

Occidental Community Center Advisory Council
Meeting October 15, 2013 6:30 pm
Location: 14700 Second Street, Occidental

Attendees:

Benjamynn Gabriel, David Benefiel, Lee Sandahl, John Greaves, Courtney Meyer, Diane Masura, Janet Foley, Alexander Laszlo, Heidi McNeal, Colin Gabriel, Brian Grant, Jeff Tweddale, Michael Stusser.

I. Brief Statement

Benjamynn introduced general reason for calling the meeting and interest in limiting the discussion to the focused effort of the future of the Occidental Community Center. Benjamynn willing to act as current moderator and set ground rules for the meeting to establish an order of volunteer speakers and allow all interested attendees to speak.

II. Introductions / Interest in Center

Benjamynn: Parent of soccer player at OCC, would like to see center improved to provide a more comfortable and attractive facility.

David: Board member of the Occidental Center for the Arts (OCA) would like to see the center provide more complimentary opportunities for businesses and community.

Lee: Member of the former Save the Occidental Community Center (StOCC) group would like to see the center remain available to the public.

John: Volleyball player and frequent user of the gymnasium would like the gym to remain available to the public as a gym.

Courtney: Owner of Bohemian Market, no specific vested interest but would like to see the Center revitalized and more frequently utilized.

Diane: Occidental Community Council (OCC) and OCA board, important to identify greatest need for the Center. Multiple users, the OCC needs public restroom access, something to benefit the OCA, and possibly a visitor center.

Janet: Veterinarian at Occidental Veterinary Hospital, school board member and volunteer, no personal agenda and has heard community interest in; children's needs for after school programming, community garden area, open park space and giving the building a face lift.

Alexander: Provides sports classes weekly at the Center including martial arts. Would like to help organize community with common interest for a range of shared opportunities at the Center.

Heidi: Member of the former (StOCC) group, would like to investigate what can be done with the Center, possible additional uses for gymnasium, would like to maintain interest in progress so momentum can be maintained and not let group fade like the StOCC group

Jeff: Arch Board member, gym user and tourism representative by trade, important not to ignore tourism interest in leveraging of funds while working with County, visitors and locals need a place for children to play.

Colin: Occidental citizen, more presence from YMCA or programmer would be great, scheduling and access to the facility have been a problematic.

Brian: Monte Rio resident, PRAXIS Architects and in contract with County to investigate options for the future use of the facility. I would like to engage community dialogue and bring perspective and result of community input to County Regional Park staff.

Michael: Owner Osmosis Day Spa, improving the Center will be a challenge and require out of the box thinking identifying what will work, the OCA is a great model. There should be an effort made to identify a new niche of use that does not negatively impact the local businesses.

III. Changes to Agenda

None

IV. Reasons for Being Here

- A. Make Occidental a more beautiful place
- B. Restore/Rebuild Center to be of best possible use FOR community
- C. Represent consensus of the entire community as much as possible
- D. Create vision. Per above, that is DO-able
 - a. Consensus
 - b. County financial involvement
 - c. Our role
 - d. Worth working for
 - e. Do-able

General discussion proceeded with Benjamynn moderating regarding items A-D and all attendees were invited to speak. Speakers and comments/discussion are listed below in order of speaker.

Benjamynn: Should the center be torn down? Does it only need a face-lift? I would prefer it to look nice with children oriented amenities. The county should help fund raise and we should think beyond the existing footprint of the building.

Heidi: Upgrade to commercial kitchen with consideration of existing businesses and complimentary use to the OCA.

Diane: The OCA has an adequate warming kitchen and St. Phillip's Church has a commercial kitchen available for rent.

David: OCA does not have need for more kitchen facilities. The new use should be complimentary to existing uses in town, not arts, not food, it should be park use or oriented toward children or the use of the community.

Alex: Options include a middle of the road scenario, which would involve augmenting the existing facility to extend and improve usage of the building versus a larger vision of a west county wonderland, a hub to Bodega Bay and beyond.

Benjamynn: Let's take a straw poll for those folks who would like to discuss or table the discussion regarding the larger vision beyond the Center. I would like to keep the conversation focused on the Center. (No straw poll was taken)

Alex: We should consider a playground or some use dedicated to children it is a missing amenity and a need in the community.

Janet: Some members of the Town Hall Committee have expressed concerns of the County's interest in tourism and some feel the County cannot be trusted and will move forward with a larger plan. A concern is that if we as a community support the improvements at the Center that it will cause the County to proceed with plans to cause the gateway project to come to pass. The discussion has caused an unfortunate and sad division in the community.

Courtney: How do we as a group address this issue of concern and how can we regain the confidence of the community in the interest of gathering consensus? The Occidental area is already an attraction for visitors from the bay area and beyond and the Center is not a draw for tourists. The improvements to the Center will not change or create a new hub and flexibility of use is the key. The Center should be capable of growing with the community, as the community's needs change.

Benjamynn: It is up to us to change the community's perspective. It is up to us to come up with a vision, a community oriented vision.

Lee: What is happening with the Gateway proposal.

Benjamynn: Let's stay on topic, if there is interest in discussing the Gateway project it should be the subject of another meeting.

Diane: Our group would be better served if we had County representatives in the room as stakeholders in the discussion.

Michael: Caryl wants to see something come up from the community. If the County can support the community's vision they will. We should focus on our needs and tell the County what we want to do. We need to stay on top of this discussion and make sure we are not run over with tourism, drivers and too many cars. Now is the time to come together for a solution and define the type of visitation we will accept as a community. It could be an educational facility oriented toward the ecology.

Alex: We should dream and not fear. Within the laws of physics design a process for dreaming with blue-sky vision with an eye toward back casting to insure we are not getting ahead of ourselves.

Jeff: There are two types of tourists I see regularly on weekends, bicyclists and wedding attendees. The ages of the bicyclists are generally a younger group. We should offer to make Occidental better and more attractive to tourists. The school age population has declined and the community is aging. Is a new playground appropriate for a declining youth population? Can we promote biking? Why do we as a community not want more tourism? I can see the need for building a new playground but as part of an offering for tourists who travel with children.

Janet: In my opinion the majority of the community does not want more bicyclists.

Benjamynn: A number of the local bicyclists do not want more bicyclists in the area.

Janet: More bicyclists is a safety issue not a in my backyard issue.

Courtney: It is dangerous to ignore tourism, Guerneville is now a destination and we need to stay progressive.

John: Regarding tourism and possible improvements to the center of Occidental, when my family traveled with children we often visited towns such as Sonoma or Healdsburg and took advantage of the public town squares. Would it be possible to have a public town square here at the Community Center site? Can we utilize the low portion of the existing building to serve the needs of tourists and save the gym? One model for maintaining public park space is Armstrong Woods as they have docents to provide tours and complete maintenance tasks.

Lee: Tourists always ask for directions maybe we need information center to answer questions.

Heidi: There should be more people here from the town hall committee.

Janet: We need to focus on what the community does want. Are we really going to try to incorporate input from the community? Is it possible?

Benjamynn: Brian you have not added anything do you have anything additional you would like to say.

Brian: In discussion with County Parks we did establish that there is a high level of interest in having a community based ground swell committee to speak on behalf of the community. To Michael's point earlier, Caryl wants to see something come up from the community and I think it is an opportunity for the community to be heard. Our hope is to be able to bring the community's perspective back to County Parks.

Benjamynn: On the agenda I got stalled with how to proceed with so many different views and interests. Do we think there should be representation from other groups in the community? My goal in sending invitations was to get as broad a cross section of the community's input as possible. I did invite Chris Martin and Snap and both agreed to attend but tonight is an OCSD meeting and there was conflict. I also invited David Dillman and Eric Koenigshofer they also expressed interest in participating but are out of town.

General discussion regarding the possibility of inviting representatives from Harmony Union School District, CYO, Westminster and or Alliance Redwoods. Consider contacting Annie from Ocean song and Steve Fowler. Also when would it be appropriate to invite Caryl Hart or County staff to attend?

Janet: Brian are you here representing the County?

Brian: I am not representing the County but I am here to record the discussion with the intent of clarifying to the County how the community would like to proceed.

Janet: I see you are taking minutes; will you be sharing them with the County?

Michael: I think anyone taking minutes should share them with the whole group for review.

Brian: I will share the minutes with the group in draft form to be reviewed and modified, as clarifications are required. Once approved, the minutes will be shared with County Parks.

Michael: Do we think it would be appropriate to invite Caryl to the next meeting?

Brian: It may make sense to have some direction established regarding process prior to including Caryl. I would recommend that the group might consider preparing a survey in the interest of gathering documented input from the community to get a feel for how we might proceed.

General discussion was had that a survey would be a good way to gather community input. The intent is to provide various venues for the survey to be published both in hard copy and electronically.

Alexander: The survey could also be posted to a survey website such as survey monkey or the like.

Diane: I can bring copies of the survey to the OCC and the OCA.

Brian: We have prepared similar surveys in the past for other community projects and we would be willing to bring a draft of a survey for the review and modification by the group if that would help move the process along.

Benjamynn: The next meeting time and location should be established. We can meet here again but as the group grows we may be too large for this venue.

Brian: We can confirm with County Parks and or Jeremy with the YMCA that we could meet at the Center if we could get keys to the activity room next to the foyer.

General discussion was had regarding timing and day of the month on which to meet. It was determined that the first Monday of the month was available as an option and the group generally decided the next meeting would be Monday November 4 at 6:30 pm venue to be determined. Benjamynn will send out an invitation to the entire group announcing time and place