

## Minutes

### SACRED HEART REUSE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

The Sacred Heart Reuse Committee ("SHRC") held its fifth meeting on April 30, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Members present were: Stephen Carter, John Davis, Rita Fontes, Ed Keenan, Irene McCarthy and Alan Wachman.

John Davis reported on his conversation with Town Counsel, Richard Geleman, regarding use restrictions on the site. Parcel N is restricted to use as parkland and/or for outdoor recreation consistent with limitations imposed by the National Park Service (which helped fund the purchase) and a Town Meeting vote. Although the deed to the property is itself unrestricted, the acquisition of the property *was* restricted. The property was acquired for conservation purposes. Attorney Geleman believes Parcel F was removed from any use restrictions, but does not know precisely when or how. He can obtain this information for the Committee, if necessary.

The restriction on the use of Parcel N can also be removed, Attorney Geleman explained, but would require a Special Act of the Legislature, consent from the Department of the Interior, and a two-thirds Town Meeting vote. The process is difficult, but not insurmountable.

Stephen Carter reported on his conversation with the Sharon Building Inspector, Joseph Kent. Mr. Kent believes the structure is "uninsurable" and should be demolished. The structural materials are saturated with water. Mr. Kent shared copies of building plans dated February 12, 1959 with Mr. Carter for review by the Committee. There is apparently tremendous interest in the site, including a queue of special interest groups with various ideas for its use. Still, the Committee has neither seen nor reviewed any documentation confirming that the building is not salvageable and must be razed. The Committee discussed whether a structural assessment should be conducted to confirm the need for demolition. Any such assessment should address (1) overall structural integrity; (2) the present condition of the building and whether its reuse is economically viable; and (3) the estimated cost of demolition. The Committee also discussed whether the building is a public safety hazard. If it is, then this status might enable the Town to locate or identify the funds necessary for demolition.

Michael Baskin, member of the Wilber School Redevelopment Committee, as well as a registered architect and urban planner, met with the SHRC. Mr. Baskin was a member of a previous committee appointed by the Town to explore uses for the Sacred Heart property. The existing structure, Mr. Baskin explained, was designed for use as a dormitory and "is not terribly adaptable." It cannot be reconfigured for use as a library due to its inadequate floor-load capacity. (A library must sustain loads of up to 120 lbs/square foot.) At the time it was built, the structure was light-weight and inexpensive. For several years now, the roof has leaked badly, allowing water to infiltrate the unheated

structure, thereby leading to numerous and damaging freeze/thaw cycles. Bar joists in the roof and ceilings show considerable rust and rot. Architecturally, the building is “not noteworthy.” It cannot be used as a fire station, as floors do not have adequate headroom. The question is whether there is a sufficient life cycle left in the building to justify rehabbing it. Mr. Baskin thinks not. The structure has been abated and contains no asbestos. In Mr. Baskin’s view, it should be demolished.

The Committee briefly discussed community needs. Mr. Baskin identified local demands for a gymnasium or a swimming pool, or another facility that could be used for teen activities. Relocating Town Hall and/or the library to the Sacred Heart site could, in Mr. Baskin’s view, negatively impact the downtown area and, perhaps, the Deborah Sampson recreational facilities as well.

Mr. Baskin recommended that Committee members remain “process-oriented” rather than “goal-oriented.” The SHRC should also keep in mind the notion of proposing some sort of shared-use facility that addresses two or more community needs, such as a library and administration, or administration and public safety.

Irene McCarthy and Rita Fontes will invite Lou Kafka to attend a future SHRC meeting. They will also inquire of Ben Puritz whether the structure is insured. Alan Wachman will draft a proposed letter to area residents inviting them to a community meeting. The Committee will also invite Eli Hauser (Sharon Planning Board) and Jane Desberg (Sharon Housing Partnership) to future SHRC meetings.

The SHRC adjourned at 9:30 p.m.