

**Friends of Mechanics Hall**  
**Meeting with Michele Barker of Preservation Massachusetts**  
**May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 at 6 PM, Mechanics Hall**

Attendees: Michele Barker, Judy Dino, Sheila Dubman, Alex and Mark Fiandaca, Phil Mighdoll, Faith and Larry Pistrang, Karen Rossow, Ken Seims, Judy Tyler, Ed Yaglou and Geoff Yaglou.

Michele Barker, of Preservation Massachusetts, examined the exterior of the building and toured the interior including the basement. After the meeting and a second visit to the basement, it was noted that there was significant dampness between the sill and foundation on the building's north side and rot beneath the rear corner of the south side. Upon closer inspection of the south side rear corner, it appears that the inside corner of the rear addition is supporting the rear corner of the main building. Additionally, squirrel damage to the second floor windows has worsened significantly and as a result the panes are barely intact.

Michele's overall impression of the Mechanics Hall was that it was square and sturdy and in much better condition than some of the buildings she has worked with. Michele felt the second floor was a huge asset and noted that large spaces tend to get chopped up when old buildings are reused. If smaller areas are needed, Michele recommends using temporary partitions. Michele noted the following drawbacks: limited parking, small lot size and lack of septic system.

In addition to the following suggestions, Michele provided resources for grants, schools with preservation programs, towns that have restored/reused old meeting halls and a list of 'critical village elements' created by a Vermont-based preservation group.

#### Future Use

- Seek uses that can sustain the building without financial support from the town.
- Aim to have something taking place in the building on at least a weekly basis.
- Consider a combination of uses, such as renting one room as an office to earn income while keeping the rest of the building available for public use.
- Refer to previous studies for community input and conduct further community-wide surveys. Brainstorm. Put feelers out in the community to gauge interest and determine unmet needs which Mechanics Hall could provide.
- Contact experienced towns for sustainable program ideas.
- Michele thinks MH is well-suited for meeting space, community education, continuing ed, club meetings, craft classes, exercise classes. Instructors could be charged for meeting space.

## Grants

- National Trust for Historic Places offers a \$5,000 matching grant that could be used for a structural engineering study. Deadline is Oct 1.
- Using Preservation MA's list of public grants and private foundations, contact grant providers for copies of successful grants. Contact successful applicants for advice, contractor references, etc.
- The Massachusetts Historical Commission provides grants and posts recipients online. Program is the Mass Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF). Contact grant recipients for advice. MHC contact is Paul Holtz. Deadline is March. Workshop is offered by MHC shortly before application due date.
- Consider grants for planning stages as well as restoration work. Will need a planning document before applying for grants for actual work on the building.
- USDA had a grant program at one time and might still. They also might have a loan program.
- Regional planning agency (CMRPC) might have funds available for planning and for establishing a community facility.
- Create a grant calendar containing due dates of the grants for which decide to apply.
- Consider sources of corporate philanthropy such as banks, real estate companies and home improvement stores that might donate materials.

## Schools

- Consider partnership with schools such as UMass Amherst for planning project. UMass has a preservation studies graduate program and MH might be an attractive student thesis project. Try to get a student with real world experience (engineering or otherwise). Plan to contact department heads 2-3 months before start of semester. Michele provided a list of other schools and also mentioned the North Bennet Street School in Boston which teaches traditional crafts. Additionally, Clark University in Worcester has graduate programs in non-profit administration and could offer advice with fund raising and grant writing.
- If we are able to involve vocational school students, be sure to have a contractor willing to train and work with the students.

## Public Relations

- Report all progress to the community. Create displays showing before and after photos. Do not forget to include work that is out of view, such as sill repair and basement work. Highlight all achievements and give credit to the workers. Work with local press to cover the Friends mission and progress. Promote the history of the building with historic stories/press releases. Maintain the public's interest!
- Make calendar of short-term goals available to the public and include scheduled events, visits with engineers, etc.
- Not having a defined use at this time should not discourage fund raising. Funds can help achieve a plan for future uses. Do not be afraid to say "we don't know the use yet, we are working on it".