

Report of Public Forum on Stimson Hall  
Town of Gray Community and Economic Development Committee  
July 18, 2011



Prepare by:

Donnie Carroll, Facilitator



## Public Forum on Stimson Hall, July 18, 2011

The Community and Economic Development Committee sponsored a forum to solicit public comment, thoughts, and on the future of Stimson Hall. This forum was conducted following a town-wide mailing of a newsletter to the citizens inviting all to attend a forum for the expressed purpose *“as a community...decide what to do about Stimson Hall”*.

The newsletter provided a brief history of the building, the state of the building as it sits today, and some “thought starters” aimed to bring out any and all ideas from those who would attend to forum.

The forum was conducted at the Newbegin Center on Monday, July 18, 2011 beginning promptly at 7:00 PM. There were in place a sound system, video from local cable channel, two flip charts with scribes assigned to record ideas, a recorder to keep a record of all questions and related comments (enclosed with this report), ample chairs to accommodate members from the public, and a podium for the facilitator. An overview of the goals and purposes of the forum was presented by the facilitator as well as general rules for the evening (enclosed with this report). The attendance at the forum was between 65 and 70 persons with 27 different individuals presenting their views and options to the forum.

This report will provide a summary of comments presented throughout the evening, a list of recurring “themes” or “concerns” raised, and suggested next steps that the CEDC may want to consider as they move forward on this matter. Following the report is the one page document stating the rules and format for the forum and a copy of the recorders “minutes” from the evening.

The original plan for the evening was to open the floor for attendees to present their concepts on the future of Stimson Hall. The scribes would alternate recording these ideas on their respective flipcharts. The second half of the evening was to be a more detailed discussion of the concepts presented. However, as the evening unfolded, the two became as one and each comment elicited responses and/or counterpoints. Therefore, the forum proceeded in an open manner with individuals making suggestions on their individual ideas while simultaneously addressing those areas previous mentioned by others.

The evening went smoothly, congenially, and productively through adjournment at 8:45 PM.

The evening comments can be divided/summarized into five broad categories:

1. History
2. Town usage
3. Private usage
4. Development approaches
5. Other thoughts

**1. HISTORY:**

Comments within this broad category were:

- (a) Respect the history of Stimson*
- (b) Building was a gift to the town (twice)*
- (c) Keep Stimson, Keep our History*

There was a sense of history and a community “tie” to the building itself that was present amongst those (not all) present. This is reflected further as you review the next category.

**2. TOWN USAGE:**

Comments here were broad and varied. Mixed amongst the comments was a sense the building is a part of the character of the town and there must a use that can be found. Although ideas were presented, an underlying them of costs permeated the evening.

- (a) Find a way to maintain the building, but recognize there will be a cost*
- (b) Building was a gift to the town – lease it to the church for 100 years (this comment will appear under other categories as well)*
- (c) Current library not enough space, Stimson “could” be library, although not suitable for it now, expand it and move library to Stimson*
- (d) View entire area as one site; expand Stimson, using properties to entice development, redevelop gas stations*
- (e) Keep it as town property, do not sell to church, take it to referendum to determine final usage*
- (f) It was a gift to the town, keep it, give to historical society*
- (g) Senior Center, pool, community center, social center*
  - i. High density housing to support senior center*
- (h) Create a park around the space*

### **3. PRIVATE USAGE:**

Comments were balanced and fairly consistent in this category. Overriding them was the lack of maintenance and neglect this building (many town buildings) receives. There seemed to be no consensus developed on whether to keep the property as one parcel or “save” Stimson and develop the remaining acreage.

- (a) Not concerned with usage, the properties are not marketable as is*
- (b) Keep the old post office, eliminate the town hall, develop site as upscale restaurant*
- (c) Level them all; make park/green space in the short term and market commercial space in the long term moving the access to a central location*
- (d) Give it to the Church, they recognize the need for maintenance*
- (e) Increase marketing efforts; town needs to rid itself of some properties*
- (f) Demolish it and sell the property*
- (g) Make it generate revenue for the town*
- (h) Sell this property and maintain the others*
- (i) Demolish post office, develop that site, deed land to Stimson*

### **4. DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES:**

Comments here may also be reflected earlier.

- (a) GO SLOWLY, develop a comprehensive plan for the entire property remembering route 100/26/115 are very pedestrian unfriendly –must consider route 26 traffic*
- (b) Weigh the costs versus the function, what function makes sense*
- (c) Research grants for use of building; possible “mixed use”*
- (d) Town has neglected the building, select user who is “financially sound” to maintain/upkeep building whatever the use or group may become*
- (e) Explore legal issues for re-use or splitting of property before making any decision*
- (f) What is an acceptable price if selling the properties*
- (g) What design standards will be followed*
- (h) Use building in concert with reasonable development*
- (i) We need development*
- (j) What is the building condition*

## 5. OTHER THOUGHTS:

These comments were taken from the flipcharts and from my notes as the evening went along. They may or may not fit in one of the previous categories but are or should be part of the discussion:

- (a) Can a public-private partnership be created*
- (b) Things change over time, we should preserve the village center*
- (c) How does Stimson Hall, some of these ideas fit with the concept design of "Monument Square"*
- (d) Keep the current lease or sell to the church, is it possible*
- (e) Look beyond the history, the buildings and toward development that generates revenue*
- (f) Establish costs on any proposed concept before going forward*
- (g) A master plan will allow better town control of the property and its marketing*
- (h) Remember there is a cost to demolish buildings, if this is true, get those costs and present them in the "mix of ideas"*

## SUMMARY/SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

There appeared to be few recurring thoughts to keep in the forefront as you move forward.

### 1. COST! COST! COST! –

*Suggest that you establish hard data on bringing Stimson to code, estimated annual operational costs, and compare that to demolition of the building. As you work through potential uses, be as detailed as possible and develop specific costs for each concept*

### 2. MARKETING -

*Clearly there is evidence of near anger on the part of the public for what is perceived or real lack of aggressive marketing of the properties. Suggest the Committee develop a strategy for short term and long term marketing of these 1.7 acres both with and without buildings*

### 3. WHAT TO SAVE -

*Although the focus of the forum was Stimson Hall, there is clear division on which of the buildings (if any) should be saved or demolished. The forum showed no absolute direction in this area with thoughts ranging from razing them all, to keep two, to keep Stimson. However, it was very much clear that a consensus of speakers believed the town must rid itself of properties or begin to maintain them (with emphasis on ridding the town of properties)*

#### 4. NEXT STEP(S):

*The Committee should assess some of the concepts and “triage” them as to both feasibility and costs. The Committee should keep the public informed frequently along the decision making process. You have the November program, the Monument Square ideas, and the thoughts from this forum to work with. As you review all these ideas, I believe it will quickly whittle down to two or three concepts that would be worthwhile pursuing.*

*Prior to getting to far into your work, I would suggest the legal review of the Stimson gift, deed, and restrictions (if any) which may impact potential concepts from moving forward.*

*The Committee would do well to heed the speaker’s idea to “GO SLOWLY” and assure whatever you bring back to the citizens are “functions that make sense”*

*I would suggest a second newsletter this fall, if for no other reason but to present an update and progress the Committee has made. This should be in concert with program(s) and presentation using Gray’s public access cable channel.*

*If at all possible attempt to put together a timetable that will assist you in your deliberations, it is always helpful to have that “drop dead date” even if you have to move it because you are not quite there.*

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I hope this is helpful. Thank you for the opportunity to assist and play a small part in the process. If you would like the original flipcharts for your files please let me know and I will get them to whomever you designate.

## **CEDC COMMUNITY FORUM JULY 18, 2011**

### **General Rules and Program Format**

#### **RULES:**

1. There are NO bad ideas
2. Respect the opinions and views of all participants
3. Speak only after you are recognized by the facilitator
4. Identify yourself for the record
5. Speak clearly and loudly
6. A five (5) minute time limit will be followed for all speakers
7. This is your time to STEP-UP and SPEAK-UP – take advantage of it

#### **PROGRAM FORMAT:**

1. Program to begin promptly at 7:00PM
2. Overview of the evening by the facilitator
3. All concepts for the potential use of Stimson Hall will be presented
  - a. Bullet points to explain each concept will be accepted at this time
  - b. All presentations will be verbal this evening
4. All concepts and bullet points will be recorded on a separate sheet of paper and posted for everyone to see
5. Once all concepts have been presented, each will be discussed with comments taken pro and con, again all comments will be recorded
6. A final wrap up will occur with potential next steps explained
7. The facilitator will collect all recorded sheets and any “minutes” taken and write a report summarizing the evening’s comments and submit the report to the CEDC and Town Council no later than one week following the program
8. The program will end no later than 9:00PM



Stimson Hall Public Hearing

submitted by: Anne Gass

No bad ideas

Respect the ideas opinions

Speak only when recognized

Identify self

Concept- Use

**Jim Monroe:** Stimson ought to continue the heritage- has been the backbone of the community for so long.

**Joyce Berle (Sp?):** Do we know the condition of the building- before we go forward; we should know what we're dealing with.

**Ed Libby,** CEDC Chair: As stated in the newsletter, estimated to be \$400K to bring to code- could be some more structural problems that haven't been explored yet. Also ADA issues, elevators, etc. to bring to usable standards.

**Pam Wilkinson:** It is an icon of the town, shouldn't be taken away. Would like to see some entity research grants to see what's available. Would love to see the library there. Or senior citizen or combined use. Could be combined with some meeting rooms, arts. In a perfect world. Believes it will be more than \$400k- needs a professional engineer to look at it. Find something that will really work there.

**Mark Grover:** The church was interested in purchasing the property- thinks it is compatible with the building, we should sell it to the church.

**Audrey Burns:** This was a gift to the town. It's one of the few things that meets the criteria for that building, If not sell it, and then lease to the church for 100 years.

**Jim Monroe:** Not so concerned about use. Not talking just about Stimson Hall- has to talk about the rest of the town-owned properties. Does not believe the town hall is marketable by itself. Not just Stimson Hall.

**Louise Knapp:** Opened in 1903. Social center. Make an assortment of things that can use the hall. Need to work with historical grant.

**Ray Clark:** Have a terrific library with great staff. Only lacks space. Parking, space for staff is lacking. Could Stimson be a library for the town? Worth exploring.

**Matt Sturgis:** Preserve architectural integrity- keep whole parcel and add on? Is the will there to add on to that building and make a larger library? Is there an adaptive re-use possible? Stimson itself is too small- the other two buildings would need to be in play.

**Ted Googins:** Looks at it as all one parcel. Keeping the building would enhance the town center.

**Fran Monroe:** What needs to be looked at is the idea of community economic development- to taxpayers that means bringing in revenues by bringing in new businesses. Referred to the charette- emphasized the importance of using the building and the site for economic development. Can't keep spending money. If you want community, have to start with the foundation- need money. Whatever happens with SH should be based on economics not memories. Consider demolishing the building in concert with responsible development.

**Will Burroughs:** Need to go slowly, deal with entire parcel. In developing a plan look at function first. Want a building, a park? limitless number of possibilities. Need to develop a cohesive plan. Not an ideal location for something like the library. Not doable. Is pessimistic that the building can be rehabbed to moderate energy efficiency. The cost issues, looking at cost-benefit, need to be weighed. Doesn't want to see it become a liability for the town. Needs to be an asset.

**Ray Clark:** The purpose of this meeting is to come up with ideas for SH. Park or tear them all down and sell it. Be careful about shooting down ideas at this stage. Give it over to the Historical Society.

**Debby Mancini:** Likes this forum- creativity. SH has a lot of problems. We have an awesome responsibility to take care of the property and we have failed. Need to make sure that whatever/whoever takes it over has the wherewithal to maintain it. Need to take it slowly and carefully.

**Jim Monroe:** Tear down the Post Office (PO). Re-draw the parking lot to ensure that the parking is incorporated w/ SH- deeded property rights. Then build a commercial building on the back half of the PO lot. Where the PO sits you have the potential for parking for what takes over the old TH and SH.

**John Redlon:** Thinks the PO should stay and the Town Office (TO) should go. Throwing a lot of \$ at SH wouldn't go too well. Be cautious with the money.

**Pam Edson:** She did not vote for Pennell. Old buildings need a lot of upkeep. She thought the town was going to sell some properties. Stimson Hall would be most valuable. Town has built a new salt shed, transfer station, public safety, and town hall. We haven't been stingy. Need to take care of the buildings we have. Save the trees, let SH go. Guesses it would cost as much as \$1 million to renovate for a library. Would the council be open to aggregating the lots and sell them all in one go to make them more marketable? Her son lives in Gray- many young people have to work 2 jobs to make ends meet- need to keep taxes low.

**Will Burroughs:** Raze and make a park out of all 3 buildings- short term. If they don't sell in 5 years, then look at a library for part of the lot. Believes the cost of rehab at Stimson is unrealistic as is.

**Pam W.** Also need to look at the legality of disposing of SH and splitting properties.

**Sue Austin:** After the forum last fall, came up with a consensus then. What now has brought us to this evening? Seems like there's a gap.

**Don Hutchings:** Charette did not explore the fate of SH with the diligence we should have. There are people who like it, others who don't care. Wants to explore possibilities before we hang our hat on one thing. Looking for ideas. Tear it down, keep it, and change it? Need to be sure.

**Ed Libby:** Described the charette process, and the benefit of the master planning process. The design workshop was step 1. Reviewed the concept drawings that R. Licht put together.

**Karl Schatz:** This is an exciting thing to be able to shape what the center of town could be. Currently the traffic is chaotic and it may seem like it will never be pedestrian friendly but we can continue to transform the center of town to be more friendly to visitors. Would like to see some plan that makes the center of town a destination not just for Gray residents but for others as well.

**Ron Nevers** – how about giving the building to the church? (JK). Admits it's a lot of work but the church is very grateful. He's from Gray and a taxpayer. Can sympathize with all sides.

**Don Hutchings:** Have to have economic development. About 6-7 years ago did an update to the comp plan. The consultants gave them some ideas. A main idea was that we need economic development. When a developer or a businessperson comes into a town the first thing that they do is look at what the town looks like. Probably would cost a lot to keep Stimson, but would also cost a lot to tear it down. Preserving SH should be explored to keep it as a town-owned property for town use. Cannot see selling it to the church. Likely to go to referendum. Owe it to past and future generations to explore this.

**Pam Wilkinson:** It is our icon and we should do what we need to do to present to the town and let the people decide. Library, school, senior citizens. Working together- would hate to see it empty.

**Helen Davis:** SH is the most beautiful building in the town, and it was a gift. How lucky we are, and how ashamed we should be that we can't take care of it. If the town doesn't want it give it to the Historical Society.

**Dick Barter:** Ambivalent. Need to use our limited resources, look at the past, plan for the future. Yes it does cost a lot to heat but it's because we haven't kept it up. Important to get public input before we act. Hopes there are more newsletters and meetings like this.

**Anne Gass:** Thanked everyone for coming.

**Peggy Brown:** Thinks we should keep the building- don't have a senior center, restaurant, and combined effort to have a gathering place. Re-utilize the stage. Maybe even a library annex. Chamber of the commerce? It's a beautiful building and should be maintained.

**Fran Monroe:** Have wonderful plans. Frustrating that the properties have been for sale for several years. Tonight's meeting duplicates the charette. Good ideas have come forward- haven't been acted on. May need to go out of state to find a developer. Great ideas came from the charette, these are just reconfirming what was said there.

**Rick Licht:** Gave update in what has happened since the charette. The charette looked at the "what if" for all of downtown. Then we decided we had to scale back and look at just the properties the town owns. Doesn't happen overnight, but it's extremely important that we do our diligence.

**Jean Buber:** Thinks the for sale signs could be bigger and be clearer. Should clarify that all 3 buildings are for sale? Thinks we need to get rid of some properties. Please no more leases! SH has more potential than the other two.

**Peggy Stewart:** Community Center with adjacent pool and senior center. Maintain SH and have a place for older people to go, as well as younger people.

**Mark Grover:** How low can you go? This question should be on the list- what is the lowest price the town would accept? Would like to see high density housing as one possibility.

**Pam Wilkinson:** Should have design guidelines. If we tear it down have the developer build another one using green design principles.

**Ed Libby:** The master plan will help to set design guidelines for future development. The input from this meeting will be collated with the design workshop input.

**Don Hutchings:** Recognized the CEDC members, Doug Webster, and Donnie Carroll.