



Davis-Thayer Building Reuse Advisory Committee Agenda & Meeting Packet

June 10, 2024

A meeting of the Davis-Thayer Reuse Advisory Committee was held Tuesday evening, June 10, 2024, at the Municipal Building, 2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, MA.

Members present: Chair Deborah Pellegri, Vice Chair Patrick Sheridan, Clerk Ted Cormier-Leger, Roberta Trahan, Sam Williams, Greg Rondeau, Chris Stickney, Gwyneth Morss, Megan McCarthy.

Other staff present: Town Administrator Jamie Hellen, Deputy Town Administrator Amy Frigulietti, Director of Public Facilities Mike D'Angelo, Deputy Director of Engineering Kevin Harn.

Chair Pellegri calls the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

The Town Administrator gave a brief overview from the Executive Summary of the property appraisal review titled "[Real Property Appraisal Report, Shepherd Associates, LLC - May 1, 2024](#)" The Administrator described the property is appraised at \$3.2 million for the land and building combined (fee simple) or \$1.4 million for just the land only (fee simple). These assumptions were on the current zoning, Single Family Residential IV, which limits what could be built. He suggested the Board of Assessors had the valuations of \$4.7 million for the land and building. The town has appraised the property at \$1.97 million for the land and \$2.7 million for the building. Both appraisals depict different assumptions, but this is typical. Member Stickney, as a certified general appraisal in the Commonwealth, suggested the appraisal was done well and has no major issues with the appraisal. He raised two observations from the Shepherd Report. The first being that the land value scenario as put forth seemed a little low and the building value scenario seemed a little high.

Chair Pellegri raised the idea to decide if the committee desires to recommend to the Council maintaining the ownership of the parcel, the building and to preserve the facade of the building.

Clerk Cormier-Leger asked TA Hellen to clarify the Committee's charge asking whether the recommendation can be broad rather than specific to a particular project. TA Hellen agreed with Clerk Cormier-Leger and clarified the charge and process to the Committee.

Member Williams asked about limitations to the proceeds from the lease or sale of the building. TA Hellen stated there are limitations on both the sale of the building and a lease, but it is less restrictive with a lease. He indicated the funds would need to go into a special account and funds from a sale would need to be spent on purchasing land.

Vice Chair Sheridan indicated he would like to keep the building facade.

The Committee discussed whether or not it was appropriate to ask if those interested in the parcel would entertain a ground lease and agreed that it was appropriate to have this discussion at this time.

The Committee invited those who have filed expressions of interest and were in attendance to give a preliminary review of their proposals. The five Expressions of Interest are listed below.

[Matthew Zajac](#) - Was not in attendance.

[Dean College](#) - Sandra Cain from Dean College was there representing Dean College. The Chairman of the Board at Dean College & Interim President was participating via Zoom. Ms. Cain indicated that in speaking with the Chairman and Interim President, Dean would be interested in a ground lease option for the property. Ms. Cain talked about Dean's proposal for an Arts/Cultural Hub and Community Center for the College at this location, indicating concern for the future use of the property as it is both an entrance to the Town as well as the College. She stated a desire to work with the Town on a project that benefits both parties.

Member Cormier-Leger asked about their willingness to invest in the property to comply with ADA, etc. and Ms. Cain indicated support for doing so as well as for paying taxes.

Member Trahan asked about a gallery space for Franklin Arts Association and Ms. Cain expressed support for such a space.

[Pennrose, LLC](#) - Was not in attendance.

[HFA and TMC Properties](#) - Sharon Charwick, architect from HFA was there representing HFA. HFA and TMC Properties are jointly proposing two options for the Davis-Thayer property.

The first option is an adaptive reuse proposal - "The Davis Thayer Center for the Arts". The primary function would be to preserve the building and celebrate the historic nature of the building as well as keep the ball field and enhance the youth activities that occur on the field. The proposal would activate the front lawn with a large balcony across the front of the building and create an engaging space on the front lawn with public art. The first floor would have a fine dining restaurant with an outdoor patio to the front lawn. The gym area would be a multi-level performance area. The proposal also envisioned a speakeasy in the basement and a function space on the second floor leading out to the balcony. The proposal makes space for a local organization such as the Children's Museum or Franklin Arts Association with gallery/studio space and/or a business use on upper floors. As part of this proposal HFA/TMC would seek to renovate the existing ball field and potentially relocate the Town Recreation Department next to the field. The proposal also rebuilds the playground and provides an area for food trucks - activating the area for the use of the community.

The second option is the "Facade Preservation and Redevelopment" which looks to provide multi-family housing at this location. This proposal maintains the front facade and creates a more dense site with housing. This proposal would also include social gathering spaces and performance spaces.

Chair Pellegri asked if HFA/TMC would be open to leasing the property. Ms. Charwick could not say for certain but stated she would defer to TMC and they would be able to answer these types of questions at the next meeting on June 25th. However, she thinks they would be open to it.

Clerk Cormier-Leger stated he loves the idea of keeping the field.

Chair Pellegri asked about the Recreation Department moving to the field and questioned the space capacity. Ms. Charwick stated it was just an idea, however she believes based on the site plan that they could build a new two story building at the site that provides more space than their existing building. She explained the thinking was to have a youth sports/community organization next to the field near downtown. Clerk Cormier-Leger indicated that he liked the thought of exploring this option based on feedback from the Recreation Department in the past regarding interest in the site.

A question from the audience was asked about a non-profit organization paying taxes on the property if there was a lease. TA Hellen explained that it depends on the use as to whether or not the organization would need to pay taxes. He explained that Dean College does pay taxes on many of their buildings. TA Hellen also clarified that any agreement would not preclude a PILOT - Payment in Lieu of Taxes.

[Camford Property Group, Inc.](#) - Brad Chaffee was there representing Camford Property Group, Inc. He discussed his thinking around trying to keep the school and ideas pertaining to an educational or community use. He stated that keeping the building or taking it down really comes down to finances. Also believes that some sort of mixed use is the likely option. This proposal would allow the back of the building to accommodate green space, a theater, and mixed use community space.

Mr. Chaffee indicated he would be open to ground leasing the property; however, he indicated it makes the deal more complicated but also provides some benefits. He also stressed the need for rezoning the parcel and any development deal would be contingent upon getting the parcel rezoned and the timing associated with a rezone.

Clerk Cormier-Leger asked if the proposal includes some senior housing. Mr. Chaffee stated that the proposal includes housing, but not specific to seniors. However, he would be open to a senior housing or mixed use housing proposal.

Clerk Cormier-Leger and Mr. Chaffee discussed performance space in the building and the capital expenses associated with this use.

Member Stickney indicated his support for a combination of these proposals stating he likes HFA/TMC's reuse of the existing building and Camford's activation plan for the rear portion of the lot. Member Stickney then went on to discuss financing and stated he believes the Committee should recommend to the Town Council that the Town leverage the stepped ground lease process to give the developers a leg up by not needing to come up with the capital to buy or take ownership of the property, essentially allowing the developer to lease at a very low price for a period of time so long as the Town is able to have recommended amenities. In his experience, Mr. Stickney does not believe this type of project is a money maker for the Town but more of a benefit to the Town with regard to what is developed.

Member Morss asked Mr. Chaffee if he manages his own properties and Mr. Chaffee indicated that he does.

Vice Chair Sheridan, Chair Pellegri, and Clerk Cormier-Leger discussed the benefits of having senior housing at this location coupled with the ballfield. Member Rondeau stated an option of having senior housing in the back and a mixed use development in the front. Member Trahan cited the benefits of senior housing near downtown and the activity centers and felt that this type of housing could work well in this area.

Mrs. Charwick indicated the amount of hazardous material abatement required in the building and stressed that any new housing units might want to be part of a new addition and not a part of the main building/school renovation.

Member Trahan asked the Chair to solicit feedback from the members of the Committee and the Chair opened up the discussion to the members. Member Morss indicated she likes the idea of a mixed use development and wants to ask proponents what level of involvement with the Town would they consider. Member Stickney stated he is in favor of a lease scenario when Town maintains ownership of the land and enters into a mutually beneficial lease. Member Stickney believes this provides the Town with greater control as to what can and cannot happen on the site. He also feels strongly that housing be a part of any development on the site. Member McCarthy indicated her preference to preserve the facade of the building as well as keeping the property. Member McCarthy is excited about the proposals, but she has concerns about capital funding. She indicated her appreciation for the discussion around leasing options and would like clarity around proponent vs.

town expectations at the next meeting. Clerk Cormier-Leger believes that keeping the asset and the long term lease idea makes the most sense. He indicated his preference for a mixed use space, specifically concerning art and performance space. He stated his preference for a bustling hub with a restaurant and preservation of the park/field. Clerk Cormier-Leger is also amenable to senior housing as part of a separate structure, but stressed the Town's limited funds. He is less concerned about keeping the facade. Member Williams stressed the need to maintain flexibility, specifically regarding zoning, but also to understand benefits for both the developer and the Town. Member Trahan indicated a preference to save the facade but it is not a deal breaker. She stressed the need to do something with the building sooner rather than later and likes the idea of leasing the building so that the Town can keep the asset. Member Rondeau expressed a strong preference for the Town to keep the property and indicated an openness to a potential partnership based on financing. If not financially feasible, he has a preference to take down the building and maintain the parcel as ballfields. Vice Chair Sheridan stated his appreciation for all three proposals Chair Pellegrini indicated her preference for a mixed use development, keeping the ball field as well as keeping the facade. She also indicated a preference for a restaurant stressing the importance of the location as an entrance to the Town. She asked TA Hellen to explain the leasing option and Town funding.

TA Hellen indicated that the Town does not have any money to subsidize this project, however CPA funding may qualify for some funding but not enough to make a difference in a project of this size. He explained that a lease would allow for a long term agreement between the Town and a developer/tenant to upgrade and manage the property. The tenant would have a low cost lease and would recoup costs based on the use.

Member Trahan asked when Town Council should be included in the conversation. The Committee discussed their role and agreed to have the four proponents back at the next meeting in order to make a recommendation to the Town Council.

Next Meeting Date: June 25, 2024

The Chair entertained a motion to adjourn **MOTION** to adjourn by Rondeau. **SECOND** by Stickney. **VOTE:** Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:41 PM