

September 19, 2021

RE Agenda Item: Winburn Way, Ad Hoc Committee, Final Report

Honorable Mayor and City Council Members,

My name is Dale Shostrom. I am currently a member of the Ashland Historic Commission and have served the City as a commissioner for over 22 years, where I help carry out the Commissions' charge to preserve the integrity of our historic structures and resources. I am speaking to express some thoughts and concerns regarding the proposal submitted by the Winburn Way ad hoc Committee. Because the Historic Commission has not met since the proposal was submitted, I am speaking on behalf of myself and not the Commission as a whole.

I have worked as a designer/builder in Ashland since moving here in 1974 and have collaborated with many structural engineers during my career. In the early spring of this year, by previous order of the City Council, I was invited by the Public Works Dept. to provide technical expertise and community representation in the evaluation of Engineering and Architectural firms that had submitted proposals to provide comprehensive evaluations of Pioneer Hall and the Community Center. During this process I developed a robust understanding of the condition of these structures via on-site visits with architects and engineers and I thoroughly reviewed all the documents, architectural drawings, engineering reports that pertain to these buildings.

In my opinion these buildings have some serious structural deficiencies and deferred maintenance issues. Pioneer Hall has been well investigated in recent years, whereas the Community Center has had only a preliminary report on the structural deficiencies of the roof and north wall of the main hall auditorium.

I think the ad hoc Committees' proposal can safely re-open these buildings. I whole heartedly agree with the need to get these buildings open for public uses and to find cost effective solutions. But the ad hoc charge to 'develop least-cost recommendations' falls short aesthetically and impedes the opportunity for historic restoration.

My major concern is with the Community Center auditorium ceiling and the proposed fix, by the installation of a **steel moment frame**. The existing curved vaulted ceiling covers an open floor area of 30 feet by 40 feet. The ad hoc Committees' structural solution is comprised of a series of asymmetrically spaced steel beams, headers, and post (wrapped in drywall) that will completely overpower and interrupt the historic openness, simplicity, and detailing of this beautifully vaulted auditorium.

Further, this utilitarian retrofit support system will complicate or permanently eliminate future opportunities to restore the north wall and roof systems, without the additional wasteful expenditure that will be needed to remove the steel moment frame. Specifically, the Committees' recommendation would severely restrict or preclude future repair of the sagging floor and compromised foundation, the outward leaning windows and wall, and the 15-inch-deep belly in the exterior roof plane. The consensus engineering solution, to remedy all these problems, has been to remove the existing roof structure and rebuild with new wood trusses. I believe the proposed **steel moment frame** is a totally unacceptable solution, both aesthetically and historically.

As a next step, we need to develop cost-effective design solutions that address safety concerns, longevity of the structure, and preservation of key historic design features, as previously directed by Council. By incorporating the ad hoc Committees' findings, we can simplify a new 'preliminary design and engineering phase'. Because the City may need to re-open a competitive solicitation process for engineering services regardless of the path forward, a more economical opportunity to better assess the long-term needs of these buildings is not likely to occur again soon. This phase should facilitate public input, needs analysis, and budgets. The resulting "menu" and price list of repairs, improvements, and restorations will enable Council and the community to better prioritize which actions should be performed over time.

These buildings are nearly a century old. It is time for a detailed evaluation that will guide decisions to ensure our historic public resources will serve the Ashland community for another 100 years.

Respectfully,
Dale Shostrom