CITY COUNCIL SHOULD TAKE DIRECTION FROM THE SURVEY RESULTS FAVORING PUBLIC, NON-COMMERCIAL USES -

It is very clear from the results of the Harley Clarke Citizen’s Committee (HCCC) survey ranking of the five options, that a majority of the citizens (67%) want the future use of the mansion and grounds to be used for public, non-commercial purposes. This data alone should be enough to rule out commercial and residential development of the property. Of the 67%, 38.5% of the respondents preferred Option 1 (“City retain and renovate the building for public use”) and 28.3% chose Option 5 (“City sell or gift the building to an organization that would renovate and preserve it for public cultural and/or educational use”). An additional option, which has been referred to as Option 6, was discussed at the HCCC’s last meeting of June 1. Option 6 would allow the City to “lease the building to an organization that would renovate and preserve it for public cultural and/or educational use”.

The results of this survey corroborated my personal experiences of talking with Evanston residents of all ages, races, socioeconomic and geographical distribution. The majority of citizens want this prime community asset-- the Harley Clarke mansion, coach house, and parkland-- to remain available to citizens for community, public use. They support future uses that are compatible with the existing Open Space zoning. They do NOT want it to be privatized for commercial use (as evidenced by the low vote numbers for the hotel (19%) and residential development options (2%)). Public sentiment does not support changing the zoning to allow for profit, commercial uses in the middle of public parkland or adjacent to, and impinging on a public resource such as the Lighthouse Beach. The City Council should honor the results of the survey conducted by its appointed HCCC and city staff and figure out how to implement the will of the citizens—their constituents.

OPTION 6—A LEGAL VARIATION OF OPTION 5 -

After participating in this process, my view is that the best option to implement is Option 6-- “City lease the building to an organization that would renovate and preserve it for public cultural and/or educational use“. This option is essentially Option 5 with the change that the City would lease the building, rather than selling or gifting it, to an organization that would renovate and preserve it for public cultural and/or educational use. Per the survey chart, the two highest weighted choices were also for public use. Option 5 had the highest weighted score of 3.83, with Option 1 as second choice with a weighted score of 3.74. The HCCC Chair indicated that this proposed lease under Option 6 had merit and could be given further consideration.

RENOVATION COSTS-

In the process of the HCCC meetings, we learned from construction experts that the mansion is structurally sound with the foundation, walls, and roof in good condition. In addition, we had city staff share important information with us to assist in getting a clear understanding of the renovation costs involved. According to the Evanston Department of Public Works at the April 15, 2015 meeting:

Code Compliance items - Construction Costs - $ 170,000
“Leasable Space” items - Construction Costs - $ 420,000

TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COSTS $590,000

This is a very modest cost compared to the multi- million costs about which some have speculated. This number refers to the costs required to have the interior space made “leasable”. Any other construction costs would relate to changes made by the end user for their programming needs or potential future exterior renovation costs.

FOUNDATION ESTABLISHMENT AND RENOVATION TIMING-

Option 5, combined with the leasing provision (i.e., Option 6) , would best be accomplished through the establishment of a legal entity (Non-Profit Foundation) to determine programming goals and begin subleasing and fundraising efforts. The focus of this option would be on ecological and historical education as well as community wide seasonal and cultural programming. It may take a year for the fundraising efforts to be completed before use specific renovation can begin, but code compliance work can and should begin sooner.
FINANCIALLY SELF-SUSTAINING OPERATIONS-

My research indicates that the building can be financially self-sustaining with revenues from programming, events, and subleasing. I have visited four successful financially self-sustaining public mansions in the Chicago area and three of them have shared details of their financial operations. All have indicated that they break even in operation and maintenance costs.

PUBLIC USE- OPTION 1-

While my preferred public use option is Option 5 (6), I could also support Option 1 with the City continuing to own and renovating the building for public, non-profit, community use. This option received the greatest number of survey votes- 38.5% of the total votes.

I suggest that this project would be a very good use for the first year $1,000,000 installment payment of the “Good Neighbor Fund” from Northwestern University that Evanston will receive annually for five years. The Mayor and the President of Northwestern can meet to discuss pledging the FY 2016 funds toward the reasonable renovation needs of Harley Clarke. Additional funds could come from grants that are only available to municipalities and the public sector.

Another potential source of funds for the renovation of Harley Clarke is to reallocate the $900,000 earmarked in the Capital Improvement Plan for the renovation of the two fog houses located next to the Lighthouse and used for Ecology Center programming. The Ecology Center programming could then operate from the larger and more desirable space in the mansion. Further, many more types of public uses throughout the entire year could also be programmed for the mansion.

I also suggest the creation of an Enterprise Fund to segregate the operating funds for the mansion from the City’s General Fund to provide transparency and accountability to the taxpayers and Northwestern University.

DEMOLITION COSTS - OPTION 2-

The City of Evanston Department of Buildings and Inspection provided a cost estimate for demolition of $185,000. This was documented by several correspondences. One memo dated March 20, 2105 listed $60,000 for soft costs and services, and another estimate on May 11, 2015 quoted $100,000-$125,000 for labor costs. The costs for deconstruction (where reusable materials are separated out and the property owner is paid for them) might vary somewhat but would be in the same general ballpark. This is a modest cost to preserve the Harley Clarke property for parkland and public use.

I would choose the demolition option over any option that involves for-profit commercialization of lakefront land and building. All private, for-profit, commercial use options including a hotel, senior assisted living, or luxury residential development are totally unacceptable options as evidenced by community opposition, workshop and survey comments, and survey results.

FURTHERING PUBLIC POLICY-

The City of Evanston’s Comprehensive Plan identifies our community priority to maintain existing public open space and to expand parkland wherever possible. In addition, the City of Evanston’s Lakefront Master Plan establishes the community’s priority to keep the lakefront free from commercialization.

PRESERVE A PRECIOUS PUBLIC ASSET-

This property was initially bought by the City of Evanston for the citizens of Evanston for the parkland and the beachfront. The mansion was not purchased for the benefit of a private developer or business or any such use that invariably will negatively impact the experience of the property’s public uses. The public lakefront is Evanston’s most valuable asset for the benefit of its citizens and it should never be privatized for the commercial profit of the few. The public value of the many and varied potential uses and public enjoyment of the mansion, its ancillary structures and the grounds far outweigh the cost figures for renovation and operation. The truth of this statement was demonstrated by the results of the citizen survey. The survey indicated that: 1) the citizens do not want the Harley Clarke property sold or leased to a commercial developer for residential or commercial uses; and 2) citizens want the city to maintain ownership of the property and/or lease it to a non-profit organization for public use in perpetuity. The Harley Clarke Citizen’s Committee focused on an opinion seeking process. Therefore, recommending the citizen’s choice for public use is the obvious and best recommendation that we can make to City Council.