

Comments to the Village Board by Larry Bell, December 9, 2008

Economic Environment

- The current economic environment presents the worst conditions in decades to bring forth a proposal to build a community center. The SCC recognizes the fiscal issues facing the Village, the State and many families in Scarsdale.
- Our timing is driven by the Village's request to review site alternatives and the maturing of the studies undertaken in response to that request. As a result of the very public review of the studies conducted over the past six months, the project has achieved high visibility in this period of economic turmoil.
- As the SCC has repeatedly stated, it recognizes that the current economic uncertainties will adversely impact the timeframe at which subsequent steps of the project can be completed.
- However, we also believe the environment does not justify canceling the project or putting it in deep freeze or on an undetermined hold. Even if we wanted to finance and build the project right now, we estimate we would not be in a position to do so for approximately two years.
- Therefore, the SCC believes that now is the perfect time to undertake the planning required in order to move the project forward when environmental conditions permit.
- Indeed, if we do the planning now, environmental conditions may present opportunities from which we will only be able to benefit if we are prepared. For instance, can we complete the required planning in time to benefit from reduced construction costs in a slack economy? Is it just possible that, if the project matures in time, that we, as a village, may be able to benefit from some of the infrastructure financing support opportunities that appear to be on the horizon?
- We don't know what opportunities may become available to Scarsdale, but we do know that we will be able to benefit from such opportunities only if we are prepared to move forward.

Village Board Involvement

- In order to move forward, the community center project needs the Village Board to become involved now in resolving open issues. Failure to do so, and placing the project on an indeterminate hold, would be tantamount to killing the project. That is not what the project deserves. It is not consistent with the immense amount of volunteer effort that has been invested and it is not consistent with the broad community support that the project enjoys.

- So what exactly is the Village Board involvement that the SCC seeks? Let's go through the steps that we see as necessary to move forward:
- First, we need the VB to define the process the village sees as necessary; the due diligence steps the Village needs to perform; the tentative timetable on which those steps can be accomplished.
- Second, certain tests and studies are appropriate as input for consideration of the best site for the facility. The SCC is prepared to work with the Village to get these tests and studies done but the plan needs to be developed with and to the satisfaction of the Village.
- Next, with the benefit of the studies and tests, the concerns of the neighborhood in which the facility is to be located need to be addressed. The Village can play the part of an honest broker in the process of resolving these issues.
- If these steps can be completed, then a site decision is needed and should be possible. That is a Village Board decision and can only be achieved if the VB is involved in the process leading up to such a decision.
- Once a site decision is reached, an architect needs to be engaged and the facility needs to be designed and publicly reviewed and accepted.
- Only after the facility is designed can the required environmental reviews be undertaken. Again, a process under the purview of the Village.
- A financing commitment may be able to be delayed until the above steps are completed and at that point, we can hope that the economic environment will have significantly improved. Clearly, such a financing commitment would be contingent on a range of possible conditions including the successful achievement of the capital pledges envisioned by the financing plan.
- So the capital campaign would be the next step but the prerequisites are a site decision, facility design and a conditional commitment for the Village portion of the financing plan. If Mamaroneck can achieve such a public-private financing plan for their new \$20 million library addition and renovation, why can't we do something similar in Scarsdale?
- Finally, only after these steps are completed would we be ready for construction bonding and for actual construction to commence.
- The above proposed sequence illustrates clearly the critical role of the Village from this point forward in bringing to fruition the community center that so many Scarsdale residents desire. We urge the Village Board to take the required steps, as the environment permits, to bring a community center to Scarsdale.