

**July 16, 2007 Email from Warren Hutmacher to History Center Board Chair  
Anne Webb** (copied to History Center Treasurer and Community Center Director)

FYI

This is the memo I delivered to the Mayor and City Council for tonight's meeting. I look forward to working with you as we begin to turn the museum concept into a reality.

Thanks.

Warren

**Text of Attached Letter:**

# Memo

**To:** Honorable Mayor and City Council

**From:** Warren Hutmacher, City Administrator

**Date:** 3/10/2009

**Re:** Norcross History Center – Staff Recommendations

As per the request of the Mayor and City Council, I am delivering a preliminary staff recommendation regarding a proposed Norcross History Museum.

The addition of a Norcross History Museum is a positive addition to the City and to the downtown due to the intrinsic value of preserving history and as a limited but meaningful tourist attraction.

Assuming that the City Council agrees with my recommendation to find a way to support a History Museum, I pose the following questions to Council with my recommendations at this juncture. Additionally, I would prefer to hold off on recommending a site for a potential Welcome Center until I am able to fully evaluate existing buildings for their suitability. Neither the Church Rectory nor 189 Lawrenceville Street is available at this time for inspection.

## **LOCATION**

There are several possible locations for a Norcross History Museum. The facilities that have been suggested as possibilities at this point include the Rectory located adjacent to the Norcross Cultural Arts and Community Center (NCACC), 54 Jones Street and 189 Lawrenceville Street.

I think the important factors to consider in choosing a location will be:

1. Highest and best use of the facility
2. Appropriateness of the building for desired function
3. Cost to renovate/make accessible for ADA compliance.

Please note that I am providing this recommendation regarding a choice between three possible buildings without the opportunity to tour and evaluate two of the

buildings. I am familiar with 54 Jones Street, but not the other two buildings under consideration.

- **54 JONES STREET**

I feel that 54 Jones Street is not an appropriate location to house a museum. It is a dysfunctional building with the concrete block walls and no central open spaces. Additionally, there are questions regarding humidity and open questions as to the usefulness of the building in our downtown revitalization strategy.

- **189 LAWRENCEVILLE STREET**

189 Lawrenceville Street is supposedly the first brick house built in the City of Norcross. The County purchased the building with intent of demolishing it as part of the new Fire Station construction project. It was later determined that the house was not needed for the project and the County has since leased it to the City of Norcross for use as either offices, a welcome center or a museum. The City is committed to renovating the bathrooms in the building for public use. The County is also building a fire museum on the new Fire Station 1 property that will house some city artifacts. I have received the executed copy of the lease this week and am in the process of providing the County proof of insurance for the building. Once that is complete, the County will provide me the keys to the house.

I have no comment regarding the appropriateness of the building for a Museum or the cost to renovate the building since I have never seen the interior of the property. However, I do think it would be a good candidate for a History Museum due to its visible location on Lawrenceville Street and its proximity to the new Fire Museum. Additionally, the City is already committed to funding repairs to the building to provide for bathrooms and accessibility.

- **CHURCH RECTORY**

The Church Rectory property is a historical residence that will be ultimately turned over to the City of Norcross no later than December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007. It may become available earlier if the Pastor of the Church moves out prior to the deadline. We have been told that it is probable that he will vacate the building in the next few months.

I have no comment regarding the appropriateness of the building for a Museum or the cost to renovate the building since I have never seen the interior of the property. I think it is a good candidate for a Museum due to the history of the building, the proximity to the Community Center and its ample parking. It is not a very visible location and not easily accessible from Lawrenceville Street. The other issue regarding this building is the potential lack of any other feasible use of the building.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

I recommend further exploration of the Church Rectory and 189 Lawrenceville Street to determine the suitability for a museum of this nature and the potential renovation costs to upgrade the facilities for use as a public space. I recognize that it may take considerable time

to evaluate the Church Rectory due to the ongoing residence of the Pastor in the house. However, ultimately it would be irresponsible of the City to commit to leasing the facility to any group until staff has an opportunity to conduct a thorough inspection and evaluation of the property.

## **ORGANIZATION**

The Norcross History Museum has incorporated and is in the process of forming a 501 c 3 entity. The Museum will have a Board of Directors setting policy and managing the vision of the museum. I recommend that the City treat this organization as a separate entity from the City and not be involved in their governance or staffing. I further recommend that the City staff not be involved in providing any services to the building or staff nor provide any ongoing supplies or materials. The issue has been raised regarding full time staff. My opinion is that the facility will be more successful with some level of full time staff, but that the City should not be involved as a partner in the operation of the facility. Our role should be to offer space to house the museum and provide some method of funding.

## **FUNDING**

I have carefully reviewed the proposed budget for the Museum that was provided to me by the Museum Proposal Committee. The total cost of the operation per year is estimated to be approximately \$128,000. This includes approximately \$80,000 in personnel related costs.

There are several sources of funding for this museum:

- Hotel/Motel Tax Fund – operating or capital
- General Fund – operating or capital
- SPLOST Fund - capital funding only

The Hotel/Motel Tax Fund generates approximately \$180,000 per year. The City uses these funds to promote tourism and market the downtown and the city as a whole. There are insufficient funds in this account to provide capital funding for renovations, and the account cannot afford to provide ongoing funding for the operations of the museum without sacrificing other city initiatives that may provide more “bang for the buck” in promoting the City of Norcross. However, if the City chooses to make a contribution for a limited time, this fund can likely provide \$30,000 a year in funding for up to 3 years.

With an annual budget of \$11,000,000 the General Fund can afford to fund operating costs for this operation on an ongoing basis, but the City has other priorities in the budget that will need to be funded before this operation.

The SPLOST fund has adequate resources to support a capital renovation (depending on the eventual cost of the renovations). SPLOST funds cannot be spent on operating costs.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

I tentatively recommend the City provide SPLOST funds for the renovation of the eventual location of the Norcross History Museum. I will withhold a final recommendation until I have the opportunity to gauge the actual costs of renovations/improvements for a museum use.

Assuming the annual cost to run the museum will be \$128,500, I recommend the City provide 75% of operating funds for the museum in the first year, 50% in the second year and 25% in the third year. There is no provision for an escalator or cost of living adjustment. After the third year of funding, the City will not obligate any funds for the Norcross History Museum.

FY 2007/2008 \$96,375 (\$30,000 from Hotel/Motel Fund and \$66,375 from FY 2008 budget)

FY 2009 \$64,250 (\$30,000 from Hotel/Motel Fund and \$34,250 from FY 2009 budget)

FY 2010 \$32,000 (\$30,000 from Hotel/Motel Fund and \$2,000 from FY 2010 budget)

Total City funding: \$192,625 over three years for operating funds. Capital funds are unknown at this time. This equates to \$90,000 in Hotel/Motel funds and \$102,625 in General funds over a three year period. The average yearly expenditure is \$64,208.

### **TIMING**

I recommend that the City provide a classroom at no charge to the Norcross History Center board to store equipment and artifacts for a 90-120 period until a decision is rendered as to which, if any, facility the City will provide to the History Center board.

I anticipate that I can evaluate the 189 Lawrenceville Street building for suitability and renovation costs within 45 days and will do the same for the Church Rectory within 45 days of the building being vacated.

I recommend that partial first year funding be made available upon the execution of a lease agreement with the Norcross History Center for the use of one of our facilities. The City can utilize the \$30,000 in Hotel/Motel Funds upon execution of the lease agreement and make the balance available January 1, 2008 (dependent on FY 2008 budget funding for this purpose). In future years, if funds are budgeted, the City can make a lump sum payment January 1 of each year.

[End of Memo]

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