

BGHPB hears reno proposal from Friends

■ BY MARCY SHORTUSE

The meeting of the Boca Grande Historic Preservation Board on Wednesday, Nov. 8 featured a presentation by Friends of Boca Grande regarding their proposed renovations for the Community Center, The Island School, the Teacherage, the Dishong-Bowen House and the Crowninshield Community House. They wanted to see how the Board perceived their ideas and, to their benefit, everyone on the Board seemed to have no objections at all.

Three speakers were included in the presentation –

Bayne Stevenson, from the Friends of Boca Grande Board of Directors; Marta Howell, Chief Executive Director of Friends; and Jeff Mudgett, an architect from Parker/Mudgett/Smith Architects, Inc. out of Fort Myers (the planners of The Island School).

Stevenson spoke first, explaining that the \$11 to \$12 million dollar proj-

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*from **PAGE 1*** ect was strictly in the preliminary stages. Friends has sent out about 300 booklets to members of the island, to stress the importance of Louise du Pont Crowninshield's part in the origin of the community center and the Crowninshield House. Keeping to the original vision and community use of the buildings, as well as the architecture, is vital to them, Stevenson said, as well as honoring its history.

Their action plan includes a new auditorium in a slightly different location that will seat 242 instead of the approximately 200 they can seat now. It includes relocation of the volleyball court to the 9th street beach, designing parking options to include more golf cart and bicycle parking and more. He wrapped up his part of the presentation by stressing that this plan is very preliminary.

Then Howell spoke, addressing the fact that Hurricane Ian made some changes to their future renovation vision, as well as how it will affect the seven leaseholders at the Center and the 30+ organizations that use the facility.

“I don't think anyone will have a problem with that,” Board Member Becky Paterson said. “This is the most important thing you're doing!”

The addition of more decking is a big feature of the plan. It would wrap around the entirety of the south side of all the buildings and would potentially feature awnings for shade that could be easily detached.

At the southern end of campus, changes would include an expansion of The Island School by 2,300-squarefeet to include a new lunch room, multi-purpose room and office space. The GICIA would stay where they are, while some other offices would be shifted around. The existing auditorium would be gutted and would eventually become multi-purpose rooms and the fitness room. The new 8,500-square-foot auditorium would be to the west of the sunshade pavilion. The main floor of the auditorium would be above flood plane.

“Once we freed it from the historic fabric, we realized this was the best place,” Mudgett said.

The area between the trees and the Community Center on the west side, on Park Avenue, could be used for golf cart parking, Mudgett said.

She also explained the scope of work that had been done preliminarily, even before presenting the proposal to the Historic Preservation Board. She has met with all of the organizations that use the Community Center, the county and The Island School, to make sure that everyone was viewing the plan in a favorable light and felt it would suit their needs.

Mudgett then spoke, explaining in a half-joking manner that there will be quite a number of issues to bring to the Board when the time comes, as they are touching every structure of the campus, changing some elements of the grounds of the campus. He said they are willing to come back before the board as many times as it takes to come to a compromise.

In a nutshell, in the initial stages of the plan they would work on the Teacherage (where Boca Bargains and the Historical Society are), the Dishong-Bowen house (where the Boca Grande Art Center is now) and the Crowninshield Community House.

In the proposal, Boca Bargains would stay where they are at but they would have the whole building. The Boca Grande Art Center would stay where they are, but would have an addition for storage and bathrooms (which they do not have right now, they have to share bathrooms with others). The Historical Society would move into the Banyan Street side of the Crowninshield House, which would give them a front door and a presence on the street. They would also have more space. The small space that Boca Bargains currently uses for storage would be a multi-purpose and green room.

Another big change, Mudgett said, would be the expansion of the kitchen at the Community House, to a commercial kitchen that could be easily used by everyone.

“From 1940 onward, until modern fire codes and organizational problems came about, there were fish fries and spaghetti dinners held here,” they said. “Friends wants to meet all modern codes so it can be used again for such things.”

The anticipated start date, if all goes well, would be May or June of next year. They hope to have the addition to the school done in March of 2025. In June of 2026 the auditorium could be complete, and the last phase of the plan would be to tear down the old auditorium and create new space there.

As the presentation wrapped up it was clear that the Historic Preservation Board was enthusiastic about the plan, so expect to hear more about the plan’s progression in the future.

In other board news, they approved renovations at a home at 851 Palm Avenue that include the expansion of the garage, enclosure of the space between the house and garage, construction of a second floor above the garage and enclosure of a deck.

Pending cases for December include an application for historic designation for the building at 446 4th Street, owned by Braxton Bowen, at the corner of 4th Street and Palm Avenue.

The Boca Grande Health Clinic will be coming back for a second try in December as well, not necessarily for a Certificate of Appropriateness, but to present a new, scaled-down version of their proposed expansion.

Last on the list is 161 Gilchrist Ave., the C of A the board denied earlier in the year, but then went in front of a Lee County Hearing Examiner a few months ago. The Hearing Examiner ruled that the Board did not make a ruling in good faith on the proposed single-family home that will be located on two lots – 161 and 181 Gilchrist Ave. – and that the plan should be approved.

The next meeting will be held on December 13.