

## **“Who Needs a New Village Center?”**

**The Problem.** Almost seven years ago the leaders of Cherry Hills Village noted that our Village Center was inadequate to our needs. Mayor Jeff Welborn, Mayor Pro Tem Viola Lahana, Municipal Judge James Turre and others commented on our lack of space for public hearings, community meetings, storage and staff. (Village Crier, May 1999 and August 1999)

In the ensuing years additional problems have been noted: dangerous build-up of mold, leaking roof, insect and rodent infestation, lack of technological infrastructure. And on and on.

In addition to these documented problems, advances in geotechnical assessment have made it clear that the current location is problematical from a flooding perspective.

Far from getting any better, the picture got a lot worse, on a daily basis.

**The Process.** In response to this information, the City Council determined in 2004 that we could no longer simply “make do” with our antiquated, dilapidated and increasingly unserviceable facility. Having carried forward a “plug number” in our Village budgets for a great many years, we decided that the time had come to take action.

With the help of professional consultants experienced in such matters, an exhaustive study was commenced to determine exactly what the minimum needs of the Village were. Surveys were conducted. Data were accumulated. Analyses were commissioned. When those numerous processes were completed, the results were presented to Council.

**The Conclusion.** One conclusion was obvious and unavoidable: a new Village Center would have to be constructed if we were to provide adequate usable space for the programs and services that were essential to the public health, safety and welfare of our Village. We could not simply “retrofit” the old building. A patchwork quilt of repairs and additions would simply serve to mask the numerous problems, and to render more expensive the ultimate “fix” that would have to be implemented.

That said, we as a Council began exploring what the cost would have to be for this undertaking. In the past we had always used a \$4 Million number for a new building for planning purposes. That number was not the result of any

professional study. It was the proverbial “plug number” that had been used for many years previously. It was always known and clearly understood that the ultimate number for the total cost of such a project including site costs, fit-out, equipment, yard, etc. would be something higher.

But the \$4 Million number was a good start for purposes of more detailed study.

Once we determined that we had to do a “scrape off” of the existing facility, we instructed our professional consultants to work with us in determining what a new, serviceable replacement would cost, taking into account all of the realities with which we had to deal, including the highly sensitive and problematical concerns regarding the flood plain. We resolved that, as to the flood plain and all other development issues, we would hold ourselves to the very same standards – or higher – that we hold our citizens to in their development applications.

**The Vision.** We discovered in the process that we could accomplish a much more worthy goal than simply replacing an old and crumbling facility with a new, workable facility. As laudable as that goal was, we determined that we could implement the vision of our Council to provide for greater open space and park facilities in the Village.

Rather than simply focus on the Village Center in isolation, we took a much broader view of the area that sits at the very heart of our Village.

What, we imagined, would happen if we took this opportunity not only to fix the very real problems facing us, but also to create an attractive assemblage of parkland that would surround the Village Center, and shield its impact on our adjacent neighbors? What if we were to take the opportunity of maximizing the impact, the feel and the effect of our existing parklands?

**The Goal.** Some of us then took our hand at trying to draft a statement that would articulate the overall goal that we were trying to accomplish here, as part of an integrated set of goals for all things having to do with the Village. This is how we stated that goal (with great thanks to former Mayor Jeff Welborn for some of the word-smithing):

Fund and commence construction of a fit-for-purpose Village Center and municipal park that will provide

- Efficient, usable office space for the city manager and staff;
- Facilities necessary to support an effective, well-trained, 24-hour police force;

- Space for storage and maintenance of public works equipment;
- Effective communication within and with city government;
- Adequate space for our municipal court, for community meetings and events and for other occasional uses; and
- Provide for enhanced open space and park land for use and enjoyment by our citizens.

**The Plan.** This review and goal setting exercise, and the opportunity to put our money – and our support – where our mouths were, resulted in the Plan that we have brought forward to the community. That Plan has several integral elements:

- Move the Village Center to a place that would not be in violation of the flood maps.
- Construct a Village Center large enough to house adequately – but not luxuriously – the essential programs required to provide services to Villagers.
- Build a Village Center that would incorporate the necessary technological infrastructure to allow effective and instant communication with all Villagers, by virtue of high speed internet access and real-time cable-casting of all meetings and gatherings in the Village, so that never again could anyone legitimately say that they did not have an opportunity to observe, in real time and on a truly interactive basis, all of the “doings” at the Village Center.
- Amass a block of open space that would buffer and insulate the operations of a 21<sup>st</sup> century city from its neighbors.
- Create open space and visual corridors that would enhance the residential experience of all of our homeowners.
- Provide for an improved fire, health and safety response team to serve all of our individual and corporate citizens.
- Provide public works facilities designed to increase response times for our paid professionals to respond to any natural or man-made disasters.
- Locate a Starbucks™ or similar coffee stand in the lobby of the new Village Center, with some comfortable chairs and reading materials, in order to encourage citizens to gather, feel welcome, stay a while and chat with their neighbors and city staff.

The above Plan is a clear expression of civic pride: pride that Villagers take in their Village, a pride that is expressed in having great open space and in having livable, workable facilities for our paid staff and our citizens to use.

**The Cost.** The first attempt at calculating revised numbers required to achieve these goals, before we had engaged an architect or a contractor, led us to the initial thought that the bricks and mortar for a new facility would probably cost us something like the \$4 Million we had been talking about all along. When taking into account the additional program elements (site costs, flood plain, open space, parkland, buffers, green zones and view corridors), our initial estimate was that the entire program might cost us upwards of \$5 Million.

But this was, at best, a “working number” (not far from the “plug number” used in the past) for rough planning purposes only.

Some thirteen months later, after we had engaged and instructed both an architect and a highly competent and experienced project manager in the process, we were advised that our numbers were low ... very low.

What made the numbers low were a number of factors. These included the lack of a clear and stable vision for the entire project, the huge increase in construction costs experienced during 2005, and some less than perfect planning by all of the engaged professionals and the elected volunteers overseeing the project.

We can spend the next four decades or more trying to figure out “Who shot John.”

Or, we can remember the needs that we recognized many years ago and focus on the goals that we are trying to accomplish on a much broader basis for the Village, and move on with the best information reasonably available to us and complete what is unquestionably a necessary and a worthy project for the creation of a new Village Commons, with all of the open space, parks, buffers and physical facilities that we have identified as being in the best interests of the health, safety and welfare of our Village.

As of today, and with the assurance that the most qualified experts in the field have looked at this overall Village Commons project, we can say that our entire costs for bricks and mortar is most likely in the range of \$7.8 Million or so, which is admittedly much more than our original – but uninformed – “plug number” was. The overall project cost (construction, site costs, equipment and fit-out) is probably something close to \$9.6 Million, which is also greatly in excess of our original “back of the envelope” numbers.

**The Result.** Our Village Commons project envisions a development of open space and parklands that is more than 150% of the size of what we had when we

embarked upon this ambitious venture of increasing open space in the very heart of Cherry Hills Village.

And while our existing facilities, including the public works yard, occupied about 6% of the campus before we began acquiring open space, the newly planned facilities will occupy less than 8% of the total assemblage that we have put in place as the new Village Commons.

Is it the best we can do? No.

Is it all we can do? No.

Is it a vast improvement over what we have? Yes.

Will it provide demonstrably enhanced real services to our citizens? Yes.

Will everyone be happy? No.

Will we ever be able to satisfy all of the naysayers, especially those people who have said that they would prefer our Village staffers worked out of portable trailers, or be moved completely outside of the Village limits, or who say they absolutely don't want citizens to come into the Village Center and be greeted with a cup of coffee? No.

But we will be able to provide the perfect answer to the question posed above:

Who needs a new Village Center?

We all do.

-- Douglas M. Tisdale, Esq.  
Councilmember, District 1

February 1, 2006

Statistical Note: The size of our original parcel (4.42 ac) and John Meade Park (6.71 ac) equaled 11.13 ACRES. The properties acquired recently (90 Meade Lane (2.5 ac) and the Teitelbaum Property (2.36 ac) and the Fire Station Property (.65 ac)) equal an additional 5.51 acres. The new Village Commons site now equals 16.64 acres. The footprint of our current buildings equals 10,892 square feet. The public works yard equals 18,000 square feet. The proposed new buildings will equal 28,563 square feet and the new public works yard will equal 26,783 square feet.