

Montpelier Planning Commission
February 9, 2004
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: David Borgendale, Chair; Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair, Anne Campbell, Bryan Mitofsky, Valerie Capels. Planning & Community Development Director

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by David Borgendale who stated that there was not a quorum present and agenda items that required formal action would be deferred.

Forum on Cultural and Recreation Resources

Anne Campbell introduced the subject and outlined the questions that panelists were asked to consider:

1. Describe the mission, functions, and/or activities of your organization.
2. What resources are needed to fulfill your mission and functions? Include any barriers and opportunities you face toward fulfilling these.
3. What could the City do, both realistically and ideally, to enhance your organization's contribution to the cultural and recreational life of the city?

Below is a summary of comments from the forum panelists.

Kim Bent, Co-director, Lost Nation Theater

- Lost Nation Theater is a professional theater company in residence in Montpelier since 1989. The theater company presents more than 120 performance events each year in space in the City Hall. The company also facilitates 40 to 70 other events each year by other groups using the Lost Nation Theater space. There are currently four full-time employees and four part-time employees.
- There are three aspects to the company's mission: performance, education and outreach.
- The company provides educational opportunities to middle school students through its youth theater laboratory. It works with high school students in its conservatory program and with college and post-college age interns. Senior citizens from across the country participate in the elder hostel program.
- Outreach occurs through sharing of resources with the city and schools in the community. The company is proactive in improving accessibility to the theater and to theater programs. For example, the company introduced audio-description in a recent production of "Educating Rita." The company actively seeks grants for improvement of the facilities in City Hall.
- The City could assist the theater company in meeting its resource needs by facilitating cooperation and connections between the activities of the various arts groups in the community.
- The City could support the recently discussed legislation to create a statewide forum to help the creative economy.
- To enhance Lost Nation Theater's contribution to cultural life, the City could generate a pool of money to help to market the Montpelier area as an arts destination.
- A slightly larger performance space is needed in order to bring people from a larger area to the City. Lost Nation Theater's space provides for 150 seats and the Pyralisk is expected to provide 250 seats. A space with seating comparable to the Barre Opera House is needed. A location near the river would be preferable.
- In response to a question from a Commission member, Mr. Bent stated that the high school auditorium provides a 600-seat space, but has technical limitations. The possibility of renovating the facility is interesting. Private use might be limited by the schools needs for the auditorium.

Patrick Healy, Green Mount Cemetery

- Green Mount Cemetery was founded in 1855 to furnish a retreat for the dead. The current mission is to provide a natural location for burial and cremation.
- The 40 acre cemetery is a quasi-municipal nonprofit organization.
- The Cemetery has been a work site for offenders since 1981.
- In order to continue to meet its mission, the cemetery will need to expand in the future. The City can provide assistance by ensuring that the zoning permits the expansion of the cemetery within the boundaries of the current 40 acre site and on adjoining lands permits expansion. Future expansion will require another 40 acres.
- The City can continue to promote the cemetery on its maps and brochures. The City could promote an awareness of all that the cemetery offers including history, open space and walking paths. Tourists, genealogists and artists presently visit the cemetery. Guided tours are provided.
- The 150th anniversary of the cemetery in 2005 may include a re-enactment of the original dedication and the participation of the cultural organizations will be welcome.

Hilari Farrington, Kellogg-Hubbard Library

- The Kellogg-Hubbard Library was founded in 1894 as a result of a bequest. It is a private nonprofit organization. Nineteen percent of the library's funding comes from tax support. The sources of the balance of the funding come from the endowment and fund raising.
- The library is integral to the quality of life in Montpelier. It provides educational opportunities in many forms in addition to books. These include books on tape, documentary videos and computer tutoring.
- There were 260,000 items circulated in 2003. Meeting rooms were reserved for 1,000 events. There were more than 50 exhibits of art. An average of 129 children per day came to the library after school.
- Before the recent expansion of the library, the annual circulation was 172,000 items. The circulation has increased to the current 260,000 items. In addition, the number of people coming into the building has doubled.
- The library has five computers available for internet access in the adult library and one in the children's library. One public computer is dedicated to word processing. The library subscribes to the Vermont On-Line Library which provides access to many journals, magazines and databases. The library would like to increase the number of computers in the adult library to eight and to acquire one additional computer for children to use for homework.
- The City has assisted the library by installing parking meters on the street and by providing police and emergency response.
- There is no formal handicapped parking at the library. Currently, handicapped drivers parking in the loading zone at the side of the library are not being ticketed, but the need for formally designated handicapped parking is still being discussed.
- The library would like to find funds to support its opening for part of the day on Sundays.
- The City could assist the library by providing garage space and maintenance for the bookmobile. Assistance with ground maintenance would also be welcome as the library lawn serves as a pocket park.

Peter Holman, President, Onion River Arts Council

- The Onion River Arts Council (ORAC) serves as an arts council for central Vermont, but it is most active in Montpelier and Barre.
- ORAC's mission is to provide art to the community through arts education, support of local artists, making art accessible and advocating for the arts. In Montpelier it has organized First Night and Independence Day celebrations, Third Thursdays and brown bag events.
- Linkages are provided between performers and schools allowing students to interact with performers. Artist visits to local Headstart preschools are coordinated by ORAC.
- ORAC's presence in the community and its availability to provide expertise is an asset.

- More than 500 artists are engaged through ORAC over the year, Of these, 92% were local.
- Discounted and donated tickets are available to make the arts more accessible.
- The City presently provides a stipend to ORAC.
- A larger performing arts venue (300 to 400 seats) is needed to bring quality acts to the city. The new venue would not compete with the Barre Opera House which is committed for more than 250 nights per year and has limited availability.
- The City could assist ORAC in its need to find office space for a central ticket office.
- The City could work on growing the Community Arts Fund, grant permission for more banners for upcoming events and support the development of the Pyralisk.
- A cultural liaison position in the City government could be established to work with arts organizations.

Don Lorinovitch, Director, Recreation Department, School Facilities and Grounds and Montpelier Senior Citizen Center

- The Recreation Department is currently organized under the school system. It is responsible for the recreation center in the old Armory, the recreation field on Elm Street, the swimming pool, skating and the playground at the school, tennis courts, several ball fields and school facilities.
- The Department's mission is to provide a variety of quality programs and community recreation events with a focus on development of innovative programs, promoting personal growth and well being and strengthening the community.
- Grants supporting the Department's work include grants for tree planting, a grant for the skate park through Community Connections and a Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant.
- The Department's ability to provide programs is limited by the number of instructors that are available and by the support available through user fees.
- Overuse of the facilities is also an issue. Many fields are now used from spring through fall.
- The Recreation Department needs continued financial support in the City Budget and assistance in marketing its programs through the City's Web site. The continued cooperation among city agencies is also important.

Katherine Fennelli, President of Pyralisk Art Center and **Dan Hecht**, Founding President

- The Pyralisk is a private nonprofit multifunctional arts organization that was originally established in 1989 in the old post office. The organization bought the old salt shed on Stone Cutters Way in 1996. They have a \$400,000 HUD grant. The Pyralisk Center will be developed as a collaboration with the Vermont Economic Development Authority and a private developer.
- The Pyralisk's mission is to provide a multifunctional community cultural center designed for active citizen participation in the arts. Its functions will include serving as a community resource clearing house, providing a regional cultural center and hosting community activities. The Pyralisk will support other arts organizations and fill in the gaps in service rather than compete with the other organizations.
- Resource needs include funding assistance and technical assistance.
- The City could facilitate connections with other organizations and provide support in the Pyralisk's interactions with state organizations.
- The City could support the Pyralisk's grant application and serve as a co-applicant on the grant.
- Tax stabilization and abatement will be needed once the building is improved.
- A vision for Montpelier should be developed. As the State's capitol city, Montpelier should also be the cultural capitol. The city needs beautiful spaces to generate interest in the community. The expansion of downtown into Stone Cutters Way should be planned for. Turntable Park should be improved as a beautiful accessible green space.

Following is a summary of the additional discussion between Commission members and the forum participants.

- A Commissioner asked whether ORAC could organize visual arts displays if space was available. Mr. Holman responded that ORAC's primary focus is performing arts and that it would have to reach out to other groups for assistance. Mr. Hecht said that cooperative work between groups should be able to accomplish this. A member of the audience said that the City provided a curator for visual arts in Montpelier through the City Arts Fund.
- In response to the question of whether a larger facility requires a critical mass of patrons to be viable or whether the presence of the larger facility brings in additional patrons, Mr. Bent responded that careful planning is required to make sure the facility meets expected needs.
- A Commissioner asked whether the City could plan a center for arts and recreation. Mr. Hecht said that those functions go together very well and are natural links for young people. Mr. Lorinovitch said that the Recreation Department has plans for a field house that would include a walking track, basketball courts and a climbing wall. Such a facility could be used for performances, school graduations and other functions.
- A question was raised regarding whether the Recreation Department could pick up some of the activities that Community Connections had been responsible for. A representative of the Department explained that the Department has partnered with that group for day camps and ski trips, but the Department's will have difficulty taking on programs that are not fee-supported. Space is also an issue as other groups have needs for the same activity spaces. The Department will have the next year to consider whether it is feasible to take on the Community Connections activities.

The forum was then opened for a roundtable discussion. A summary of those discussions follows.

- Rich Hansen, Union Institute and Vermont College, said that the presence of higher education institutions provides economic and cultural benefits to the community. Union Institute focuses on adult education and provides a full service library available to the community. It also provides recreation space to the community. The Institute's needs include continued cooperation from the Planning Department and consistency in the permitting process.
- Gabrielle Detzell, CCV Arts Council, said that the group offers performing arts and visual arts courses. CCV is interested in cooperating with other arts groups in the community.
- Geoff Beyer, Parks Department, described the rich diversity of parks in Montpelier. He indicated that the city needs parks closer to the town center and a system of trails connecting the City parks. The trails could be located on both public and private properties.
- Alex Aldrich, Vermont Arts Council, said that the City plan needs a vision statement incorporating the arts and culture. He advised that future planning should consider the resources that the community values rather than wants. Mr. Aldrich stated that the river front is the city's greatest malnourished opportunity and that there are cultural opportunities in both directions along the river. He also suggested that the City consider seeking payment in lieu of taxes from the State. These funds could be used to support the arts and recreation in the city. He also suggested dedicating a percentage of municipal bonds to support the arts.
- Margo George, Montpelier Heritage Group, described that organization's mission to preserve the past and ensure that the city maintains its archaeological heritage and open space. She stressed that the vision of the community needs to be described.
- Paul Carnahan, Vermont Historical Society, explained that the organization is a private nonprofit organization housed in the Pavilion Building. The recent move of their library to Barre allowed the Society to expand the museum space in Montpelier. The renovated museum will have 5,000 square feet of exhibition space, a museum and the intact Victorian lobby. The focus of the museum will be education. The Society will partner with the Capitol on exhibitions and interpretation. It is hoped that the museum will be a destination for the entire state. To accomplish this, the Society needs the City's cooperation in promoting and publicizing. Additional signs would be helpful to direct visitors off of the highway and within downtown.

- Mary Hooper, Montpelier Downtown Community Association, said that recreational resources are important to the City. She said that the changing role of the Senior Citizen's Center should be considered as the expectations of seniors will change with the aging population.
- Michael Levine, Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation, said that his group is looking at where cultural life, community life and economic life combine. He emphasized the relationship of cultural life to the economy and said that creative people go to creative communities and jobs follow. Mr. Levine said that Montpelier should nurture cultural life. He also said that Montpelier has an authentic city-scape which is attractive to people and should be maintained.
- Hilari Farrington suggested that the forum participants consider creating a cultural and recreational council to foster cooperation and avoid competition.
- Rich Hansen said that providing the best quality public spaces will foster greater public engagement in the city.

Mr. Borgendale closed the forum portion of the meeting and thanked everyone for their participation..

Other Business

Mr. Borgendale said that he wanted to move ahead on the Transportation Survey. Mr. Mitofsky said that he was concerned that more than half of the current document was new material. Ms. Capels explained that the survey the Commission last reviewed was the consultant's first draft.

Mr. Borgendale asked for the new version to be sent to him by e-mail so that he could send it to the Commission members for comment. He said that the current version does need some work. Ms. Capels said that since the document could not be published in the Bridge on February 19, there is time to work out the issues.

Mr. Mitofsky said that he is concerned about the process. He said the document is substantially different than the one discussed at the last meeting and that the work on the issues affects the timing. Ms. Capels said that there is still time to make changes and have the survey available at the Town Meeting. Mr. Mitofsky said that the document should stop changing if it is to be ready for Town Meeting. Mr. Borgendale indicated that he understood that there would be some major changes to the document. Ms. Capels explained that the document that came back from the consultant was considerably different from the one that the Commission discussed. She said that she could put a notice in the Bridge alerting residents to look for the survey. Ms. Capels also said that the time frame will need to be compressed in April in order to have the survey results ready in May. Mr. Mitofsky said that the process described by Mr. Borgendale must be followed in order to be able to vote on the survey at the next meeting.

Mr. Borgendale asked whether the 6:30 p.m. version was complete. Ms. Capels responded that a map and a business reply page need to be added. Mr. Mitofsky asked whether that version includes questions on bridges. Mr. Borgendale referred to question 14L. Mr. Mitofsky indicated that the question should be removed or another question related to maintaining traffic flow should be added.

Mr. Borgendale indicated that he thought that there was agreement that the survey should ask respondents to prioritize choices. Ms. Capels said that question #13 was an attempt to consolidate questions on prioritizing. Mr. Borgendale said that the question does not actually require that people make choices. Mr. Mitofsky stated that the table that was dropped would provide a great deal of information. It could be circulated with a request that only Montpelier residents complete it. Ms. Capels said that the consultant recommended that it be dropped because there was no clear way to instruct the user to fill it out properly. Ms. Capels also raised the issue that the table format will not work well with the proposed method to collate information and enter it into a database. Mr. Mitofsky said that the information was important to collect. Mr. Borgendale stated that the layout of the document should not

take precedence over the collection of information. Ms. Capels cautioned against making the document too long or complicated and suggested that it could be tested on a few people before being finalized.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Capels

Transcribed by Kathleen Swigon

These minutes are subject to approval by the Planning Commission. Changes, if any, will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which they were acted upon.