



WORK SESSION of the Greenbelt City Council held Monday, May 21, 2001, for the purpose of reviewing responses to the Request for Proposals to provide arts education programming in the Community Center.

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:40 p.m. It was held in the Council Room of the Municipal Building.

PRESENT WERE: Council members Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, Alan Turnbull, Thomas X. White, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Hank Irving, Director, Recreation Department; Joe McNeal, Supervisor, Community Center; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Jessica Gitlis, the Greenbelt Pottery; Barbara Simon, the Greenbelt Association for the Visual Arts (GAVA); Dennis Jelalian, Robert Schafer, Ginny Zanner, and Richard Bates, Arts Advisory Board; Amy Boyes, the Gazette; and Nelda Young, Greenbelt News Review. Others associated with GAVA or with the Pottery were in attendance.

Mr. McNeal reviewed the chronology of events leading up to the City's decision to issue the RFP. He then briefly summarized the two complete proposals that were received from GAVA and the Pottery and observed that the Pottery proposed a new structure that would bring arts education programming within the purview of the Recreation Department for the first time. He said the GAVA proposal would require that the City continue to pay for the duplication of administrative functions, with the result that the staff recommendation would be about \$10,000 lower in cost than GAVA's. He said that the substantial volunteer component of the Pottery's proposal was in part what permitted them to keep their costs down, but he described this aspect as "convincing." He said the staff recommendation would bring stability to the arts education programs, with fixed ownership of assets and a steady environment for administration.

Mayor Davis asked how much would have to be added to the budget to undertake Scenarios A and B. Mr. McNeal said \$1,700 and \$11,400 respectively. The staff recommendation option would save money, with the caveat that if GAVA did not accept that option, the City would have up-front expenditures in the first year for equipment currently owned by GAVA.

Mr. White asked why the funding GAVA expects to receive in donations and grants was not shown as revenue in the comparative budget materials staff handed out. Mr. McNeal said it was because it was not certain to be received. Mayor Davis said in that case staff should have cut the Pottery's anticipated revenue as well, since it reflects very ambitious class registrations. Mr. McNeal said the Pottery expects to offer additional classes and that staff believes they may be able to produce these revenues.

Mr. White then questioned whether, under the staff recommendation, the work could actually be accomplished by two half-time people. Mr. McNeal and Mr. Irving both said they believed it could be, primarily because they would have the support of the Recreation Department staff. Mr. White also expressed concern that there was no way for applicants interested in responding to the RFP to anticipate that the City would decide it wanted to hire two part-time staff to administer the programs rather than awarding one or more contracts.

Mayor Davis asked if there was enough time for response to the RFP. This topic was revisited several times over the evening, with the prevailing opinion being that the process was started too late, given the need to mount summer programs, and taken to Council too late, given Council's need to review a substantial amount of written material. The turnaround time for review by the Arts Advisory Board was also not adequate.

Mr. White asked why, given the eventual RFP, GAVA had been asked to go through the process of applying for funding as a contributions group. Mr. McNeal said it was a contingency plan, because at the time staff did not know if there would be an RFP or not. Mr. Turnbull said when this was discussed in executive session, it had been stated that an "open, transparent process" was wanted. Mayor Davis said when the break-up between GAVA and the Pottery occurred, Council had agreed to continue GAVA's contract until its conclusion but that she thought it should have been clear to all concerned that the bidding would be open at that point. Why, she asked, would this have been a surprise to anyone?

Mr. White said another problem was that the staff had never produced a report on programming that was to be done during the remainder of the contract time. Mr. McNeal said this had not been done because GAVA did not submit its quarterly reports on its programs. Mayor Davis asked Mr. McNeal if Council had been alerted to this. Mr. McNeal said no, but that this was a difficult time, and a lot had been going on. Mr. White asked what specifically, and Mr. McNeal responded that there had been arguments, safety concerns, locks changed, and disputes about equipment and money.

Mr. McLaughlin said he had thought enough time was being allowed but that, in hindsight, perhaps there had not been. He also said that staff had wanted to give GAVA three months from the time of the Pottery's split from GAVA to get its programs together, with the result that staff was not pushing GAVA to submit a report. Mayor Davis suggested that in the future Council should be told if reports are not being produced in a timely fashion and that, in a situation like this, the staff report can still be produced and say that the provider's reports have not been submitted.

At this time, GAVA and the Pottery were asked to give presentations on their responses to the RFP. Ms. Simon spoke for GAVA. She said that rather than reviewing the material that was presented in detail in their written submission, she would prefer to respond to some of the staff recommendations and comments that had been made. With regard to the budget, she said GAVA makes a practice of offering many of its courses at low prices that do not cover costs. This is not a result of bad planning or accident, she stressed, but because the assumption is that some programs require or deserve subsidy. She said GAVA believes its budget to be realistic and that she and other GAVA staff would be happy to address questions about it. With regard to the

Pottery's keeping costs down by use of volunteers, she said GAVA uses volunteers, too, but that they have learned from experience to be very careful about how they use them and incorporate them into programs so that quality and consistency can be maintained. Regarding the issue of stability, she said the City had not raised these concerns with GAVA, and GAVA would be happy to discuss, for example, the question of equipment ownership with the City. Regarding the staff recommendation to hire part-time coordinators for pottery and the other visual arts, she said, "This would be a very radical change." She said GAVA is concerned with quality of programs and that this evening the City staff had been talking about cost but had said little about quality.

Ms. Simon went on to emphasize that GAVA had been seriously handicapped by the timing of the RFP and that they had been unable to do either the advertising that normally would be done by now nor the registration that would normally have started to occur.

Mayor Davis asked whether, if Council decided to go with Scenario A, GAVA would withdraw. Ms. Simon replied that they would pull out because they do not wish to split the programs. She added that GAVA would like to introduce another possibility: namely, that the GAVA contract would be renewed for a year, with thorough evaluation and community input over the year to decide the best way to do arts programming in the future. She said GAVA would be willing to cooperate with a long-term process that would take the time to do it properly. Mayor Davis said she was concerned with the \$11,000 in extra funding GAVA would require but that she was even more concerned that GAVA would pull out.

Mr. Putens asked if it was not the case that the pottery program was originally separate from the other visual arts education programs. Ms. Simon said that was true for the first 18 months but that while it had worked adequately then, at this point GAVA believes the programs to be too interdependent. In addition, GAVA believes the Pottery's budget to be flawed, and they do not want to risk working with a provider whose budget is weak.

Mr. Roberts said he too was disappointed to hear that GAVA would pull out if an option other than Scenario B were to be chosen. He said had it not been for the foundation laid by the Pottery, GAVA would not have been able to present pottery programs of the quality it had. He said he thought all parties involved had hurt arts programming in Greenbelt. He said, "I'm disheartened by what I am hearing tonight." He added he was inclined toward Scenario A.

Mr. Turnbull asked Ms. Simon to elaborate on why the pottery and other visual arts programs could not be separated. Ms. Simon said it would hurt GAVA with funding sources if they were no longer providing the full array of programs.

Mr. Putens agreed with Mr. Roberts that it is the residents of the City who are hurt by this. He said an ability to compromise is needed. He said he too was inclined toward Scenario A.

Mr. White said he wanted to clarify that it was the Pottery that had left GAVA and that his understanding was that the problem was that one was non-profit, the other was not.

Jessica Gitlis then gave a presentation on behalf of the Greenbelt Pottery. Other members present to answer questions were Florence Kasden, Don Oberg, Gina Mai Denn, Barbara Hille, Karen Morgenstern, Jean M. Sickle, and Chris Coyles.

Mr. Putens and Mr. White both asked for clarification on what the role of the Pottery would be as an entity if a part-time staff member were to be hired by the City to oversee pottery programming. Ms. Gitlis responded, with confirmation from others, that they envisioned the board of the Pottery becoming a group similar to a "friends of the library" group or, within Greenbelt, the Friends of the Greenbelt Museum. They would provide support, be a sounding board for ideas, spearhead fundraising efforts, manage events and publicity, and undertake other activities as needed. Council members quizzed the group for some time regarding whether they fully appreciated that they would be relinquishing much of their power and creative control to the City. The group said they had discussed all of these matters in great detail and assured Council they knew what they were doing. Ms. Gitlis added, however, that they had attempted to lay out in the proposal their vision of what a community ceramics program should be, and that their assumption was that if the City was interested in their proposal that it was also buying into this vision.

Mayor Davis asked Ms. Gitlis if the Pottery would attempt to incorporate the pottery instructors currently teaching at the Community Center into their programs. Ms. Gitlis said she hoped they could.

Mayor Davis asked for the Pottery's response to GAVA's criticism that their budget was unrealistic. Ms. Gitlis said she thought it was realistic given that the staff person would take on all the "administrative distractions," with the budget funding being devoted just to the programs.

Mr. White said he was still troubled by the relationships to be worked out. In particular, he thought it would be problematic for the part-time coordinator to serve the "two masters" of the City and the Pottery board.

Regarding the recommendation of the Arts Advisory Board (AAB), Mayor Davis noted that the board supported Scenario A but that there had been a minority report in favor of Scenario B. She asked if anyone from the AAB wished to speak now. No one responded.

Ms. Simon said she did not see how a staff member could develop programs if she or he had to work on programs proposed by the Pottery. Mr. McNeal said that would be true initially but the individual hired would have a high level of involvement thereafter in program development.

A member of the audience who is a member of GAVA's board expressed reservations about visual arts staff members reporting to the Recreation Department. Mayor Davis said that in small organizations it is often the case that specialists in certain areas report administratively outside their speciality. Another member of audience said the more important consideration was that the Pottery's proposal would put a pottery expert in charge of the pottery program.

Kay Stafford, GAVA Board, spoke to say that she had worked on the budget and would stand by it and the program. She added that the City's approach to arts programming in the past had been,

in effect, to put a "firewall" between the arts and government and that Council should think hard about this before turning 180E on that principle.

Mayor Davis asked what the impact would be on GAVA's proposal if the City could not come up with the entire additional \$11,000 to cover its budget. Ms. Simon replied that there are programs done now because she volunteers her time rather than paying teachers and that she would probably continue to volunteer.

Robert Schafer, vice chair of the Arts Advisory Board, described the problems the board had in trying to meet the schedule for the RFP review. Mr. White said neither Council nor the board was well served by this particular process. Mr. Turnbull agreed that the process had been flawed both structurally and in terms of the time line. Mr. Putens added that over the years the board had given good service to Council.

Mr. White asked Mayor Davis what purpose would be served by issuing another RFP in a year if a staff member was hired rather than having the work be under contract as before. She said this might not be necessary but that GAVA could still be under contract and that Council had always left open the possibility of reopening the process if that appeared advisable.

Information Items

In response to a query from Ms. Gallagher about whether a meeting with Public Works staff had been requested, Council agreed to leave the work session with advisory group chairs scheduled for June 6.

Council agreed to hold the May 23 work session at 7:30 p.m. in response to a request from Mr. Liebesman conveyed by Mr. McLaughlin.

A State Highway Administration meeting on the Greenbelt Road Neighborhood Conservation Project will be held in the Council Room at 7 p.m. on May 31.

Mayor Davis announced that there are four Prince George's County Redistricting Commission meetings scheduled, all at 7 p.m.: June 5 at Crossland, June 7 at Eleanor Roosevelt High School, June 13 at Flowers, and June 14 in College Park. She asked that the June 7 meeting be put on Council's calendar.

Council directed staff to approve reimbursement to the Mayor for \$36 for Greenbelt mugs.

The meeting was adjourned at about 12:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher

City Clerk