

Beacon Hill Garden Club Meeting 6/12/18

Open to the public and on the agenda, Save Garden House

Minutes updated 06.25.18, changed are highlighted

Betty Jean Williamson presenting

Good evening everyone,

Welcome to Garden house.

My name is Betty Jean Williamson, I am the Beacon Hill Garden Club co-president. I am also the Board President of Beacon Arts, local arts council that has been renting the office upstairs and opening this hall to the public for concerts and events.

We are here to invite you to help us lead a positive campaign to preserve the garden house.

Seven years ago, I helped to found the Beacon Hill Chapter of the WSFGC to share my love of gardening and have a better connection with WSFGC, the State organization that owns this property. Through the work of their House board of Trustees, they have managed and maintained this house as a public rental venue for the last 40 years

When we learned that WSFGC was planning to hold a vote to decide if they should sell this property, we reached out to the neighborhood to ask individuals to join our club to demonstrate support to preserve the property.

Last week I attended the WSFGC Convention in Tacoma. I was proud to report at the convention 51 new dues paying members. Thank you, your willingness to join us helped send a strong message of community support

I read that statement at the business meeting and hope that our intent was heard. We seek an amicable solution to relieving WSFGC of the responsibility of maintaining this property and seek to preserve both the house and the gardens it as a historic cultural site for use by the community.

We do not know the process that will determine the next owner of the property, but it lies in the hands of the WSFGC executive board. These are the hearts and minds we must win over. I believe we will have better luck persuading them to sell to us if we are respectful and express our gratitude for their stewardship. State President Joyce Lounsberry wrote to me in email today that the WSFGC intent is to preserve Garden House. The State Board are women of conscience in the difficult position of implementing a hotly contested decision to sell and now must do so in a manner to best serve their constituents in the process.

Beacon Arts has been aware that the “deed was cleared” some time ago. We explored avenues of funding to be able to make an offer to purchase that property. However, we could not begin fundraising until we knew that the property would be sold

Beacon Arts has consulted with various government and private sources and with your support and with a little time to organize, write grants and raise funds we hope to be the entity that manages the property for the benefit of our community in the future.

If successful, we would honor all current tenants and seek to make the necessary repairs. We plan to open the house to the public with Garden House concerts and new programs to serve our community. Because we live here we can be more accessible and effective stewards.

All of this will take time and a lot of work. We ask for your support in time, and resources to be successful.

Now you can:

- *Write a personal Thank you letter to WSFGC executive board.*
- *Make a donation of any amount to Beacon Arts to support our efforts to purchase Garden House.*
- *Post pictures of your events and celebrations at Garden House on Beacon Arts Facebook page and Instagram*
- *Sign up for our emails and we will keep you informed of our progress and additional actions at the appropriate time.*

Beacon Arts needs to expand our Board and build a work group to guide the process of fundraising and negotiations with WSFGC. Please let us know what skills and talents you want to contribute.

- Introduces charter members of the Beacon Hill Garden Club
- Increased membership from 8 to 59 in one month as a show of community support for Garden House.

Asks for anyone else representing organizations to introduce themselves:

- Elaine Ike, co-chair of Seattle Green Spaces Coalition is wanting to preserve the green space.
- Lee & Julie from NW New Deal are interested in preserving this historic house for community use like their Prohibition Picnic, a vintage style event.
- Gina Tolentino is on the Jefferson Lawn Bowling Board.
- Eugenia Woo from Historic Seattle, since 1974, owners of Good Shepherd Center
- Susan Sanders, Emergency Preparedness Group, wants to see low to no fee access for community.
- Giovanni Dellino, Beacon Food Forest, has many great memories at Garden House. There’s nothing like it in Seattle with this character.
- Craig Lorch, Beacon Hill Merchants, has already written a letter of support.

- Judith Edwards, long time resident, loves the Garden House Concerts here. Her sister in law (now in her 80's) remembers coming here as a child to the garden club meetings.
- [Name] has good memories of the Seattle Cello Group performing here.

Here is the statement that Betty Jean read at the convention:

I'm Betty Jean Williamson,

co-president of Beacon Hill Garden Club, located in Seattle's Beacon Hill Neighborhood, which functions like a small town. I have lived here for over 25 years.

We love and revere the Headquarters House, which we lovingly call Garden House.

It's our local grange hall. For over 100 years, It has been the site of countless birthdays, weddings, memorials and community gatherings of all kinds. WE are grateful to WSFGC for the 40 years of service maintaining this jewel in our community. And to Jefferson Park Ladies Improvement Club, who gifted the property to WSFGC in 1977, for their previous 70 years of civic engagement and devotion to parks, schools and public health issues in our beloved community

We seek to insure that the historic house, orchard and gardens are preserved intact. 6 weeks ago ,I began to speak to my neighbors about the potential sale of Garden House. Our garden club has grown from 8 paid members to 57. 6 local non-profits sent letters asking that the site be preserved whether or not the house sells.

Because we have no assurance of its fate my club and my community are voting NOT to sell and asking if you must sell, that you give us time to continue organizing to preserve the site intact.

Our local Arts Council, Beacon Arts, 8 year tenant in Garden house, is in communication with City and County agencies, historic Preservation organizations and Charitable foundations to help us find a way forward to an amicable and mutually beneficial solution which would provide appropriate monetary compensation to WSFGC and maintain Garden house as a small sanctuary in our neighborhood.

Our intent is to preserve the site intact not only as an historic site, but also as the desperately important community gathering place and open green space in a community rapidly redeveloping into 8 story apartment buildings all around the nearby Beacon Hill Light Rail Station.

Please hear our request to preserve this site intact for the sake of the health and well-being of my community.

Thank you

- **Al Finegold asked, at the vote, what was the question posed? Authorization or requirement?** Answer: *The vote was as stated, Should the WSFGC sell Garden House? Yes or no? Unclear beyond that.*

Betty Jean introduces Evie Marwood to speak:

I'm the Greater Seattle District director until 6/19. I was elected to be house trustee until 11/17. Joyce Lounsberry, WSFGC president, called me to say that the state executive officers agree they want to protect and preserve the house intact. They are seeking an appropriate buyer with that same intent. They are forming a special team because the vote was taken but no plan put in place. She asked me to join this team to determine a plan and I accepted. Stated that there is a lot of work ahead including landmark status, financials, etc.

Betty Jean echoed that we have created a bridge between the two side and we are going in the same direction.

- **Why did they clear the deed?** *Answer: Reasoning can be found in the minutes from 2 years ago. Because the deed was no longer legally binding in real estate law.*
- **What was the motivation behind the vote?** *Answer: Membership is aging and the WSFGC doesn't have the funds to maintain the house. Doesn't serve the full membership, not large enough to hold conventions and membership distributed around the state.*
- **Is there an expectation to sell at full market value?** *Answer: We don't know.*
- **Who can apply for landmark status?** *Answer: Any community member.*
- **Where are the proceeds going?** *Answer: Not defined but talk of special committee to distribute. It could go individual chapters or scholarships.*
- **What is the WSFGC budget?** *Answer: We don't know that.*
- **Sasha Anderson commented:** Formerly on the board of the Seattle Landmark Preservation, it's important to move forward with landmark preservation status. Used Hugo House as an example when they asked to not make it a landmark so they could do some maintenance but promised to preserve the space. They ended up tearing it down. Also commented that there are different preservation models: Exterior, interior and grounds. Ideal would be to have exterior and grounds since interior has been renovated and has little of the original.
- **Terry commented:** The WSFGC met with Historic Seattle and that they proposed selling the two side lots and preserving the house exterior only. Betty Jean commented that was incorrect. The WSFGC asked about different status levels, the split lot wasn't a serious option. Historic Seattle does not want to own the property but they can help with funds for maintenance.
- Betty Jean has already met with 4Culture and they are offering emergency funds.
- The board of the Dante Alighieri society, who has been meeting there since 1930, is discussing if their organization will request the landmark status.
- **Comment:** We need to be sensitive of the facts of the monetary value of the house and the needs of the WSFGC and the non-monetary value of the property to the community. Need to pursue the landmark status to preserve. *That's why we are talking to individual donors and pursuing grants. Using the 4Culture emergency funds to pursue landmark status and lawyer fees to draw up and offer/contract.*

- **Lona Finegold commented:** WSFGC had an inspection of the house done. Produced a 29 page report which was mostly bad, hundreds of thousands of dollars in repairs. The trustees hired another inspector which countered most of the report. Betty added that the deferred maintenance is not structural.
- **Ginger Knudsen commented:** Every 2 years there's a new board president. Each time the house is always in some state of hoo haa. They are sick of dealing with the house. She feels this house should be operated by a group in Beacon Hill. The part that bothers her that they are stewards of the land and selling for profit runs contrary to that.
- **Betty Jean commented:** One of the neighbors remembers the annual Easter Egg hunt being held on the grounds. Also, the caretaker at the time would let the neighborhood kids play in the yard if they mowed the lawn.
- **Lona commented:** When WSFGC got this house they dug the basement out bucket by bucket.
- **Does anecdotal information help with landmark status?** *Sasha answered no. The look at architecture or cultural significance or an architect of note on record. Also not helpful to talk about how it will be used after it's torn down. Not in their purview.*
- **Lona Carter commented:** An UW student did some research and showed that this house has been recorded in books. Also that the Jefferson Ladies Improvement Group was one of the first women's groups to have a community building like this. **It's on the National Historic Register.**
- **Lana Finegold commented:** **Built in 1883 or 1882 by the Turners.**
- **Has there been an appraisal including maintenance? Has anyone worked with an architect for maintenance? Has there been talk of raising the rents?** *Answer: General response from the audience was to keep as is and keep rents low.*
- **How much does landmark status cost?** *Answer: We don't know yet but working with 5-6 community groups to create a coalition. Some comments from audience was it could range from \$10,000-16,000 for hiring a consultant to create and present the report. There is no fee to apply.*
- **Have you started an online campaign yet?** *Answer: We have two volunteers working on Kickstarter now. Delayed because Beacon Arts just got it's own 5013C and is transitioning from fiscal sponsorship with Shunpike. Working on getting a checking account this week.*
- Offer from NW New Deal to donate any profits from their Prohibition Picnic to the cause.
- Suggestion to have a Beaconettes benefit concert.
- **What's the timing? With the Seattle Times article broadcasting to developers how can we stall?** *Sasha Anderson: Buildings over a certain age triggers automatic landmark review. But can be avoided if building is the same type, for instance if they tear this down and replace with a McMansion.*
- **How can the public find out about the review?** *Sasha Anderson: Only if the owners share the information.*
- **Eugenia Woo commented:** Status does not dictate use. Can be turned into a single family home, a high end wedding venue etc. You can make changes to a protected site, for example the additions to the Carnegie libraries. You seek approval based on the

design guidelines before any permits are issued. CEPA can also trigger, which looks at the zoning and proposal. I've already called status officials to keep an eye out for permits. I feel this is a slam dunk as a landmark. It helps to show up to the public designation meetings, email or even better in person. Also important to get owners support. After designation the city and owner must negotiate the agreement and the person who nominated can be left out of the process. Economic use, ie I could put 20 apartments here and make millions, can be used to counter with a economic hardship. It doesn't happen often but sometimes those designated still get torn down, 2 recently.

- **How can the community help?** *Answer: Money, volunteer time, emails, and letters.*
- **Claudia commented:** Look at CNP in West Seattle, threatened with being torn down, the community rallied and raised \$XX money to save it.
- **What's the property taxes? What is the Garden House budget?** *Answer: Property taxes are based on potential but the WSFGC being a 5013C has a waiver with the department of revenue because the rent to the community. It's only about \$1600 a year. The income for the house is \$47,000 and the expenses \$50,000. And those figures were through mid-May.*
- **Comment:** WSFGC could use this as a way to engage with younger and more diverse groups which aren't reflected at this meeting tonight.
- What are next steps?
 - Email Results
 - Creating committees to work on Landmark status, Public outreach, fundraising, and liaison to the WSFGC. Ask for anyone with relevant skills to contact us.