

Emma Townsite Steering Committee Meeting – Feb. 7, 2022

Feb. 7, 2022, 6pm – **Steering Committee Members:** Carolyn Shipp, Harry Teague, Martha Ferguson, Margaret Simmons, Liz Newman, Mitzi Rapkin, Matt Annabell, Suzannah Reid, Jason Smith **Open Space Staff:** Jessie Young, Janet Urquhart **Pitkin County Human Services Staff:** Nan Sundeen, Sam Landercasper

Steering Committee members unable to attend: Raul Gawryś, Sara Nadolny, Michael Kinsley (Open Space Board liaison)

On Feb. 7, the group met via a Zoom conference call. Jessie Young introduced Nan Sundeen, Pitkin County Human Services director and Sam Landercasper, manager of the county's Economic Assistance Department, and briefed the committee on its work to date.

Sam Landercasper explained his role in a regional approach to food storage and distribution – a need that intensified with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. He approached Open Space and Trails regarding the potential for a Food Hub at the Emma Store buildings after a partnership of organizations explored other options, none of which proved feasible. The proposal includes use of both store buildings for food storage and a production kitchen; the need for the auxiliary building is uncertain. An envisioned bike path through the site would be accommodated, along with historical interpretation about the buildings and an educational component focused on food insecurity, he said. The hub would not provide distribution directly to the community; food would be delivered there for storage and then transported in smaller vehicles to neighborhoods with the goal of reaching more people in need than can be accomplished with weekly food distribution sites around the valley, he said. The hub would also offer root cellar and refrigerated/freezer storage to area food growers.

Landercasper said a steering committee would provide an advisory role and oversee the hiring of a site manager to work at the Food Hub, Monday through Friday during normal business hours. He estimated deliveries by 40-foot trucks a few times per week and the smaller, mobile distributions occurring once or twice per day. The county would retain ownership of the property and lease the space to the group overseeing the Food Hub, Jessie Young said. A 10-year lease is envisioned.

Young said an engineering analysis confirmed trucks with a 40-foot wheelbase could access the site from the westerly entrance off Hwy. 82, though intersection improvements may be necessary. The proposal has not yet been presented to the Colorado Department of Transportation, she said.

Harry Teague voiced support for the group's mission to address food insecurity, but said he feels Food Hub use is not compatible with the Emma Store site. He questioned the difficulty and safety concerns associated with accessing the site, the cost of renovating the buildings for the proposed use and said use of the buildings should engage the public. They are handsome buildings that the public should be able to enter, Teague said. He suggested the cost of

renovating the buildings would be higher than building or leasing a facility elsewhere and urged the proposers to continue their search for a more suitable site. Teague called for patience in the hopes that a proposal that is a better fit for the Emma buildings emerges. The Food Hub would require a large parking lot, room for trucks and condensers for refrigeration, he said.

Martha Ferguson agreed with Teague, calling the proposed use a major commercial operation that is incompatible with the recommendations for future use of the store that were crafted by the Emma Townsite Steering Committee.

Mitzi Rapkin asked about the needed infrastructure changes at the site and how quickly alternations could be removed if the Food Hub vacated the site, but she expressed support for the concept. She said she'd prefer to find a way to accommodate the proposed use rather than let the buildings sit vacant.

Margaret Simmons also voiced support for the proposal, calling it a good use of the store buildings while acknowledging ingress and egress from the site is not perfect.

Landercasper said he believes the partnership behind the Food Hub can secure the necessary funding for the project; the group wants to know if the store buildings are a possibility for the location of the hub. Young said she is optimistic the issues with the site can be addressed. The Food Hub proposal offers an opportunity to put the buildings to use and it could potentially host some public programs, she said.

Liz Newman predicted strong opposition to the proposal from the Emma Caucus. She noted Pitkin County has the ability to develop 5,000 square feet near the Eagle County Community Center and suggested a Food Hub could be constructed there for a lower cost than retrofitting the Emma Store. She asked if the store site would need to be rezoned for commercial use to accommodate the hub.

Young said the proposal would be subject to a Location and Extent Review by the county Planning and Zoning Commission rather than a rezoning. The review would determine whether the use is compatible with the Emma Caucus Master Plan or if impacts could be mitigated so that it can be compatible. The proposal would go to county commissioners to gauge their support before it would be presented to the Caucus, she said. Within unincorporated Pitkin County, only the Airport Business Center is currently zoned to accommodate such a use, she said.

Jason Smith asked what other sites the partnership has explored. Landercasper said 10 to 12 other sites were considered. Some were cost prohibitive and finding vacant land doesn't seem viable or affordable, he said. Additionally, potential grant sources have not been identified that would support the purchase of land. Facilities within industrial areas were rejected as inappropriate for food storage because of other, chemical uses in such areas. A vacated Glenwood Springs grocery store was considered, but the group was told it had been leased, he said.

Matt Annabell said he feels the Food Hub proposal merits further exploration and noted it fits with the historic context of the store buildings. Jason Smith also voiced support for further

assessment of the proposal. He suggested the use could generate less than 10 trips to the site daily and noted food storage could be an asset for farmers at certain times of the year.

Suzannah Reid also voiced support for exploring the proposal in greater detail. There will be challenges and considerable expenses for any operation that uses the site, she said. "The best form of preservation is use," she said. Reid suggested a closer look at what the Food Hub's demands on the buildings and the site would be.

Jessie Young relayed the thoughts of Open Space Board liaison Michael Kinsley, who could not attend the meeting. His opinion was that a single use of the building would be acceptable, she said. In general, he is supportive of the concept and advancing it to the next step, Young added. Smith said he agrees that the use does not need to fulfill the committee's desire for multiple uses at the site, but Ferguson said she'd prefer multiple uses within the buildings and does not want the entire site devoted to a single use.

Ferguson asked about the potential for construction at the Eagle County Community Center. Nan Sundeen said she is aware there have been discussions about what could be built there. Landercasper said Eagle County is a member of the food distribution group, but has not raised the site as a possibility. He said he will inquire about the possibility of the Community Center site for the Food Hub.

Rapkin said if the Emma Store site doesn't work for the Food Hub, she remains interested in the production kitchen and meeting space to facilitate multiple uses of the building; she offered farm-to-table dinners and canning classes as examples. The proposed Food Hub gives the county leverage to encourage uses that engage the community while having the ability to influence how people arrive at the site, using transit or non-motorized modes, Young said.

Teague asked how many trucks would be parked at the site and reiterated that asphalt parking and truck use is not compatible with the buildings. Newman predicted the Emma Caucus would agree that the use is not compatible.

Landercasper said the large trucks would come and go, but would not be parked at the site overnight. The smaller trucks don't have to be stored at the site, either, he said. Also, he said the proposers are not considering large, built-in freezers, so there would be no outside condensers.

Young said the committee had raised legitimate concerns that are shared by the county. The discussion helped identify additional information that is needed to help the steering committee better understand the impacts of the proposed uses; the information will also be important for discussions/presentations with the Open Space and Trails Board and Board of County Commissioners, which will discuss the proposal in March. Specifics about the site layout, impacts to the exterior of the buildings and the number of vehicles serving the Food Hub are needed, she said. Annabell said he also wants to know how a loading dock at the back of the buildings will look and function. Ferguson said the area in back of the buildings was the "sweet spot" for a gathering place in the committee's vision for the site.

Landercasper said he wants to provide a greater visual and financial understanding of the proposal. Sundeen called the committee's input valuable; the group raised questions that need to be answered no matter what site is eventually selected for the Food Hub, she said. The partnership needs to find a site and will continue to explore other options, as well, Sundeen added.

Young asked committee members for an informal "yes" or "no" to the proposal. Newman, Ferguson and Teague said they don't wish to see further exploration of the idea. Shipp, Simmons, Rapkin, Annabell, Reid and Smith (and, presumably, Kinsley, who voiced support prior to the meeting) were all open to giving the proposal further consideration.

Young said she would update the committee regarding the March 1 discussion by the Open Space Board and county commissioners. The meeting adjourned at about 6:40 pm.