

CHENEY BROTHERS NATIONAL HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
JANUARY 7, 2010
LINCOLN CENTER HEARING ROOM
4:30 P.M.

Members Present: Vivian Ferguson, Bettye Kramer, Robert Shanbaum, John Malone, James Quaglia, John Wilks, Rita McParland, Lynne Ferrigno, Barbara King, Leslie Frey, Dan Bebyn, Susan Barlow, John Dormer

Also Present: Mark Pellegrini, Director of Neighborhood Services and Economic Development

Members Absent: Mike Stebe

Before the business meeting officially commenced, Ms. Ferguson announced she would allow Ms. Susan Barlow, who is expected to be appointed to the Cheney Commission, to sit as a Commission member in an ad hoc capacity for this meeting.

Election of Officers as Required

Mr. Shanbaum moved to nominate Ms. Ferguson as Chair, Ms. Kramer as Vice-Chair, and Ms. Ferrigno as secretary. Mr. Wilks seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

Ms. Ferguson thanked the Commission members for reappointing her to this position.

Adoption of 2010 Meeting Schedule

Commission members reviewed the proposed schedule and it was adopted by consensus.

Adoption of Minutes of November 19, 2009 and December 3, 2009 Meetings

Mr. Wilks pointed out that he was present at the December 3, 2009 meeting and this was not reflected in the draft minutes. Commission members also discussed the minutes of the November 19th meeting, in particular the discussion of the adoption of the October 1 meeting minutes and the different recollections members had regarding the choice of materials and colors for the shed that was eventually approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission for Fuss & O'Neill's building at 160 Hartford Road.

Members agreed that if the third sentence in the portion of the minutes regarding adoption of the minutes of October 1 were stricken, the minutes still accurately reflect the discussion and ultimate disposition of the item. Commission members wanted the January minutes to note Ms. Frey did not recall the conversation regarding the options for materials and colors for the shed as they were recorded in the minutes, but had no objection to adopting the minutes as proposed.

The Commission unanimously adopted the minutes.

Discussion of Study of Mary Cheney Library by Town Appointed Committee

Ms. Ferguson said she had been invited to participate in a design study commissioned by the Town to explore the possibilities for the expansion of the Mary Cheney Library at its present location at Center Memorial Park. Ms. Ferguson read a prepared statement, which she said she intended to ask the Commission to endorse, that would express the Commission's opposition to an expansion of the library if it would infringe upon any of the land in the park. Ms. Ferguson noted the Board of Directors had authorized the preparation of the study but she was concerned that the Historical Society and the Cheney Commission had not been consulted about the decision to look at expanding the library into Center Park. She noted that the Historic Society Board had written a letter in opposition of the expansion plan if it would infringe on the park, and that the Town's General Manager had responded to the letter and that had been reported in the Journal Inquirer. Ms. Ferguson asked for a vote for the Cheney Commission to oppose any encroachment into the park or any other decision on the library without the approval of the Town's residents.

Ms. Ferguson asked Mr. Pellegrini to review what he knew about this planning process. Mr. Pellegrini said in February 2008 the Board of Directors authorized \$60,000 to conduct a design analysis. The intent was to determine whether there was any feasible and acceptable way to expand the Mary Cheney Library at its present location. He said the Board felt that while some people had expressed their opposition to expanding the library in place, either because they felt another location would be more suitable or because they wanted to protect the park, there had never been a rigorous analysis of possible expansion options.

Mr. Pellegrini said General Manager Shanley invited a large group of stakeholders to participate with the consultants in interactive design workshops to be conducted over a series of four meetings. He said the Manager's intent was to involve people with a wide range of interests and perspectives in the process so their opinions and values could be part of the analysis. He said the Manager made it clear both in his letter of invitation and to the members who attended the first design workshop that as a part of this exercise they had to pretend there was no other possible location for a library expansion. This ground rule was intended to encourage innovative thinking to address the building and parking needs at the library in the context of its historic setting. Mr. Pellegrini said he agreed with the Manager that if individuals do not believe there is any way the library can or should be expanded at the site, they should consider whether to participate in the exercise, or wait and make their comments on any final recommendation that comes from the process.

Ms. Frey said she was surprised the Board would even consider supporting the expansion of the library at its present location.

Ms. Kramer said she had discussed the project with Ms. Ferguson and Mr. Pellegrini prior to the meeting, and that she does have concerns and she would not want to see any major encroachments at the Center Park. However, she noted she would prefer for the Commission not to be opposed at the very beginning of the process and should participate, but should make its concerns known to the General Manager and the Board of Directors. Ms. Kramer stated she is aware of very creative solutions to on-site expansions which preserve historic architecture and settings, including the addition to the Salvation Army in Manchester and an addition to the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, for example. Ms. Kramer said while it is hard for her

personally to imagine there is a solution that would satisfy the competing interests of library expansion and park preservation, did not mean it was not possible.

Ms. Kramer read a statement for the Commission's consideration that expressed the Commission's awareness and understanding of the current library facilities' deficiencies and needs, and the desire to keep it at a central and convenient location. The statement also noted that the Cheney Commission has an interest in ensuring that any expansion maintains the integrity of Center Park, which the Commission considers a Town treasure located in the center of the community and a developed neighborhood. The statement says that while the Commission does not reject the concept of expanding the library at its present location, the Commission does have concerns and the study should take into consideration the appearance and use of the park and encroach on the park as little as possible.

Mr. Shanbaum said he agreed with Ms. Kramer's statements. He also noted that the results of the study may show it is not possible to expand the library in place. Ms. Ferrigno also agreed with Ms. Kramer's statements, and said it was important for the Commission to make their initial position known early in the process.

Ms. Barlow asked whether the Historical Society had been invited to be on the Steering Committee. She noted that in the past, studies have been conducted and the community was faced only with an option of whether to accept or reject a possible solution, such as when a study for expansion of the parking was completed several years ago. Both Ms. Barlow and Ms. Ferguson noted several prior incidents, in particular the proposal to demolish several buildings at the Bennet School complex and the demolition of the Hollister School, as examples of what they felt were the Town Board of Directors making decisions without consulting the community early in the process.

Mr. Dormer said the Historical Society was not invited to be on the steering committee but only to attend the design workshop. He said he was not sure if it was an afterthought that the Historical Society was invited. Mr. Dormer said the letter the Historical Society sent did not object to expanding the library, but objected to taking any land from the park as part of that expansion. Ms. Kramer said she may be willing to give up some park land provided it makes the library better and doesn't damage the park. Ms. Barlow suggested a few revisions to Ms. Kramer's statement, including replacing the words "endeavor to encroach on the park as little as possible," to "protect and preserve the park as much as possible and to emphasize protecting the park's historic appearance."

Mr. Pellegrini said there is an important difference in this current library expansion design study and some of the other projects mentioned by Commission members. He said the General Manager purposefully invited a broad range of stakeholders to participate in design workshops to develop a recommendation before it is even presented to the Board of Directors. He also noted the library expansion project, wherever it occurs, will be a multi-million dollar project and will require a referendum vote to authorize financing for the project, so there will be ample opportunity for the public to be part of the decision.

It was the consensus of the Commission to ask the Chair to send a letter substantially along the lines of Ms. Kramer's statement, with revisions suggested by Ms. Barlow. Ms. Ferrigno offered to work with Ms. Ferguson to draft a final statement and send it to the Commission and to the General Manager for distribution to the Board of Directors.

Discussion of the Great Lawn in the Cheney Mansion Zone

Ms. Ferguson said she has long been concerned there should be some explicit language preserving the Great Lawn as open space in perpetuity. She noted that while the Town acquired the property for that purpose, there is nothing in the land records or elsewhere that documents the intent to leave it as open space. She noted several individuals have raised various ideas on putting public facilities or doing other work on the Great Lawn. She would like the Commission to request the Town Attorney's office and the Board of Directors adopt some legal restriction that would make it clear that the Great Lawn is to be preserved as open space in perpetuity.

Ms. Ferrigno moved that Ms. Ferguson make a request to the Board of Directors to place restrictions on the Great Lawn to keep it as open space in perpetuity. Mr. Wilks seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. Mr. Shanbaum abstained from voting on this measure, because he is an abutting property owner to the Great Lawn.

NOTICE: THE CASSETTE TAPE RECORDING OF THE BUSINESS MEETING CAN
BE HEARD IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.

OFFICIAL TAPE NO. 28

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