



**Special Meeting with Work Session
January 19, 2020**

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 5:01 p.m. by Bob Becker, Board Chairperson.

Roll Call: Bob Becker, Sandy Apidone, Jeff Deluca, and Cindy Lombardo
Pat Norris joined the meeting in progress at 5:05 p.m.

Absent: Art Gonzales - excused absence

Also in Attendance: Administrative Coordinator Mindy Remec, and 25 additional residents/attendees

Work Session

Mr. Becker opened the discussion and gave a brief overview of previous discussions on the Oviatt House and the 6-1 vote in favor of demolition at the November 25, 2019 meeting.

Oviatt House - Public Comment:

Mr. Larry Brichacek, owner of a historic restoration company and Richfield resident, presented images of the Oviatt house and spoke about the structure's condition and needed repair. He also presented images of a 4,800 square foot house he refurbished in Ohio City and selling for approximately \$560,000.

Public comments for proposed uses of Oviatt House were: visitor's center, retail shop, environmental sciences lab for Case Western, administration offices, or a rental facility. Mr. Brichacek estimated approximately \$200,000 to restore the building but the end use of the building would determine additional cost. He said that \$29,000 had been pledged to date.

It was pointed out that any of these proposed uses would require ADA compliance. In addition the dam would need reclassification to obtain a certificate of occupancy because the house is in the floodplain.

Mr. Mitchell spoke to the historic significance of the family who built the house. Additional comments from residents were that the family was historically significant but not necessarily the building.

Mr. Deluca said the structure was evaluated for insect damage in 2017 and there is considerable damage.

Mr. Swan said discussion should be for immediate needs to "mothball" the house and then research the cost for complete restoration.

Mr. Brichacek and Mr. Ken Bowman have offered their services at no cost to "mothball" the structure. This would include patching the roof, removing the back section that is rotting, venting the building, removing siding on the front half to expose original siding, and cleaning out the carpet and debris.

Public comments included that the original chimney is no longer there and the front door location has been moved. Mr. Becker said the house that is there now is not the original house that was built by the Oviatt family. This was confirmed by a Cleveland State University study.

A gentleman who lives in the GAR house pointed out that his house is 200 years old and the “bones are still there” even if the house looks different. Once the house is down it is gone forever.

Mr. Smith, former RJRD Board member, commented that the house is in the primary flood zone and voiced doubts about ability to get permits for any work. He said that the board’s decision must be honored in light of other priorities.

Ms. Slifcak pointed out that Oviatt house was never on the RJRD priority list since it was in a flood zone. She commented on the community’s offer to help and her observations that Emmett Farm and Oviatt farm are the bookends to Richfield, which is unique. She said that pledged money will not be there for just mothballing the house without the commitment to save it long term. In addition, she stated it is not fair to neighbors to mothball the house. It needs to look nice as well.

Mr Becker asked for clarification on pledged donations. Ms Slifcak said there is \$29,000 pledged and \$21,000 addition if the house is saved, making it a total of \$50,000.

Mr. Smith reiterated the importance of honoring the Board’s decisions.

Ms. Sue Serdinak provided information on the Scenic Byway application, which was denied because there were no places to stop. She proposed that the main entrance of the Richfield Heritage Preserve be changed to Oviatt Road and then reapply for a Scenic Byway. Funds may become available after Scenic Byway status is established. Ms. Serdinak asked the Board to accept the help of Mr. Brichacek and Mr. Bowman to secure the house, and the help of Mr. Fry to paint outside and donate the Wheatley Wagon for display onsite. She proposed using the model of Heritage Corridors of Bath and have displays to say what is here in Richfield with the house. Ms. Serdinak stated that the Richfield Town Trust, a 501c(3), cannot help unless its articles of incorporation are changed, which could take two to three months. If their board approves the changes, an application for a Town Trust grant can be submitted for funds.

Additional questions were asked on who would finance the cost of future maintenance and utilities. Mr. Brichacek suggested donations from visitors and through the internet.

An Oviatt Road resident commented on the house as a huge eyesore and a waste of money. He suggested taking the house down and building a pavilion that would be much more useful.

A resident asked what the house does to tell the history that a Wayside stop could not do? Other attendees voiced opinions that fewer people would visit without the house.

Mr. Jim Fry stated that old Richfield residents did not talk about or document abolitionist history because it was illegal so it was not recorded. He said he is trying to acquire the John Brown house and wants to link the history of the houses. He proposed saving the house and making it look nice until the rest of the money can be raised to renovate.

Mr. Paul Swan commented that the community wants to be involved. He said that he does not want to see the same thing happen as the Knopp House when the community wanted to save the house and the mayor took it down.

Mr. Deluca spoke about previous years' requests to the community to save the Oviatt house and received feedback that fell through. At that time, the Board made the decision to demolish based on finances and lack of use for the building.

Mr. Richardson asked for clarification on the finances. Mr. Brichacek said they can mothball without any money donated.

Ms. Slifcak summarized previous statements that it would take a year to reclassify the dam. She proposed \$50,000 to stabilize the building and make it look nice to be fair to neighbors and this is all or nothing. She added that there must be political will to save the house and secure the structure. She reiterated that her donors would not give money to mothball the house, only to save it otherwise she cannot secure the \$50,000 in donations.

Ms. Serdinak spoke about the social media outcry to save Oviatt house after the Richfield Times article.

Mr. Norris commented that the Board only has so much time and money and asked for confirmation that nothing would be required of the Board as long as the house is not razed.

Mr. Fry said he got mixed messages on what he was, and was not, allowed to do to Oviatt house which is why he stopped work.

Northcoast Signs offered to make signs as a donation to raise funds.

Mr. Becker outlined three stages of funds needed: 1) cost to make it pretty and safe, 2) cost to rehab, and 3) endowment fund for maintenance in perpetuity. He spoke about the environmental impact and that the mill would be lost in flood as would Oviatt house. He commented on the warnings they have received about potential dangers of the house being broken into and someone getting hurt. There are many factors the Board must consider before making any decisions.

Final comments included: making the house pretty and safe would only take them two weeks and that the board should not stop money influx by razing the house.

Mr. Becker thanked everyone for attending and their comments. The Board took a brief recess and reconvened at 6:50 p.m.

Special Meeting

Fence Repairs:

Mr. Becker said three quotes have been received for fence repairs. Mr. Deluca said the quote from Southway Fence Company included concrete work by the stream which made it the best proposal.

MOTION by: Ms. Lombardo and seconded by Mr. Norris to accept the contract from Southway Fence Company for fence repairs.

FURTHER DISCUSSION: NONE

MOTION PASSED: Vote taken by voice Yea, which was unanimous

Structures:

No action was taken on structures.

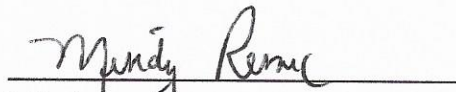
Adjournment:

MOTION by: Ms. Apidone and seconded by Mr. Norris to adjourn the meeting at 6:57 p.m.

FURTHER DISCUSSION: NONE

MOTION PASSED: Vote taken by voice Yea, which was unanimous

Submitted by:



Mindy Reme, Administrative
Coordinator

Accepted by:



Bob Becker, Board Chairperson