

62 attendees

Community Conversations

Riverlight Park

June 29, 2017

Moderator: Mary Lou Carolan

*This was a fast-moving conversation and we have done our best to capture it in its entirety. Many speakers are named, others are identified as “attendee,” as we may not have caught the name or known the speaker. This is not meant in any way to slight the speaker. Thank you for your understanding.

Welcome by MLC.

The Community Conversations programs have turned out to be a successful endeavor because people need to be heard and have forums to express their ideas/suggestions. We’ve met a lot re: mental health, downtown economic development, the environment, legislative issues, etc. Over the last few weeks, I’ve been approached from many different people asking to have a public forum to discuss the issues we are talking about tonight. There are many present who can speak to the various issues. Our goal is to eliminate rumor and base tonight on facts. Reminder, we have more in common than not. As we go through the night, you will realize that. We want what is best for Cornwall. There are different philosophies on how to get there. All are important. We all want to be heard and treated with respect. We may learn something and that’s the goal. Please sign in and review the documents on the table.

Issues to be considered tonight:

1. Alienation of parkland issue.
2. Proposed development of museum.
3. Proposed location of visitor’s center
4. Sustainable design plan – for existing uses of park – life, property, safety.
5. Was professional input sought regarding this issue?
6. Was community stakeholder input sought?
7. Were alternate locations and sites considered?
8. What other public space is available to the town?
9. What are the next steps?

This is a good place to start. I am so impressed by the commitment you all have to the community. There are various people in the room with expertise to talk about these issues, but your opinion is important too. Notes from this meeting will be shared with all of you and given to town board in preparation for the Monday July 3 work session.

Q: Will the notes be publicly available to public?

A. Yes. On the library website, also.

A bit of history. At the first Community Conversation in May 2016, Town Supervisor Richard Randazzo brought up development of a museum next door the library to house Cornwall History Museum and consideration for a part of it to be a visitor center. It would be a prefab structure. No timeline was discussed.

Since then, issues and concerns have been raised by groups in the community. For example, the Library Board is seeking NYS Construction Grant Funding to add 11 spaces to the parking lot. With the proposed development adjacent to the lot, the board was concerned if the development would impact the way the library is planning. This began the discussion.

Recently Assemblyman James Skoufis and Senator Larkin approved the alienation of parkland legislation at the request of the Town Board. They exercised “Home rule” which is when the town has a decision to make, it’s left to the local folks to handle it and the legislature approves/rubber stamps it. Town board passed the alienation of parkland proposal 4 to 1. Many issues were brought up including traffic and safety.

The floor was given to Susan Kamlet, Historical Society President, to present details and a timeline from the historical Society.

Susan Kamlet:

I’ve been President of the Historical Society for 1 year. I’d like to present a timeline of the Historical Society. Present are 2 founding members: Dean Satterly and Jane Harkinson . It was founded in 1999 by a group of citizens.

In November 2000, the society received NYS charter for the 501(c)(3) charter. They are not town or village funded. Only through donations and memberships.

In 2003 the town Supervisor at the time suggested to move ahead with the society being in town hall to be utilized as museum and meeting room. Everything will be preserved and protected. Requested board approval to move ahead. It was approved and seconded by a roll call vote and was unanimous. Room is 14’ x 33.5’ or 469 square feet.

In 2003, it opened. Obtained World War II wall of honor. Had an approved mission statement.

In 2012 the Sciple Cooper family proposed donating their home to house the Historical Society. In Dec. 2013 the trustees visited the home and the building was in disrepair and unsuitable. In May 2016, the first general membership meeting was held at Motorcyclepedia museum. At end of the meeting, Supervisor Randazzo asked me to meet with him. I was afraid but I got permission for my treasurer to go with me. Mr. Randazzo expressed interest in building us a museum. It would be more than double the size. That same week the society was contact by Five Points Mission. The museum committee met and they offered Donahue farm/barn/kennel. One of our members evaluated the building and gave us estimates. We declined the offer.

Another resident of the village, Susan Glendenning invited the committee to her museum and grounds. She offered us her museum, but was unable to show us the interior. We declined the offer.

In the Fall of 2016, the Cornwall Public Library Board of Trustees suggested the library be used for museum historical center. I informed them that the space would be unsuitable but thanked them for the offer and invited them to visit the museum. In my memory, no one else has ever visited from the board. Janine Bixler and Mary Lou Carolan did visit.

Right now, it’s upsetting to read what’s on Facebook and the discussion around town. I sent a letter to the Cornwall local. (SK read letter to Editor she sent to the Cornwall Local). Many of you participated in our meetings and events. The majority of you have not. 2 things people to say when they visit. The first is “I didn’t know you were here” and the second is “Wow you have so much stuff. You really need more space.” Everything else people are saying about us is not true. Also, when Richard Randazzo approached us the first person I went to was Mary Lou Carolan and she was great.

MLC:

It’s important to hear the time line, so we know how we got to where we are today. It doesn’t seem that the museum is a problem, just where it will be located is, and the process for selecting that location.

What are some of the issues you have?

ATTENDEE (to Susan Kamlet)

Do you have minutes that reflect these offers were made?

SK: Yes. Of course. Timeline was taken from board minutes.

Attendee:

Do you have general statistics? How many visitors you get, etc.?

SK: We are open 2 days a week. We may get 2 or 3 visitors per day. Not everyone signs in. It's an average. Visitors are not recorded. We record volunteer hours.

Eric:

I would like to present a timeline for how this came to the awareness of the public. Also, I do not oppose you (historical society) getting a location. You are vitally important to the community. Invaluable.

I went back and read past minutes. Parkland alienation was voted on March 13, 2017. Never in minutes prior to that. This is the first time this thing hit the public.

SK: This (proposed building) was brought up at Community Conversations in May 2016

Eric: It was not brought up in a government capacity. Agenda Item # 22, resolution home rule request town park March 13, 2017. Must wait till late to get the agenda. I have no idea what that means. April Meeting: conducting survey of proposed site and making suggestions. No mention of survey finding. Randazzo said no plans made. May: Nothing in minutes. Did take a vote for a new generator in Munger cottage. Did all that but nothing for the new building site. June 2017 minutes, Randazzo stated no plans, no firm idea, just experimentation, but now we hear mention of a 1400 square foot building. If no plans, how did he come to that?

SK: Randazzo said pre-fab building. Larger than what we have. Probably double the size.

Suzanne Vondrak: Last summer they got estimates.

Eric: No information was given out to the public. You see that from the minutes. That's why lots of people are voicing their opposition.

SK: If there is info, we have not received it. I have to go with what was told to us. Since the museum is for us, we have not gotten any info other than what I told you. Estimates don't count. It's what action is taken. We're waiting to hear from Randazzo and town board.

Simon:

I want to say that I think I don't speak for anyone else, but I feel almost everyone would support the growth of Susan's organization. I think it's positive if we can all go home agreeing on that. Question is how and where it's done.

SK: Just to be thought of by the supervisor is a compliment to all of us at the Historical. Society. When I first came in here tonight, I was upset, but it is nice to see all this support

MLC

It seems, the issues are around transparency about the process, not the concept of a museum.

Claudia:

I second what Simon said. We are all seconding your mission. I am a librarian with knowledge of archiving materials. My question is, has an analysis been done on what your needs are? Whatever building was specified, did the plans include anything to keep archival materials safe? Air conditioning, etc. My guess is 1400 square feet is vastly undersized.

SK:

Everyone said don't put the cart before the horse. See what you can get. My goal is to fill our museum to the best of our ability as it stands now. This was offered to us. We are not seeking a new facility.

Rick Gioa

I don't think anyone disputes that we need someplace to house artifacts. But everything seems to be pointing to this new construction as the only option. Many of the other options were declined. The Lightron building on Hudson St. in the village could be an option. Front section is brick construction. It's off the tax rolls. Zero money would be spent by housing the museum there. It has structural integrity. Just did roof. Just put solar panels on. It's an eyesore. Spend resources on an appealing façade on Main Street. There's foot traffic, parking in back. Food bank would be more than happy to share this location.

Tom:

I would like to address issue of the process and give you my experience with another issue. I lived in Cornwall for 30 years. Moved to Beacon for 1 year. About 6 years ago, the mayor in private consult with the MTA, cooked up an idea without any input from the public. When it came up, people said, that the idea would draw business away from Beacon's Main Street. It would not integrate with the city and the organization "Beacon Deserves Better" was created. We said this wasn't a good idea and you did it in secret. City council said we are putting brakes on this. We formed a linkage committee. Searched for and found a grant and we were able to pay a planner to help organize along with volunteers who met for 12-18 months with how the city will approach this matter. The *process* is really important. The Historical Society in this town is fabulous. Echo what Rick says. I can't imagine anyone putting it in a building and hiding it behind the library.

Eileen Hartman

I talk to visitors more than anyone else here. Best place to put a visitor's center is when they drive into town. Visitors will not come and find it. They are looking for convenience. It must be at the start of the town. I don't feel this location would be used by visitors.

Question

It's obvious that Susan did not initiate this. Last night we went to a book discussion at the Historical Society and we had to unfold tables and it was a small space. Also, a question about utilization. Read responses from school children who visited and you would be amazed at how articulate 2nd and 3rd graders are. They were touched by this experience.

MLC

Process is a problem. Transparency. What about forming a committee?

Question

A committee for the Park or museum?

Responses

Both.

Attendee:

I am passionate that if we do a museum it should be in the heart of town. We need to apply pressure to town government. To allow us to get what we want. Everyone needs to come to town board meetings.

Tom:

Members were invited, but they did not come tonight.

Bruce:

I am in favor of a museum. I've taken my kids many times. I have been in that room and have been a donor. I understand there are many empty rooms in Town Hall not being used.

(Crowd disagreed)

Attendee:

I am extremely disappointed Richard Randazzo is not here. My main question is: with the proposed building. I can't get to town meetings. I have 2 kids. I follow minutes. Eric is right. It started in March and I looked back to Cornwall local to December. There's never been a cost analysis done for the Museum, Sands Ring, Clinton Street church. Sands ring has no bathroom. Why can't we put one in? Historical Society helped fund Sands Ring. Logically, if that is one of the most historical sites in town, why did we fix it if no one goes? Why is that location passed over?

Michael

I'm on town board and I gave him my thoughts about what would work well. I suggested Sands Ring to Richard Randazzo. I thought we could raise a barn that looks appropriate. Install facilities and personal services to accommodate school groups/adults. There was never really an announcement or firm proposal. He has this in his mind that he wants to do this. For me it's a process. We should have been involved sooner. When I voted no it was in response to all the feedback.

MLC

How would the process of a committee be received by the town board?

Michael

If all these people showed up, they would probably feel compelled to do it.

Bernadette:

An opinion from someone who has a business for 10 years. I own Brid's Closet. People come to us to see what's going on in Cornwall. With that in mind, having something on Main Street makes sense because our Main Street is short. People want to shop and eat and walk around to make a day of it. Having a museum fits in with the historical nature of Cornwall. People come in from Storm King, and having a museum on Main Street can take advantage of foot traffic. It makes better sense.

Bill Braine

I used to live close to the library. Drainage is an issue for the residents that live near the library. The drainage has runoff for residents on Kelly Lane. Paving any piece of the field will cause problems.

Attendee

Any run off will be at resident's expense.

Attendee

All agree that we want a museum but not behind the library. I mean, who puts a historical museum in a prefab building? Can we start a petition?

Eileen Hartmann

“Cornwall Rising” is working to revitalize Main Street and make it more walkable. We’ve been working on this a year. Jumping through hoops. We should hire an expert. Draw up a plan. Public can join us. We’ve spent over a year talking about maybe making a park in town and it’s taken forever. There are other places to consider. I like the Sands Ring idea. It’s the process. We need it somewhere where it could get staffed more. The problem is the process and the people have not been included. It’s being crammed into us. Water study, parking. I’ve lived here for 50 years. There’s never been a project to say what this park should be. Before all of this is done, there should be a site survey done.

Attendee

There was a master plan for the park done in 1959.

Eileen

A committee should be formed. At Monday’s meeting, we should tell the board a committee is being formed and asked what is the plan for the park. Look at all factors before \$300k spent on a prefab.

Ruthann

What is the objection to the Canterbury Presbyterian Church

Attendee

Cost. Taxpayers won’t go for it. Structure is falling apart.

Attendee;

The brick is falling down. In order to fix this, it would cost a lot of money.

Simon:

I have been looking at this park for years addressing drainage matters, rainfall. Pond is silted in. Needs to be dredged and restored. I proposed a small amount of money be put toward rain garden/drainage and keep it from causing problems. We have facilities being under used. American Legion building. They are the only ones using it. There’s a professional kitchen in Munger Cottage not being used. We have efficient space. My suggestion for a committee is to think about using this existing town park and Sands Ring area. We all need to come together to support the Historical Society needs.

Chris:

An issue we need to keep in minds is what are the historical societies’ needs. Space, preservation. We need clarity before we look at space issues.

SK

We do not need to collaborate with town or village historian. They are paid positions. We are not publicly funded.

MLC (to Susan Kamlet)

Since this proposal was given to you, were these issues of space and your needs ever looked into? The Historical Society has some work to do to see what your space needs are.

SK

No. You don’t go look for a car before you have the money.

Tom:

We are stakeholders in this community.

Rick

This has to be a community decision. Not a cause of one person.

Attendee:

This will require town funding. It needs to be a community decision if town monies are going to be spent. It's not one person's decision. We are all stakeholders. That includes the town board. That's where the missing link is. We hope to form a committee and walk step by step with Dick and the town board.

SK

Maybe I'm naïve, but when Richard Randazzo says we don't have plans, we will raise the money, we will write grants...I have to trust him.

Attendee

Trust but verify!

Historical society member:

I think Eric jumped the gun. This whole group is believing something that is not a fact. Having RR say that he is going to send something to the state saying he is annexing the property is just a step. There is no conspiracy.

Attendee:

There is a drawing from the town. It has dimensions. Plans to alienate the parkland.

Carlos

The property in question, in those dimensions, will remove that portion from being zoned as parkland. The bill that is going to the governor now says this land has to be used for a local history museum, if not it gets reverted back to parkland. New policy.

Attendee:

Once parkland is consecrated, parkland becomes parkland. If you need to change that, you go to Albany and get people to carry the bill. Don't read too much into it. Put cart before the horse. If they want the option.

Attendee:

But it presupposes the location.

Eric;

2 points to make. 1. Sands ring (read Town meeting notes). If we go to R. Randazzo and say what's the plan. They say we have none. Am I right?

Anita

He said it's in the process

Eric

We have the minutes. It's right here.

Eileen

I think this meeting isn't about the Historical Society. I disagree that it's just a process /concept. It has moved along. For some of us we don't like that process. Susan, it's not about you. We don't like that in 2 months this thing is in Albany before we can even talk about it. It wasn't offered for public comment.

Claudia

We are not attacking the Historical Society. We need to think bigger. Not just society members. Adults, etc. It can be bigger. Get everyone's name here and get members. Let's not shut it down.

Attendee

What about housing it to the right of town all? It would be across the street from Sands Ring on level ground and close to the Farmers Market.

Attendee

One of the things getting my attention, is why aren't you planning for your growth. How much of your planning takes in growth?

SK

We are planning to get more members to help evaluate. 1/10 of members work. We don't have time or facilities to plan for this.

Attendee

This has been going on for years. We've attempted open forum discussions. We need answers and none are forthcoming. We need a plan of action. We will pull into the library one day and a building will be there. We need to figure something out. Plan of action.

Dean

Go to every town board meeting.

Attendee

I was on master plan committee. No one shows up to town board meetings. If this is the only time you show up, it won't work.

MLC

Why did you come here and not a town board meeting?

Attendee

There's usually a small amount of time for public comments. It's not announced in advance when these discussions will take place.

Rick

Museum can't fit in Sands Ring. Clarification.

Tom

Go to every meeting. 50 people is great, but 200 people need to be there and follow up.

MLC

July 3 is the next work session.

Attendee

Not a great time, but make it work.

The first Monday is normally scheduled town board meeting.

Dawn

You ask why don't we go to town meetings? Well we elect town representatives. I expect them to run local government the way we want them to. We elect who we trust to do what we want. I saw this coming. What if they get this approved and don't use for its intended purpose?

Dean

Important to go to board meeting and don't go by the printed agenda. Things are discussed that are not on the agenda.

MLC

What do you want to come out of this? What is the **Plan of Action**:

1. Show town board there are people opposed to this. We oppose the location. The process is in question. Not having a voice in the process is a lack of transparency.
2. Exhaust the possibility of any pre-existing building. We have empty vessels and should utilize what we have.
- 3. Concerned citizens should get together and suggest to the town board that a committee be formed dedicated to finding a suitable home for the historical society and a visitor center.**
- 4. Concerned citizens should bring to the town board the suggestion of engaging in a comprehensive planning process for parkland and Sands Ring.**
5. Request town board recognition for formal committee.
6. Joint committee with town and Historical Society to plan for growth, cost, size of land, building.
7. Have Historical Society develop a plan. Town – would there be a paid position? What part of the bill is the town picking up?
8. Something needs to be stated that the building can't be taken away from the Historical Society at any time.

Start a petition asking for the committee development.

Community interaction. Positive actions. This is about all of us. We are asking to be involved. Should not be spot developed. The most successful communities are planned and thought out.

MLC

Thank you for coming this evening.