey they did from kids. It will be added to google drive.

Connie Dennis reported her impressions of the current library. She said they had places she didn't know existed. The current library is 35,000 square feet which she thought was more than was needed but would give us room to grow. It is a good location. She thought it would be good opportunity for Knox College and Carl Sandburg College would have opportunity to mentor and tutor. She believed there would be ability to add showers and washers & dryers.

Ted Hoffman brought up potential for money to fund a community center. Bond for logistic park will be paid off which would be available. There is also the new .25 sales tax and the gambling money. He can't think of a better use of gambling money than providing opportunity for kids.

Sharon Custer agreed that the library would be a good location. She brought up the topic of transportation again. She thought kids should be home by 6:00 and not be running about. She wasn't sure about the weekends, but something could be offered.

Maria Salsman agreed that transportation was going to be essential. They have to get the kids there and back home. She also like the current library as a location for a community center. She feels it is important that the community center be someplace for people of all ages to meet and hang out. She thinks the library would be easily accessible, kids could even ride their bikes.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters thought the Community Satisfaction Study was a good place to get the top ten list of wants in a community center.

Tony Franklin's list included: long-term financial commitment, being safe, inclusive, and welcoming, debunking the myth that a community center is just for poor or people of color, youth & adult programming, one stop shop for services, transportation, education and skill development, meeting space, coordinating with existing entities, arts & crafts and awareness raising.

Encouraged everyone to submit their top ten lists to Elizabeth so she could put them on the drive. He's certain we will see commonalities.

Tasks for next meeting – submit your top ten lists and your top 3-5 locations and why? Review proposal submitted by Adam and DeMarkius.

Maria Salsman stated she still wants to know how much the city is going to invest annually because that will be important to our decision making.

Public Comment

Sam Cohen thought the proposal had some good ideas. He liked the idea of a facility on the southside. He thought it would go well with a more central community center. He said there was a lot of talk about compromise and that over half the task force seemed to be in favor of the current library building. He has concerns about inviting separate entities to be involved instead of just the government as Elected Officials can be held accountable by their constituents, but when private entities are involved, they could pull out and it would throw things into crisis. His concern with the Y includes the stigma associated with it and the bureaucratic hurdles some have to jump to be members. He suggests the Task Force look at the parts of the proposed business plan that can be used; that the library may be the compromise we are looking for; and cautioned against giving money to a private entity (the Y) who would then make money off the improvements.

Linda Miller first addressed Adam Sampson and said that the Y is not a good fit for this because it is private entity. She stated that if the partnership did not work out, the Y gets to keep the improvements. She explained she pays for a family's membership because the Y would not give them a discount and she doesn't believe that is good practice. She said the community center should be free. No one should be charged to go hang out. She said there could be a charge for programming, but the doors have to open with no charge. She cautioned that partnerships is actually privatizing, with the city giving up control. She believes the city should own the building, but can lease out who comes in and runs it. That way the lease can be changed if they are not doing a good job.

Carolyn Grinder campaigned again for the task force meeting to be streamed or recorded and aired on-line.

Jaclyn Smith-Esters handed out letter sent from concerned citizens. It was not read aloud. It was requested we read it at home.

Anthony Law made the motion to adjourn. Seconded by Adam Sampson. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Darla Krejci

The next meeting of the Community Center Task Force will be Tuesday, November 14 at 6:00 at Crist Student Center, Carl Sandburg College.