

FARMINGTON CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING

A special meeting of the Farmington City Council was held on Thursday, June 30, 2005, in Council Chambers, 23600 Liberty Street, Farmington, Michigan. Notice of the meeting was posted in compliance with Public Act 267-1976.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Mayor Campbell.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Bush, Campbell, Knol, McShane, Mitchell.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

CITY ADMINISTRATION: Clerk/Treasurer Cantrell, City Manager Pastue, Assistant City Manager Richards.

DISCUSSION REGARDING WARNER MANSION

Mayor Campbell opened the meeting with a welcome to everyone in attendance. He then turned the meeting over to City Manager Pastue who provided an overview of the purpose of the meeting. Pastue introduced Assistant City Manager Richards who facilitated the meeting.

Richards stated the goal for the evening was to achieve a “shared vision of a preferred future for the Mansion.” He further stated that a desired result would be a set of recommendations to submit to City Council. He requested participation on five questions that had been prepared:

- What purpose does the Warner Mansion serve in the community?
- What programs and services should be added and why?
- What is the level of satisfaction regarding condition and use of the grounds?
- Does the City provide adequate funding and support to the Warner Mansion as it pertains to capital maintenance of the building, ground maintenance, and Mansion operations and expenses?
- What is the best administrative structure of governing for the Warner Mansion?

1. What purpose does the Warner Mansion serve in the community?

Participants’ comments included:

“The Mansion is a landmark and jewel in our community”

“It provides historic and architectural value for Farmington and the State of Michigan”

“Value as an educational site”

“Repository of historical artifacts from the history of Farmington”

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"Farmington as a destination location"

"Destination as a limited Park facility"

Discussion followed regarding the official title, advertising and historical value of the Mansion.

Participants' comments continued regarding the purpose of the Mansion:

"A place to hold events"

"Place for like-minded people to meet"

2. What programs and services should be added and why?

Participants concurred that there are four venues available on the Mansion grounds including: house, gazebo, carriage house and grounds.

Richards advised that the house is used for school tours, general tours and City activities, such as Mayor Exchange Day. Mansion volunteer, Dick Carvell, noted that the house was built as a single-family residence and could accommodate about 25 people. He stated that different events have been tried in the Mansion with little success because people do not always value or respect its historical value and preservation.

Participants' comments to a request from Richards for ideas or comments regarding potential use of the house included:

"Living history day"

"Limited restroom facilities is a problem"

"Weather-proofing the Carriage House for year around use"

Councilmember Knol suggested remodeling the Mansion or rearranging the furniture in order to increase use of the house. She further suggested activities such as: small teas, storytelling, lectures, etc. Other ideas offered by participants included music programs and changing displays which is already being done.

Discussion followed regarding the reasons why visitors come to the Mansion and their expectations for seeing a furnished Victorian Home. It was noted that there is limited interest in the Governor Warner family.

Responding to a question, Councilmember McShane stated her view that the Mansion should be used as an educational facility, and to a limited extent, a gathering place; and that the grounds could be better utilized by planning musical events, picnics, croquet

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matches, etc. She stated that there has to be exhibits or events that draw people to the inside of the Mansion. She further stated that it takes committees and partnering with other organizations to plan such activities. She expressed concern regarding preserving Museum artifacts.

Richards asked for input regarding uses for the Mansion porch.

Participants' comments included:

"Ice cream social"

Councilmember Mitchell expressed his concern that the house and porch are not handicap accessible.

Other participant comments regarding uses and concerns of the Mansion included:

"Past modifications to make the Mansion handicap accessible were considered, but there was concern that they would deface the property"

"Café on the Porch"

"Facilities could be used in combination for events such as weddings"

"Noise limitation from Grand River was noted"

"Bingo"

"Halloween event – judging costumes and providing refreshments"

"Old-fashioned or antique auction on the grounds"

"Warner Mansion art show"

"Antique road show"

Richards asked about uses for the carriage house and the following participant suggestions were offered:

"Working with the schools and library to develop curriculum to teach at the Mansion"

"Art classes"

"Perennial exchange, however, parking is limited"

"Trunk or fashion shows"

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Richards noted that activity at the Mansion needs to reach a level where people are asking, "what is happening at the Mansion today, this week, this month, etc." Richards asked about other events that might take place on the grounds or at the gazebo and responses included the following:

"Black tie events, red hat society"

"Past events have not been well attended at the Mansion"

"Kids events on the grounds"

"Newspapers are not responsive to publishing Mansion events"

"Move Friday night concerts to Mansion"

"Antique car show"

"Old fashioned day including petting animals"

"Taste Fest"

"City needs to assist in publicizing events"

"Name and address of every visitor to the Mansion should be documented"

Discussion followed regarding partnering opportunities with other community-based organizations with comments from participants as follows:

"Seek volunteers to maintain trees at the Mansion, i.e. Green Industry Council"

"Corporate sponsorships"

3. What is the level of satisfaction regarding condition and use of the grounds?

Participants' comments included:

"Kudos to the volunteers who maintain the grounds"

Councilmember Mitchell noted that the Mansion grounds show well. He suggested installing pavers to the gazebo and throughout the grounds.

"Use of pavers is an effective fundraising vehicle"

Councilmember McShane suggested the addition of directional signage to designate when the grounds are in use.

"Additional parking is needed"

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Councilmember Mitchell recommended increased ground lighting.

"Picnic tables on grounds"

"Fountain needs to be cleaned and lighted"

"Northwest corner of the grounds needs improvement, possibly the addition of grass"

Councilmember Bush suggested the addition of art sculptures on the grounds.

"Plants underneath the Tulip Tree near Grand River need to be removed"

4. Does the City provide adequate funding and support to the Warner Mansion as it pertains to capital maintenance, and museum operations and expenses?

Mayor Campbell requested that City Manager Pastue provide an overview of the City's financial support of the Mansion.

Pastue provided a brief review of Mansion funding and capital improvements.

Discussion followed regarding the cost of maintaining the Mansion and whether it is adequately funded.

Mayor Campbell noted that even if the Mansion were closed, fixed costs would continue.

Richards asked if there should be a shift in funding priorities, i.e. more on grounds and less on building.

Pastue noted that due to the current economic environment, the City would not likely increase funding, therefore the focus should be on shifting funds and/or seeking other ways to raise funds.

Richards stated that it appeared that participant consensus is for renewed emphasis on programs and services offered by the Mansion.

McShane requested feedback on a list of repairs and improvements at the Mansion and their funding.

Richards noted that the upper ballustrade is scheduled for replacement this year and the plumbing has been completed. Carvell noted that funding for carpet replacement has already been appropriated.

Richards asked about options for funding Mansion repairs and improvements with a participant's response as follows:

"Raise admission fee"

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Richards suggested other options including: City budget, fundraising events, grants, and user fees. He asked if anyone would be available to address grants or fundraising.

McShane noted that fundraising does not always have to take place at the Mansion, suggested "movie night" at the Civic Theatre.

Bush stated that there are a lot of "angels" in the community who might support the Mansion.

The following comments were offered by participants:

"Publish a pamphlet that outlines what the Mansion has to offer"

"Huge task for volunteers to keep the Mansion running and requires structure for staffing and task assignment"

5. What is the best administrative structure of governing for the Warner Mansion?

Richards stated that the current structure is a City/volunteer staff relationship. He noted that there is minimal funding for a staff position. He posed the question of who should be responsible for the Mansion going forward.

The following participant comment was offered:

"Responsibility for the Mansion is a huge job for a volunteer"

Richards stated that the City recognizes that relying solely on volunteers to run the Mansion is inadequate and therefore has budgeted funding at the level of the previous part-time Director.

Carvell suggested that there are two areas of responsibility for maintaining the Mansion, including someone with the curator expertise of the previous director and a business director.

Richards suggested the possibility of recruiting someone to fill an operations manager position and hiring a curator as a consultant on an as need basis.

McShane discussed generating funds through rental fees that would offset the expense of an operations manager.

Knol suggested partnering with the government of Farmington Hills that could also include expertise from the Special Services Division. She noted that the Mansion is a "gem" for both Farmington and Farmington Hills. She encouraged the City to explore this type of relationship.

Discussion followed regarding other options including organizing as a 501(C)(3).

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Richards clarified that a policy for photography reservations would allow a party to reserve space at the Mansion, but would not be used to restrict anyone who “just wants to take a picture.”

Pastue stated that with regard to photography fees the City would likely draw a distinction between commercial and general community use.

Richards cited four possibilities for the administrative structure of the Mansion: (1) status quo, (2) Historical Commission, (3) new independent commission, and (4) legally authorized private non-profit organization known as 501(C)(3).

The following participants' comments were offered:

“The Mansion has an “identity crisis” and the question is how to “brand” it so that it becomes easily recognizable”

McShane noted that in February 2000, City Council passed, by resolution, the formation of the Governor Warner Mansion Committee and established formal by-laws and structure. She asked if this model could work again.

It was noted that there are other models of museum operations that can be modified to suit the Warner Mansion.

Discussion followed regarding the challenge of finding someone to oversee the functions of curator, operations and fundraising that are jobs that typically do not overlap.

It was noted that an operations/business manager of the Mansion would need to have first hand knowledge of operating a museum.

Discussion continued regarding management of the Mansion and the merit of establishing a 501(C)(3) organization.

McShane stated that the Mansion could possibly be part of the Farmington Hills Foundation.

Richards noted that there are several models for a 501(C)(3) in the community, including the Founders Festival.

Pastue stated that City Administration would compile and evaluate the information gleaned from the meeting, discuss with Council, and determine a process going forward.

Mayor Campbell thanked everyone for attending and expressed appreciation to all the Mansion volunteers.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

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Arnold T. Campbell, Mayor

Patsy K. Cantrell, City Clerk/Treasurer

Susan K. Halberstadt, Recording Secretary

APPROVED: AUGUST 1, 2005