

CHAPTER 4 – THE ACTION PLAN FOR A FIRE BARN AND COMMUNITY HALL IN PANAMA

A goal without a plan is just a wish. ~Antoine de Saint-Exupery

The initial goal for this Planning Project was to provide technical assistance to the Village of Panama and its residents to enable them to establish a community center. This goal underwent a process of metamorphosis when it became very apparent that the Panama community was confronting another high priority project which involved the Firth Fire District and the potential for building a new fire barn in the community. The existing building that stores the fire equipment is beyond repair and the rural fire district has indicated that there is funding available to help construct a new fire barn. It became evident that if the village of Panama chooses not to support the Firth Fire district in the fire barn initiative, the district would have no obligation to locate the fire barn in the village and could relocate the fire barn in another community. This essentially left the Planning team with three alternative courses of action to assist Panama:

1. Formulate an action plan for a stand-alone community center as envisioned in the first draft vision presented to Panama on November 9th. 2006.
2. Formulate two independent action plans:
 - a. for a stand-alone community center; and
 - b. a stand-alone fire barn

3. Formulate an action plan for a fire barn and community hall as an integrated compromise arrangement of alternative 2 above.

Alternatives 1 and 2 above were both locked into the vision that was presented to Panama on November 9th, 2006 which was determined to be unworkable, as described in the narrative in Phase 2. The combination of the two functions co-existing in one facility appeared to provide the best prospects for success in Panama and achieve both goals:

1. The Firth Fire District could capitalize on the community support of Panama to obtain the funding required to build the fire barn in the village which would include a large activity space to be designated as the emergency shelter for the community.
2. The Village of Panama would share the large activity space with the Firth Fire District by using it as their primary space for all community activity when it was not used as an emergency shelter. By securing the opportunity to use this space in partnership with the Firth Fire District, the community could subsidize the cost of constructing a fire barn in Panama for the overall common good of the Village community.

This strategy was adopted by the Planning team to formulate the Action Plan for the Fire barn and Community Hall in Panama. The vision for the Fire barn and Community Hall in Panama is reiterated below:

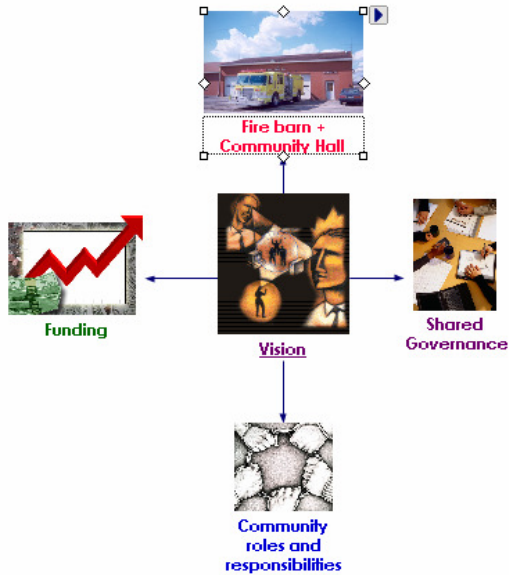


Figure 46: The vision to be accomplished by the proposed Action Plan

The vision that will be accomplished by the proposed Action Plan consists of 4 elements:

1. A Fire Barn with a Community Hall
2. Funding
3. Shared Governance
4. Community roles and responsibilities

The details of the vision are described in Phase 2 and are not duplicated here. The strategies for accomplishing each of the 4 elements of the vision above are described below:

Strategies for creating the Fire Barn and Community Hall

There are two strategic objectives proposed that will need to be accomplished:

1. Formulate a space plan for the building which includes both the functionalities of a fire barn and a community activity space with the provision that they can co-exist in a harmonious and compatible manner.
2. Determine a compatible location for the facility which fulfills all the requirements of:
 - i. Conformity to the Zoning ordinances in force, with or without a variance
 - ii. Adequate provision for off-street parking to prevent intrusion into private property
 - iii. Convenient access for persons of all ages and physical challenges
 - iv. Access to the trail system
 - v. Adequate open space that could be used as a playground for outdoor recreation for youth and adults

Space planning for a fire barn and community hall

The Village Board working in partnership with the Firth Fire District needs to take the lead role in space planning. The steps that are recommended include:

1. establishing the dual functionality of the proposed building
2. determining activities that will occupy each functional space. Key activities to be included will be storage of fire safety and protection equipment, emergency/shelter, space for special events, functions

and activities to be determined by potential users of the community hall, and rental spaces for village offices.

3. Which functions will make regular use of the building? Should the Village Offices be located there?
4. determining space needs for each activity
5. allocating activity spaces to specific rooms
6. establishing the size of the building that will accommodate all rooms
7. designing the building
8. presenting the building design to the community at a town hall meeting to secure their input and approval
9. making any adjustments to the design to incorporate valid recommendations made by the community
10. verification of building codes to ensure conformity
11. conformity to accessibility requirements for the handicapped
12. conformity to standards for occupational health and safety

Once the building is designed the following steps need to be carried out:

1. Securing the building permit
2. Hiring a contractor to construct the building
3. Building construction
4. occupying the building

A licensed architect needs to be hired jointly by the Firth Fire District and the Village Board and entrusted with a contract to design the fire barn and community hall.

Site selection for the fire barn and community hall

Site selection for the fire barn and community hall would fall under the purview of the Village Planning Commission. The village board needs to authorize the Planning Commission to conduct the site selection and the following steps are recommended:

1. Identifying alternative locations that satisfy the following preferred criteria
 - a. Public ownership of property. Other sites may also be identified but assigned a lower priority.
 - b. Central location preferably close to downtown
 - c. Access to some on street parking away from residential areas

NOTE: It became very evident from the focus group meetings and discussions with Village residents that the site the empty lot north of the Café appears to lend itself as the best choice for the following reasons:

1. the property is owned by the Village.
2. The property has close proximity to the Village's existing sewer system.
3. the property is adjacent to the downtown area and readily accessible from within and outside the Village.

4. the property location is in consonance with the recommendation for the community center according to the Comprehensive Plan.
5. the property already appears to address most of the community concerns for parking along non-residential streets, including in the downtown area.
6. Narrowing the selection of properties in step 1 to those that meet the minimum space requirements for the fire barn and community hall as follows:
 - a. Space for the building
 - b. Adequate space for off street parking and sidewalks
 - c. Adequate space around the building to meet setback standards
 - d. Space for playground, recreational equipment and space for shooting hoops
 - e. Landscaping, outside furniture, grilling and garbage disposal
 - f. Distance from built up residential spaces to buffer noise
7. Community survey to identify community preferences for locating the fire barn and community hall.
8. Analyzing community survey results, identifying the site preferences and ranking preferred locations

9. Conducting spatial analysis of at least two top ranking site alternatives to confirm:
 - a. Conformity to zoning regulations with the understanding that if a site does not satisfy zoning regulations, then procedures need to be followed to seek and obtain a variance to the zoning regulations if the site is selected.
 - b. That the site falls outside the flood plain. Most sites in Panama are expected to conform to this requirement.
 - c. Access to water, sewer and electrical lines with priority being given to gravity flow for the water and sewerage system installed in the building
 - d. Access to storm water drainage to ensure that surrounding properties will not be affected adversely by the proposed structure and paved areas
 - e. Close proximity to walking paths, bike paths and trails
 - f. Close proximity to existing baseball field
10. Presentation of results of site analyses to the community at a town hall meeting and public hearing to secure input for final site selection
 - a. Site selection based on community input
 - b. Recommending the selected site to the village board for approval and further necessary action.

Strategies for Funding

There are two strategic objectives that need to be accomplished with respect to Funding. These are:

1. Fund raising for Capital costs
2. Fund raising for Operating costs and maintenance costs

Funding for Capital costs is envisioned as relatively short term, whereas Funding for Operating costs and expenses is a continuing long term activity. The Firth Fire District, the Panama Community Foundation and the Village Board have the lead roles for fund raising for capital costs and operating costs and maintenance costs for the Fire barn and community hall.

Fund raising for Capital costs

The following action strategies are recommended for raising funds required for capital cost commitments, to be titled the "Capital Campaign":

1. Sale of the rights to the publicly operated electrical service. It is learned that the rights to this service would be sold within 1 year and would generate a minimum of \$150,000 that could be applied to the capital cost for the Fire Barn and Community Hall.
2. Sale of village owned vacant properties which are either not in use or not identified by the Planning Commission as a potential site for the Fire barn and community hall

3. Sale of village owned occupied buildings and properties such as the village office building, the post office and the property currently occupied by the existing fire barn
4. Seed money from the Panama Community Foundation
5. Loans
6. Grants
7. Revenue Bonds
8. Funds obtained by the Firth Fire District. It is learned that if the Village of Panama agrees to the construction of a combination fire hall building, the local fire district has agreed to pay 60% of the costs for the Fire Barn and Community Hall initiative.
9. Funds from FEMA. FEMA currently has a program where it will pay a percentage of the additional construction costs required to meet safe shelter standards.
10. Private donations from community residents and non resident alumni.

It is recommended that experienced grant writers and fund raisers from the Village of Panama be recruited by the Village Board and authorized to assist them in the grant writing and fund raising activities. The Village Board and the Panama Community Foundation may also consider hiring a consultant to assist them with tax increment financing.

The actual capital that needs to be generated will be determined by the cost estimated for land acquisition, construction of the Fire Barn

and Community Hall and equipping the facility. A good rule of thumb that is recommended is to raise an amount equivalent to twice the cost estimate for land acquisition, construction and equipment. The first half of this amount will be used for the aforementioned costs and the second half is to be invested in revenue generating and/or interest earning bonds securities or other private investments to be determined by the Village Board in consultation with a reliable public investment consultant. The revenue generated by these investments would be the primary source for funding maintenance costs for the Fire Barn and Community Hall.

Fund raising for Operating Costs and Maintenance Costs

The following action strategies are recommended for raising funds required for Operating Costs and Maintenance Cost commitments:

1. Revenue generation from:
 - a. Interest from revenue generating investments described above
 - b. Building space rentals to the relocated village office
 - c. Space rental of the Community Hall for community activities such as:
 - i. Wedding receptions
 - ii. Trade shows
 - iii. Craft Shows

- iv. Other revenue generating activities recommended by the advisory committees to the Village Board and the Panama Community Foundation.
- d. Allocation of Property tax revenue with the option of a special assessment for the Fire Barn and Community Hall to be determined by the Village Board in consultation with the community residents
- e. Private donations from community residents and non resident alumni.
- f. Special sales taxes are an alternative that may be considered if the commercial retail sector of the village economy picks up with the relocation of new businesses in downtown.

Strategies for Shared Governance

Three lead agencies are recommended to play pivotal roles in the governance of the Fire Barn and Community Hall facility. These are:

1. The Firth Fire District
2. Village Board with a supporting role by the Planning Commission
3. The Panama Community Foundation

It is further recommended that the Lead Agencies convene and conduct a public meeting with the village residents at least once a year to keep them informed and updated about current policies, annual plans for the Community Hall, and progress reports of projects and programs undertaken at the Community Hall, during the previous year. This meeting

and/or a separate meeting may also be convened to include a listening session with citizens to secure a better understanding about citizen concerns, priorities and emerging needs that need to be addressed in future plans, policies, programs and projects.

Other recommendations suggested for consideration include:

1. Adoption of policies and procedures to entertain unsolicited petitions from the public relating to the operation, maintenance and management of the Community Center
2. Information dissemination through public notifications and postings in the media – primarily the VOICE.
3. A suggestion box for unsolicited input from citizens
4. A community information web page with provisions for blogs, chats and direct email communication with representatives from the three lead agencies. Youth volunteers may be recruited, provided with opportunities for web authoring and web marketing training and commissioned to manage the web page. The web page may assist in the community efforts to promote the village and market the village to potential entrepreneurs and investors who may be invited to locate their businesses in Panama.

Strategies for Community Roles and Responsibilities

The successful implementation of the Fire Barn and Community Hall initiative requires the active participation of all the residents of the Village

of Panama as an imperative. The Strategies recommended in this section envision the full engagement of the Village residents to accomplish the following strategic objectives:

1. Coordinated guidance and Liaison with Shared Governance lead agencies
2. Fund raising
3. Planning
4. Marketing and Promotions
5. Staffing

The proposed methodology recommended to facilitate the full engagement of the village residents is to involve a core of volunteers representing all interest groups and age groups as members of:

1. an Advisory Board responsible for Coordinated guidance and liaison with Shared Governance lead agencies
2. Ad hoc Committees and/or Task forces responsible for:
 - a. Fund raising
 - b. Planning
 - c. Marketing and promotion
 - d. Staffing

Advisory Board

An Advisory Board made up of representatives of all community interest groups including youth and senior citizens is recommended as the

primary advisory body and the only Standing Committee associated with the Fire Barn and Community Hall initiative that will have the responsibilities for coordinated guidance and liaison with Shared Governance lead agencies. They will also function as the principal lobby group for the village residents. The Advisory Board may include volunteers nominated by the community, appointed individuals selected from the community by the three lead agencies and an ex-officio staff representative from the Village Office. The three lead agencies may:

1. choose the number of members that will make up the Advisory Board and determine their terms of office;
2. formulate and adopt a charter of responsibilities and authority for this Board and adopt rules and procedures for the conduct of Board meetings, reporting and book keeping.
3. appoint an interim chair for the Advisory Board whose sole responsibility will be to convene the first meeting and conduct an election of the Chartered Chair of the Advisory Board.

Ad hoc Committees, Task Forces and Staffing

Citizen involvement is also recommended by recruiting, appointing and authorizing them to serve on Ad Hoc Committees or Task Forces on an as-needed basis. It is recommended that all appointments are to be made by the three lead agencies responsible for Shared Governance

and granted specific responsibilities and authority to carry out the following activities:

1. Fund raising
2. Planning
3. Marketing and promotion

It is also recommended that an ex-officio non voting member from the Village Board staff be included as a member of all the Ad hoc committees and task forces. This staff member will serve as the primary liaison with the Lead Agencies responsible for Shared Governance.

Ad Hoc Fund raising Committees

It is recommended that the membership of this Ad Hoc Committee be made up of the aggregate membership of two subcommittees. One subcommittee will undertake fund raising responsibilities associated with the Capital Campaign. The other subcommittee will undertake fund raising responsibilities associated with Operating Costs and maintenance of the Fire Barn and Community Hall. The membership of the two subcommittees may involve the same persons but the charge for each subcommittee will be obviously quite different. It is recommended that appointments to this committee be made by selecting those residents who have practical and professional experience with grant writing, fund raising and other activities relevant to the solicitation of money for

community causes. It is recommended that this committee reports directly to the Panama Community Foundation.

Ad Hoc Planning Committee

It is recommended that the Ad Hoc planning committee be appointed with designated responsibilities for long and short term visioning about the future use of the Community Hall, planning and scheduling specific social, cultural, recreational, educational and community activities, functions and events at the Community Hall, planning, budgeting and oversight of operations, management and preventive maintenance of the Fire Barn and Community Hall complex. It is recommended that this committee reports directly to the Village Board with communications to the Planning Commission and the Firth Fire District.

Ad Hoc Marketing and Public Relations Committee

It is recommended that the membership of this Ad Hoc Committee be made up of the aggregate membership of three subcommittees, each of who will be responsible for one of the following activities:

1. Building Promotions
2. Communication with Media
3. Recruiting

It is recommended that this Committee report to the Panama Community Foundation.

Staffing

The last area of concern is staffing. It is recommended that Staffing is a responsibility of the Lead Agencies responsible for Shared Governance. It is recommended that a staff appointee serve as ex-officio non voting member of the Advisory Board and all the Committees and Subcommittees, whose primary functions will include scheduling Board/Committee/Subcommittee meetings, efficient record keeping of the proceedings of all meetings, administrative support for Fire Hall and Community Hall operations, maintenance and security, reporting to the Advisory Board and other office management responsibilities assigned by them.