

Notes from February 2011 Board Meeting

Notes from Trustees Retreat February 4, 2011

Important Ideas were on the table as the Chautauqua Institution Board of Trustees conducted their annual February Retreat amidst the winter bluster and beauty of Chautauqua.

My privilege was to listen and learn and interact with Trustees, staff and guests including CPOA board member Bob Jeffrey.

These are my observations about the events I witnessed and how they might affect CPOA and all property owners. Please feel free to call or write me for clarification.

Drainage Management

Director of Operations, Doug Conroe, presented a summary of the key findings and action plans arising from the report which was prepared by an engineering and architectural firm who knows Chautauqua well.

1. As the Institution owns nearly all of the watershed we occupy, it is our privilege and responsibility to manage it.
2. Past and present efforts to mediate water flow such as the Massey wet land, the Fletcher rain garden and the bay saver boxes (which are buried at the bottom of streets recently rebuilt) were the correct actions to take in reducing effluent and sediment discharges into the lake. However, the 13 “mini-watersheds” of Chautauqua identified in the study need additional work and an investment of perhaps \$1.5M over 3-5 years in order to complete the task of reducing our lake impact to within federal Clean Water Act requirements.
3. Additional storm drains are not the best answer nor is it necessary to build a multi-million dollar processing plant for our runoff so long as the Institution successfully undertakes efforts and procedures that reduce the level of runoff that eventually reaches the lake. Directing runoff, capturing sediments and chemicals, filtering and slowing down water flows, investing in landscape improvements at crucial lakefront discharge points and educating property owners about how we may all contribute to this important improvement will need to begin as soon as design, funding and resources become available in order of criticality.
4. Standing water is not needed nor are pest or mosquito problems expected due to the proven science and engineering techniques which Doug’s team reviews and adjusts according to specific experience. However, choices for rain garden and wet land vegetation as well as their location around the grounds must be made to achieve the goals of meeting requirements leading potentially to new additions to our landscape which must be managed within resource constraints and with property owner awareness. Doug assured us that these new gardens would be a mix of flowering plants and other natural touches, not simply reeds and cattails, but they may appear in places which may be grass now but will be something else in the future under the study recommendations.

The study report in its entirety is a large document with measurements, maps and specific recommendations. It appears to be well researched and well informed as to Chautauqua’s present and future structure and needs. I encouraged Doug to work with us on the CPOA board to find a venue this summer to present and discuss the study and his planning process with the public including the probable order and timeframe within which the engineering will occur.

A priority project of considerable expense has been funded which will repair and re-route the drainage away from the Vincent Avenue brick walk and Bestor Plaza to reduce the puddles on Pratt and then to carry the rain away to the ravine behind the Colonnade. This project and some design work will be carried out in 2011 using the capital fund created by the real estate transfer fees.

Turner Gate Replaces Hurst Gate

Turner will be both walking and vehicular access to the grounds in 2011. New pathways will be developed providing enhanced pedestrian access to Turner including a new path from Hurst over to the Turner parking lot and sidewalk. I have asked Operations to keep me up to date on their decisions about pathway lighting and the potential for bike lanes on the grounds.

Architecture and Land Use Study Group

You will recall from last report that Bob Jeffrey (CPOA Ombudsman and area 7 representative) has been named by Chairman George Snyder to lead a study group whose charge is to review the history and current status of the Architectural Review Board and its place in the matrix of land use planning regarding the private buildings on the grounds.

The group is formed and ready to function. It will meet in March to formulate its timeline and methodology which will be reported to the Board at the May meeting for approval. Once again, the Important Ideas were on the table and more will be studied prior to the promised October 2011 preliminary report which the board expects.

George Snyder told me he fully expects rule and methodology changes and is confident that Bob's group will cast a wide net to gather in ideas from our community and from other places similar in one fashion or another to our own. CPOA's inputs are clearly a strong presence, but many other groups and individuals will weigh in before the group's work is complete.

Amphitheater Project

A professional group with impressive credentials in architecture and preservation both on and off the grounds of Chautauqua will meet soon to begin the year-long process of bringing together the myriad issues, challenges, constraints and opportunities which will someday coalesce into designs and costs, budgets and campaigns. Non-architects including CSO members and Chautauquans will join this group later. A kick-off meeting on March 2 will bring together the architectural historians and other professionals who will ultimately process the input and render a design. The Institution will be shortly announcing the names of all members as well as the methods which will be used to attract input from the community.

Drawings are not forthcoming this year. If you have seen someone's idealistic sketch of one possible Amphitheater, you should neither be alarmed nor expectant. Important ideas come first; design and drawings come later.

Hagen-Wensley Project

On time and reported to be operating within the new budget, the building has a roof over its head now but the porches will be seen later.

Reimagining 394: a Charette*

Bob and I also were invited to the exciting session entitled "Reimagining 394: a Charette." The idea was to rethink the potential use of land along and to the west of state highway 394 that would result in a more vibrant Chautauqua.

Trustees and staff are excited about Chautauqua's future and highly receptive to ideas for improvement, even radical ones, which might become reality in future Board actions.

A warning: Ideas are different from plans which are different from budgets which are different from results. You may hear of concepts or approaches which were discussed during the retreat weekend which you think are lame or wrong-headed. No final decisions were made here since none were intended. Quite the opposite: if an idea was not tabled I would be surprised; we all were encouraged to think and speak freely in classic brainstorming fashion.

These important ideas represent the possible near and far future of the place we are determined will last forever.

*A **charrette** (pronounced [shuh-ret], often Anglicized to charette and sometimes called a design charrette) consists of an intense period of design activity.