

CENTRAL PARK GOVERNMENTAL/ACADEMIC CENTER MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT



Draft Proposal

Prepared by: John McGrath

March 1997

THE CHALLENGES

The need to consolidate dispersed Cambria County governmental facilities in the Johnstown area into one efficient, centralized complex.

An opportunity to enhance the capabilities of Cambria County Community College and provide better community access to collegiate education programs in a centralized, state-of-the-art facility.

The need to attract new retail tenants to help revitalize the Johnstown Central Business District.

A CONCEPT TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES

Redevelop the former Glosser Brothers department store structure into a mixed use facility with:

- 1) 30,000 square feet of County office space
- 2) 15,000 square feet of academic facilities
- 3) 15,000 square feet of ground floor retail space

RATIONALE FOR CONCEPT

Following is a rationale for each of the three components of the mixed use concept:

1) Cambria County Office Component: *30,000 square feet on 2 floors*

- Consolidation has been recommended by an ad hoc County facility planning committee
- Feasibility of the consolidation was confirmed by a Wessel & Co. study
- Central location in downtown Johnstown is desirable
 - 1/2 block from Cambria County Transit Authority Center
 - convenient to the 7,000+ employees working downtown
 - accessible via major highways to all areas of Southern Cambria County
- 2 rehabbed floors in the Glosser structure would accommodate the County's needs
 - handicapped accessible facility space via two existing elevators
 - large 15,000 floor plates allow for flexible office design
 - hundreds of on-site free parking spaces are available on former Glosser lots
 - historic structure affords unique office design possibilities
 - building setting overlooking Central Park is attractive
- Office employees and visitors would generate large volumes of traffic to support other components of the complex: an academic center and retail stores

RATIONALE FOR CONCEPT

2) Academic Center Component: *15,000 square feet on one floor*

- One rehabbed floor would provide space for a number of advanced, state-of-the-art classrooms and office facilities for academic support staff.
- Center could be the new home of the Cambria County Community College
 - CCAC would have plenty of room to grow to meet future needs
 - Johnstown campus could expand from 5,500 square feet at Hiram G. Andrews
 - CCAC's location would be more convenient to a large base of potential students
 - 7,000+ employees downtown
 - 1/2 block from Cambria County Transit Authority Center
 - CCAC would increase its community image in this high-profile location
- Center could also generate revenue by leasing facilities to "guest" programs from local colleges
 - Attraction would be the state-of-the-art classrooms in a central location which could attract thousands of prospective students. Potential "guest" programs include:
 - UPJ corporate training/professional certification programs
 - St. Francis undergraduate courses currently taught at Bishop McCort
 - IUP's weekend MBA courses currently taught at the Holiday Inn
- Students and academic employees would create large volumes of traffic to support the retail component of the complex, particularly establishments targeted to students.

RATIONALE FOR CONCEPT

3) Retail Component: *15,000 square feet on ground floor*

- Retail space would be on the rehabbed ground floor with a historically restored facade and large windows overlooking Central Park.
- At least three retail spaces would be created and marketed to businesses most likely to benefit from the traffic generated by the office and academic center components of the complex. Likely candidates include:

1) Bookstore/Coffee House

- would benefit from student traffic and textbook purchase needs
- would address a need suggested in the Downtown Johnstown Shopper Needs Study conducted in 1996

2) Tavern/Grill

- would benefit from traffic from the office component of the complex as well as from its proximity to the 7,000+ employees who work downtown.
- could also serve as a “meeting place” for continuing education students before and after classes at the academic center
- possibility exists for a more ambitious brew pub facility, which could incorporate portions of the basement level of the structure

3) Convenience Store

- would benefit from student and county office worker traffic
- also addresses a major need identified by the Johnstown Shopper Needs Study

CONCEPTUAL FLOORPLAN

Below is a look at the floorplan of the rehabbed structure. The perspective is looking North from Central Park

5th 7,500 sq. ft

Storage/
Mechanical

4th 15,000 sq. ft

County Offices

3rd 15,000 sq. ft

County Offices

2nd 15,000 sq. ft Academic Center

1st 15,000 sq. ft

Retail

Bookstore/Coffee House

Tavern/Grill

Convenience Store

OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

The concept could be controversial because of its unconventional mixed-use nature and because of skepticism driven by failed past plans for the site. Following are some likely objections and how they could be addressed:

Objections

“It’s never been done, so it won’t work”

“It would probably be cheaper to just tear that old building down and build a new building”

“Moving everything in there will just create more empty storefronts”

“We don’t need another building taken out of taxation in the city”

Response

The concept has been proven successful in a former department store structure in Chicago (*see DePaul project evidence*).

Two responses:

- The building appears to be structurally sound and could cost less to rehab when demolition or land acquisition costs for a new building are factored into the cost estimate. Historic preservation grants might also make the rehab option more attractive.
- The building is an important symbol for the County. The courthouse could also have been demolished and replaced with a new structure, but its symbolism was recognized and restored.

Traffic generated by the complex, particularly the after-5 pm and weekend student business, would create greater demand for retail downtown, potentially drawing new tenants.

The property is currently not generating tax revenue, and could cost hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars to demolish (cost of Hendler Hotel demolition = \$170,000+) Also, the building could help generate revenue through the leasing of academic and retail space and mercantile taxes.

To: President Etheridge

From: John McGrath

Date: March 25, 1997

RE: Downtown Johnstown Economic Development Concept

As promised in my e-mail, this provides some background on a concept for redeveloping the former Glosser department store building.

I shared this concept with commissioner Ted Baranik in February, with a heavy emphasis that I was acting on my own as a private citizen, and not representing the University. He was positively disposed toward the concept, but asked me to keep it confidential. As a result, I have not approached you until now. However, the county's plans were leaked to the Tribune-Democrat resulting in a news story last week. In light of this development, commissioner Baranik authorized me to approach you with the idea.

The concept is contained in the following pages, but as an executive summary, UPJ's role could be as follows:

- a largely symbolic involvement, representing a gesture toward the community, perhaps in the context of the kick-off of the new University capital campaign.
- possible use of new classroom space in the building, contingent upon securing funding from corporate sponsors for training programs downtown (i.e. US Bank discussions), or from government grants for service learning programs downtown (via Jon Darling's work).

The attached piece is largely self-explanatory, but if you have any questions, please let me know. The concept is based heavily upon my experience at DePaul University in Chicago, which participated in a similar redevelopment project with a former department store in the Loop. The case study has been a very successful one, which could serve as a model for this project.