

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section

Meeting of the National Board

Via conference call, Thursday, May 29, 2008

Board members present: Pat O'Brien, Cindy Domingo, Ellen Murtha, Ann Pendell, Laura Roskos, Chris Morin, Audley Green, Georgia Pinkel, C.J. Minster, Nancy Munger

Board members excused: Paij Wadley-Bailey, Odile Hougenot-Haber

Staff present: Linda Belle (JAPA)

WILPF members present: Meta Sheperd, Lois Fiedler, Phyllis Yingling, Libby Frank, Judith Joseph, Regina Birchem, Sandy Silver, Joan Goddard, Linda Belle, Mary Zepernick, Gwyn Kirk, Joan Ecklein, Barbara Nielson, Denise Hall, Jean Hayes, Joan Poss,

Members sending greetings: Naomi Marcus, Yvonne Logan, Marii Hasagawa, Ellie Bluestein

Chris Morin, president, facilitating. C.J. Minster, program chair, as parliamentarian. Laura Roskos, secretary, as note taker.

Chris explains to all that this board meeting has been called solely to take action on the Past President's Report which was submitted to the National Board prior to its April meeting and subsequently made available to members through the website, e-mail announcement and excerpted in *Peace and Freedom*. The report contains a great deal of detail, and recommends the sale of the building at 1213 Race Street. This issue is emotionally loaded and so the board has made special efforts to make it public. On tonight's call, non-board members will speak first. Please keep comments to about a minute or so so that everyone has a chance to speak; try not to repeat what has already been stated; try to use respectful words. This first group of individuals includes incoming and former National Board members.

The floor is open for comments and discussion among non-board members.

Joan Poss believes in transparency and doesn't want a repeat performance of our government; doesn't see any reason why we can't discuss this at our congress in late June

Regina Birchen has a question about the research the past presidents' did: what is their recommendation about what the national office of WILPF should be? Hard to discuss selling the building without having a proposal about the future location. Do we want to have an office? What kinds of associations do we want to have with this office? Research on actual situation in real estate and building inspections in Philadelphia.

Libby Frank was part of the voting that agreed to move to Race Street way back but has no emotional attachment to the place; she knows it is a bad workspace. She doesn't see where the sale fits into a long range plan and doesn't understand the strategic plan. She can't support selling until we know where we are going. It is not a done deal that the block will be taken over by the convention center expansion. She doesn't think that we pay property taxes, remembers being at the court case where it was agreed that JAPA did not have to pay property tax. Everything she's read says it is a bad time to sell.

Barbara Neilson seconds everything that Libby has said. Does not see why this decision is taking place in such a hurry.

Mary Zepernick feels she had her say in the report, which she helped write. The critical point is the extreme inaccessibility of the building; if we were subject to ADA we'd be in big trouble. She has watched, as staff and board, members struggle to get into the building. Doesn't feel this is a rush; a discussion about selling the building has come up in every board term, but was always something bumped to next board. It was not so much as decision not to sell as it was inertia that kept anything from being done.

Mari Hasagawa asked that it be reported that she had found it a very hard place to work during her term as president back in the 1970s.

Jean Hayes is thinking about the trend toward urban restoration rather than suburbanization. She hopes we aren't thinking about suburban locations.

Ellie Bluestein hopes that if this building is sold that a building would be purchased in Washington D.C. (sentiment sent through Jean Hayes).

Regina Birchem: yes, the building is lousy but what about having an architect gut it and re-do it as lofts? There may be grants for inner city work like that.

Chris Morin: the past presidents' report recommends two steps subsequent to tonight's decision. Two committees should be formed: about a permanent location and about the disposition/financial aspects.

Joan Ecklein is concerned that plans will move forward, the building will be sold, and no other decisions will have been made about where we should be in the long term. As a branch co-chair it was very helpful to call the national office to get clear definitions and direction. She feels we need a centralized orientation with a national office and staff all in one place.

C.J. Minster: despite the overall sink in the housing market, there are pockets where the market is strong—especially in high density areas where there is not new land to build on.

Phyllis Yingling: one of the things the past presidents were asked to do is make a recommendation about what to do with the building and we recommended selling it.

Libby Frank: Are these committees that are going to be set up to decide where WILPF will be in the long run going to be only comprised of board members?

Laura Roskos: The long range location committee could have a due date for their final recommendation.

Barbara Nielson: Who gets to decide about the proceeds?

Linda Belle: recommendation is that a committee be established to make a recommendation about proceeds. The original money was donated and matched by JAPA to buy the Walnut Street; when Walnut Street burned Race Street was bought with the insurance proceeds.

Ann Pendell: This has to be decided by that committee—to subtract expenses from proceeds, and then do what they can to help WILPF do what they want with that money.

Linda Belle: There are lots of ideas floating around, but there are also restrictions, such as those binding JAPA as a 501c3.

Chris Morin: Let's get back to the sale of the building. Are there any other non-board members who would like to speak to this issue.

Phyllis Yingling: I remember when we were working on this, we had some figures about how much JAPA loses every month taking care of the building.

Linda Belle: It is a 6000 square foot 4 story building, we charge \$1000 a month, not to make money but to cover expenses like taxes (a small amount), repairs, insurance. But we can't really predict what future repairs might be required.

Sandy Silver: One of the things that the Past Presidents looked at was the history of inertia around this important decision. Felt it was important to take this decision prior to bringing on the fresh energy and talents of the new board; it would be better to use these energies to do the hard work of the committees established to take this decision forward.

Libby Frank: I've been doing some research at Swarthmore and it is true that the question of selling the building goes way back in the board agendas even before the late eighties as Mary reported

Joan Goddard: The Race Street building is not in the current expansion area for the Philadelphia Convention Center. It will be important to sell it before it does get integrated into another expansion and taken by eminent domain.

Judith Joseph: Because of accessibility issues my mother had to stop working at WILPF when they moved into the Race Street, and now thirty years later As a JAPA board member, I cannot condone continuing to pour money into the building.

Ellen Murtha: Let me try to summarize our discussion so far. The biggest concern I hear is the timing. There are members who wonder what the rush and really want a sense of how does this decision fit into the larger movement of WILPF. They want to have a plan about what the face of WILPF will be. For the most part there is a strong understanding that the building is inaccessible and that as we grow in our understanding of inclusiveness we don't want a building that is inaccessible. We understand that it is just a building—loaded with history and memory—but not really the holder of all the work we do. We might not want to do the work of caretaking an aging building. This call is about the decision to sell the building. From that decision, follows the work of forming committees to decide on the future home for WILPF and the financial disposition.

The floor is now given over to deliberation among board members.

Georgia Pinkel: In just the short time I've been on the board my changing physical abilities have really brought home to me how unsupportive the building is to doing work with things scattered all over four floors. None of it is conducive to modern communications, or HVAC. I would hate to think about even painting it. We accepted it because it was sort of free in our minds; but it's like a bonsai misshapen. Better to find a new garden where we can do our work the way we want to do it.

Nancy Munger: I read the comments that were mailed to inforequest@wilpf.org. I really appreciated the thoughtfulness of those comments and the comments tonight. I liken it to an aging couple saddled with a house they can no longer maintain. It is important to make the decision to sell even if they don't know what they will do next. Tonight we can make the decision to sell but that doesn't mean the building will sell tomorrow. I do not think we're moving in a rush because this has been debated for over twenty years. Just because previous boards have not made the decision doesn't mean that we should not make a decision. For any who are distrustful of this board, they should know that all the work in carrying out this decision will be done by the new board. I trust that the incoming board members will do a good job with this.

Ann Pendell: Someone was talking about the support that the national office got from the Philadelphia branch, and when I was on the board back when Mary Zepernick was on staff, I used to stay with members when I was in Philadelphia. The suggestion has been made that in looking for a future home, we should look for a strong branch.

Audley Green: I was uneasy about making this decision, but I feel better after hearing from our members on tonight's call.

Pat O'Brien: I second Nancy's remarks about the amount of work going forward. Some people feel that we're rushing but they may not realize how much work has already been done. We need to prioritize ethics, and ethics demand that we do our work in accessible workspaces.

Laura: There are two issues that were raised in members e-mails but have not been addressed yet on this call. One is our relationship with the IWW, the union that represents our staff and formers staff. The issue of the building sale and possible decentralization of WILPF staff was discussed with Alexis at last week's negotiating meeting and she stated that she is fully prepared to represent staff working in decentralized, even home-based, workplaces. The other concerns caretaking of the historical documents and artifacts currently housed at Race Street. Throughout this spring, we have been in close contact with Ann Yoder and Wendy Cheimelski, the curators of the Peace Collection at Swarthmore. They have already completed a preliminary inventory of the material on site, and we have also consulted with individuals whose personal mementoes and papers are currently in the building. Much of this stuff is already deteriorating and needs to immediately be moved to acid free boxes, etc., for preservation purposes.

Cindy Domingo: I was feeling torn because of the state of divisiveness in the organization, and concerned with transparency and member input. I am satisfied that these conditions have been met. I am prepared to move on the issue today.

C.J. Minster: This report was presented to the April board meeting and discussed thoroughly at that time. In the current structure the national board is the only body that is empowered to make this decision. I am looking forward to working on program at congress.

Georgia Pinkel: Are we ready to form a proposal?

Question from the floor from Barbara Nielson: If you are already taking stuff out, then you've already decided to move?

Laura Roskos: Things needed to be moved to make space to work in this spring.

Nancy Munger: Archiving is an ongoing process; 10 years ago Wendy sorted and removed papers to Swarthmore.

Audley Green: Laura and Nancy have been doing a good job of looking after this important task.

Chris Morin: I would propose that this present board take the recommendation from the past president's report, make the decision to sell the building; this decision would then be followed up with the formation of committees and steps.

Ann Pendell: Chris, I think the wording needs to be changed so that JAPA has a role.

Further exchanges, wordsmithing, etc. followed to devise the following three proposals, all of which were affirmed by the consensus of the full board with no reservations, stand asides or blocks.

- ❖ To accept the recommendation of the past presidents report and respectfully ask the Jane Addams Peace Association to take steps to sell the building at 1213 Race Street.

- ❖ To ask the incoming board to set up a committee of current and past board members and WILPF members to make a recommendation on the most appropriate location for WILPF U.S.'s location going forward within an agreed upon timeframe, preferably within the calendar year 2008.
- ❖ To establish a committee comprised of both WILPF and JAPA board members and JAPA Executive Director to research and negotiate a sale and make recommendations to both boards regarding the allocation, use and management of the proceeds.

Meeting adjourned: 10:28 p.m. EDT

Minutes respectfully submitted,

Laura H. Roskos

Secretary, National Board