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SOS COMMITTEE REPORT

The Save Oxford School Committee was formed in late January, 1980, to determine whether the Oxford School building could be used for worthwhile community purposes or should be demolished. The Committee concluded, without reservation, that it would be both desirable and feasible to save the building and use it as a Community Center for the residents of Oxford.

The Committee was organized as follows:

- Sid Campen: Legal Planning
- Guy Lovelace: Physical Planning
- Norman Harrington: Usage Planning
- Ellie Conner: Funding
- Doug Hanks, Jr.: Member at Large
- Philip Conner: Chairman

*Raymond E.
McMann Oil Co.
Market St.*

There was a sub-committee for Usage Planning consisting of: Bobby Banks, Clarence Cox, Doug Hanks, Jr., Sue Jackson, Peter Lasher, Mae Kammert, Dorothy Moore, and Jerry Valliant.

The goal of the Committee is to save the Oxford School by using it for a worthwhile purpose or purposes at no expense to the Town. The first objectives were to determine the legal and physical feasibility of saving the building, determine worthwhile uses for it, and develop a plan for implementation.

In reviewing the legal situation, it was learned that the Town is under contract with Talbot County to purchase the building for \$1.00, but there would be no conveyance of the property to the Town. In addition, the contract requires the Town to tear the building down at its own expense and liability, clean up and grass over the site, and deliver it to the County by November 14, 1980. The County would retain title to the property and use it for the Talbot Parks and Recreation Program. It was also learned that the County had previously offered the building and the land to the Oxford Fire Company.

After several conversations with County officials, the Committee believes that the County would be willing to convey title or enter into a long term lease with the Town for both the building and the property, if it were to be used for a public purpose, and that the County would let the Town out of the existing contract.

The Physical Planning involved having a general contractor and an architect carefully examine the building to determine if it were worth saving and to estimate the cost of preserving it. They concluded that the facility is far too valuable to destroy and that it could be preserved for a total cost of \$10,000.00. This would involve re-roofing the flat portion of the roof, replacing broken glass, replacing broken doors, and repainting the exterior trim.

The Committee suggests that even though the existing heating plant is in good condition, it is not energy efficient and that it be used only to heat the auditorium area when needed. The classrooms could be heated and cooled by individual heat pumps as required. It is estimated that this could be accomplished for approximately \$2,000.00 per classroom. It was also learned that matching grants are available for installing energy efficient systems in older, non-efficient structures.

The Committee believes that the Beautification Committee would voluntarily assist in landscaping the land surrounding the School to improve the general appearance of the property.

Usage Planning was done by an active sub-committee who considered not only their own ideas, but actively sought ideas and opinions of other residents. The desire to use the building for different community activities is shared by many people in Oxford.

The most suggested use is for a community center which could utilize the auditorium for Town meetings, performances by theater groups, concerts, movies, recreation, watermen's and farmer's markets, activities for senior residents, youth programs, fund raising activities, arts and crafts exhibits, etc. It would also be desirable to utilize one of the classrooms for smaller functions such as scout meetings, educational courses, etc.

It was noted that there is no visible Police Department in Oxford. Many believe that the mere presence of uniformed police and marked police cars deters crime. If the Police had their office in the building and their sign were appropriately displayed and visible to all entering the Town of Oxford, this might serve as a further suggestion of authority and prevent problems.

Moving the Town Office to the School has often been suggested. The current Office is adequate at the present time, but if either the Town Office or the Oxford Museum wish to expand in the future, more space will be needed. The Oxford School building would be an excellent and relatively inexpensive resolution to that problem when it occurs. Before that time, the space in the building could be used for other purposes.

The Talbot Little Theater Group has expressed a definite interest in renting 2 rooms in the building. They would also give a benefit performance in the auditorium. It is estimated that this would generate approximately \$4,500.00 per year in income. They would pay for their utilities and would furnish their own seating, lighting, etc.

The Head Start Program is still looking for a permanent home. They would be interested in renting 2 classrooms. This could produce approximately \$5,000.00 to \$6,000.00 annually.

Mini-warehouse facilities are popular in many other places, but are unavailable in Oxford. Each classroom could be converted into 3 or 4 storage rooms very inexpensively. The income produced would be \$1,300.00 to \$2,400.00 per year per classroom used for this purpose.

Someone has offered to donate very valuable furnishings for a Heritage Museum. These would include an 18th century kitchen and bedroom to be housed in one portion of the building. A modest admission fee could be charged to cover operating expenses.

Considering the ideas and examining the space available, it is apparent that the building can accomodate many different uses. It is also evident that with planning and management, this building could be used for public purposes, and the costs could be underwritten by income producing uses.

There are many avenues available for funding once the general usage of the building is determined. Funds could be obtained from private sources, Talbot County, Federal Grants, fund raising activities, and through earned income.

We have the enviable and unique advantage of having a building that is fully paid for, has no mortgage to repay, and pays no taxes. The annual operating costs would depend on the uses, but with planning and management, the costs could be offset by generated income. Insurance, utilities, and general maintenance are estimated to be less than \$6,000.00 per year, if operated as outlined.

The Committee has determined that the building is worth saving and should not be demolished. It was decided that in view of the many worthwhile purposes suggested, the various methods of funding, and the limited time available, that it would be unwise to suggest a specific use for the Oxford School Building at this time.

The Committee does, however, make the following recommendation:

That the Commissioners of Oxford create an Oxford Community Center Authority consisting of 5 to 7 members. The Authority would be responsible for:

1. Determining the legal structure or basis for the Oxford Community Center.
2. Negotiating with the County to obtain title or long term lease for the building and the land.
3. Determining the specific initial uses for the various areas of the building.
4. Developing a funding plan for the initial capital improvements, including the suggestion that the Town utilize those monies which were to be used for demolition, clearing, and grassing the site, toward the initial capital requirements.
5. Developing an operating plan for the Center.

The Save Oxford School Committee has carefully studied the legal and physical problems involved in preserving the school building, has determined that there is great desire and need for an active community center for the residents of Oxford, believes that there are ample and capable volunteers available not only to establish the facility, but also to operate it in the future, and that this can be accomplished without burden to the taxpayers of Oxford.

February 27, 1980