

Preservation Alliance Special Meeting
On the OWENSBORO ARMORY
2011-02-18
MINUTES



1. **Welcome** – At 12:00 noon Gary Adams introduced attendees...
 - a. City Operations Manager Tony Cecil
 - b. PA board: Gary Adams (Sec.-Treas.), Sally Anderson (emeritus), Lisa Epling, Neal Tong (Pres.), Helen Wagner (prospective)
 - c. Others: Corey Allan (News-25 WEHT), Richard Anderson, Terry Blake, Sue Fowler, Mary Michael Hayden, Kim Johnson, Susie Tyler, Jim Zabek
2. **Background** - Gary Adams provided background on the Owensboro Armory:
 - a. Architect was Frederick Hoyt Elswick, Louisville; also was an architect of Freedom Hall and the Kentucky State Fair Grounds starting in the late 1940s
 - b. Architectural style listed as "Modernist Movement;" also called "Modernist Functional," based on "International Style," elaborated with rounded and streamlined touches of "Art Moderne" (late "Art Deco")
 - c. Cornerstone was dedicated by Kentucky Gov. Simeon Willis 1947-12-05
 - d. Construction completed in 1948; formally dedicated 1949-01-30
 - e. Has been used for both military and community gatherings since its dedication
 - f. Listed in National Register of Historic Places 2002-09-13, after Kentucky Heritage Council conducted historical survey of Kentucky's military facilities over 50 years old; register listing was based on its integrity of location, setting, materials, design, and association for the armory property type
 - g. Kentucky Adjutant General Maj Gen Edward W. Tonini declared the Owensboro Armory surplus property in 2008, in conjunction with plans to construct a new Readiness Center (armory) at the O-DC Regional Airport, which is under construction
 - h. The building is a solid structural bunker with some water issues in the sub-basement due to the surface flooding in the vicinity and roof leakage due to flat roof system and internal downspout system. A historically sensitive window replacement program was only partially completed before ceasing upon its designation as surplus; twin armory at Ashland was renovated in the last decade.

3. **Tony Cecil**, City Operations Manager's made a presentation on the city's considerations...
 - a. There has been no formal decision on the future of the armory, but current commission will make a decision. City has adopted plans to make a significant improvement in storm drainage in the vicinity of the Armory. City has discussed two scenarios with RWRA: a surface basin (wet or dry) or much more expensive, in-ground water storage. Because of the combined storm-sanitary sewers in this area, the analysis is quite involved; it is expected in about six weeks. The future of the Armory building depends on the extensiveness of the storm water system improvement.
 - b. It is expected that the National Guard will move to the new readiness center by late summer or early fall. The city used Your Community Vision funds to purchase the Armory from the state; with the idea of donating the land (up to the entire site) to RWRA as the city match for the storm-sanitary sewer improvement project. The city budget has no funds allocated for to do any project with the Armory.
 - c. There are significant implications for other infrastructure costs in the vicinity. In studying a potential upgrades to the Sportscenter, it was discovered that a remodel costing over 20% of the building value would require a sprinkler system. However, currently the water supply is inadequate; it would cost \$500,000 for a new water line.
 - d. A new senior center has been proposed for the Armory property after it was determined that a site north of the Sportscenter, which was initially under consideration, could not accommodate the proposed single-story 60,000 SF building.
 - e. Cecil likes the idea of a Request For Proposals. But, that would require direction from the city commission.
 - f. Cecil wants to come back to PA with RWRA's information shown on a map.

4. **Q&A** – Open session for attendees to ask questions of Cecil and offer suggestions:
 - a. Sally Anderson asked what happens to the Munday Center, the former Lee School that serves as the current senior center. There is no plan.
 - b. Gary Adams mentioned that the Armory property was originally part of Moreland Park; it was offered to the state for construction of the Armory, which also served as a public community center prior to and after the Sportscenter opened. Any sale of the Armory to a private developer for a commercial or residential use would mean sale of public land to a private entity. It would be preferable to keep it under public ownership as a community center, even though there is no funding to renovate it at this time. The senior center might be able to use part of the building and add onto it and still meet its program. And/or the farmers market could operate in the adjoining parking lot and have an indoor market in part of the building.
 - c. Sue Fowler said the master plan for the Moreland Park did not address the Armory. Cecil said the conceptual plan to replace the Armory with a surface storm water detention basin was never adopted by the city commission.
 - d. Richard Anderson said the Armory could last for a couple of centuries. It would be a shame to waste such a robust facility. Arguments about the inadequacy of the neighborhood infrastructure are red herrings. This is a huge piece of community property; any use will require utilities. Anderson, who was involved in the tennis association, argued the gymnasium building could be used for indoor junior tennis courts, for teaching young people tennis. Adjoining the Armory could be infrastructure

for new indoor tennis courts and/or other racquet sports. The Armory is ideally suited for a tennis facility. It's a crime to tear it down.

- e. Terry Blake said underground storm water storage would be preferred. Any serious renovation of the Armory would require new everything and would certainly exceed 20% of value of building, thereby requiring application of full building codes. Blake questioned whether tennis would work. However, it could be converted to a senior center. If there is a possibility of using the building for anything, then we should do that. We've got to reuse buildings. Our tax dollars cannot continue to be used to build new buildings.
- f. Richard Anderson countered: It can be used for starter courts. The basement could be backfilled.
- g. Cecil disclosed that the streamlined bronze eagle sculpture over the front entrance of the Armory will be relocated to the new Readiness Center.
- h. Blake lamented: Is there anything we can do?
- i. Jim Zabek supported study of the farmers' market idea. Owensboro has a penchant for tearing down buildings.
- j. Cecil state that any asbestos in the building has been abated.
- k. Richard Anderson asked if there might be a distinction between repair and renovation as regards strict code application.
- l. Terry Blake said that HVAC now requires special permits.
- m. Sue Fowler asked is it was razed, what would it cost and who would pay for it. If it is RWRA, then the public at large would pay for it out of funds that have not been allocated.

5. **Conclusion** – Tony Cecil thanked the group for the opportunity to meet with us. He considered this meeting an initial step. Cecil said he would get back to PA when RWRA has its analysis completed regarding storm water options in the vicinity of the Armory. PA President Neal Tong thanked everyone for attending. The meeting was adjourned.

6. **Follow-up notes** as of 2011-04-21:

- a. Tony Cecil said that the RWRA analysis has been delayed because of other pressing matters at Dublin Lane and downtown sewer construction.
- b. Cecil said that the move to the Readiness Center may be delayed until next year.
- c. On 2011-03-02 Gary Adams discussed building codes with OMPC Associate Director of Building & Electrical Jim Mischel, who said historic buildings are afforded special consideration under the Kentucky Building Code. In historic buildings, subject to interpretations of the chief building official, if the new use is considered in the same use group as the original and total cost of improvement is less than \$500,000, then no more than 20% maximum of investment is required for accessibility improvements (ADA). If you tore down part of the building and attached a new building to the remaining historic part with a firewall separation, then you would not be required to improve the unchanged use, etc. However, if you change the use and change over 10% of the structure, then seismic and all other codes apply.