



Rose Quarter Development Project
Veterans Focus Group
Room C, Portland Building
December 15, 2009
5:30 – 8:30 pm

SUMMARY

Attendees

Focus Group Members: Jim Arling, Del Arthur, Sam Brooks, Gil Frey, Pat Groves, George Hager, Barry Hawkey, SFC Phillip "Vince" Jacques, Charlotte Schwartz, Rudy Soto, Tony Stacy, Grantly Vaughn, Harley Wedel

Staff and Consultants: Jane Ames and Amy Ruiz (Mayor Adams office); Kia Selley, Kevin Brake and Nikolai Ursin (Portland Development Commission); Elaine Cogan and Alisha Dishaw (Cogan Owens Cogan)

Guests: Jerry Ghigliers, George Hocker, Jr., Jay Isaacs, Trudy Reusser, Karen Whitman

Introduction

Facilitator Elaine Cogan opened the meeting by explaining that the members of this focus group were appointed by Mayor Sam Adams to advise his office and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) to the Rose Quarter Redevelopment Project on aspects of a veterans memorial at the Coliseum or elsewhere. It will not be necessary to reach a consensus.

After self introductions, members were asked to say in no more than three words, their opinions of the ideal attributes of a veterans memorial in Portland. Responses are as follows:

- Visibility, impact (engender emotion) and gravity (formal experience)
- Inspiring, contemporary, connected with real people
- Honor our vets
- Love, honor, defend
- Visible, better symbol (tired of the helmet on an M-16); be able to spend time with family
- Honor for service
- Honoring the deserving
- Acknowledgement, maintain, preserve
- Inspiration, unique (consistent with Portland), intergenerational (past, present and future)
- Duty, honor, veterans
- Honor our dead
- Dignity, enhancement, connectivity

Summary of Recommendations

After a full discussion, members agreed unanimously to the following:

- *The entire building and the activities that happen there are the memorial*
- *Change name of the building to Veterans Memorial Coliseum*
- *Enhance and add to what is there now*
- *Place a more visible memorial statue or plaque in a more prominent location, such as the entrance to the building*
- *Consider a "living" memorial – a place to gather*
- *Sponsor events for veterans at the Coliseum*
- *Provide educational experience for school children*
- *Put names of those who died in wars on the wall with an additional dedication to all veterans*
- *Make access to sunken area more welcoming and accessible*
- *Serve our veterans and their families*
- *Add a library for memorabilia, space for veterans and/or their families to gather*
- *Rededicate the plaque as it is written, "This Memorial Coliseum is dedicated to the advancement of Cultural Opportunities of the community and to the memory of our Veterans who made the Supreme sacrifice to preserve for us the Inalienable Rights of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. And to live in the Hearts we leave behind is not to die."*
- *Consider additional memorial opportunities at the Rose Quarter*
- *Reconvene this Focus Group after the SAC makes its preliminary recommendations*

Background

Nikolai Ursin, PDC project coordinator for the Rose Quarter Development project, narrated a PowerPoint presentation with the overview of the project to date and the history of the Memorial Coliseum. Focus Group member, Harley Wedel, added further historical information.

Group Discussion

Advantages / disadvantages of a veterans memorial in a renovated or adaptively reused Coliseum; what works? what doesn't work? what veterans should be included? Summary notes are as follows.

Harley: The original intent was that this be a memorial to those who did not return from all wars. Only two wars are currently represented, WWII and the Korean War, and only the names of those who came from a 12-mile radius of the building. The memorial needs to include the Civil War through what is going on today. There is only one other all inclusive memorial in the state, in Southern Oregon, in White City.

Gil Frey: The Memorial Coliseum is indeed a memorial dedicated to veterans – the walls in the sunken area are "honor" walls. The Gold Star Mothers made the whole project possible – let's not ignore that.

Harley: Reaffirm the dedication on the plaque, "This Memorial Coliseum is dedicated to the advancement of Cultural Opportunities of the community and to the memory of our Veterans who made the Supreme sacrifice to preserve for us the Inalienable Rights of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. And to live in the Hearts we leave behind is not to die."

Gil: The City does not recognize that the memorial is the (entire) Coliseum.

Barry Hawkey: A sports arena with a memorial seems like an odd pairing.

Gil: Back then in Portland we didn't have adequate places for recreation, sporting events and conferences.

Vince Jacques: The plaque says it all. We should honor those who died by making a place for families to go and enjoy and/or mourn safely.

Elaine: Should the memorial remain at the Coliseum or should it move, and if so where?

Charlotte Schwartz: In other words, can we improve the memorial at the Coliseum or should it be elsewhere?

Amy Ruiz, from the Mayor's office noted there are three SAC members here today; she asked if they could give their opinions of the role of this Focus Group.

Tony Stacy: There has been a lot of talk about how to incorporate ideas to dignify the memorial, not move it. It needs to be self-sustaining and enhances and creates job.

Sam Brooks: The SAC's job is to recommend. We are an advisory group to the elected officials. The Focus Group's role is to help us make recommendations to the electeds on all aspects.

Jim Arlin: Agreed that we need to look at it from the veterans and the sports fans view points. If we move the veterans memorial or if we refurbish the Coliseum there is going to be concern with cost. There are a lot of veterans who would be willing to help refurbish it.

Rudy Soto: I think the Mayor had foresight to convene this Focus Group. The best use of our time here would be to discuss important things that should remain intact, that should be improved. This is a real opportunity. There is a huge disconnect between the military and society. How can we create this to educate people in a progressive way and have a place to gather?

Charlotte: Can we also talk about who should be included?

Amy advised that the deadline to propose plans is January 8, 2010. There will be a public presentation of the plans January 26, 2010.

Grantly Vaughn: There is confusion about purpose of building. Could we change the name to “Veterans Memorial Coliseum” to decrease this confusion?

The group agreed.

Gil: Many high ranking officers do not know this is a veterans memorial.

Elaine: Should we be clear about who we are memorializing?

Harley: At the beginning, several rooms were intended to be reserved for veterans use. A space to help vets find work or for helping homeless vets also would be good. There was an original intent to have a library. There could be a learning center.

Elaine: Are we agreed we would like the building to be a living memorial?

The group agreed.

Jane Ames: Does this Memorial Coliseum serve our veterans well? I didn’t know for a long time what we were memorializing. It needs to be engaging and a sanctuary for families.

Elaine: Should the veterans memorial at the Coliseum should be less of a static place?

Vince: Veterans groups are ready to get on board, including financially.

Tony: If we keep the same we won’t enhance. We need to bring it more visible – not down in the hollows.

Vince: You can add to it but you cannot take away from it. Moving this thing is like moving a gravesite.

Grantly: Everyone who sees the memorial of Mt. Suribachi knows that it’s a veterans site. We need something like that out front of the building.

Rudy: Most don’t know the wall is there or where the names are.

Grantly: I took a tour of the inside and outside yesterday. It’s a good sound structure. We should enhance it, currently it’s sunken down below. You can enter the Coliseum without knowing it is there.

Gil: I couldn’t get to the memorial honor walls because of the guards.

Elaine: Would you like to keep it there but make it much more of a living, active memorial?

Barry: Living and functional but also keep in place like a grave.

Gil: It's down two levels. The Gold Star Mothers wanted a place to honor and meditate.

Vince: I'm hearing an opportunity here. We want to fix the problem and the Gold Star Mothers and other organizations could help. We should make it grand.

Elaine: What veterans should be included in the memorial?

Barry: All Oregon veterans. It's an Oregon structure – should include those who lived or do live here.

Jim: All veterans.

Harley: It should include individuals who did not return from the wars; those who died in conflict giving the supreme sacrifice.

Barry: But also those who came back but were/are changed.

Elaine: Should it include those who perished in conflicts or all veterans?

Charlotte: I think all veterans.

Gil: The Oregon Country – Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana

Jim: List the names of those who died in war on the wall, also include a dedication to all veterans.

Elaine: I hear a consensus that you want more prominence to the memorial i.e. plaque, statue and/or signs and that it should honor vets who died in service on the walls with a dedication to all veterans.

The group agreed.

Jim: The Korean Memorial in Wilsonville includes those who died in the conflict on the wall. There are bricks in front of the wall for those who served but died later. Families can choose to add the name of their veterans for a small fee.

George Hager: There should be activities and events at the facility to honor veterans, including conventions of different military organizations.

Jim: The American Legion wanted to have a convention there but were told to pay up or get out and haven't been back since.

Grantly: I had to go to the Hollywood area on Veterans Day. Why wasn't it at the Coliseum?

George: I speak at high schools and I often ask the kids how many of them are patriots. I've yet to get a 100% response. I then give them the definition of a patriot – someone who will love, honor and defend their country.

Tony: Last year Harley and I organized four veterans events at the coliseum. As vets, we have to be proactive and ask what do we have to do to get this done.

George: I am a bugler and sound Taps at memorials and funerals. If you've ever heard echo Taps, it is something special. We could do it here.

Elaine: What are your opinions about possibly moving the memorial elsewhere within the Rose Quarter, to somewhere else in the city or keep walls at the Coliseum and put the rest elsewhere?

Harley: Envision this for a moment –the walls are moved up to the main level with a flag pole and plaque. People will come to and from games and events. Is that where you would like to go to remember the fallen? It's a memorial/location to commemorate. It's not longer on the table to tear it (the building) down.

Elaine: The City will be entertaining many ideas for reuse of the coliseum. I hear a general consensus that this group does not agree the memorial aspects should be moved anywhere else.

The group agreed.

Sam: We need to hear the sentiments of the veterans community when the SAC votes.

Elaine: How far are you willing to go, if anywhere?

Barry: I'm hearing three options: 1) refurbishment, 2) move somewhere else in the Rose Quarter and 3) move it somewhere else in the city. I think we should scrap the third option completely.

Rudy: What is our consensus with this statement? As someone on the SAC, this is good information to know.

Jim: I'm dead set against moving the memorial anywhere, including to the Rose Garden. What does "active" memorial mean?

Vince: Inside the building, we need some place for vets or those interested in veterans affairs, including a room to just sit and talk.

Elaine: Do we want to at least entertain the idea of moving the memorial as that is likely to be in some proposals?

Pat: Is there any possibility of augmenting what we have now and speak to what is happening now? We don't want to leave out a generation. There is a new sense about going to war. Do we need to expand our idea of what it is to memorialize?

George: It is down in a hole; needs to be accessible.

Charlotte: I agree with keeping it where it is, in the Rose Quarter compound or right where it is now.

Rudy: Proposes an additional monument for most recent wars. It could be a tall visible structure within the study area. Agrees that within the current site maintain the current features but go a step further.

Elaine: Is moving the memorial outside the Rose Quarter grounds off the table?

The group agreed unanimously.

Grantly: A lot of people don't realize that their freedom isn't free. The memorial should be active and ongoing. They should know it's there and what it represents.

Gil: It is the memorial. If we're talking about moving the honor walls, we should ask the Gold Star Mothers.

The group agreed.

Tony: We should expand while enhancing the existing aspects. Also, we need to make it ADA accessible. The Coliseum is considered a soft target. The elevator is located inside, making accessibility to the outdoor memorial difficult.

Harley: I have spoken with many veterans groups. They would like to feel they have a stake in and a right to use the building. It has never been used as originally intended. It needs to be educational, to draw people in, and be accessible to all. We should honor our dead and educate the youngsters so they can learn from our experiences.

Sam: Leave the walls but augment the memorial.

Elaine: Of the three options, the third (moving it offsite) appears to be off the table. The first (staying where it is) and second (onsite on another enhanced site while leaving what is there intact) are both still agreeable to this group.

All agreed.

Elaine: Should we reaffirm the dedication?

All agreed.

George: This memorial should be utilized for Veterans Day, Memorial Day or anything connected to veterans.

Harley: We had a small ceremony there this year. Advertising was the key.

Tony: One reason for not advertising is that it was physically impossible to attend all the ceremonies in the city. Current management helped us with this last year and it was better.

Grantly: In five months we will have Memorial Day. Couldn't we approach management now to say we want to have a major event there?

Tony: We have to schedule way in advance.

Gil: Many years ago, Harvey discovered that there wasn't a flag onsite. POW, USA and Oregon flags are now flying at the highest piece of land on site, which I nicknamed "Harley's Hill". We can easily expand on that. The Gold Star Mothers chose the place so they could go and mourn in peace.

Nikolai: How do you deal with accessibility where the walls are standing now?

Harley: Change the ramps and make the elevator more accessible when the building is not in use.

Sam: After the SAC knows what people are recommending, should we reconvene this group?

The group nominated Harley to be the Veterans Focus Group spokesman to present its recommendations at the SAC meeting January 12.

Elaine wrapped up by citing the words that group members gave at the beginning of the meeting to describe the ideal attributes of the memorial. The group agreed that they stayed consistent with these ideas throughout the meeting. The recommendations noted at the beginning of this summary were affirmed by all.

Meeting adjourned.