

Historic District Commission Meeting
Topic: Demolition of the John H. Newman Armory

October 4, 2023

Victoria Smith 1:07:07

(gavel) Back in session. I need to get everybody to quiet down so they can hear. All right, this is going to be a little more formal, because there are lots of people who want to speak and there's a lot to get through. And we've covered everything except this one topic. So, before we get started, I just want to say that there's been public concern expressed about conflicts of interest within our commission, and that it's up to the individual Commissioners to decide to recuse or not if they can make an independent and fair decision on their own without influence from other parties. Is there anybody who feels they need to recuse. All right. If there are any concerns about it, bring it up with the Ethics Commission. Second, we're going to have a short five-minute presentation about the history of the armory just from it's being sold by the State and up to this point. So, Kees is going to give that presentation.

Kees deMooy 1:08:31

The John H. Newman Armory, also known as the Chestertown Armory, was built in 1931 and was used for seven decades by 115th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Division of the Maryland National Guard, which later became into 175th regiment. The 115th Regiments was part of D-Day operations on June 6, 1944, and in 1999, the Armory was named after a Chestertown resident who landed on Omaha Beach. During its heyday, the Armory was used for many events including Washington College basketball games, the Christmas Bazaar, and even a performance by Little Richard in the late 1950's.

The Armory was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, at which time its condition was listed Fair. The Criteria given for inclusion in the National Register were criteria A: Event, the 115th Infantry's involvement in WWII; and criteria C: Design/Construction, which refers to the architecture of the building. Its architecture was described as embodying "the distinctive characteristics of its type," i.e., a facade modeled on a medieval fortification with a T-shaped plan. The Statement of Significance lists "its association with the reorganization and expansion of the National Guard system in the 20th century."

The armory was declared surplus in 2005. State-owned facilities typically first offered to the municipality in which they are located, and this was done about five years later, when it eventually led to the transfer of the Armory to the Town on December 13, 2012. The Town had no resources to develop the property and the College had expressed an interest in acquiring it as part of their planned waterfront campus, to which the Town agreed. On September 5, 2012, Washington College organized a 3:30pm site visit to the armory for the Historic District Commission to preview the College's application for demolition of the rear additions to the building, which at that point was already severely deteriorated. At the regular meeting a half hour later, the HDC unanimously approved a demolition of the two additions, the creation of window openings in the rear of the main building to allow for water views and a deck which at some point in the future could become an addition. That's the same month, the Town enacted Ordinance 05-2012 expanding the Historic District to include the Armory, which became effective on September 9, 2012. On December 17, 2012, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Washington College and the Historic District Commission that described the HDC's September vote to allow demolition, which was precondition for the College's purchase of the Armory. On May 3, 2013, the deed conveying the Armory to Washington College was signed.

Although the College had originally planned to renovate the Armory into new facilities for the Center for Environment and Society, those plans, along with other ideas for the building fell through for a variety of reasons, including the mold issue that is in today's application. On October 5, 2022, the College applied for demolition of the Armory, citing mold and other issues. The HDC voted unanimously to approve the demolition, but at the following meeting rescinded the approval with a vote of 3/2 due to procedural issues that had come to light. The College was invited to reappear at the December 2022 meeting but withdrew its application to have more time to gather more information, which is how they came to be here today.

Victoria Smith

That statement

Barbara Jorgenson

Madam Chairman

Victoria Smith 1:12:49

That statement will be in the public record.

Barbara Jorgenson 1:12:54

Madam, Point of order, where in the historic district guidelines is a town employee permitted to act on behalf of the applicant? Where is that?

Victoria Smith

He is not. He gave a historic

Barbara Jorgenson

(unintelligible) things he just said are in support of the application.

Victoria Smith 1:13:05

I'm sorry. You are out of order Barbara. He gave a historic perspective for everybody. So, at this point, we're gonna start with an opening statement and presentation from the applicant. After that, we will open it up for Commissioners to make comments and have questions, then the applicant can respond to that and then we will have anybody in the public who wants to make statements. If you have sent letters to the commission, they are part of the public record. You don't need to reread them. So, we've got a three-minute limit. So, I suggest that you be organized and succinct in your comments. So, you like to start?

Mike Sosulski 1:13:59

Thank you very much. Well, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Mike Sokolski, and I'm the president of Washington College. I'm here today to respectfully and with sincere regret, request permission to demolish the Chestertown Armory in part. Though we have appeared before this commission before, this is in many respects a new request. Since we made our last one, we felt it would be helpful to the Commission and the community to clarify that our intended purpose for the

property does in fact, comport well with the requirements of the original deed, and that the Maryland Department of the Military and the Board of Public Works in the State of Maryland heartily endorse our position while the future use of the site is not strictly a matter for the Historic District Commission to consider. We have heard feedback from some members of our community on this point. And so we thought that clarification would be very helpful to the general conversation around the site.

The first thing I want to say today is that the college agrees that the Armory has historical significance. This is beyond debate. It is on the register of historic buildings and from 1931 until the early 2000s. It was in-fact, as Kees outlined, an active meaningful military and civic facility in Chestertown. Since the military ended active use of the Armory some 20 years ago, it has been a constant struggle to find a purpose for this building. As Kees mentioned around 2006, it became clear that the state would be divesting itself of the building as part of a statewide plan. Most such (DX sessions) and there were 18 sold by the year 2008. Most of these resulted in a town or a county acquiring the structure. Chestertown and Kent County had no interest due to the expenses involved at the time.

From 2007 to 2011, a community organization called STAY or save the Armory. Yes, tried valiantly to find tenants for funding to develop a business plan that would keep the Chestertown Armory in public hands. Those intensive efforts were unfortunately unsuccessful.

In late 2012, Washington College did acquire the Armory from the state via a pass through from the town of Chestertown. At the time, the historic district commission agreed upon permission for demolition of the rear more modern portions in the building. And the idea was that the 1930s core would be retained in any future development. The college then went through several exercises to find a use for the building. The college considered adaptive reuse of similar properties in Easton and in Centerville. But the uses found there ended up being redundant with existing facilities on the college campus at the time. The college considered using the Armory as event space as it had once been done. A possible home for studio art, given the scale and the space in the main part of the building, or as the headquarters for the Center for Environment Society.

The costs for all these adaptive reuse proposals turned out to be prohibitive. It was estimated, at the time, that it would require about \$4 million just to stabilize the structure itself, and up to \$10 million to become a home for something like the Center for Environment Society. The costs really were prohibitive. And it's important to note that those cost estimates at the time excluded any environmental remediation that would have been necessary, and we know that it was. The college also sought external partners and investors at the time and found no success. My understanding is that no stone was left unturned in this process. Although, I was not here at the time.

After the college had owned the property for just over five years and failed to find an appropriate repurposing for it, in 2018, Hersha Hospitality finally did emerge as a potential partner. This was the first viable possibility to emerge since 2006. Hersha proposed to partner with the college in building a small hotel with a conference center that would adapt the core structure of the existing armory to its new purpose. As our report demonstrates, this is a standard operating procedure for colleges and universities nowadays, it provides educational and other benefits for the college but also for the surrounding region. The Hersha team was excited by the rehabilitation of the main 30's structure for the

hotel entrance and lobby, as well as the potential for a ballroom in the event space. But as we all know, COVID descended upon us and planning stalled, but the thinking has reemerged now with great energy.

As part of this renewed efforts, various background studies have been done, including two environmental assessments by reputable independent firms, and we stand by their findings. These environmental studies found asbestos and lead throughout the building, extremely high humidity levels with standing water in places and that mold has infiltrated the entire structure to such an extent that it cannot be guaranteed to be remediated. Some have asserted neglect on the part of the college as a way to demolish the building gradually. Such an assertion ignores the facts. The building has been in decline since well before acquisition by Washington College. The National Register, as Kees mentioned, in the nomination to be placed in the national register, Register of Historic Places in 1980 noted that at that time its condition was only fair. The building suffered significant water intrusion during Hurricane Isabell in the year 2003. With standing water left inside the ground floor and basement of the structure. Parts of the building continued to suffer from recurring water intrusion, now from high tides which have increased in frequency over the past two decades, along with climate change. The increasingly high-water table and tidal input has resulted in water and mold wicking into porous parts of the concrete block and brick, with standing water inside that structure for long periods of time. All of this has resulted in extensive mold contamination over the last 20-years, not just since the time the college acquired the property in 2012. The Chestertown Historic District guidelines permit demolition in the case of economic hardship, when the public good is served, and when retention of the structure would not be in the best interest of the majority of persons in the community. To address the concept of economic hardship, the college itself cannot afford to attempt remediation, or to demolish the current structure or to fund a new project there, that would be an adaptive reuse.

The college is currently operating with a moderate annual operating loss and so it was in no position to do such a thing. Significant external investments will be required for anything to happen other than further deterioration of this historic building. No serious investor would be willing to invest if mold remediation could not be guaranteed in the long term. Underwriting of projects would quickly identify the risk of mold returning if we tried to preserve the existing structure in its entirety, making the cost of necessary capital prohibitively high. The cost of insurance for what is proposed will be significantly higher as there will be much higher legacy risk, exponentially increasing the cost of any project. Even after an attempted remediation, environmental consultants generally do not carry enough malpractice insurance to be able to give a building like this an-all-clear with certainty for lack of liability coverage limits. So you can see there are numerous economic reasons why preserving the entire structure and attempting remediation is not possible and would present an economic hardship for the college.

Secondly, service to the public good. Allowing the armory to further deteriorate in no way honors the memories and the service of those who served in the Newnam Armory. The public good is best served when we make way for a new structure that will truly honor and memorialize the military and civic place that the John H. Newnam Armory has had in Kent County history. Chestertown and Kent County will benefit tremendously, economically as well. From the redevelopment of this property in the manner that we propose. It will truly lift (abodes) in ways that Chestertown and Kent County desperately need.

Now to the question, can any portion of the structure be preserved? Yes, we believe it can. Saving the facade is a possibility, and if we can do so, we would absolutely prefer to do that or replicate it in any new construction if it turned out not to be possible. Memorials to servicemen and women who served on the Armory would absolutely be preserved under any circumstances, and in fact, as our proposal indicates, we would like to create new ones.

Now, I want to take a minute or two to just address some elements of the public conversation around the Armory and our proposal. Some have argued that the Armory could be preserved, and a hotel and conference center could be built elsewhere. This argument, though, I am certain it was well intentioned, simply doesn't square with the reality of the situation. Extensive efforts have in fact already been made to source funding to find such uses and all of them have been to no avail. Those advancing this argument are doing so in the absence of an extremely important piece of information. That is the college's financial position and the limited options that are available to us. Though our overall balance sheet is relatively strong, we are not in a position to invest on our own in a project such as this, with other pressing capital needs on the horizon. The reality is and will remain that the current state of the building will not support investment. It is simply too risky. Others have argued if we had one more environmental study, or two more, or five more. This would make it the third if we do one. If that would somehow tell us something that we need to know that we don't already know from our current reporting. The point is there have been two studies conducted by independent environmental consultants and they are each with us here tonight and available to answer any questions. And each of these consultants have staked their professional reputations on this work. I do not see any particular reason to question that. Secondly, no matter how many more studies are commissioned, they still won't address the central issues at stake here. Investor confidence, and economic feasibility. Those are the items that need to be focused on here at this time.

So, to summarize, we stipulate the historic significance of this building, there is no issue about that. Washington College has in fact worked hard over the years to identify an alternative and adaptive use for the building. And all those efforts have, unfortunately, been unsuccessful. The only viable plan that has emerged over the past 20 years has been the current hotel and profit center plan. Grave environmental concerns do exist in a historic building and successful remediation cannot be guaranteed, which is the primary impediment to investment. No reasonable investor would take a risk of that kind of magnitude with the possibility that their investment could be lost due to a failure in remediation. So we propose that the only solution now is in fact demolition, at least partial demolition, followed by new construction that might preserve the facade of the building, for example, and which can include the retention display of historic artifacts from the Newman Armory. Parts of the facade, if possible, and the museum exhibits that celebrate the past history of this site as a civic and military part of our history on the Eastern Shore. And it will also offer new social and convening spaces for community members, for students, for faculty, staff, and all of us to enjoy. So, thank you for your service to this town, those of you who are on the commission. And I'll be happy to take any questions that you have.

Victoria Smith 1:27:21

So, I think the first issue for us is to, I think that we need to state that we find this a significant historic structure.

Samantha Hollomon 1:27:32

Yeah, that's my understanding is our first responsibility is to declare whether this is a contributing or noncontributing. Do we need discussion or any comments or questions?

Audience Member

Could you talk louder?

Samantha Hollomon

I could. I actually used to be a sailing coach; I can talk well enough for Cecil County to hear. So, our first responsibility is to determine whether this is contributing or noncontributing. Do we need discussion? Or shall I go ahead and make a motion, given the college's indication in their application?

Victoria Smith

I think that's fine.

Samantha Hollomon 1:28:07

If we don't like my words, jump in there. So, I'll make a motion to approve the John Newman armory at 509 South Cross Street as a historically contributing structure, Per the historic district guidelines, Chapter 2 Item 7.13, given it year of construction of 1931 falls within the range, the period of significance determined during the nomination to the Chestertown historic district for the building on to the National Register of Historic places.

Michael McDowell 1:28:37

I second, the motion.

Victoria Smith 1:28:38

All those is in favor.

All Commission Members 1:28:40

Aye.

Victoria Smith

Motion is approved.

Samantha Hollomon 1:28:43

And Lynda, I will email you that motion.

Chris Drummond 1:28:49

Would the district, with the Commission's approval, I think that I would suggest that because there's a lot of interest, because we're going to have a second meeting in which there's going to need to be significant deliberation, findings of fact, applying those facts to the law that we agree or you authorize me to when all the decisions had been made to draft a memorandum for the Commission's approval. It is likely, I shouldn't say likely, it is conceivable that there will be appeals from whatever the Commission

decides. And one of the most important things for review in court which in this case initially would be the circuit court of Kent County is whether the commission, as consideration of the evidence presented to it, made sufficient findings of fact, to support the conclusion. And it is very helpful to have those findings of fact which come out in deliberations reduced to a memorandum that is endorsed by all of you, so that circuit court doesn't have to poke through pages and pages of transcript, if it doesn't want to, we can see in written form, you know,

Victoria Smith

Subject of our approval.

Chris Drummond

summary deliberations and the findings of fact. And so I would suggest that we include, for example, this motion should go in the minutes. It also be included in that final memorandum. Boards of Appeals, do it, planning commissions do it. Most agencies have written findings of fact.

Rebecca Murphy

We need to approve whatever the memorandum is.

Victoria Smith

And then we have approval, final approval (intelligible)

Chris Drummond

I draft it and then you decide whether I've correctly written down what you all discussed. It's not my product, it's your product.

Victoria Smith

Thank you.

Samantha Hollomon

Thank you.

Michael McDowell 1:30:51

I think, however, that does not obviate some public discussion of these matters, because there's huge public interest.

Chris Drummond

O no, it would be

Michael McDowell

If I could just finish for the commissioners and the audience. So I just want to put that on the table and I have some questions for

Victoria Smith 1:31:08

We're gonna do this in a more orderly manner than most of our discussions. Because of the huge interest, we're going to go around the table, each commissioner has a chance to ask questions, we can go back if there are other questions, the college can answer anything that we ask and have a response before we have public comments open.

Samantha Hollomon

Okay

Victoria Smith

So you want to start Samantha? I'm left-handed, so I always look this way.

Samantha Hollomon 1:31:38

So first up to bat, my understanding is that the balance of this hearing is to sort of have, like an exploration of more information needed to assist us so that a subsequent second hearing has enough information for us to make significant progress on this decision. Yes?

Various Commission Members

Hear, Hear, Yes

Samantha Hollomon

So, there were some elements in the application that I didn't feel gave a complete enough or current enough condition report. That would be very interesting and informative for our use in the second hearing. One would be a structural report, you indicated in your presentation that there was one done, maybe back in 2012, sometime in there, you said it was \$4 million, just to structurally rehabilitate,

Mike Sosulski 1:32:30

to stabilize,

Samantha Hollomon 1:32:32

stabilize. So, provision of that report, I think a current structural report is necessary for a structure such as this. Personally, when I consider the building, I think of it in three separate components and given that environmental degradation from specifically water, is a key topic. I think that it would help me in hearing too, to hear these three areas very carefully, and specifically addressed separately. So, I see the building as, and it's a classic armory construction. So, this front piece is called a head house. So, it's not just the flat facade, it also encompasses about three windows on that second story going back. If you look at the building and plan, it juts out wider than the main hall behind it. So, the head house, the next piece behind is that historic main hall that has the buttress structure. And then there's all the rest of it right the structures that were added on the additions from 1950 to 1956. Very specifically, having a structural report, as well as an updated mold report, I think you said to the large mold report, we were going to get a plan before hearing two, to see the condition for the head house, the main hall, and the additions is really important because the river is behind the additions. And I think concern and interest flows opposite the water. So, we need to really understand that more clearly. Also, since the building is on a historic registry, state and federal funds for remediation and rehabilitation could have been applied for and used in the years of the college's ownership. So, any paperwork, any applications that you all

have, demonstrating your attempts to rehabilitate the building would be really informative and useful. That also will give us an understanding of how well certain bits of remediation work and don't work. Of course, the proposed design for the hotel, if certain elements cannot be included, is going to be central to any discussion as well as a payback difference. So, whether the project has remediation and reuses the 1931 structure or doesn't, I would demonstrate a cost difference. So, the payback or however you want to demonstrate a cost difference, whether that's NPB or just raw cost or whatever, so that we can understand the economic hardship between remediation and preservation versus demolition. And then, I think finally, I know that I have read the Secretary of the Interior's standards for rehabilitation, for my bedtime reading since receiving your application. That is a part of the toolkit for this commission and for our district. And so, I am very hopeful that in the second hearing, we hear a lot about those measures and how that applies to what the college would like to do with the building moving forward.

Mike Sosulski

Thank you.

Samantha Hollomon

Those were my thoughts. Thank you.

Chris Drummond 1:35:51

Can I just interject that the second to the last point, the cost difference? If you read case law in Maryland, demolition of historic structures? Every in the recitation of facts and almost every one of those cases? The active, the proponent of the demolition has produced the cost. The cost, of remediation, restoration versus demolition. Every one of them. And you haven't done that.

Samantha Hollomon

Yeah, he gets to for the second one. Okay. Yep.

Victoria Smith

Michael

Michael McDowell 1:36:23

So following what Samantha said, and also the attorney here, let me preface my remarks, particularly by my own connection with Washington College and an interest. I've known four presidents of Washington College. Douglass Cater, Mitchell Reiss particularly, Sheila Bair slightly and Kurt Landgraf. So I have a very positive view of the college. And I appreciate what you're doing in order to preserve the college going forth and that will be a major challenge. It's a very difficult time for small colleges. I also commend you for your honesty and decency in dealing with us in this. You're coming to this almost like me, de novo. And I don't like surprises. And when I was surprised, more than a year ago, with hardly any notice at getting the package. I made a wrong decision. I've only been in the commission for three months. I regret my decision. And I'm glad we rescinded it and it went to the council. Because I was not aware enough of the previous history of the Armory and the emotional quotient that involves in this community. I am far more informed now.

I was a journalist until 25 years ago, and I still think like one. When I look at documents and dossiers, I look for what's missing, or what is not answered. And Attorney, Mr. Drummond and Samantha focused on something I saw immediately. I've been through this document four times, Mike. And I don't see a cost for remediation. I want to know what that cost is. And I think it is in your benefit to show us what it cost. It is not sufficient. Again, on Monday, the commissioners received a 75-page report from your environmental consultants. Again, I'm not blaming you, but why was that not supplied with the original, new submission? I mean, I don't understand that. That's a surprise. I don't like surprises, nor do the commissioners.

In terms of the mold issue, particularly. I'm not an expert on mold, but like a barrister or journalist, I can read the report. And it's all very nice. It tells me all these different things. But at the end, I'm looking for a conclusion, and therefore it would cost \$6,300,000 to remediate, it's not there. What I would suggest to you and I'm not insisting but I would like you to bear in mind for the second appearance here, is that you consider an independent assessment on the mold and an independent assessment on the structure viability of the building, which would be paid for by the college. I don't think it would cost a huge amount but would not be done by the college and it would not be done by the town either but by the commissioners agreeing to consultants to do it. I think you're sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to find people to do it. That's a couple of requests. You said, and I believe you, this is a new request. But with respect, the only new part of it is the reconciliation of the original dates. And you went to the Board of Public Works and so on. That's fine. That's good. But again, what is missing? I'm always looking for what is missing? What's missing in the argument is the question of remediation. Because we have a duty to the citizens in this town to say we have done our best, we either are agreeing to demolish or partially demolish, or we don't agree to demolish. That has not been shown to me, I don't want to stand in the way of progress. You know, I think ahead and so, can you please take seriously the suggestions I'm making so that we can resolve this problem, I hope in a cooperative and positive way, and that there are answers to those questions, which aren't posted.

Mike Sosulski

Thank you.

Victoria Smith

Rebecca

Rebecca Murphy 1:41:21

I just have one question that sort of bares on the preceding questions, do you

Audience Member

Can you speak louder?

Rebecca Murphy

I'm sorry. I tend to be a low talker. So, I apologize. With respect to the economics of the project, does the college have and could they make available the budget and cost estimates from the previous development efforts, I'm thinking in particular of the stay effort because they engaged the services of a developer or an architect, so, that might have a little more detail to it. And it would be great if we could

have greater clarity on the development team, and perhaps access to your working proforma so that we have some understanding of the sources and uses that have been identified for both scenarios, both the rehab scenario and a new construction scenario. And in addition, the only other thing I would ask and I think Samantha may have already asked for this. If there have been previous tax credit applications made, it would be great to see those applications.

Mike Sosulski

Thank you.

Monica Sella 1:42:36

Echoing what everyone has said around the theme, the cost of remediation, I also think it'd be helpful to see cost of remediation, and demolition by section of the building like Sam said. So, what is the cost of remediation, if we were to just do the front part, just remove the back part? I think that breakdown would be really helpful when we're looking at the expenses. And then additionally, would love to hear if there's any reviews or studies that have been done around additional infrastructure that would be needed with the addition of the hotels that were to come. Conversations with the State Highway Association, if there are road changes that need to be done to the road. Or like, any plumbing changes that need to be done, you know how that infrastructure is in the town right now. So just love to hear more about that, and any costs that are associated with it, to make sure that's all out on the table.

Mike Sosulski

Thank you.

David Holman 1:43:43

Well, I'm at the end of line, I think all the good questions got asked. With that, I am a construction expert. I'm a licensed contractor remodel and new home builder. When we talk about this remediation concept, you know, I've read through this a bunch. Is it just getting the mold out of the block word, are we talking about the conduits, the raceways, the HVAC, the roofing. That's a, you know, it's vast. So, you know, I'd be really interested to seeing these reports that are inclusive of all those costs, not just the asbestos and the mold all the underlying structures and kind of how that all plays out. I thought all the other commissioners had great questions, and I look forward to hearing your response.

Mike Sosulski

Thank you.

Victoria Smith 1:44:24

So, I have some concerns. Aside from these, the environmental concerns, of totally demolishing a building and then rebuilding. I've just come back from Italy with the land of repurposing and reusing and making new things out of old and I just want to be sure you're considering the environmental costs of demolishing this building and getting rid of that rubble, which it would be at that point.

Mike Sosulski

Yes.

Victoria Smith

And then bringing in totally new stuff. I have huge concerns about those environmental issues involved in this project. I'd like to hear a response about how you're looking at that and comparing that to costs. Because it's not just financial costs. It's a whole package.

Mike Sosulski 1:45:17

You're totally right about that.

Victoria Smith

All right,

Rebecca Murphy 1:45:26

Just two quick ones. First, when you discuss the preservation of the facade, I think that it will be really important to understand whether you mean the facade of the building or the head house, because I think that those are two distinct things. And it's important for us to understand what you're talking about. And then secondarily, I also should probably say that I have a background in historic preservation and, I'm a real estate developer who specializes in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. Having said that, I'm curious to know whether you have any correspondence that you would be able to share that would shed some light on this question of ability to finance and ability to underwrite, because I think it would be helpful for people who don't do this work for a living, to understand what goes into an underwriting decision and what goes into an insurance decision. And what information you have thus far that leads you to the conclusion that the building can't be remediated. On the merits, I think that would be helpful for everybody.

Mike Sosulski 1:46:36

Sure, yeah. Happy to do that. You're gonna get those.

Chris Drummond 1:46:38

I'm particularly interested in your background on your claim that the structure either cannot be insured, or that the premiums will be so prohibitive as to make the project economically/not economically feasible.

Rebecca Murphy 1:46:58

I think that is, I think that and the proforma

Chris Drummond 1:47:00

And the underwriting

Rebecca Murphy 1:46:58

will help us understand what the real costs are.

Mike Sosulski

Alright.

Chris Drummond 1:47:06

It would make some sense, if I was the insurer, would I want to insure a building where mold might grow again, I think we need to know more about.

Samantha Hollomon 1:47:19

That's a long list. It's a lot of digging. But you were saying economic hardship. So total transparency. (unintelligible).

Chris Drummond 1:47:29

Whoever is working on this with the college, please look at pages 61 through 66 of the guidelines. It's all there.

Samantha Hollomon

Memorize it.

Victoria Smith 1:47:42

Ok, Michael, you have a follow up?

Michael McDowell 1:47:44

So, Mike, do you have a response to what's been said already?

Mike Sosulski 1:47:48

No, I'm just grateful for the feedback. Actually, I think that's very helpful. And we'll do our best to provide what the commission is asking for.

Richard Greaves

Michael, can I speak on behalf of the college?

Mike Sosulski

Ah, certainly.

Samantha Hollomon 1:47:59

Can I just make one more comment. Personally, I don't need to see anything in the second application that has already been submitted, is that prospective shared? So that we can very clearly, see, keep separate, the previously reviewed and publicly and then the second application being all new material.

Mike Sosulski 1:48:20

Very good. Yeah, that's,

Samantha Hollomon

We appreciate that

Mike Sosulski

I'm happy to do that.

Samantha Hollomon 1:48:24

help. Also, I think with any misunderstandings and miscommunications, etc. Thank you.

Mike Sosulski

Sure. Thanks for that.

Barbara Jorgenson 1:48:29

You also have the 72 page report you got on Monday.

Samantha Hollomon 1:48:32

That was actually 109 pages and I believe that

Barbara Jorgenson

Sorry, somebody said 72

Victoria Smith 1:48:35

I believe it's been put onto the website already.

Samantha Hollomon

Yup

Barbara Jorgenson

You got any public discussion about that?

Samantha Hollomon

Yes, but just a moment.

Mike Sosulski 1:48:44

So please introduce Mr. Richard Greaves, who is part of our partner group.

Victoria Smith 1:48:52

Part of your what group?

Mike Sosulski

Partner group that would help develop the property.

Richard Greaves

Keith Coe who's working on this project with us. So, I think we need to have some transparency here. I know there's been a lot of discussion, a lot of things written, there's a lot of anxiety here. Right? About the major project. And, I

Victoria Smith

Understandably.

Richard Greaves

Understandably. So I am the managing partner in the Armory Group LLC. Just to be clear. About seven years ago, Richard, six years ago, five years ago? Richard came to me and called and introduced this guy by the name of Jay Shah. And Jay Shah runs a publicly traded REIT. He also has a management company that manages 220 hotels. Okay, we open the discussion. We set up the LLC with John Moge who runs the stadium authority brought the Ravens to Baltimore. We hired on Keith Coe, who's run hotels and been in a bit in the business a long time? So, we started the discussion and that's all it was just a discussion. And, the idea was that the college had this land, right. And

Victoria Smith

It's not just land.

Richard Greaves

Well, this building, this lands, all of it. Right. And we had accumulated all this property by the way, over time. And, we always discussed what we're going to do with it. So, the idea of a community hotel came up. And that's what this really is. I think there's a, a misconception that this is the big bad wolf Hersha hospitality and they're gonna take all our money. They couldn't be any farther from the truth. The truth of the matter is, anybody in this room can be an investor.

Victoria Smith

So I,

Richard Greaves

This is going, I know, let me just finish.

Victoria Smith

Quickly.

Richard Greaves

So, it's community hotel, Hersha Hospitality will be, owned the management company, okay. The problem is, over the last five years, I've been tasked to raise the money. Nothing happens unless we raise the money. Frank tried to raise money to save the Armory. Okay. So what's unspoken, here is our due diligence. With Harken. We have, we have numbers, we've got Harken, I raise hundreds of thousand dollars of donations to make this happen to do the due diligence.

Victoria Smith

Investments

Richard Greaves

that you want. Right? And, the numbers don't work. And the reason the numbers don't work. And the reason we can't go back and study more mold, is because investors will not put money in this. This is a \$25 to \$30 million project. That's what it is. No one that I have talked to, any stakeholder, I've talked to hundreds of people, will put a dime in this armory as it sits. That's it. So, we have a world class team, a

world class team of people, we have a guy Jay Shah, who's been around and just stuck around for a long time.

Samantha Hollomon

May I

Victorica Smith

Yes.

Samantha Hollomon 1:52:23

May I be permitted to interrupt your flow, if I may. This sounds a lot like hearing 2 content.

Richard Greaves

Okay,

Samantha Hollomon

we've shared the material that we need to make our decision.

Richard Greaves

Ok

Samantha Hollomon

And I look forward to some of what you're sharing verbally being submitted for our careful review in print,

Richard Greaves

right

Samantha Hollomon

as preparation for that.

Richard Greaves

But I do want to just say one thing, I'll make one point. There will not be any money or any armory built in any hotel. With any investor. If, If, If

Victoria Smith 1:52:53

Sir, let's not make threats

Michael McDowell

Yes

Richard Greaves 1:52:56

No, I'm not making a threat. I'm just saying, that's not a threat. I'm just saying. The idea is this won't exist. And that's sad to me. That's all I'll say.

Samantha Hollomon 1:53:08

You've been heard. Thank you.

Richard Greaves

Thank you.

Samantha Hollomon

Madam Chair, person. Are we moving on now to public comments? (intelligible)

Victoria Smith 1:53:11

We are moving on now to, I thought this was part of the college presentation and not really officially part of the college presentation. So, we're moving on to public comment. And we are going to have a three-minute limit. I've got a list of people who want to testify. I want to assure everybody that any letters that have been sent in or will be sent in at any time will be included in the public record. So I'm asking you to be organized, succinct. Try not to repeat yourselves. And we'll get through this together.

And yes, you want my phone or are you going to use yours?

Rebecca Murphy

I can use yours.

Kees DeMooy

I think Lynda has some color cards...

Rebecca Murphy 1:54:04

all right.

Victoria Smith 1:54:06

Set it for three-minutes.

Rebecca Murphy

Okay.

Victoria Smith

And we're gonna start at the top of the list and this is only for people who are present. The first name on the list is Richard Kevin,

Various voices

Keaveny

Richard Keaveny 1:54:22

Rebecca, could you use my timer, please?

Rebecca Murphy

No.

Richard Keaveny

Full disclosure, full disclosure. I do plan to apply for a part time concierge position at the hotel because I believe so firmly that all of the guests of this town need to know what we all know and love about our town. I am glad the meeting is in this room. Because almost five years ago in this room, Main Street, Chestertown, a nonprofit organization, had a two-day meeting of about 40-50 citizens. Several of you were here. I was a board member, I was also the Chair for the Economic Development Committee. I actually sat at the same table as Barbara Jorgensen. That's not going to happen anytime soon. But I look forward to it eventually, because I really respect Barbara. But in this room, after two days, every participant had a vote. Thank you. But had five votes. And you could use your votes on one thing that would give economic development and the boutique Waterfront Hotel, in downtown, walking distance of downtown, was by far the biggest thing. Sunday morning after my everknot at Evergreen. I emailed my friend Jay, who is in the hotel business and asked him if he would have any interest. And he said, Hey, I'm off this week, because we just did our thing. He came down, that with Chris Cerino, formerly of Main Street, Chestertown, myself, and we went to the armory waterfront property. And he really expressed some excitement and interest not for his public company. This will be a profit, it needs to be a profitable venture, but it will not be an investment of the industry averages. But the people involved are almost, not stupid, but they have this philanthropic let's help our community spirit and I can attest to that. One final thing about this mold remediation. I get it. I've read lately, some of the new processes. I have bought 10 diet programs over the course of 20 years. All of them say 90-95% results. Oh, look at me, they have failed. There is no such thing as 100% mold remediation. I know investors would find the capital if it costs \$20,000 or whatever it costs. It's not just the capital costs. It's the ongoing operating costs to find significant liability insurance for environmental it's already limited.

Rebecca Murphy

Time

Richard Keaveny

And,

Rebecca Murphy

Thank you

Richard Keaveny

Thank you, very much.

Samantha Hollomon 1:57:51

Wow, I hope everyone has such comedic flair.

Victoria Smith 1:57:55

Next, he's coming up to the table now Steve Mitchell.

Steve Mitchell 1:57:58

Trying to keep the time going here. All right. I'm Steve Mitchell, resident of 112 North Water Street Chestertown. I'm a licensed professional engineer with over 40-years' experience in the environmental/safety and facility management disciplines. And Michael knows where I used to work.

I support the college's effort to utilize the property as a boutique hotel, I think it'd be very beneficial for the economy of Chestertown and the upper Eastern Shore.

My disagreement is with the proposal of the college to tear down this historic property - one that is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places - to build this hotel. Their justification for tearing down the building is that the mold in the building is so extensive that they cannot clean it up or if they could there's no guarantee that it wouldn't come back. This was based on the statement of one asbestos and lead paint testing laboratory that wasn't qualified to make the statement and didn't back that up with any sort of technical study.

In response to a letter to the editor in the spy that I wrote after the initial approval to demolish the Armory, Dr. Sosulski, agreed in his own letter to the editor dated October 28, 2022, that, quote, "community members have noted that lead and asbestos in the building can be addressed, and they are right... end quote. So, let's eliminate the asbestos and lead-based paint from the equation, since Dr. Sosulski said that it could be managed.

The college has not proven that mold remediation is not technically possible or economically feasible. Their application package includes a report from the laboratory that did some testing that concluded that there was mold in the building. There is no discussion about the extent of the mold or the process to clean it up and what it would cost, as you have pointed out. Their only cost estimate in the application is for demolition.

The basis for the college's assertion is the Sussex environmental Corporation's lab report (Exhibit K), which was focused on asbestos and lead-based paint sampling, and mold and moisture observations. They did no mold sampling at the time, because they were not qualified to do that sampling, however, they made unsupported statements that the mold that was there was so pervasive that it may never be able to be remediated. The person making that statement has no data to back that up and did not appear to be qualitative make it as well.

I made a common in a Spy letter to the editor that the college had no data on the types and extent of the mold in the building and the college dutifully hired a mold sampling company, MMTS, to conduct this sampling (Exhibit M). However, MMTS' conclusion to the college was, quote, "Upon review of the lab results and visual observations, the building needs to be addressed by a Certified Mold Remediation company", end quote. MMTS did not say that the mold was so pervasive that it could not be cleaned up. They said it would need to be assessed by a Certified Mold Remediation company. The college has not done this.

Last week, there was a community meeting here in town where we heard presentations from two certified mold remediation companies. The bottom line of these presentations was the Armory, because

of its brick and block and concrete construction, would likely be a candidate for mold remediation. Their presentation has been sent to members of the HDC and is available on the website, savethearmory.org, one word, savethearmory.org. I encourage you to view it. Their conclusions was that the Armory's materials of constructions provides the best opportunity for success for mold

Rebecca Murphy

Time.

Steve Mitchell

of any type of construction. Thank you.

Victoria Smith 2:01:18

Thank you. Next up is Lynn Mitchell. Your two timing us here. Your double timing.

Lynn Mitchell 2:01:26

Well, actually yes, because I'm finishing up with his conclusions. I'm Lynn Mitchell, also of 112 North Water Street and I'm here to wrap up Steve's suggestions for this very important HDC decision. For the record, I fully support them.

We recommend that the HDC undertake an independent survey of the mold contamination in the Armory as suggested by a certified mold remediation company. This would be paid for by the applicant, but the company would be selected by the HDC. This report would describe the extent of the mold contamination and what methods could be employed to remediate the mold and what the estimated costs would be. The current estimate that these two mold remediation companies mentioned last week. They're estimates, not having seen the actual space, but having heard about it and read about it was \$275,000 for mold remediation. The college estimates the demolition would be over \$600,000. \$275,000, 600,000.

The college developed a very nice plan in 2017 for adaptive reuse of the Armory to make it a hotel. What changed? We don't know why they are abandoning it, but we would advocate for that design or similar to be considered by the college.

To state again, Steve and I are all in favor of the college building a hotel at that site, but they should preserve at least components of this historic building and re-use. Chestertown is rightly proud of preserving its historical past. Had our predecessors demolished all of the 18th and 19th century houses in town because it was just easier to build new buildings, there would be no historic district and Chestertown would just be another town on the Eastern Shore. The HDC was created to preserve this legacy of this town and only allow demolition in extreme circumstances. We do not believe that the Armory meets this criterion.

In summary, four points.

1. We're all for a hotel at the Armory site that incorporates portions of the current historic building.

2. We questioned Washington College when it says mold is the reason the building cannot be saved - not even parts that don't have mold.
3. Washington College has not implemented the recommendation of their mold sampling laboratory, which was to hire a certified mold remediation company to determine the technical and economic feasibility of removing the mold.
4. To resolve the difference of opinions, we propose that the HDC or the college hire an independent certified mold remediation company, to be paid for by the applicant, Washington College. If they decline that, then the town should pay for it. In worst case, Steve and I will personally pay for it. If Washington College truly believes the only barrier to them preserving another Chestertown landmark and making it commercially viable, this should settle the question. Thank you.

Victoria Smith 2:04:27

Next up Barbara Jorgenson.

Barbara Jorgenson 2:04:45

Thank you. I'm not going to belabor points that have been made before you all have the opening letter that I sent all of you. I will say that I disagree with the way the conflict of interest was handled. I would ask you to take a look at Chestertown public ethics law. Sorry, I would urge you to take a look at the public ethics law of the town of Chestertown. And you'll see that there are reasons that at least one and possibly two of you should be recused, should of recused. I won't go any further with that. Second point I want to make is hire your own lawyer. With all due respect to Chris Drummond, he represents the town, it says right there on the name tag, town attorney. He doesn't represent the historic district commission. And you have to understand that you have a different, you have a different obligation then the town has. Very disturbed that Kees DeMooy was allowed to make a presentation. He is a town employee, he shouldn't have done that. That was something that should have been done by, by the college. In particular,

Chris Drummond 2:05:50

Ms. Jorgensen, you've suggested that my ethical standards are not what they should be. And I can assure you, ma'am, as they are. I know who I'm representing here today. I don't need your lectures about my ethical obligations.

Barbara Jorgenson 2:06:07

And to clarify, you were representing the town is that correct? That's my point. Well,

Michael McDowell 2:06:11

Madam Chairman, I'm perfectly fine with Mr. Drummond commenting, but not until the presentations finished.

Victoria Smith

Thank you.

unknown voice

Does she get another 3 minutes?

Barbara Jorgenson 2:06:19

Yes. In particular, there's an issue here about demolition by neglect. I was glad to hear Mr. Drummond say, cited case about that, because that's something that needs to be addressed by this body. But a lot of talk about what's happened in the past 12 years with the Armory building, and that needs to be addressed. And you need legal advice on that. Hire your own environmental experts. I won't go into that you need your own environmental expert. There's no question about that. The college has done an incomplete job. And you need to make sure that the environmental expert is your expert, not hired by the college and paid for by the college. Last, I want to say that, we want you to know what the guidelines require. And I'm actually somewhat disheartened by this meeting, as opposed to the ones I attended last year, because last year, nobody was following the rules this year. Under a new chairman, people were following the rules and I appreciate that. Lastly, I want to say something to Richard Keaveny which is, I was there. I was a member of the Main Street board. I was one of the people who supported the idea of a boutique hotel. I still support that, I just don't want you to tear down the Armory without a good reason and without showing that it has to be done. Thank you.

Victoria Smith 2:07:55

Thank you. Now we have Tom Kocubinski.

Tom Kocubinski

Chairperson? Could you, please distribute these?

Victoria Smith 2:08:11

I believed this came electronically.

Tom Kocubinski

Correct

Victoria Smith

If anybody wants a paper copy?

Michael McDowell

Yup

Victoria Smith

Some of us are old school.

Tom Kocubinski 2:08:24

That's good. That's alright. Just want to make sure. I've had computer problems this morning. And I respectfully ask that the documents that I submit be attached to the meeting minutes. Okay.

Chris Drummond 2:08:38

I'm not sure they'll be attached to the minutes there'll be in the record.

Victoria Smith

Right. It's in the record.

Tom Kocubinski 2:08:42

That's fine. That's good enough for me. All right. Okay, I am Tom Kocubinski, a resident and registered architect for over 40 years with significant experience involving historic buildings and sites, including those with landmark status. Thus, I offer my observations, findings and opinions. I support repurposing the 1931 armory with new construction to create a unique boutique hotel that preserves this distinguished historic resource. In January 2023, I attended a building walkthrough with representatives of Washington College and a reporter. My comments are based on firsthand knowledge and observations of the armory. My January Spy Op-Ed documented the conditions. This report and the opinions therein, have not been refuted. My focus today is repurposing the 1931 original structure designed by renowned Baltimore architect William Gordon Beecher.

Armories are historic resources and a unique subset in American architecture. With their large drill halls and robust construction, they had been successfully repurposed for hotels and many other uses.

Repurposing our armory: Washington College, in 2017, prepared a hotel design study reusing the 1931 Armory. The structure was used for guest services with hotel addition overlooking the Chester River, commendable example of integrating old and new. Repurposing is a hot industry trend. Why? Because it saves. Bottom line construction costs, delivery time to market, embodied carbon. Repurposing is also a hot hotel trend. Why? Because it provides a unique hotel experience discerning travelers are looking for. It's proven financially successful nationwide. It is far greener than all new construction. What do we gain? Repurposing is an opportunity to save money, go green, benefit local businesses, enhance our draw as an authentic and unique historic destination and underscores our role as good stewards of our historic heritage.

My walkthrough observations: I saw surmountable challenges, routinely addressed by the construction industry, nothing alarming. Electric was cut off, HVAC equipment and sump pumps cannot operate, leaving the building unconditioned, unprotected. Exterior: Large roof opening at the drill hole, open windows, broken glass, clogged gutters, open wall cracks, spalling concrete, failed paint, no management of surface runoff, freeze/thaw cycle deterioration at exterior walls. Interior: Deteriorated plaster, peeling paint and mold, due to water intrusion and absence of operating the HVAC system. Unaddressed

Rebecca Murphy

Time

Tom Kocubinski

Excuse me.

Rebecca Murphy

Time. It's your time.

Victoria Smith 2:11:46

Thank you, we have your letter.

Tom Kocubinski 2:11:48

Please. There's more to it. And I just want to add that regarding world class team, I would like to know how many historic hotels adaptive reuse projects

Victoria Smith

So

Tom Kocubinski

have they done here?

Samantha Hollomon

Sir, Thank you.

Victoria Smith 2:12:01

Your time is up. Thank you.

Samantha Hollomon

Let's try to be fair.

Victoria Smith

So we're only going with people who are present. We have a letter from Jeremy Rothwell. That is a part of our records.

Barbara Jorgenson 2:12:14

Mr. Rothwell authorized me to read that into the record today. I have an email from him asking me to read it into the record.

Victoria Smith 2:12:21

I think

Samantha Hollomon

it's in the record.

Victoria Smith

It's in our record.

Barbara Jorgenson 2:12:26

It's not in the public record. People who are here today don't know what you know.

Michael McDowell 2:12:32

Madam chairman can we put it into the public record then but not (unintelligible)

Victoria Smith 2:12:38

We're in, please, in saving some time let's leave it to

Samantha Hollomon

It will be available publicly

Victoria Smith

People. It's a part of the record.

Unknown speaker

It's on the town website then.

Michael McDowell

That a great

Barbara Jorgenson 2:12:48

All of these, all of these letters are going to be put on town websites so everybody can read them?

Rebecca Murphy

Yes.

Michael McDowell

Why not?

Unknown Speaker

Okay.

Victoria Smith 2:12:58

Joan Farley, Is she here?

Barbara Jorgenson 2:13:01

No, she also asked me to read her letter into record.

Victoria Smith 2:13:02

It will go into the record.

Samantha Hollomon 2:13:07

We'll post it.

Victoria Smith

We have all read this.

Samantha Hollomon

I haven't read it either. I haven't yet.

Victorica Smith

You haven't?

Samantha Hollomon

Because I've been at work all day. So

Victoria Smith 2:13:11

Okay. David Sobers.

David Sobers 2:13:14

My name is David Sobers. I'm a resident of Chestertown since 2008. Among other things, I'm a professional planner for all of my career, worked in Montgomery County. Have done contract work for FEMA, which will bear on my remarks. So, I'm familiar with the nature of cultural and historical resources. I'm also, I think importantly, a veteran, a war veteran. With in terms of possible consideration, something I didn't hear mentioned tonight is the Armory sits in the floodplain right next with the Chester River. Climate change, according to my online source indicates a four-to-six-foot rise in the Chester River in the forthcoming decades, which is likely to impact this site. So, maintaining that facade in any shape way or form, with that, river rise, we commonly call it sea level rise is going to be problematical and expensive at best. So, if the choice is to don't demolish it, that allows the site to not only be leveled the debris incidentally could be build, on the site, and reused not only in tribute, but in practicality, that would be referred to as a brownfield site. That would and they could further elevate the site for the benefit of the success of use, whether it's a re-modified version of that or the boutique hotel. And if the hotel is demolished, I think you could develop a memorial. That would be a greater destination for veterans and citizens alike, something that could be the subject of an art contest and constructed on the site. Hopefully with at the benefit of the hotel's financing. That concludes my remarks.

Victoria Smith 2:15:33

Edward, that a P. Patrick?

Edward Patrick 2:15:41

I signed in but I didn't request this.

Victoria Smith 2:15:45

Oh, okay. Thank you. Vic Sensenig.

Mike Sosulski 2:15:49

I also did not check.

Victoria Smith 2:15:51

Ok, Thank you. Yeah, it was not clear here. So people have signed whether they came in or want to speak Susy Chase.

Susie Chase 2:15:59

Yeah. We just thought we're just to sign.

Victoria Smith 2:16:01

Stan Yeakel

Stan Yeakel

I'm same, same boat.

Victoria Smith

Okay, thanks.

Unknown speaker

This is making it easier.

Samantha Hollomon

This is like calling roll.

Various speakers

(unintelligible)

Victoria Smith

So why don't I go, I wasn't sure whether people understood whether they were, this was for speaking or they were just signing in.

Various Speakers

There's a box to check.

Victoria Smith

Alright, then we will go to Gregory Moore.

Gregory Moore 2:16:31

Good evening. Now evening, I'm Gregory Moore. I live at 215 South Water Street. And I just recently renovated 123 - 125 High Street and I had the opportunity to be before this board, I think four times. I appreciate it, all the hard work. The building that I renovated has the gas lanterns, if you have seen them. I'm very proud of that building. I am a retired architect. And excuse me, I am a licensed engineer. I am the retired owner of Becker Morgan group, which is one of the largest architectural engineering firms, dealing and building, designed both renovation and new construction on Delmarva. We practice only on the coastal plain. That is our area along the coast of the Chesapeake, the Delaware, the ocean, etc. You may not know my company, we did do the architecture planning for the YMCA, we did the architectural plans for the Kent County Community Center, among many others. My company did the

architectural plans for my minor renovation on High Street. I know what I'm talking about. And I've heard all of the discussion. I fully support Washington College in the reuse of a portion of this building, whether it be the front facade, and then the erection of a new hotel on the backside to allow them to diversify their offerings. And I'll comment that in the end. But I will tell you, we understand hotels. The last hotel Becker Morgan has been doing a \$300 million Margaritaville in Ocean City. It's nothing like this, but I understand hotels, and I know the clients that come for the hotels, those that build them. You will not get a reputable hotel manager or investor, go in that building with all of the record that has been set here today, with mold. It's inundated with water it has been inundated with water. It has not been air conditioned. I'm not saying it can't be remediated. I'm not saying that mold certifiers can't certify. You will not get a hotel because you will not get the investment from a hotel group, with that risk in this small market. It's not going to happen. And I know that from projects. Number two. I am retired but I am consulting a few hours a week, I do not want this job. I am not being paid. I do not want people coming to me for architectural projects. I want to live in Chestertown like I do now. But let me tell you I have two projects going on now that I'm consulting with. They have had certified mold remediations, they are in the coastal plain, they are along the edge of rivers, one of them in this county and one of them is in another county. The mold remediation firm came back and said certified mold remediation. Occupants went back in, the mold reappeared. That is why you're not going to get a hotel investor, put \$30 million up with the possibility that the mold comes back. They just won't do it. I don't want to get into the discussion of all of the

Rebecca Murphy

Time.

Gregory Moore

And with that, I'll turn it over to you and good luck.

Victoria Smith 2:19:44

Dickie Groars. Do you recognize the name?

Various speakers 2:19:53

Dicky Grieves.

Victoria Smith 2:20:07

Okay.

Various speakers

He already spoke.

Victoria Smith

Thank you. Frank Rhodes.

Frank Rhodes 2:20:13

My name is Frank Rhodes and I'm a resident of Chestertown, I would just want to read something I read off the internet recently. This was from a gentleman named Michael C. Patrick. I served six years

in that building. And I'm sad to hear that a piece of history is going to be torn down. Only 11 guys from the 29th division walked away from Omaha Beach on D-Day, and that was the home to them and their fellow soldiers. Now, I don't have really any side in this case, but one thing I'll say is that we did, my wife and I, we organize the STAY group and we know a lot about that building. We know the investors, the people in Baltimore, if you have any questions, we got a binder with all the information. I do know that Washington College, I think Baird Tipson was the president at the time and we met with him, and he implied that they would be an investor, they would rent some space in the building, because we had people to rent the whole thing. And by the way, the building was in very good shape, in my opinion, when we got it, did have mold and some asbestos down on the bottom floor, but it was in good shape from, from the army. And so, but the college when we came to the meeting, Margo Bailey was the mayor at that time. And at the last minute, they came out and said, they're not going to do the deal. We thought they had it all set and the college just bailed on us. I don't know why. But I wish they had let us know beforehand. And then, the next president that came in, Mr. Reiss met with us about five or six years later, and he wanted, he just asked me said, I wish we could just blow the building up. So my impression is that the college really didn't want to put anything in the building. That was my impression at the time we had made, I think, an honest deal. So what I want to say is that has anyone from this committee? Has anyone been in the building recently?

Various Commission members

No

Frank Rhodes

Okay, you have to wear a mask, obviously, you can go on there. So what I want to say is, on the other side, we need development, Chestertown. I mean, we're just sort of, families are leaving. I want development to come here we've got, there might possibly, might be a new school and Chestertown, I'm able to go to Worton but with this project we could bring, we could be bringing \$100 million dollars into Chestertown and we need the development, big time and would be nice to have something on the river that would bring people here. This is a prize for a developer, I recommend local contractors for the build. We should have local people working at this site if we can and please save the Croix de Guerre, it's a, it's a monument at the building. No one's brought it up. But it's a very famous monument that the French gave to our soldiers from, from D-Day. And, I would suggest also that the frontispiece of the building, maybe could be used inside the hall. I don't know what you plan to do but that should be saved, the doors and everything. I do think that the mold is a problem. But as I said when we started the STAY group and we have a binder, we can show you, all of our stuff.

Rebecca Murphy

Time.

Frank Rhodes

Okay.

Various Commission Members

Thank you. I appreciate it.

Victoria Smith 2:23:17

Do any commissioners have any other questions for presenters or for the college? College? Do you have anything you'd like to say in response?

Mike Sosulski

Nope. Not at this time.

Samantha Hollomon 2:23:39

I have one closing comment that I'll make.

Victoria Smith

All right.

Samantha Hollomon

I'm really encouraged. I think there's a lot of ground of agreement. And I think this is a process and I encourage everyone who is this passionate to stay patient. Let's go through this together. We all are trying to find a way forward. Let's treat one another with respect, with civility. Here we go. It's a group effort. Thank you.

Victoria Smith

Thank you.

Samantha Hollomon

Would you like a motion to adjourn?

Victoria Smith

Yes, we

Samantha Hollomon

I'll make a motion to adjourn our meeting.

Rebecca Murphy 2:24:20

I will second that motion.

Victoria Smith 2:24:21

All those in favor

Various Commission Members

Aye

Victoria Smith 2:24:23

Thank you.