

Arvada City Council Meeting Workshop, March 9, 2015

Notes taken by Susan Shirley

Mayor Marc Williams and Councilmember Bob Fifer were at the conference of the National League of Cities, in Washington, D.C. Present for tonight's meeting were Mayor Pro Tem Mark McGoff and Councilmembers John Marriott, Bob Dyer, Jerry Marks, and Don Allard.

Public attendance was approximately 6.

The topics of tonight's discussion were:

- A. Revised Historic Property Survey
- B. The Role of the City in Preserving Arvada's History

For very detailed information on the updated historic property survey, see http://www.arvadarecords.org/councilpacket/current_week/02.A.%20Historic%20Property%20Survey.pdf

The last survey was done in 1997, so at the time the most recent properties would have been built in 1947 or earlier. In 2004, a fifty-year old house would have been built in 1964, so that leads to the potential for expanding historic districts into such areas as Allendale and Alta Vista.

Last year, the City contracted with SWCA Environmental Consultants to update the survey and to do a "reconnaissance" survey of Alta Vista and Allendale, and to make recommendations to the City based on that work. Tom Witt of SWCA gave a brief presentation of the findings.

Of the properties included in the 1997 survey, 230 are unchanged, 23 have been demolished, one has been moved, 12 are now being recommended as contributing properties which were not recommended in 1997, 8 were contributing in 1997 but are no longer considered so, and 50 would be considered contributing if the boundaries are expanded according to the recommendations of SWCA.

SWCA also recommends in some cases considering buildings newer than 50 years old as contributing properties if there is a significant association with an individual who was or is important to the City's history. In addition, Witt said, some whole areas of town are themselves historically important.

Alta Vista and Allendale are examples of post-war suburban housing areas. The idea was to create secure, open family environments within the homes. Of the 603 residences SWCA looked at in Alta Vista, 80% retain excellent or good integrity (little to no significant exterior change to the buildings since they were built) and there are 8 remaining cottage schools, built to take pressure off existing schools following dramatic increases in population.

Allendale properties showed 86% excellent or good integrity. A selling point of some homes in Allendale were the built-in bomb shelters found in many of those homes. There is also a 1921 bungalow which was surrounded by the newer neighborhood.

SWCA recommends further study of the post-war areas of town, for the purpose of nomination as districts for the National Register. Witt said it's helpful to know what a city's history is, in order to make better planning decisions. "Arvada has a long and vibrant history, something that should be understood and promoted." Witt also recommends Arvada apply for designation as a Certified Local Government, opening the door to grants and other benefits.

Councilmember Bob Dyer began the council discussion, saying that he grew up in the Alta Vista and Allendale neighborhoods. He wondered why the Hutchinson Homes on the northeast side of Allendale were not included in the reconnaissance. He said, "I hope we are not limiting ourselves...between the 1950s and the 1970s was a big population boom and we have a lot of places we could be looking at." Arvada Senior Planner Cheryl Drake said this was just a starting point, because even a recon survey is an expensive venture. The entire job cost just under \$150,000, with the intensive survey costing about \$500 per house, and the recon not nearly as expensive.

Mayor Pro Tem Mark McGoff asked how involved would be the process to become certified. Witt said that we have a Landmark ordinance already, which meets most of the guidelines for certification, so it would generally be a matter of applying. There would be some additional requirements, but nothing tremendous. Cheryl Drake said that, with that designation, contributing structures would be eligible for historic district tax credits, which would help a lot more citizens.

Councilmember John Marriott said that if two neighborhoods are plucked at random out of the whole city, a lot more would be missed. He said that he'd prefer a good overview, at this point, and would not advocate spending large amounts on super-specific surveys yet.

Dyer agreed, saying he also thinks it's reasonable to apply for designation as a Certified Local Government. Councilmembers Jerry Marks and Don Allard agreed with Dyer and Marriott's views. There was no Council discussion about the SWCA recommendation to expand all boundaries of the three present historic districts.

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The role of the City in preserving Arvada's history: Mayor Pro Tem McGoff said that he wants to make sure the City is doing all that is needed to preserve the history of the area. To that end, tonight's workshop is an exploration of various ways and means to determine the city's role and how any changes might be approached.

Communications Manager Maria VanderKolk opened the discussion with some facts. The Arvada Historical Society was formed in 1972. In 2005, Arvada donated the McIlvoy House to the Historical Society as its home. The Society has an active board of directors as well as an active volunteer base. Looking at how other municipalities deal with their historical societies, VanderKolk said that Wheat Ridge funds a part-time staff position; Aurora governs and funds the Aurora History Museum ("they have a rather tepid Historical Society," she said); Broomfield has a Historic Landmark Board, a small budget, and its board is staffed with community development staff. It has a museum "which is not open that often." Golden has five city employees, including a director and a curator, dedicated to historic programs. Westminster is similar in approach to Arvada. It leases the Bowles House to the Historic Society for \$1.00 a year.

Arvada's written history is not up to date, either. There are four books written by the Historical Society, covering Arvada's history in some detail, but ending at 1976. So there is nearly a 40-year gap since then. McGoff's opinion is that even that last book, the one covering 1942 to 1976, is not really a history book but is made up largely of excerpts from newspapers.

Councilmember Marriott noted the great work the Historical Society does, adding that the City ought to help with both money and staff. He said, "The Historical Society should decide what's best for them." Helping to print new books would be a good plan. Marriott is also in favor of having the City preserve its history through its own records, which he said would be really fascinating.

Councilmember Dyer asked for comments from the Historical Society. McGoff at that point said he had comments from a meeting he had with the Historical Society on February 21. Their priorities are to bring the written history up to date; to republish the earlier books, particularly the first two, *Waters of Gold* and *More than Gold*, which are out of print but in demand. Third priority would be for more funding, followed by more storage, and a designated curator at the Arvada Center.

Dyer said there are many items in storage, but without a curator, the displays never change. "There's nothing more boring than stagnant history," he said, "we could do so much better."

Councilmember Jerry Marks asked if a city employee couldn't facilitate things, similar to the relationship between the City and the Festivals Committee.

Allard said he'd like to have recommendations from the Historical Society. He said that, before the Arvada Center was even built, a big factor in passing the bond issue for that was the part it was expected to play in showcasing Arvada's history. While noting that he is supportive of the Historical Society, in his opinion "the less government involvement in it, the better." McGoff disagreed. Marriott said he'd like to see the Historical Society bring Council a plan: "What we do for the Historical Society needs to come from them," he said, "what they've done is amazing, using limited resources."

There was also discussion about having other City departments and entities, such as the Fire Department, write and preserve their own histories.

Some feedback from members of the Historical Society: Bonnie said a big problem with storage is that there are pallets upon pallets of the most current book, *Arvada Comes of Age*, which is not a really high-demand item. She would also like to see the museum stay open at the Arvada Center, with a curator. Archiving items there would go a long way to solving the space problems at McIlvoy House. She would also like to see a couple of pages of each Arvada Report given over to the Historical Society.

Nancy Young agreed, and added that a less-well-known problem is that many historic documents require special humidity as well as low-light environments. Photos need special storage. There are bound volumes of the Arvada newspapers from 1922 through 1970, which are disintegrating due to improper conditions. The city could also provide a program to help with the restoration of historic structures, including homes. She said that period windows alone cost 4 to 5 times as much as regular windows.

There were no updates from the City Manager's Office, and the workshop ended at 7:25.