



Foundry Advisory Committee MEETING MINUTES

May 16, 2017

Participants:

Advisory Committee Members: Folakemi Alalade, Miriam Buchelli, Deborah Ruhe, Jamie Sabino, Mark Tang, Richard Thal, (Jason Slavick not present)

City and CRA Staff: Taha Jennings (City Manager's Office), Tom Evens (CRA Executive Director), Kathryn Madden (CRA Strategic Planner), Carlos Peralta (CRA Planner)

Public: See attached sign in sheet

Purpose of Meeting

The Foundry Advisory Committee met to discuss the Foundry update, new ideas for moving forward, and possible program mix.

The following captures the questions and discussion among different members of the Advisory Committee, as well as questions and comments from the public in attendance.

Discussion

How does the historic landmarking process influence the project's timeline and design?

- *The CRA has had discussions with the Historic Commission staff to assist in making planning decisions. A landmarking process would occur simultaneously with other permits and approvals.*

Are the City Council members on board with approach individually or collectively?

- *Most of the Councillors have been briefed on the project update. A meeting of the Neighborhood & Long Term Planning, Public Facilities, Arts & Celebration Committee will be held on Wednesday, June 21, 2017 @ 1:00 PM, in the Sullivan Chamber.*

What notifications to the public will be made of the public opportunities for input?

- *There is a Foundry CoUrbanize site (courb.co/foundry). Information is also posted regularly on the CRA website. The CRA Board meets monthly in a public meeting; the agenda is posted on the CRA website and often includes the Foundry; public comments are welcome.*

Is it economically feasible for operations to support community uses? Operationally we don't want to run the reserves into the ground. What are the range of rents to attract the right mix and make the whole project feasible.

- *We are projecting that the City and the CRA will pay for the capital cost of renovating the building; the mix of uses will include market rate office uses and community non-profit uses to generate fees, rents, and memberships sufficient to support the ongoing operational*

costs of the entire building, including maintenance, repair, programming, and a capital reserve. In this overall mix, we are also trying to include some “public” space that would be free, such as rooms for public community meetings and similar uses.

Has anyone tested the demand for a black box theatre and art studios? Will the people who want them have the revenue to use them? What is the pricing structure?

- *The CRA is in the process of reaching out to various constituencies to understand better the feasibility and operations of each of the program types. Some work has been done but this outreach will be ongoing.*

There is lots of demand for theater spaces that are affordable. Some spaces exist, such as the High School, but janitorial costs are high. Theater spaces that have raised stages, wings, and curtains are not flexible. Some theater groups are not aware of each other – the non-profit community needs to work more cooperatively.

- *The current proposal includes a “black box”, which is an open room, equipped with lights and sound; the performance area and seating is flexible and there are no curtains. We are looking at fee structures that may allow for a range of fees depending on the production and the type of supporting services. It’s not always easy to share spaces during a production run with a fixed set.*

The City and the CRA are making a huge commitment to fund the capital costs. It’s good to hear that the financial model also includes several staff positions to operate the building. Too often it is assumed that one person can run a building like this.

- *The CRA is trying to project the right amount of staffing, recognizing that there is the need for property management for the building itself, but also staff that will coordinate the day to day facility management especially where different groups are sharing space, staff that will stay engaged with outreach to the community and booking different programs, and staff that will market and lease space for anchor tenants, whether office users or studio artists.*

One example to look at is [NEPAC?]. They use facilities to the maximum degree. Some facilities such as the Multicultural Center do not have the benefit of market rate office to help support community use of the space, which makes the Center often seem like a very closed space.

- *The ongoing role of the Foundry Advisory Committee will be very important to continually advise the City and the CRA about the success of the overall programming and interactions. We are also looking at operational processes that involve setting goals, forecasting uses and programs, regular reporting and evaluation to be sure that we are on track over time.*

There was a desire to include the Cambridge Arts Council, which has a small staff but is very effective.

- *We are in regular discussion with the staff of the Cambridge Arts Council for planning and operational advice and will continue to explore their role.*

There was a discussion of whether other places existed that are trying to do similar things. There was also a concern with the approach that “if you build it, they will come.” Creative Hub Worcester is beginning a project to renovate a building on Ionics Avenue in Worcester; an art event was held at the Foundry several years ago. Would a survey for demand and price point be helpful?

The City's recent survey of non-profit organizations focused on programmatic needs not facility needs (e.g. mental health, affordable housing, etc.). The Cambridge Community Development Department did an arts survey two years ago. The potential for an educational component of arts is very strong, which would involve kids in a workshop setting rather than just adult artist in individual spaces.

- *We have looked at many different models locally and nationally and always welcome suggestions.*

There was a question of whether the mix of spaces are always flexible (expand or contract) or would there be some anchors. Tom explained that some spaces cannot move like the black box.

A clear message is needed regarding the community use space. Everyone needs to understand what will support the operational costs. There will be issues to resolve with "asks." The use needs to be inclusive. The comm

There was a desire to include developers to help draw people to the building with the understanding that the arts are indispensable. We want operators that promote sharing with the user so that users feel ownership.

The question of grants supporting the building was discussed. Tom explained that this is not the case for the building itself and that it would be easier to seek funds for fit-outs.

There was a question regarding the use of community space by for-profit entities.

There is a concern of the Foundry trying to be everything to everyone. The creation of an RFI was discussed to see who's out there and who would do what.

The next FAC meeting will be in the beginning of July.