

Hiawatha Gardens Task Force

Community Comments and Questions

On March 4, 2021 the Hiawatha Gardens Task Force provided a project information update to the community in the Pikes Peak Bulletin and on the City website. As part of the update, local residents were encouraged to submit comments and/or questions to the Task Force.

This document contains all of the verbatim comments and questions received as of March 29, 2021. City staff and Task Force members are preparing answers to the questions submitted and will post a Question and Answer column on this website in the coming weeks. Comments and/or questions can continue to be emailed to the Task Force at: hiawthagardens@manitouspringsco.gov and will be posted on this site.

Comment #1

This building and property has been an eyesore for as long as I have lived here, 40 years. The surrounding area has the potential to provide some source of benefit for our town, but the building itself is a financial drain. The sentimental history of the building doesn't offset the income loss and expense of trying to make a diamond out of coal, we haven't the time, or pressure needed for such a thing.

Comment #2

Back in the old days, Manitou's population would dramatically swell in the summer months. People would take the train here and stay for weeks and weeks in hotels and seasonal homes. In the winter, however, there were very few residents.

Back then, the Hiawatha Gardens building was an open-air dance hall for summer gatherings that served the summer tourist crowds.

It was a simple building: it had a roof, a wood dance floor, and wood posts around the outside to support the roof.

Nowadays, Manitou has a residential population that changes very little from summer to winter.

But if the building is restored to its original open-air form, it will only be used the warmer months.

As an open-air structure, it will always be vulnerable to wind-blown rain and snow. Precipitation will blow into the building, rotting the wood dance floor and flooding the crawlspace.

Another problem with the open structure is that homeless people may sleep there and----with the wood floor----may burn the place down.

If the building is enclosed, with outside walls in-filling the gaps between supporting posts, it will no longer appear as it once did----ruining its historical appearance and historical status.

Further: if the dance hall is enclosed, it will have to be heated. And if it is heated, by law, it will have to be insulated. This will mean that insulation will fill some, if not all, of the "attic" area. Again, this would destroy the historical appearance and character of the building by covering up the open roof deck and roof trusses. The open trusses and roof deck are an important architectural element of the building. If insulated exterior walls are to meet energy code requirements they will be more solid-wall than glass.

Again, solid walls enclosing the historically-open building will completely change its character into something quite different from the romantic old open structure it once was.

When Manitou experiences another flood, the wood dance floor and crawlspace (both in the flood plain) will need to be de-watered, repaired, and re-finished. A flood at that location is inevitable----being forced to resuscitate this old building again and again is not.

(BTW, messy spilled produce etc. from proposed farmers markets will incrementally stain and ruin that old dance floor.)

Why should Manitou's residents put money toward a project that is intended to draw summer tourists and not serve them? Manitou does not need an expensive and high maintenance public space that can only be used in the warm summer months. We already have City Hall and open air structures at Mansions Park and Soda Springs Park. We cannot afford another liability like this----especially one that will have ever-increasing maintenance needs. Manitou does not need a problem like the Hiawatha Gardens building.

If the downtown business owners and the Cog believe that it will draw tourist dollars, let them pay for it.

Manitou has already given far too much future tax revenue to keep the Cog. For the downtown tourism businesses, we sacrificed our four-lane main street so that they can have wider sidewalks. BTW, this sacrifice of vehicular circulation forced the evacuation of the entire town when the Waldo fire threatened, because the remaining two lanes did not allow for residents AND emergency vehicles at the same time... And we all suffer in weekend traffic jams because of the badly advised two-laning of Manitou Avenue.

When will Manitou make its residents' needs the priority above the unending demands of businesses hoping to attract more and more tourist dollars?

Comment #3

It seems like a dilapidated building in the flood zone without any redeeming qualities or character. It would be costly to save it, why do you think it is worth saving? If it is such a historic building, why wasn't it included in the large historic district to begin with?

A transportation hub...seems like a fancy name for a bus station. Does Manitou need such a facility? How would it benefit pedestrians? Cyclists? Autos? It seems it would just provide some shelter for bus and shuttle riders.

The property was purchased for parking spaces, how many parking spaces would be lost by keeping the building and at what cost?

This has been an ongoing controversial project. Why not put the costs to restore on the ballot for a vote?

I am opposed to saving the building. It was purchased for parking spaces and should be used for parking spaces. The historic preservations should focus on the Library and in the future, the Stagecoach Inn, the arcade and the bottling plant...far more worthy of preservation. While focusing on this building we let the Manitou Stagecoach disappear from town for good.

Comment #4

I oppose spending any more tax dollars (even government-sourced grant funding) on the Hiawatha Gardens albatross. All along, it has been an exercise of a solution attempting to find a need or purpose, which is exactly how NOT to go about committing public funds. Indeed, its acquisition, fully disclosed to the public, did not entertain the prospect of hemorrhaging money on unneeded infrastructure without a valid purpose. It was purchased to raze and expand parking. The whole thing stinks of manipulation and pot-banging minority control – even the proposal to create a historic district of one property smacks of the artifices at play.

I oppose merging the resurrection of Hiawatha Gardens with the renovation of the Carnegie Library on any future public initiatives. The surveys about and proponents for Hiawatha Gardens have crafted themselves a very tight echo chamber, resonating as proof of the majority of public will. People with neutral or oppositional viewpoints generally do not trouble themselves with groups or task-force meetings and surveys; those events are targeted to and attract supporters (which create their own echo chambers). As case in point, I observe that the “wildly popular” MACH tax passed by only five votes out of 5000 residents—hardly a compelling case for broad community support. To gauge the true breadth and depth of community support, any public initiative must focus exclusively on the object, Hiawatha Gardens alone, and not fashion it as a poison pill to swallow with the laudable efforts to modernize the Carnegie Library building.

At a time when the city has failing infrastructure, it is inconceivable that the city would expend any further funding on Hiawatha Gardens without first addressing its other critical infrastructure needs. What ever happened to our elected representatives’ charge of taking care of the city’s needs before stuffing the barrel of pork projects? Governments have enough to worry about without taking on historic preservation, a topic which is hardly a public charge.

The best solution here is to sell Hiawatha Gardens to the Heritage Center, at cost, if it is so keen on preserving it. Then we’ll see just exactly how much public support the echo chamber is capable of providing.

Comment #5

Inputs to the Hiawatha Gardens Task Force 3

Comments and Questions

1. Fiscal competence demands a resolution to the following items before any further money is spent on Hiawatha Gardens Building 1 or any further decisions are made on its disposition:
 - a. Provide a statement of purpose, requirements, initial design and costs estimate to completion for Building 1.
 - b. Provide drawings for landscaping, sidewalks and setbacks, and new ground parking plans (with and without Building 1) clearly identifying how many parking spaces will be displaced as a result of retaining and restoring the building.
 - c. Immediately get a definitive statement from PPRTA as to what Building 1 can and cannot be used for and still be compliant with the HG purchase funding agreement, and publish that information.

- d. Produce requirements, design and cost data for the Mobility Hub including site location drawings.
 - e. Determine the minimum requirements and cost (which should be far less than \$93K) to mothball Building 1 until all the necessary requirements, design and cost data adequate to make decisions are provided.
 - f. Defer any decision on Historic District designation until all this essential data is provided.
2. Identify an independent, non-preservationist expert to attend the on-site restore/remove decision process. This person should have no financial interest in the outcome nor have worked previously on the project.
 3. How is the building restoration going to be paid for?
 4. How is the building going to support itself?
 5. If Building 1 is going to be a Mobility Hub, explain exactly what that means for a 7,400 square foot building. If, as Laura Neumann stated, the Mobility Hub bathrooms need to be separate from Building 1, what exactly is left over for Building 1 as a Mobility Hub?
 6. Are we being forthright with the PPRTA?
 7. If Building 1 is to replace Main Hall as a community center then the City needs to provide requirements for the Police Station and City Hall expansions to determine if those requirements can reasonably be satisfied by reconfiguring Main Hall.
 8. Determine what the Cog Railway is and is not willing to fund with its promised \$500K in transportation funds.
 9. The City needs to determine what the new capacity of the Cog Railroad is in order to reasonably estimate the value of parking spaces (more demand, higher value). If, as Councilman Bremner suggested, capacity has increased over 80%, then the value of individual parking spaces may be radically higher than currently estimated.
 10. The cost to upgrade the Building 1 shell structure versus cost to remove the buildings entirely would be about \$87/sf (partial demo + preservation + shell renovation – full demo). Then it's a matter of upgrading the shell to perform the functions of whatever we decide the purpose of the building will be, plus any supporting landscaping and access costs like sidewalks, ramps and the like. Let's guess a conservative \$25/sf more. At that point, we're at \$112/sf and approaching new construction costs.

New construction would be built to purpose and likely fulfill its function better than a repurposed old building. Also, a new building might not require 7,400 sf and could be built on a completely different site away from HG thus freeing the parking spaces Building 1 would displace.
 11. After all the costs are figured in, the only reason to save Building 1 is for its historical value. It would simplify the conversation immensely if the HG Task Force would simply acknowledge that fact.
 12. As Mayor Graham has suggested all of this data plus data on other first tier Manitou Projects, should be assembled in a matrix to allow Council and the citizenry to make rational, informed choices.
 13. Manitou Springs needs to consider the racial implications of naming a landmark building Hiawatha Gardens.

14. None of the community inputs collected in regards to Hiawatha Gardens support any conclusion as to whether the community does or does not support retaining the Hiawatha Gardens building. Those inputs are from self-selected attendees, badly designed surveys and grossly non-random email samples, none of which have any credibility on which to base generalizations.

The history behind the Hiawatha statue: What's behind the name, intent and controversy? | Education | lacrosstribune.com

Thank you.

Comment #6

There are so many red flags on this project and we have so many other projects to improve Manitou Springs.

1. What exactly will this 7,400 square foot building with 8-foot eaves be used for? There seems to be no clear statement of this. A lot of ideas but nothing concrete.
2. What are the requirements for the Police Station and City Hall expansions? Can the unknown requirements be reasonably satisfied by reconfiguring Main Hall or will this turn into another money pit?
3. Parking and traffic control is a MAJOR concern of most citizens of Manitou yet what is the thought process, if any, on identifying how many parking spaces will be displaced as a result of retaining and restoring the building?
4. New construction would be built to purpose (once it is determined) and would fulfill its function better. Also a new building might not require 7,400 sf and could be built on a completely different site away from HG or smaller in size thus freeing spaces Building 1 would displace. Parking is a major issue and effects both businesses, tourists and locals.

Thank you.

Comment #7

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

For at least 5 years, I have been among the many historians, architects, construction professionals, and historic preservationists who have advocated for investigating the possibility of finding an adaptive reuse for Hiawatha Gardens. An enormous amount of information about the history of the building and the steps for investigating the possibility of preserving its physical history is neatly collected in the City Council Meeting packet for July 18, 2017. Since then, there have been task forces and community feedback sessions. Somehow, it is still a question whether or not the structure is worth trying to preserve and reusing as a community center for seniors, youth and everyone in between.

We suffer from a lack of imagination which has led to close mindedness about what could be. To be sure, the current state of Hiawatha Gardens is ugly. And Manitou needs to do something about its clogged parking. For many people, these two problems solve each other. Tear down the ugly building so more people can park. While that is one possibility, it goes against the city's commitment in its master plan concerning our history. ***“Collectively, we serve as stewards of our historic and cultural resources – celebrating their ability to guide, inspire and shape our future,***

while recognizing that some change is essential to a vibrant community.” Being stewards requires our imaginations and fact finding.

As has been carefully researched and reported, the building is full of substantial architectural assets that embody important eras in Manitou Springs’ history. Although the city chose not to re-include Hiawatha Gardens in the historic district, if it did, federal and state resources will be available to complete the evaluation of the building at no cost to the city. Also the city would be eligible for grants to do the work. The argument that it would be too expensive may be true, but we don’t know. Stating that there is nothing that can be usefully saved may be true, but we don’t know. Knocking down the building before we actually find out what can be done could be destroying a future jewel of our town as a community center; we don’t know.

Let’s do the next steps. Let’s take advantage of the resources we can tap to find out what we have in Hiawatha Gardens and what it will take to return to good use. If we find that it truly is a hopeless case, the city can always decide to knock it down. But let’s make sure. Let’s use the ample expertise available to us and a pinch of imagination before this bit of history is obliterated. And let’s also solve our parking problems, but not at the expense of our history.