

Josiah Smith Tavern and Old Library Working Group

Mission & Goal, Work Completed to-Date, Current Findings and Next Steps

October 2014

This letter is intended to:

- State the mission and goal of Josiah Smith Tavern and Old Library Working Group (the Working Group);
- Inform Residents of the Town of Weston (the Residents) of work completed to-date by the Working Group;
- Stimulate discussion and solicit input from Residents and organizations (existing or to-be-formed) interested in sponsoring reuse of the Josiah Smith Tavern, Barn and Connector and the Old Library (the Properties).

Background:

The Josiah Smith Tavern, Barn and Connector and Old Library are historically important to Weston, occupying prominent locations in our Town Center and offer the potential to become significant cultural and architectural landmarks in Weston's contemporary identity. Despite the buildings' potential, previous efforts to facilitate reuse have highlighted the substantial challenges the Town faces in balancing cultural, architectural and financial components of reuse.

The Working Group was formed by the Selectmen in December 2013, and charged with facilitating and coordinating Town efforts to redevelop the Properties. The Working Group consists of up to five at-large members, selected to represent a range of views, a representative from the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Historical Commission, Community Preservation Committee and Traffic and Sidewalk Committee, the Town Manager (non-voting) and a liaison from the Finance Committee.

It is important to recognize the Working Group is not the entity that will create a proposal for the use and ongoing management of these buildings – that is not the role we have been given, nor would that be in the best interest of the Town; the Working Group is a temporary body, not chartered with long-term management and financial responsibility for the buildings. Rather our goal is to create a process by which sponsoring organizations, public or private, can cultivate and submit proposals that the Working Group can assess, and ultimately support and advocate to the Selectmen and Residents.

Since our initial meeting in December of 2013, the Working Group has held open, televised, bi-weekly meetings covering the following topics:

- We have reviewed and discussed all available information including town surveys, results of prior Town Meetings, prior Request for Proposals and proposal submissions, cost estimates, current zoning restrictions and historical easements.
- We have spoken with various stakeholders, including community organizations, participants in prior efforts, abutters, and individuals and organizations with interest in the Tavern and Old Library.
- We have discussed possible uses for the buildings that meet many resident's desire for reuse as well as satisfy the myriad of constraints, including financial, architectural and historical.

Current Findings

While the Working Group represents a diversity of views (reflecting the spectrum of possibilities with reuse), we have reached consensus that the Properties have different architectural elements, constraints, and therefore it makes sense to separate them into two parallel “tracks” – comprised of the Josiah Smith Tavern, Barn and Connector (1) and the Old Library (2), respectively. In doing so, we hope we can address issues unique to each property, accelerate development, and generate momentum in the overall project. At the same time we understand that the buildings occupy what could be considered one campus, and will take into consideration such matters as septic, parking, traffic, etc. for the campus as a whole.

With respect to the Josiah Smith Tavern, Barn and Connector existing historical restrictions and its current physical configuration significantly limit the range of reuse possibilities, particularly when practical financial limitations are included. Furthermore, the interests of existing stakeholders – including current tenants such as the Women’s Community League and Weston Historical Society, as well as the JST Corporation – must be addressed.

As for the Old Library, there is a greater range of reuse possibilities given the larger interior footprint and lack of existing development restrictions. With this wider range of uses has come a vigorous public debate over mix of public vs. private use, and level of public access (particularly to the Reading Room). In particular, strong sentiment has been expressed for reuse of the Old Library for a Cultural or Arts Center, as evidenced by the 2013 National Citizen Survey conducted by the Town of Weston and votes in the May and December Town Meetings. With that said, none of these expressions of interest had clear sponsorship, included the financial implications of such reuse, nor were they specific as to the benefits to Residents.

The Path Forward

Consistent with our belief that successful reuse will best be achieved by parallel-tracking the projects, we have outlined the following steps:

Josiah Smith Tavern, Barn and Connector

To address the Josiah Smith Tavern, Barn and Connector, the Working Group is working to engage an architectural consultant to assist in developing appropriate concepts for adaptive reuse. Their work will include establishing updated criteria and parameters for use, and translating the programmatic criteria into diagrammatic conceptual floor plan layouts that can serve as a basis for moving forward into subsequent funding, design and construction phases.

The Old Library

Regarding the Old Library, we are outlining a scope of work to be completed by a consultant to non-profit organizations that will help Residents and sponsoring organizations envision what an arts and cultural center could mean to the Town of Weston. Some of the basic questions this work will address are: What would an arts and cultural center mean specifically here in the town of Weston, what benefits including programming, activities and opportunities to gather might it offer to Residents – in other words what would a vision of an arts and cultural center look like for Weston? Is the Old Library an appropriate setting for an arts and cultural center? Can the building be repurposed to house this type of facility? What are the general costs involved in making an art and cultural center a reality?

While an arts and cultural center is just one of the many possible reuses, and without expressing that this is a preferential reuse, we feel it is necessary to explore this concept further given the interest the town has expressed.

Next Steps Relative to Both Properties

With respect to both properties, the Working Group will continue to work with organizations interested in developing proposals, providing access to information, acting as an intermediary to Town resources, and providing feedback as representatives of both the Selectmen and Residents. Assuming we are successful in generating sufficient interest from potential Sponsors, we envision we would then take the following steps:

- We will request that sponsoring organizations submit a ‘Statement of Interest’, which will present, in preliminary terms: organizational and leadership qualifications, proposed uses, financial feasibility and other due diligence;
- We will facilitate forums and other venues by which Sponsors can solicit feedback from stakeholders and Residents to further develop their proposals;
- Following presentation of the Statement of Interest and discussion in the meeting and among Residents in general, we would expect to conduct a Resident Survey which will provide up to date information on Resident desires;
- We expect it will be necessary to issue a formal RFP for part or all of the Properties;
- We will assess, select and advocate proposals for approval by the Selectmen and Residents in Town Meeting.

We look forward to continuing our work with Residents and the many stakeholders on our goal of turning the Josiah Smith Tavern, Barn and Connector and the Old Library into sustainable, vibrant and handsome centerpieces for our Town.

Josiah Smith Tavern and Old Library Working Group members:

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