

MEETING: Site Review Committee
SUBJECT: Porter County Museum
Relocation
ADDRESS: 20 Indiana Avenue

LOCATION: Zoom
DATE: March 3, 2022

PRELIMINARY SITE REVIEW

IN ATTENDANCE:

Beth Shrader, Planning Director
(219) 462-1161 / bshrader@valpo.us
Carley Lemmon, Asst. Planner
(219) 462-1161 / clemmon@valpo.us
Vicki Thrasher, Building Commissioner
(219) 462-1161 / vthrasher@valpo.us
Bill Laird, Engineering Dept.
(219) 462-1161 / blaird@valpo.us
Tony Fahel, Water Reclamation Dept.
(219) 464-4973 / tfahel@valpo.us

PRESENTERS:

Kevin Pazour, Porter County Museum
(219-252-5209) / kevin@pocomuse.org

The following is a summary of discussion at this meeting.

OPENING: The Site Review Committee met to discuss the proposed Porter County Museum relocation to 20 Indiana Avenue. Lemmon stated that site review is not an approval. Rather, it is a preliminary discussion of the requirements and issues to be considered by the developer or owner. It is possible it will need to come back before site review or to seek other approvals.

EXPLANATION OF PROJECT: Pazour mentioned that the PoCoMuse Foundation purchased this site in 2017 from 1st Source Bank. It was initially going to be part of a larger project. However, the project did not come to be. Pazour mentioned that the County is looking at doing a project that sort of combines the Memorial Opera House and the old Porter County Jail. Pazour stated that functioning as a museum they are pretty invasive for the things they do. Pazour explained that he meant the actual putting up and taking down of exhibits. In the last decade they have gone from a typical, obscure small museum to a nationally recognized institution, and this is the next step in their progression, bringing those professional standards to a county level museum within the County Seat, which is the City of Valparaiso. Generally looking at the floor plan, they have been technically using the south half of the building since 2017 in various capacities for programming. It has also been their public gallery space. Aster-Grey has been a tenant since 2017. They are moving out to a different location on Lincolnway. The old County jail will now be treated as a historical site. The

building at 20 Indiana Avenue is more of a modern build and can take the wear and tear that comes along with being a community focused museum. The Aster-Grey space will be used as a public space with the main gallery. It is sort of an unmarked space as noted in the plans. The area at the very north portion of the building will be more of a permanent gallery in the sense that they will focus on displaying local art collections that will rotate out periodically. The main gallery will focus more on material culture and telling different stories connected to Valparaiso and Porter County. Things will change out regularly, but the general theme of the exhibit will remain the same. The Montague/Urschel Gallery in the southern portion of the building will serve as their temporary exhibit galley. Beyond this there are some general functions they will be using on the west side of the building over the Aster-Grey footprint that will function as sort of a workroom-breakroom as well as administrative office space.

STAFF COMMENTS:

LAIRD: Laird asked if there are any proposed changes to the exterior (revisions or changes to sidewalk, parking area, etc.). Pazour indicated there are no exterior changes being considered at this time. Laird stated that if there is no exterior work being proposed for the site, Engineering has no comments on this project.

FAHEL: Fahel asked if there will be any alterations to the plumbing. Pazour stated no alterations are being proposed. Fahel conveyed that Water Reclamation has no comment on this project.

THRASHER: Thrasher asked if they have been using the rear area of Aster-Grey prior to them moving out of the building. Pazour confirmed that the museum has been using this area since 2017. Thrasher mentioned the Building Department has no record about what this was before, and no record of permits pulled for the work. Thrasher said it appears they are turning the retail space into the exhibit/gallery space. Is this building sprinkled? Pazour confirmed that the building is not sprinkled. Thrasher mentioned there is only one restroom and asked if another restroom will be added. Pazour said there was another bathroom, but it was removed; however, all of the plumbing is still there and asked if this required by code. Thrasher advised that typically there are two bathrooms required as a minimum. Thrasher suggested that if there is the ability to add another restroom they consider doing it. It would also be good if at least one of the restrooms can be handicapped accessible. Thrasher explained that since the building is not sprinkled and she is assuming they want to keep this out of an assembly classification, the occupant load will be limited. Thrasher asked about the maximum number of people they would expect in the space. Pazour is unsure about the number of people to expect. Thrasher said based on the useable floor space it appears they would max out at around 45 people. Pazour

does not believe they would ever have over 45 people in the space. Thrasher conveyed that the Fire Department will most likely want an occupant load posted. It will be necessary to work with the Fire Department on this issue. Thrasher stated that according to her calculations it will be necessary to have less than 49 people in the space at one time. A local Building Permit will be required for the proposed work. The local permit will encompass rebuilding the interior wall, the finished opening between the Montague/Urschel Galley, and the additional bathroom. Contractors must be listed on the Building Permit application, and they must be registered with the City. Signage will require a separate permit.

ON BEHALF OF TIM STITES (FIRE DEPARTMENT): All inspections required during the construction phase of the project will need to be scheduled and coordinated through the Building Department. After occupancy, the facility will be subject to annual fire inspections. Questions should be directed to Stites at (219) 462-8325 or tstites@valpo.us.

ON BEHALF OF NATE MCGINLEY (VALPARAISO CITY UTILITIES): It appears this will be all internal updates and no changes will be made to the exterior water service or sanitary sewer service to the building. Therefore, there are no comments concerning this project. Any questions can be directed to McGinley at (219) 462-6174 or nmcginley@valpo.us.

ON BEHALF OF SHAUN SHIFFLETT (VALPARAISO CITY UTILITIES, METERING DEPARTMENT): If any interior replumbing work or meter relocation is done, it will be necessary to bring the facility up to code and install backflow. Any questions should be directed to Shifflett at (219) 462-6174, ext. 1322 or sshifflett@valpo.us.

SHRADER: This is considered a place of public assembly (cultural or art center, museum). Even though the museum has been here for quite a while, Shrader does not believe it ever went through a review process to catch that this is actually a special use in the Central Business District. This means that any use that requires a Special Use Permit needs to come before the BZA and show that they meet the Special Use standards. We have a pretty good idea how the PoCoMuse has operated, and it seems that although it will be larger it will continue operating in a museum fashion. The museum does not expect to host events or anything that will generate large numbers of people at any given time. It will simply be people in and out or classroom tours. Shrader asked the largest user groups that would be at the museum. Pazour stated there would be school groups, but they tend to split school groups into smaller sub-groups that will visit the Memorial Opera House or the Courthouse. They usually do not exceed the 45-occupant number. The only thing that may bring in more people would be an exhibit opening. However, these have been structured in a way that is sort of a rolling open-house format that has accommodated a larger group so that they

have never had more than 50 people at one time present for anything that has been done. Shrader mentioned that the standards for a place of public assembly in the Central Business District are located in Section 2.516. The code references can be provided. There is a minimum site area, which may not be met, there are non-residential scale regulations, there is information on where it may front that may not meet the standards. Shrader said they may be okay on location. The language is a bit fuzzy in the code. This can be researched, and it will not be any more effort to add this to the list of items to be approved. The main thing will be to show that there will not be an undue parking demand that will impact the rest of the nearby users in the Central Business District that rely on public parking lots and street parking. Because this use has been here for a while and there has been an opportunity to observe that it does not seem to have a negative affect that is the underlying message, but we do have to go through the process of getting a special exception through the Board of Zoning Appeals. Shrader asked if Pazour has been through the BZA process for any other project. Pazour stated he has never gone through the BZA process. The Planning Department will provide assistance if needed. Shrader conveyed that some petitioners hire an attorney, but this is certainly not necessary. This is a pretty straight forward request. Shrader asked if Pazour felt any of the neighbors might have an issue with the proposed expansion of the museum. Pazour does not believe there is any opposition. Shrader asked if any new signage is being proposed. Pazour stated there will be new signage and they have started this process. Lemmon said she has their Sign Permit application. Shrader mentioned that the next application due date is March 18th for the April 20th BZA meeting. A decision will be made at the meeting and at this point the museum would be eligible for the occupancy permits if Thrasher is okay with it and everything else has been met. Pazour said this does not work with his schedule. Pazour explained that they have a collaboration with the Field Museum to open an exhibit on May 19th and it is contingent on their construction work being completed by April 25th. Shrader stated that construction is different than occupancy. Shrader said we can work with the museum on the schedule. Shrader will talk with Thrasher to come up with what makes the most sense. Pazour asked if contractors will be able to submit permit applications for the construction work immediately. Thrasher confirmed this is possible and it will get the review process started. Shrader advised that the things Pazour will need to be discuss is when they expect their peak uses, the number of people, how they get to the museum. If it is a school group being dropped off by a school bus, this will not impact parking. If it is an exhibit opening and everyone is driving a vehicle this is where parking will be at its peak. The museum is in relative walking distance of public parking lots and there is on-street parking. There are formulas

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in our code showing how demand is met through public parking that is offsite. Overall, there probably won't be major concerns.

LEMMON: Lemmon said she will have availability in the next week to assist with the BZA petition. Lemmon will email a BZA petition.

ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED:

- Detailed Site Plan
- Backflow Prevention (if required)
- Building Permit
- Contractors Registered with the City
- Signage/Fencing Permit
- Occupant Load (work with Fire Department)
- Variances (as required)