

Jesse Besser Museum

REPORT TO THE BESSER FOUNDATION

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS UPDATE

August 29 2003

In 2001, the Jesse Besser Museum decided to begin a full strategic planning process to analyze the museum's internal strengths and weaknesses, and determine external threats and opportunities. It gives us an opportunity to revisit the museum's mission, vision and values. From this process, the Board of Trustees, the Executive Director, the staff and volunteers will identify key issues facing the museum that will provide the basis to put goals and objectives in priority and to devise strategies to guide museum operations over a 10-year period.

PAST PLANS

The process began by examining the museum's past multi-year plans from 1974 to 1994. They consisted of a series of five- to two-year plans that sought to analyze the museum's income and activities and to develop goals and objectives for the upcoming period.

In February 1999 a new Executive Director joined the museum with considerable experience in strategic planning. She reviewed the Jesse Besser Museum's position and concluded that there was a need for immediate planning and swift implementation to keep the museum operational since it was threatened by a failure in its HVAC (heating, ventilation and air-conditioning) systems, a non-professional staff and an inexperienced governing board. There was no time to spend a year in traditional strategic planning activities. Immediate action was needed for the museum to survive.

The director presented a short-term strategic operational plan to the Board of Directors that consisted of three primary goals, objectives within the goals, and implementation strategies. The Board unanimously approved the plan on March 3, 1999 and implementation proceeded over the next 22 months. To achieve key objectives, it was necessary for the Board to begin changing some basic governing and administrative policies. Under the leadership of the Executive Director and Board Presidents Lynn Wilson and Mary Ellen Glawe, the museum began a period of introspection, examination and discussion on "who we (the museum) are" and "what we should be doing." Board committees for Collections Management, Development, Education, Finance and Nominating were approved. With the help of the Besser Foundation, the Board began a long-term capital improvement campaign and work began on the HVAC replacement project. The Board also adopted a revised mission, a new logo, and increased admission rates. They unanimously approved a new job description for the Executive Director that gave the director full authority to operate the museum, and clarified the roles of the director and the board. The Board also changed their name from "Board of Directors" to "Board of Trustees."

As the museum entered the first phase of the HVAC project, it was apparent that the scope would involve extensive work throughout the museum. This presented an opportunity to plan structural renovations to coincide with the required mechanical changes. The Besser Foundation awarded funding to hire William A. Frederick, Jr., AIA, of Jickling Lyman Powell Associates in Troy, MI to work with staff and board members to create a long-range master facility plan, which remains our guide to this day.

Early in 2001, the Board developed a second short-term strategic/operational plan. This plan incorporated elements of the 1999-2000 plan that had not yet been accomplished and it

established new priorities, objectives and strategies for implementation. Its emphasis was on preparing the museum for subsequent accreditation, expanding museum outreach to all 15 counties included in the museum's mission, and continuing to improve the museum's governance structure.

The key results of this plan included: Drafting and approving policies for Disaster Preparedness, an Employees Handbook, a Code of Ethics, A Directory of Museums and Historical Societies of Fifteen Counties in Northeast Michigan, and a Collections Policies and Procedures Manual. It resulted in new Bylaws that changed the basic governance structure of the museum, by instituting a community-based membership system. The effect of the successful completion of this plan resulted in the museum's Accreditation by the American Association of Museums in November 2002. This put it in the elite top 9 percent of museums in the United States.

PRESENT PLANNING PROCESS

In October 2001, the Board of Trustees and the Executive Director began "planning the next strategic plan". Unlike the previous two short-term plans that had to be drawn and enacted quickly to save the museum from closing, this planning process will take longer to complete but its goal is to create a viable plan for the next 10 years.

The process began by recruiting community leaders to participate as advisors on a Strategic Planning Advisory Team (SPAT). Co-led by Board Member Jon Hopkins and the Executive Director Jan McLean, the team included: *Board of Trustees Members* Jon Hopkins, Lucas Pfeiffenberger, Leona Wisniewski, Robert Lyngos and Bill Harris; *Museum Staff* Janice V. McLean, Janet Smoak, and Richard Clute; *Founders Society Member* Billi Murch; *Business Community Members* Jerome W. Tracey, Vice President, Commercial Services, First Federal Bank of Northern Michigan; Rick Parr, President, Michigan Confidential Document Destruction; Richard McElroy, Director, Alpena Area Chamber of Commerce; *Education Consultants* Tomas Lanway, Superintendent, Alpena-Montmorency-Alcona Educational Service District and Jane Guyott, Director of Instruction, Alpena Public Schools; *Government Representatives* Greg Sundin, City Planner, City of Alpena; Beach Hall, Mayor, Rogers City; and Leonard T. Zolnierek, Chairman of the Board, Alpena County Board of Commissioners.

The SPAT met seven times between October 2001 and May 2002. It developed a database upon which decisions about vision, priorities, objectives, strategies and action plans can be based. It focused on creating a vision for the next 10 years, analyzing internal Strengths & Weaknesses, and external Opportunities & Threats (SWOT), economic and demographic forecasts, present and future target audiences (constituencies), role of technology, present organizational structure of board and staff, our niche and culture in the community, and funding challenges.

In addition, surveys and brainstorming sessions were conducted for museum members, all trustees, all museum committees, staff and volunteers for their input.

Armed with this information, we will decide where we want to go and how we're going to get there. We'll identify potential partners to leverage our resources, determine our principal priorities for action, decide upon specific measurable objectives and establish a timeline to complete them. We are trying to imagine the museum of 2015 and to plan the steps necessary between now and then to make that vision a reality. In short, we are trying to create our future.

The plan that will be developed from the process is intended as a road map to the future. It will not preclude new ideas or even changes along the way. Progress will be measured annually by the board and staff and revisions and additions are expected.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

An enormous amount of data was collected and the Strategic Planning Process is ready to enter its next phase. We have formed a Core Committee to analyze the data and develop goals, objectives and strategies. This will take place over the next year.

Members of the Strategic Planning Core Committee are:

Jon Hopkins, Trustee, Co-chair
Jan McLean, Executive Director, Co-chair
Jim Arbuckle, Trustee
Bill Harris, Trustee
Leona Wisniewski, Trustee
Robert Lyngos, Trustee
Greg Sundin, Trustee
Janet Smoak, Staff
Richard Clute, Staff

ACC LAND TRANSFER PROPOSAL

At the end of 2002, Dick Wilson informed Jan McLean that ACC was conducting its own strategic plan. He suggested that the museum contact them if we were considering any expansion of our property in conjunction with our strategic planning activities.

His suggestion came at the right time. Although the final goals and objectives have not yet been established, the results of the many planning sessions thus far indicate a very strong interest in expanding the museum's outdoor historic structures (the village) in the future. The public likes this aspect of the museum, it has a great deal of educational potential, there is nothing like it nearby, our community and government leaders think this is the direction we should take, and staff and volunteers agree.

We would like to add examples of houses from the 1800s from a small merchant's residence to a larger Victorian mansion, a working blacksmith shop, a working carpentry shop, a store, a barn, and other buildings that will help tell the story of the past. With additional property, we would like to develop a nature trail, a native wildflower garden, and an herb garden to demonstrate how early settlers grew their own "cures" for illnesses. We also could develop an outdoor geology trail of the rocks and minerals in our region and explain how they have supported the lumber and agricultural industries and then the cement and concrete enterprises of today.

In January 2003, Board President Jon Hopkins drafted a letter of interest to Roger Bauer, ACC Board President (copy to Dr. Newport) to initiate discussions to possibly transfer to the museum six to eight acres of ACC property just north and east of the museum. There was no reply to this first request.

Two months ago, Jon called Mr. Bauer directly to set up a time to meet, but Mr. Bauer said Jon should first talk with Dr. Newport. Jon wrote to Dr. Newport requesting a meeting between him and us to discuss the possible transaction and that will take place in late September or early October. The museum is scheduled to present its case to the ACC Board of Trustees at their October meeting.

The members of the Strategic Planning Core Committee (see above) will develop the museum's position at an upcoming meeting. Members of this committee will present our application to Dr. Newport and to the ACC Board.

The museum's case will include these points (others will be added later):

- There is a strong interest in the community to expand the village in the future. But more space is needed to do it.
- The enlarged village will become a magnet to attract visitors to Alpena, thereby helping the local economy.
- The museum will be in a better position to interpret the history of Northeastern Michigan through the buildings in the village and the artifacts in the buildings and this will enrich the museum's educational mission.
- The village will attract many more school groups to the museum to study regional history.
- The village and its attendant educational activities (hands-on experiences in the trades, crafts, art and life of the past) will provide a better understanding and appreciation of life in the 1800s. Contrasting that to today's technological society will be an important reminder of our Michigan heritage.
- This use for the land that Jesse Besser donated aligns with his educational vision.

The museum does not have any funds to purchase the land from ACC. We will ask for a deed of transfer on the basis that the use of the land for educational purposes is in the best interests of the community at large. The project itself will require funding to bring the structures to the museum and to interpret them to the public, so we will ask that the land be donated.

Attached is a drawing of the proposed acreage.

We are interested in the Besser Foundation Board's thoughts on this plan, and look forward to receiving your suggestions and opinions.

Janice V. McLean, Ph.D.
Executive Director & CEO
August 29, 2003