

Emma Steering Committee Meeting #4

Steering Committee: Raul Gawrys, Carolyn Shipp, Harry Teague, Mitzi Rapkin, Martha Ferguson, Jason Smith, Liz Newman (Emma Caucus), Sarah Nadolny (Town of Basalt) Matt Annabell (Historical Society representative)

Staff and Board Members: Michael Kinsley (Open Space and Trails Board), Suzannah Reid (Pitkin County Historic Preservation Officer), Jessie Young (OST), Lindsey Utter (OST)

Public: Stacey Keating, Ellie Taylor

- **Reviewed Agenda**

- **Public Comments**

- Stacey Keating – Orchard Estates resident – thanked group for their work. Brick buildings considered an asset to community as a whole. Wanted to make a comment that the highest and best use may be to restore the buildings to an original, similar use – she sees tremendous value in the structures the way they are now as a visual asset, representing history. Her request of the committee is to consider the potential traffic impacts and safety at the intersection. Anecdotally in 6 years since the traffic study was completed, a lot has changed, economically driven change, higher volume of cars and the impacts may be different now. Second thing to consider is the local zoning – Emma Master Plan does not allow new commercial use in the Emma area. If a change in zoning is needed it may have impacts that would need to be reconciled with the Emma Master Plan.
- Ellie Taylor – lives up the road from the buildings – excited to have the buildings be used.

- **Reviewed Process to Date**

- Lindsey Utter reviewed the process, reminding the group that it is working on a recommendation to the OSTB, which will then go to the BOCC. The recommendation could be an idea with an obvious champion, or could be guidelines that don't have a champion but may be realized in the future. The recommendation can also have ideas for the short term or what the uses are supported/allowed in the meantime before a long-term vision is implemented.

- **Discussed Vision Statement Language Update**

- Updated vision statement to clarify what “high public value” means in the vision. The original intent was that use of the buildings should be of value to the public and not necessarily serve an individual or singular business’s interest. The use should enrich the community experience. The group revised the vision statement to read: “The Emma Store Buildings will honor their historic agricultural roots, the natural environment and character of Emma, ~~with high public value~~ and provide a space that ~~is accessible to the community~~ and celebrates the innovative spirit of this location.”

- **Town of Basalt Follow-up Questions from Previous Meeting**

- Moving Emma Trail - Town Staff thought it might be possible to relocate the trail behind the Emma Store building.

- Town Staff was not excited about the potential to have electric vehicles or any vehicles using the Emma Trail. Very constrained area, not enough room to add a road and a trail without acquiring additional land. Trail users already get upset at Public Works when they have vehicles driving down the trail to do maintenance and Town Staffs' thought is that an electric shuttle using the trail would exacerbate the issue.
 - The Planning Staff will interface with ConnectOne Design, which is running the public outreach portion of the town's Master Plan, to see if they have heard anything specific about community needs that could be considered for the Emma Store. Town Staff was not aware of any at this point, other than that they would be supportive of a low-intensity use that complies with CDOT/access constraints. Martha clarified that her thought from the last meeting was to bring people to the bridge along Two Rivers Road, past the buildings and allow them to walk from the CDOT parking area back upvalley to the buildings. This would be a question to address with CDOT, but we don't foresee any issues or reasons a shuttle route like this would be illegal. May also be possible to have a WeCycle Station at the parking area to facilitate people going back and forth. A challenge may be in accommodating people with disabilities. There could be different possibilities with a shuttle that would originate in downtown Basalt.
 - **Continued Idea Discussion and Exercise from Previous Meeting**
 - **"Long-Term Future Uses" Board:** The committee took a few minutes to add additional ideas to the board. The idea added was: permanent space for a cooperative for dissemination of information for water conservation, river biology, environment and climate.
 - The Committee Reviewed the themes / groups of similar uses that emerged from Mtg #3 – Some overarching thoughts included: the buildings could likely have multiple uses or functions e.g. upstairs and downstairs/interior and exterior; uses should activate the space year-round; the space could be an anchor point for change, serve a broad community audience; depending on the uses/traffic generation, a shuttle could help to facilitate use of the space.
- Idea themes:
- Community meeting room/event space/cooperative – upper floors could be non-profit / space for education/classes
 - Storage – WeCycle base for office/storage / agricultural or ranch storage
 - Art focus - Heritage craft center/artist coop / live-work artist space
 - Agricultural-related use, e.g. classes, dinners, local food processing (no meat), farm product sales, ag housing – capitalizing on different uses/needs in the valley
 - History / Museum type of use – historic ranching museum, farm equipment, living agriculture museum
 - Trail amenity facility with restrooms/water station/shelter
 - Secondary / Supportive uses may include limited housing, a small-scale coffee/sandwich shop type of use

- **“Champions” Board:**
 - The committee discussed that, in order to make a use feasible, it is likely to require a critical mass/be multi-use in order to activate the space. There may need for an umbrella organization.
 - Ideas that were added: Lion’s Club, historical society – Basalt Historical Society, other local organizations; Farmers organization; senior center.
 - Martha shared that themes like water, climate and food are all tied into Emma and ag ideas – these themes could potentially attract a big (possibly national) group like Wilderness Society or a group/business that could have their headquarters in the buildings. Attract a company that could bridge uses / funding with a company that makes sense.
 - Example was raised of the Roaring Fork Conservancy, which generates a number of cars coming and going on a daily basis.

- **“Uses that do not meet the vision” Board:**
 - Restaurant as a primary use – prohibited under the caucus plan, traffic generation would be concerning, septic system would need to be considered
 - No meat processing (e.g. no slaughterhouse) – against caucus plan
 - Brewery – commercial use – septic limitations
 - Visitor’s center – traffic generation / parking / not the right location / people going by too fast.
 - Housing as a primary use (could be part of a multi-use structure.)

- **“Topics to include in the recommendation”:**
 - View from the road
 - Snow fence/debris recommendation
 - Evaluation of moving the building feasibility / costs
 - Highway safety / access – potential for a bus/shuttle
 - Near-term items the County should pursue – e.g. flooring

- **Housing Discussion**
 - Jason mentioned he is intrigued by the idea of housing, specifically agricultural-related housing – with the relationship to the Open Space lease parcels on the other side of the highway – housing is the No. 1 challenge for local farmers. Intrigued by idea of modest housing on the second floor with some other related ag use on the main floor e.g. CSA pickup, small market, etc.
 - Discussion about the need to evaluate impacts of housing, sewer, having people and cars there all the time. Access challenges could make it dangerous for someone living there. However, on the flip side, housing use likely generates significantly less trips than other potential uses.
 - Housing for the site could end up being perfect, but should perhaps be on the back burner for the time being.
 - Discussed that there is an additional developable building envelope that could be used for residential use that has been identified in prior approvals and was reserved when the County purchased the property.

- Lindsey added that the Mather house is going through a renovation and will be available for some type of housing in the future.
- Carolyn added that where the old cars are stashed across the highway could become ag housing in the long term, if the property were to be sold in the future. Other locations could help provide housing that have better access.
- **Museum Discussion**
 - Valleywide historic societies are having a challenging time connecting with youths. If we go down that route, this is a challenge that we would face; how would we remain relevant/attract users.
 - The committee discussed other historic museum examples in the valley, Holden /Marolt, Thompson House, Arbaney Museum, etc. and their challenges. Mitzi commented that she was struggling with the museum idea and what uses are going to give back to the community somehow. Doesn't seem like a museum would do it. Maybe there is something that would be interactive and meet the mission, but doesn't see the museum idea being something successful.
 - Harry reviewed the example of the Ice Age Discovery Museum and its challenges. It was run by a non-profit but things haven't worked out for them, much of which is related to the challenge of finding champions and funding and difficulty in finding an umbrella organization with a symbiotic relationship. Discovery Center challenges included the perceived risk and money required for ongoing maintenance. The Town didn't want to get involved because they felt they would have to continually fund it, while the non-profit needed the commitment of the building.
 - Sarah commented that the primary function should not be static, like a museum; however a museum for instance could be a secondary aspect of the place.
- **Discussion**
 - In the bigger picture, there might be a timing issue. Don't want to do something out of desperation just to put the buildings to use; we can be patient and wait until the right use/mix of uses is developed.
 - Sarah commented that there needs to be a critical mass with enough going on to fill the building and keep it active and interesting, yet have a central theme.
 - Raul added that the trips to some type of events center can be managed, as people are accustomed to taking shuttles to these types of things. It could bring in revenues with lectures, small concerts and other types of events. If it's a destination, one day/occasional events traffic can be controlled.
- **Screening Discussion**
 - Raul shared with the group his research on ScreenSafe. It comes in rolls and can be applied to existing jersey barriers, is removable, tolerates snow – has been used in Wisconsin a lot. Traditionally used for worker and debris protection. Could allow for the buildings to be at least visible during the summer months. Raul will send out the website/information to the group.

- **Access Discussion:**
 - Harry mentioned that we have to keep open the possibility of having people come in, with the option of a bus or something, for things like community dances, house concerts, etc., that could be combined with craft expositions, permaculture classes. This is a great place for these uses to happen.
 - Sleighs like at Pine Creek could be a winter transportation solution.
 - Matt added the building's proximity to the highway is a challenge. Although he loves the buildings when thinking about when and how he would take his family there vs. other places in the valley, there are 100 other places he'd rather take his family rather than these buildings right next to the highway. He questions the idea of drawing a lot of people there with the proximity to the highway. Even places without this challenge such as the Thompson House in Carbondale which can be easily linked with the Town of Carbondale struggles to attract visitors. To access these buildings – the highway is always there... site is so constrained by the highway. Have to thread the needle in getting people there with constraints and having it be enjoyable once you are there, with the proximity to the highway.
 - CDOT would be open to looking at fixing/adding access lanes IF the money to fix them is brought to the table.
 - Emma Caucus has opposed a stop light there in the past, however, there may be a need for stop light at the Emma intersection in the future. Conversations with CDOT have established that there are other priorities. Emma residents opposed it because of the impacts of the lights and the noise, e.g. truck brakes and vehicles accelerating.
 - Harry asked if there could be an option to locate a RFTA bus stop here.
 - Michael acknowledged that there are a range of options to access the site and questioned if we need a front-end conclusion about how to access the site before discussing future use.

- **Costs/Champion/Use Linkage:**
 - Raul mentioned that we have to look at the costs – for example: do we spend the money to fix the second floor. Or focus on a primary use of the first floor? One way to realize improvements would be to look for money/state grants to improve the exterior structure, while the interior build could be put in by the first user.
 - Suzanne shared that state historic society can fund some interior improvements – like plumbing and heating.
 - If you could do all the future use ideas together, could you somehow make it work – for example, there are a lot of young people interested in agriculture and there are a lot of ranchers interested in preserving ranching in the valley and that have a lot to teach the young people who are eager to do things. There could be a symbiotic relationship between the uses, e.g. combine a farmers market with history, etc. (There is a ranch association but they are low key, may not really be funding behind them.).

- Michael added in thinking about the various potential uses/champions, it seems that unless someone at the table will become the champion, it looks as if this group turns into a non-profit group that figures out how to make the use a reality, which is not realistic. Perhaps the direction to move things forward is for the steering committee to arrive at possible uses they would support and recommend to the county and put it out to the universe/community to see if anyone bites/wants to take any of the ideas forward. The group would outline the uses that may be considered, as well as the constraints or parameters to put boundaries around what may happen and let the universe respond with ideas that fit the opportunities and constraints.
 - Some of the things to consider would be whether we are assuming that the access is not going to improve and whether or not there is space for parking/how much parking on the site.
- Jason brought up the old Aspen Art Museum space and the bidding process carried out by the City of Aspen to find a tenant for the building, which brought in some uses and exciting ideas that hadn't previously been contemplated. The RFP process established the constraints and parameters or barriers. Financial sustainability question is tied to all of the potential options.
- Mitzi clarified that it feels like that is part of this group's job to come up with some ideas/establish what the main goal is for the buildings. Would be useful to come up with a plan for some initial steps. For example, do we build out the shell/inside so they are closer to a useful product and then let the broader public figure it out?
- County is approached a couple times a year about what should go there, however, right now the County does not have an answer to give them. With the acceptable/encouraged uses and parameters identified, there may be a match in the future with a champion for activating the space in accordance with the steering committee's vision.
- Martha mentioned the partnership between Mark Hunt and Jazz Aspen Snowmass to redo the Red Onion to create another concert venue as an example of the type of partnership that could emerge in the future with the store buildings.
- Harry added we don't want the buildings to fall down, but we don't have a compelling idea that will fund itself or a compatible organization with the necessity for a location at this time. Identifying parameters may be the best that we can do at the moment.
- An idea was brought up to hold some kind of professional design competition to get ideas from the public about how to overcome the constraints; however, due to the cost for both the host of the competition and those competing there were concerns about participation and success. This idea then evolved into the potential for a student studio project. The studio project ideas was widely supported by the group.

- Harry knows a professor at UCD, Cat, who does a lot of work with students focusing on historic sites. Students could be a good approach as they are willing to tackle challenging problems like those facing this property. Cat's program focuses on one location per semester and the work product is spectacular. The Land Library is an example that exists now because of the work that started in the class and Cat's continued commitment. This could be a really great partnership to help stimulate thought around the site.
 - Harry volunteered to reach out to his contact and see if there is interest/availability. There could be the potential for an integrated class with an interdisciplinary team that would include engineering, etc. Could be either a semester project (better – more polished products) or a charrette, but either would provide some new ideas/could generate interest in the community / spark a champion into action. Harry also teaches a studio that could focus on the buildings as more of a charrette approach.
 - Such a project could use the established boundaries / parameters, such as the traffic generation/access challenges, the use of a shuttle for events/transportation. Opportunities would be in line with the group's vision for a multi-use space that incorporates some of the ideas generated for long-term uses.
 - Have to add parameter of maintaining the historical integrity / funding from the state.
 - For the town of Basalt, which is in discussions about regional approaches, integrating the uses would be a goal and having a halfway point between the two hubs would be of value.
 - This student project can help generate ideas and interest to be catalytic/inspirational and at the same time provide the parameters and put it out there to community members.
- **Next Steps**
 - OST Staff will work on developing a draft of the language/parameters (part of the recommendation) based on what has been discussed to date. Staff can also work with Harry to see if there is a willing student/professor who would take this on to see what this could be. Will set next meeting date to allow staff time to develop a draft.
 - While there isn't a huge rush, it would be nice to see if the County could find money/grants to install floor in building. Suzannah could put together a grant application to build out the inside a bit. The committee could provide some guidance as to what level of improvement / scope would be desired to improve the interior at the next meeting.
 - Raul to email information on snow fencing.
 - Harry to check in with UCD contact.