



Davis-Thayer Building Reuse Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
June 25, 2024

A meeting of the Davis-Thayer Reuse Advisory Committee was held Tuesday evening, June 25, 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 (remote).

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.

1. Committee was Called to Order at 7:00 pm. A moment of silence and pledge to the flag occurred. Chair Pellegri indicated the purpose of the meeting is to review the four proposals/expressions of interest for the Davis-Thayer School. She indicated the committee's desire to keep the building and land. The Chair also indicated for the record that Member McCarthy is participating in the meeting via Zoom.
2. Expressions of Interest Presentations (anticipated times)
 - a. 7:00 to 7:20 - [Dean College](#) - Sandra Cain was at the meeting representing Dean College, along with Mark Boyce, Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Dean College as well as Acting Interim President of the College. Mr. Boyce introduced himself and indicated that Dean College is now collaborating with Brad Chaffee of [Camford Property Group, Inc.](#) on a combined proposal as one entity with a proposal on "The Franklin Dean Gateway". Mr. Boyce described their proposal as a mixed use proposal as part of the Arts & Cultural District that would provide educational spaces, recreational spaces, and commercial spaces as an entryway into Franklin and Dean College. Mr. Boyce explained that this development would provide a new way for the College to work with the Twn through educational spaces, theater spaces, museum and gallery spaces and other innovative multi-use spaces. Mr. Boyce explained the school's desire to expand and make additional investments in the school and in the community.

Member Rondeau asked a question about ratios between educational vs recreational vs housing use. Mr. Boyce indicated they would be looking at this based on the cost perspective and return on investment. Mr. Chaffee then walked through the proposal explaining that behind the school building would be a green space with an outdoor theater with additional parking on the right hand side. The left side of the parcel behind the existing school would be two new mixed use buildings. Lower floors would be commercial space such as a restaurant.

Clerk Cormier-Leger asked if their proposal eliminates the ball field and playground and Mr. Chaffee indicated that it does. Clerk Cormier-Leger asked for their consideration in keeping the ball field and playground. Clerk Cormier-Leger asked about Dean's ability to finance the renovation of the existing DT school and desire to enter into a lease with the Town. Mr. Chaffee indicated that it would depend on the structure of the lease/agreement. He is also open to a sale

with a restriction on the building. Mr. Boyce added that they are flexible on how the deal is structured. He also highlighted Dean's ability as the abutter to use currently owned land for community recreation space if there is a desire to keep the fields. Clerk Cormier-Leger explained the need for gallery space in the community and asked the presenters to seek to accommodate this type of space into their proposal and encouraged Dean to provide arts/theater programming for Franklin public school students.

Member Trahan made a statement about the history of the Franklin Arts Association and their lack of a stable home and asked Dean/Camford to consider a space for them as part of their proposal.

Member Stickney indicated a preference for keeping the ball field and playground even if at a different location nearby. He also indicated a preference for some sort of host agreement with not only the lease but also with programming or space for the public at no or low cost.

Resident Mark Minnichelli provided feedback via Zoom. He indicated his pleasure with this collaboration between Dean and Camford. He would like the proponents to consider this project as an educational incubator encouraging collaboration between the college and the public school system. He asked how Dean chose the developer and encouraged an art area and keeping the ball field. Mr. Boyce indicated that Ms. Cain followed up with Mr. Chaffee after the last meeting and felt they had a shared vision for the parcel.

A resident spoke about previously living in Amherst and Northampton and North Adams and their thriving art scene and the benefits of arts in a community.

- b. 7:20 to 7:40 - [Pennrose, LLC](#) - Carmen Chung and Charlie Adams were there representing Pennrose and Andrew Stebbins was there from the architectural team. Ms. Chung explained the mission of Pennrose is to build high quality mixed use multi family housing indicating that they are not only developers but also owners and operators of this housing with no plans to sell the property. They wish to be members of the community long term and care about how the property is built, what materials are used, and what it looks like long term versus short term. Ms. Chung indicated their desire to work with the community on the things important to them such as the ball field, art space, etc. She explained their proposal centers around housing, as they are housing developers and they believe this site is perfect for housing. Ms. Chung explained their experience with both adaptive reuse projects as well as new housing projects, citing two former school projects in Auburn, Massachusetts as examples and other projects in the Boston area. Ms. Chung explained accessibility issues with older schools and indicated it is best to add a new building on the back to achieve accessibility. They work to keep historic elements and traditionally use the existing classrooms into a single unit, as the classrooms are well sized for one bedroom units. These projects require all new systems, windows, etc. Ms. Chung pointed to Franklin's master plan concerning the need for mixed income housing and explained their experience building a variety of housing at a range of incomes as well as market rate housing. She indicated their ability to support senior and artist housing as part of this project.

Member Stickney asked the proponent if the goal of their project is to be entirely residential or if there is a desire to have mixed use or some commercial. Ms. Chung indicated that in the school building they would want to preserve the library and gymnasium as opportunities for another non-residential use and would be willing to collaborate with the Franklin Arts Association or others for the best use. Ms. Chung indicated they would not cut these spaces up into units so there is flexibility with these areas.

Member Morss asked the proponent how they come across properties that interest them and what interested them in Davis-Thayer. Ms. Chung indicated their love for renovating old schools and stated that they look for projects that will have community support and that can be integrated into the community. Ms. Chung expressed DT's proximity to the train station and amenities as another reason. Mr. Adams expressed the historic attractiveness of the building and likened it to other projects they have completed. He explained their desire to keep these historic buildings for another 100 years, just under a different use and as a benefit to the community. The team architect stressed the sustainable design, availability of tax credits to bring such quality housing to the market, and nearby amenities in Franklin. The development team also gave kudos to building staff for maintaining the building and keeping it in good condition.

Clerk Cormier-Leger asked if the development team would entertain a long term lease. Ms. Chung stated they have no issue with a long term ground lease for the land and frequently develop projects this way.

Resident Mark Minnichelli asked the proponent about financing based on the 60-80 unit count and green space. Ms. Chung explained she believes they can make 60-80 units work based on market demand and also feels there is an opportunity to retain the field by splitting the parcel and configuring the building in a certain way close to the other building.

A resident from Pearl Street asked about traffic flow. Ms. Chung stated that this would be part of the discussion as to whether the project would cater to seniors or the general population but either way the traffic count would be lower compared to the school traffic. Would recommend a 1:1 ratio given the proximity to public transportation.

- c. 7:40 to 8:00 - [HFA and TMC Properties](#) Sharon Charwick was present representing HFA and Matt Clark was there representing TMC Properties. They are partnering on this project. Mr. Clark explained that they like the historic component of this property and stressed that they heard all the concerns of the community, from maintaining rights to the property to preserving the green space. Ms. Charwick went on to describe the site plan and project. The project is an adaptive reuse development - "The Davis-Thayer Center for the Arts". The project seeks to maintain the facade of the building, preserve and renovate the building. Their goal is to activate the whole site - keeping the playground and ball field while adding public art to the front lawn, a food truck area and possibly relocating the Recreation Department in the back of the parcel. A modern balcony would be added to the front as well as a restaurant and outdoor patio on the first floor. The plan also incorporates a speakeasy, two story function hall leading to the balcony, and performance space in the former gymnasium. There is the potential for commercial space on the side/first floor - a possible location for the Franklin Arts Association. The project team envisions artists lofts, and studios on the second and third floors. Mr. Clark feels a partnership with the Recreation Department/the Town and higher education for this project is important and honoring the needs of the community. He feels this project is feasible with a significant commitment from the Town or Dean College and would be sustainable and could last another 50 to 100 years. Ms. Charwick explained that they looked at housing at this location but ultimately decided to go with the Center for the Arts due to the feeling that housing was not a natural fit for this property due to the hazardous materials and upgrade that would have to occur. They also took into consideration other housing being developed in the area.

Member Stickney stated that the HFA/TMC interior concept and renderings were the most attractive to him, increasing the vibrancy and utility of the site.

Clerk Cormier-Leger asked a question about return of investment. The team indicated revenue generation via rentals, ticket sales, etc.

Clerk Cormier-Leger asked about ADA compliance and upgrades to the building. Ms. Charwick stated that they looked at adding elevators to the building as well as a central staircase and additional infrastructure needs. Mr. Clark stated that a lot needs to align to make this project successful and mention the potential to partner with higher education.

Member Morss asked if the proponent was most interested in the building or the location. Ms. Charwick indicated both - Appreciates the beautiful architectural elements of the old historic building with new modern addition and provides the opportunity to showcase the values of the Town as this property is a gateway to downtown.

Resident Mark Minnichelli asked if the proponent has done old school conversions in the past, if they have approached Dean College about a partnership, and why they aren't presenting housing on this property. Ms. Chadwick indicated more support for their first approach with preservation and open space rather than housing.

TA Hellen discussed next steps per the Chair. TA Hellen discussed the [Draft Letter](#) recommendation to be reviewed by the Committee and then given to the Town Council. The letter does not pick a particular project or proposal. The letter recommends maintaining ownership of the land and building, prioritizing the protection of the facade, a mixed use concept, if possible, but does not limit options for the Town Council as this process moves forward.

Member Rondeau asked that the word "if possible" be taken out of the letter concerning maintaining ownership of the land. Member Stickney concurred. Member Morss added that the end date of the Committee be changed from the original end date to reflect the new date the Committee expires to June 30, 2024. Member Stickney asked that the number of proposals in the letter be changed from four to three, as two of the proposals merged into one and indicated a few minor non substantive grammatical edits. Clerk Cormier-Leger asked that they recommend the Town Council move forward with an RFP and ensure there gallery space in any new development..

The Chair entertained a motion to delete "if possible" from the recommendation. **MOTION** to delete "if possible" by Rondeau. **SECOND** by Stickney. **VOTE:** Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.

The Chair entertained a motion to accept amended changes to the draft letter. **MOTION** to accept amended changes to the draft letter by Cormier-Leger. **SECOND** by Stickney. **VOTE:** Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0

The Chair entertained a motion to approve the final recommendation as amended. **MOTION** to approve the final recommendation as amended by Cormier-Leger. **SECOND** by Stickney. **VOTE:** Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0

3. Adjourn

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