

Notes From the Chautauqua Institution Trustees Meetings November 7-8, 2014

Bill Neches, President, Chautauqua Property Owners Association

Following are my notes from the Institution Board of Trustees held in Bellinger Hall with the Trustees and senior staff in attendance.

Our CPOA Corporation Trustees lent their thoughts to these notes, for which I am grateful.

As CPOA President, I enjoy observer status at these meetings. The four Trustees who were selected by the CPOA board and then elected by property owners (Jennifer Delancey, Greg Miller, Bob Jeffrey and Hugh Butler) represent us well and, along with other Trustees who are also property owners, promote a fair hearing of the concerns which impact quality of life on the grounds.

Items of interest to property owners are the only ones I report here, though I was privileged to hear about program elements and other interesting matters.

Amphitheater Project

This project has been in the news recently and has generated some controversy. At the November meeting, I heard the lengthy and very detailed presentation of the Amphitheater project to the Chautauqua Board of Trustees. I was extraordinarily impressed by the thoughtfulness, time, effort and due diligence that the Amphitheater Study Group, Institution staff, Board of Trustees and a group of highly respected architects and consultants have put into this project.

If you go to the Chautauqua Website, www.ciweb.org, at the middle of the home page, you will see a picture that is labeled "Amphitheater Update and View Board Presentation".

Click on this picture and you will open another page that has a scrolling window with the slides and information that were presented to the Board of Trustees. You can stop and start the slide show by clicking on the start/stop button in the center of the slides. You will find Tom Becker's letters of November 14th and December 2nd and a number of other documents at the bottom of the page.

I believe that you will find viewing this presentation to be informative.

The following is my **personal opinion** on this controversy: For more than a century, our Amphitheater has been the heart and soul of Chautauqua. While there are differing opinions regarding the direction of the current project, I believe that all parties to this discussion are acting from a belief that their position is genuinely in the best interest of Chautauqua. Civil discourse is the Chautauqua way to discuss differences of opinion and it is very un-Chautauquan for anyone to impugn the veracity of another opinion, or to suggest the presence of some ulterior motive.

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The Chautauqua Amphitheater is where we pray, learn, have discussions about a wide range of topics and enjoy the performing arts. It has been our center of gathering for many generations and will continue to be so for many generations to come. While the Amphitheater is a structure of wood, metal and concrete, we, the Chautauqua community, ARE the Amphitheater! It is our multigenerational presence and the remembrances of our collective past experiences in the Amphitheater that makes this such a hallowed space. Over the years, the lighting and sound systems have changed, the seats, floor boards of the stage and portions of the roof have been repaired or replaced and many other features have been updated. However, none of this detracts from the fact that this is the place where FDR gave his "I hate war" speech and thousands of other momentous lectures, religious services and performances have touched our lives. Thus, whatever is the outcome of the current controversy over the Amphitheater and whatever is the resulting physical structure, what has transpired in the Amphitheater will remain in our collective memory forever.

An important aspect of the Amphitheater project is the need for heavy equipment and materials to traverse the delicate inner streets of Chautauqua. When reviewing contractor bids, the Institution will decide which routes will be taken to the site weighing any road-building and road-repair factors including their potential impact on neighboring properties. Information regarding these decisions will be provided to the Chautauqua community in a timely fashion as the project moves forward.

Architectural Review Board

The new ARB regulations were effective 11 months ago and appear to be working smoothly. Some new changes to the regulations included: allowing for interior demolition between new and existing construction as long as this will not result in any visible changes to the exterior of the finished project. Alterations and changes to windows that are compliant with the selected architectural style of the project do not need to go to the ARB for approval. Construction during the Summer Assembly Season is not allowed (both interior and exterior) unless written approval for emergency work has been granted by the administrator. Pursuant to New York State Not-For-Profit law, all members of the ARB must be members of the Board of Trustees of the Institution. Robert Jeffrey, David Rosen, John Haughton, Christine Brueshke and John Milos are the current members of the ARB.

2014-2015 Capital Improvement Projects and Budgeting

Each Trustees meeting is preceded by committee meetings which do the hard and detailed work of considering policy matters in depth and the budgets which fund the strategic matters of the Institution. The Asset Policy Committee annually considers ticket and parking fees in the context of the whole budget for the coming year.

The Institution continues the long term project to fund capital improvements and to maintain the Institution's 100+ buildings. Each project, must be funded completely in cash before work commences and must provide an endowment in support of future maintenance costs.

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Capital spending for this year includes continued storm water management plan implementation, Turner boiler replacement, repair of the Lake Drive hillside collapse, roads capital improvement and renovation of 5 additional hotel rooms and the hotel annex elevator.

Last season the hotel changed from only providing an American plan, to providing a European plan options for guests. The hotel restaurant has been successful in adjusting to the new arrangements with increased daily meal revenues.

The trend for ticket sales continues to shift from long term and seasonal tickets to shorter term stays. A continued tight expense regime will make it possible, under conservative assumptions, to hold gate price increases down. Gate fees for 2015 will increase from 3.3% - 3.6%.

Accommodations

Marketing via the Accommodations website has been supplanted with “concierge” service at the Visitors Center and year round via telephone and email. This has been successful and the Accommodations website is now the center for rental activity within the Institution. The Institution is working with CPOA’s Property Owners Who Rent (POWR) to try and develop a standardized review system which will provide additional information about aspects of rental properties over and above what the owner provides in the directory.

You can help by providing short term visitors with accommodations which meet their expectations for price/quality. A valuable Chautauqua experience can make for long term Chautauquans who come through the gate, bring friends and family, and donate to the Fund and Foundation long term.

The Institution plans to continue to improve the quality of the experience through capital upgrades to roads and grounds, building upgrades and maintenance and hotel upgrades, all of which serve the interests of CPOA members and many others who enjoy a better experience year after year.

2015 street repair and other projects

Street projects and repairs highlight springtime work on the grounds.

The “On the Grounds” tab (<http://www.ciweb.org/on-the-grounds/>) is updated periodically to display project status and other items of interest to property owners, including a link to the CPOA website at www.cpoa.ws.

The Grapevine email listserv as well as property owner email address lists are being used to make more immediate and urgent announcements.