

Otwell
Route 1 Box 162
Oxford, Maryland 21654

Phone: 301-822-2327

March 4, 1980

Mr. Emory Balderson, President
Town Commissioners of Oxford
Oxford, Maryland 21654

Dear Mr. Balderson:

I came away from your February 27th meeting with an uneasy feeling that something was wrong. We not only acted like adversaries but there was a lack of mutual trust. Also, there was little doubt that the citizens of Oxford and their Commissioners are in a tug of war over the fate of the Oxford school.

I have thought a good deal about that meeting and events leading up to it. Before my impressions fade I ask your indulgence for an old lady, on the sidelines and serving by your leave, to speak her mind.

Your instantaneous reaction to Phil Conner's thoughtful report shocked me. Having talked with Fletcher Hanks a number of times these last three months, and with you, Mr. Balderson, at our Open House, both Mae Kammert and I felt that you two were a little less determined to tear down the building and a little more open to new ideas. You will remember that at one point I said to you, "welcome aboard."

But when Phil Conner completed his report the three of you, without so much as a thank you, summarily dismissed it as worthless and proceeded to overkill with such comments as "nothing new, all generalities, no specifics, questionable figures, you've bounced the problem back to us and we are back where we started."

There was little doubt that you were back where you started. Your words and your manner indicated clearly that your decision was made before the report was given and nothing Phil could have said would have made any difference.

But in no way are the committees "back where we started." When 270 concerned citizens petition their local government for a change of heart, and two representative committees work feverishly against tight deadlines to explore every conceivable

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good use for the building, we are far from "where we started."
In fact, it's a whole new ball game.

Phil's report was never intended to be a nuts and bolts report. It was a comprehensive feasibility study. Surely you knew the limitations when you set those deadlines. It requires time to get that many people together for so many meetings. It takes time for ideas to crystalize. People go away. Sudden illness strikes. But, despite all the limitations, that report was a magnificent expression of citizen concern, and a highly motivated commitment by many people to an idea they believe in and are willing to dedicate their time, energy, skills and means to achieve. It was imaginative and innovative, with the kind of enthusiasm behind it that can move mountains.

Its message was loud and clear. We want the Oxford School preserved. We are willing to take on the project because we believe the building has the potential for multiple uses for the pleasure and enrichment of people of all ages in the Oxford community. We believe we have the leadership and the kind of programs to catch the imagination, inspire participation and get the job done. But we cannot do it without your help. This is what we are asking you to do:

- 1 - Abandon plans to demolish the building.
- 2 - Negotiate a new contract with the Talbot County Council to acquire the building and land, or failing this, to obtain a 99-year lease on the land for the public use of the people of Oxford.
- 3 - Agree to make available for the stabilization of the building the funds which would have been used for demolition and preparation of the site for turn-over to the county under the old contract.
- 4 - Appoint an Oxford Community Center Commission or Authority (officially, non-profit) to work out all of the specifics of stabilization, renovation and management of the building in ways that will insure both its economic viability and dedication to public use.

If you will trust us and work with us, saving the Oxford School could provide an exciting example of community spirit at its best and reflect credit on all who have a part in it.

Sincerely,

SUE M. JACKSON
Otwell