

Rock Hall Museum Board Facilities/Operations Workshop Notes

The workshop on May 9, 2022 held from 6:00 – 8:30 pm focused on two main issues, Facilities as well as Operations. This conversation was framed in a very pragmatic way discussing the resources small, volunteer run museums typically need in order to operate in a limited manner. It is recognized that for the foreseeable future the organization will be run entirely by volunteers, primarily the Museum Board, without a fulltime or even part time paid, staff member. Due to this, projected operations must be modest. It was also recognized that the Board needs to recruit and retain additional members and volunteers if it wishes to offer meaningful visitor experiences and keep the exhibitions open on a regular basis.

ROCK HALL'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE/RESOURCES

We discussed how the planning project is all inclusive of the Town of Rock Hall's cultural landscape and not isolated only to the Rock Hall Museum. Per the awarded grant and formal contract, this process will result in an interpretive plan that strives to revitalize the heritage infrastructure for the Town of Rock Hall and identify different strategies to improve the visitor experience as well as attract new audiences. It will provide recommendations for the responsible stewardship of the Town's many collections and directly address not only the Rock Hall Museum exhibitions, currently stored in the municipal building, but also resources spread through the Town and in cases the surrounding area such as the Caulk's field historic site. Once again, the objective is to leverage the existing cultural resources in order to promote year-round heritage tourism in Rock Hall.

Because of this, facilities we discussed included both those that are formally/legally in the possession of the Town as well as those that are owned by other group's/individuals but accessible to the general public. As per the retreat and earlier workshops, such resources include:

- *Multiple* Museums
- Parks
- Marinas
- Historic Sites
- Downtown
- Architecture
- Monuments
- STORIES!
- Food & Music

Note that intangible cultural heritage such as narratives, foodways and other traditions were identified as cultural resources.

PHYSICAL PLANT(S)

- **How many?**
- **Where?**
- **What purpose(s)?**

Important note, this planning process is in no way responsible for determining the future of the municipal building. That decision is outside the scope of this project and the consultants as well as the Museum Board have not been tasked with, nor have the authority, to make that determination. The final interpretive plan will result in a wide variety of recommendations about how the available or projected spaces (according to information shared with the Museum Board during the planning process) can be, or not, adopted at some point in the future as decided by the Town Council.

This workshop was deliberately pushed back until *after* the public gatherings coordinated by the Town Council to present information about the various municipal building options, including both renovation as well as building new structures. The planning team's hope was to include this valuable stakeholder perspectives into its discussions. The entire planning process is designed to incorporate public input, with all Museum Board workshops encouraging citizen participation, as well as hosting specific meetings that will be targeted toward engaging diverse stakeholders.

Given that we are not sure at this point what exactly building(s) may be available to exhibit the Town's collections and/or store its materials, discussion proved difficult. Due to the current situation of uncertainty, the group took two different directions in its conversations- first talking about the *existing facilities*, and second projecting what the conditions might be like for future *newly constructed or renovated facilities*.

It was recognized that in either case, that a temporary site was going to be necessary during construction or renovation to at least store the collections, and hopefully display some sort of exhibition, during the duration of this work. This could provide an opportunity to partner with groups to display temporary exhibits in different locations around town.

Existing Facilities

We looked at some images of the existing facilities including the municipal building, Watermen's Museum, and Tolchester Revisited exhibition housed in the marina.

If the Rock Hall Museum were to remain in the existing space the layout of the display would likely remain very similar, though the interpretation such as labels and other techniques would need to be updated accordingly. The space dedicated to the museum would seem to be defined to its current location and square footage. Storage for the collections could be in another room or offsite.

Additional physical plants allow for exhibitions such as the Watermen's Museum, the marina and local stores where temporary exhibits can and have been displayed in this manner. These are not owned by the Town and it would not be responsible for maintaining these areas. Parks, marinas and public areas could be used to display permanent and/or temporary interpretive signage without the use of extensive facilities.

Future/Renovated Facilities?

We very briefly looked at some images of the possible new and renovated facilities including the municipal building and an early plan for a proposed complex that would include a new museum building, library and administrative offices.

It is very difficult to project what newly created facilities might offer as it is not clear what size or type of space they may offer. It could be that there would be a place for both displaying exhibits as well as storing artifacts or that these functions may need to take place in different locations. Either option is possible, and could work well, as many museums and cultural institutions successfully utilize one direction or the other, sometimes a combination of the two.

Benefits new construction or major renovation to the existing municipal building would be an upgrade in HVAC and fire suppression systems, closer adherence to ADA standards, and the utilization of new technologies. Without knowing the size, type, and location of such projected facilities, it is very difficult to make accurate recommendations as to how best use these possible resources. As decisions are made in regard to renovation or new construction, the Museum Board will need to react to what facilities are available. Ideally they should be involved in this process to ensure the exhibits and collections are preserved and interpreted according to field standards.

STORAGE

We did discuss both the need for and importance of appropriate storage facilities but not at great length as we held very detailed conversations about these issues during the less workshop on collections management in April. The topics addressed included:

- Where? Single location?
- How much needed?
- Conditions?

In order to ensure the responsible stewardship of the Town's many collections it is imperative to provide safe, secure storage facilities to store artifacts and historic materials. This may be done in the same physical plant as where exhibitions are displayed or alternatively off-site at another location. Both are common practices with cost to maintain the appropriate environmental conditions and available square footage major considerations.

As part of this planning project, the Museum Board will develop a formal Collections Policy to ensure the appropriate stewardship of materials. The plan's recommendations will be based on best practices in the field and balanced with what is possible given the available and/or likely resources.

Collections Stewardship Standards

Stewardship is the careful, sound and responsible management of that which is entrusted to a museum's care. Possession of collections incurs legal, social and ethical obligations to provide proper physical storage, management and care for the collections and associated documentation, as well as proper intellectual control.

Collections are held in trust for the public and made accessible for the public's benefit. Effective collections stewardship ensures that the objects the museum owns, borrows, holds in its custody and/or uses are available and accessible to present and future generations.

The physical plant where these materials are stored need very careful consideration and long-term sustainability in terms of safe environmental conditions.

HOURS & DAILY OPERATIONS

- *When open? How often; many hours?*
- *How often; many hours?*
- *Who is going to be present? Staff/volunteers?*
- *What is going to be accessible?*

This conversation revolved around pragmatic and logistical issues related to operating a volunteer-run organization. We discussed that much of the day-to-day responsibilities early on would come in the form of "keeping the doors open" for the public. A very early determination will be how often as well as how long the museum will be open. The consultant suggested speaking with a number of different local organizations to learn about how they operate as well as how they made their decision to open in their chosen manner. *St. Michaels Museum, Historical Society of Talbot County, Queen Anne's County Historical Society or Tilghman Waterman's Museum* were specifically mentioned.

There are two main directions that could be taken if the exhibitions were no longer in a facility manned by Town of Rock Hall staff:

- A.) *Determine hours by specific dates*
 - a. Certain days such as weekends in the summer, or Friday. – Sunday, would be selected based on the times that most visitors are expected to be in Rock Hall
 - b. This could be flexible according to season
- B.) *Make hours available by appointment*
 - a. Similar to the. Watermen's Museum many smaller, volunteer run organizations use this strategy to alleviate strain on volunteers and make things more efficient

STAFFING & VOLUNTEERS

- *Recruitment*
- *Training*
- *Management*

The first and most significant need is for the group to identify additional volunteers. Initially volunteers could serve as contributing Board Members, regularly participating in activities as defined by the various committee objectives- ie. Collections Committee, Interpretation Committee,

Development Committee, etc. Retention of Board members and an increase in the number is crucial to take action on many of the activities we have identified during this process.

The recruitment, training, and management of volunteers is something that will be an ongoing task and take a good deal of time to address properly. It is something with which most small organizations struggle, but depend on for their survival.

We identified a number of possible local groups from which draw including retired teachers (especially as docents), Kent Questors, and DAR members. In addition, partnering with other organizations such as colleges for interns or high students needing community service can be very effective. (For example the work that was accomplished with Washington College students.) Social groups can work well and provide programming. For example having a model guild or quilting group that would meet in the space and engage visitors while working on their projects.

GENERAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| - <i>exhibitions</i> | - <i>salaries/benefits</i> |
| - <i>education</i> | - <i>development</i> |
| - <i>conservation</i> | - <i>administration</i> |
| - <i>research</i> | - <i>utilities</i> |
| - <i>acquisitions</i> | - <i>training</i> |
| - <i>collections management</i> | |

According to the American Alliance of Museums, all museums should legally, ethically, and responsibly acquire, manage, and allocate their financial resources in a way that advances their mission. They should operate in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability. In order to achieve these objectives, there must be a clear and well-thought-out budget developed each fiscal year that carefully aligns the organization's resources with its goals. It is the role of the Museum Board, in the absence of paid staff, to create this budget.

At the moment many of the overhead expenses fall under the umbrella of Town regular costs of doing business as the museum display is in the municipal building and the collections are primarily stored there as well. The benefit of being hosted in a Town facility means that there is no need to pay separately for many of the basic costs that a typical non-profit would have such as utilities, staff, maintenance, rent/mortgage, etc. Whether or not the museum was located in this space, the Town of Rock Hall would still need to pay for the vast majority these services and staff, though the space could be used in other ways. With no paid staff, very limited existing programming, and free admission both the expenses and revenue are minimal.

Whether a separate 501c3 or continuing on as currently structured, the Museum Board should create a detailed budget each year that delineates between activities and is broken down by month to account for cash flow. This is particularly important in regard to grant funds. If it were to create a new 501c3, the FY budget should take into account all the topics we discussed (and seen above) and in addition, revenue streams will need to be identified to cover the overhead costs, unless there was some sort of continuing support from the Town such a space from which to operate.

WORKSHOPS: OBJECTIVES, PARTICIPANTS AND SCHEDULE

- *Museum Board Retreat*
- *Workshop 1- Governance*
- *Workshop 2- Collections Management*
- *Workshop 3- Operations & Facilities*
- *Workshop 4- Interpretation (full-day)*
- *Workshop 5- Branding/Marketing*
- *Workshop 6- Key Partners (1/2 day)*
- *Public Scoping- 3 Different Sessions*
- *Workshop 7- Interpretation Plan Review*

* *Completed*

** *Publicity/Recruitment*

We discussed the purpose as well as sequencing of the workshops with the conversation explaining that things are taking longer than originally projected due to the delay in starting the project (because of the wait on official approval) as well as the fact that we are typically meeting only once a month, when we should be gathering more frequently. Due to both of these issues, it will take longer to complete the project than the anticipated July deadline. With stakeholder engagement being crucial for the development of the plan, it was decided to hold a public scoping workshop soon so get initial input as well as fully explain the project to citizens that may still be uncertain about the process and/or goals.

MUSEUM BOARD STUDY TRIP

The Museum Board will take an educational trip to view best practices as implemented at other, regional institutions as well as meet with colleagues at several cultural institutions with similar content and collections. The objective is to become familiar with standard practices and generated ideas for future interpretive products that could we created for Rock Hall in Phase 3.

The Consultant will coordinate sites to visit with Museum Board and we began discussing which sites and when this might take place. We discussed the possibility of a visit to St. Michaels to observe collections storage, exhibits and programming at the *Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum* along with a visit to a similar, small volunteer-run organizations such as *the St. Michaels Museum* or *Tilghman Waterman's Museum*.

**Rock Hall Museum Board
Interpretive Planning Project
Facilities/Operations
May 9, 2022
6:00 – 8:30 pm**

Topics to Discuss

- **Rock Hall's Cultural Landscape/Resources**
- **Physical Plant(s)**
- **Storage**
- **Accessibility and Movement**
- **Hours, Daily Operations**
- **Staffing & Volunteers**
- **General Operating Expenditures:** ie. exhibitions, education, conservation, collections management, acquisitions, research, training, development, and administration
- **Future Workshops**
- **Museum Board Study Trip**
- **Wrap-up and Reflection**

As listed in the proposal and contract:

Task 8: Workshop 3- Operations & Facilities

Part of a series of facilitated workshops in which the Museum Board, Town officials and key partners determine how to restructure the museums to be a sustainable cultural resource for the region. In this workshop the group will review the critical analysis and condition reports on the physical spaces available to host the Town's exhibitions and programming, including the downtown area and marina. Consider access for special populations and people with disabilities. Discuss operating expenses include all expenditures supporting general operations in a including exhibitions, education, conservation, collections management, acquisitions, research, training, development, and administration.