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Final Report: Sullivan Opera House Revitalization Survey

FEBRUARY 2017

McGregor Historic
Preservation Commission
and
City of McGregor

with

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Technical Assistance to Brownfields

This is the report of a survey of the residents of McGregor, Iowa and the surrounding area. The survey was undertaken by the McGregor Historic Preservation Commission and the City of McGregor, with input from the Kansas State University Technical Assistance to Brownfields program (KSU TAB), a program of the EPA. The survey was designed to engage residents in imagining the future of the Old Hardware Store, also known as the Sullivan Opera House. The secondary purpose was to identify people who want to be involved in the renovation process and figure out the best way to communicate about the building with interested people.

The survey opened November 16, 2016. It closed January 19, 2017. The city advertised the survey in the newspaper, North Iowa Times. Notification of the survey was also included in the water bills of residents. Finally, the city hung posters advertising the survey throughout the community, in select locations in neighboring communities, and also in the window of the Opera House building itself.

The survey collected 88 responses. The majority of respondents accessed the survey online through the city's website but 7 accessed it using the QR code and 23 responded by returning paper copies of the questionnaire to the city office. The survey respondents were not intended to be a random sampling of the population but to be from people with an interest in the future of the building. About 51 percent of the respondents said they live in McGregor. An additional 3 percent live in Marquette, 5 percent live in the McGregor/Marquette area seasonally and 8 percent live elsewhere in Clayton County. The full breakdown can be found on page 9.

The survey asked 8 questions about the future use and management of the Old Hardware Store / Sullivan Opera House. The underlying assumption in these questions is that the building will be renovated. The questions are listed below (all but the first question are multiple choice):

1. What would you like to see happen to the Old Hardware Store / Sullivan Opera House in its next stage of life?
2. The renovated building could be put to many different uses. What are the 5 best uses of the building?
3. What amenities or features should the renovated building include?
4. How would you like to see the Old Hardware Store / Sullivan Opera House supported in the future?
5. Are you aware of any organizations that are in need of space?
 - 5a. What is the name of the organization?
 - 5b. What kind of space would be helpful?
6. Do you have a business or an idea for a business that could use this space?
 - 6a. What type of business?
 - 6b. What kind of space would be helpful?
- 6c. If you would like to be contacted about this, please provide your contact information.
7. If you would like to receive updates on the progress of the renovation or information about volunteer opportunities, please let us know how you would like to be contacted.
8. Where do you live?

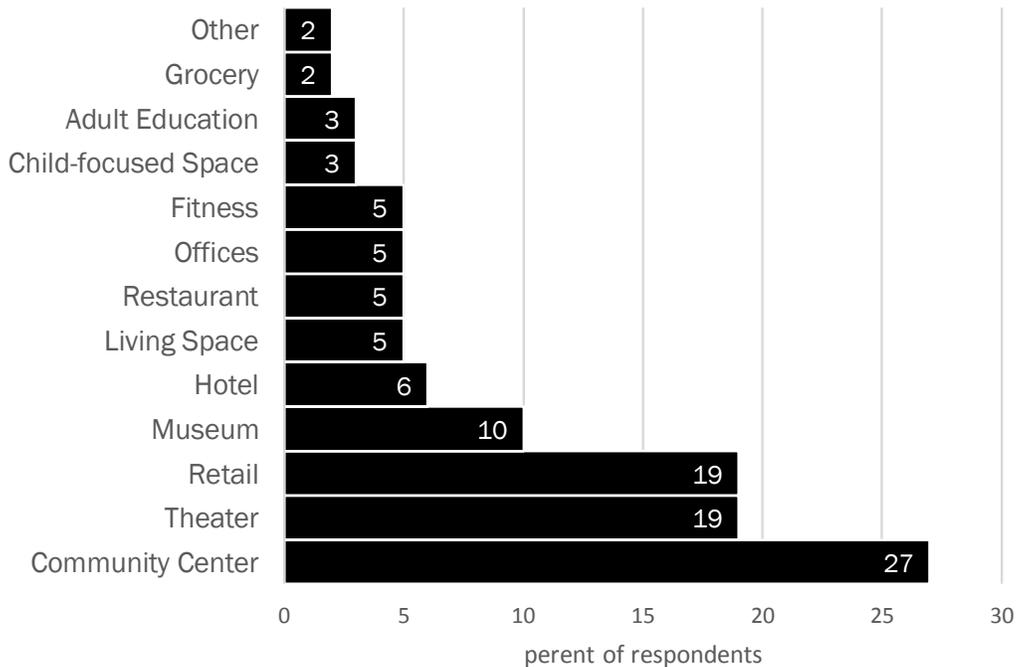
The responses to the questions are summarized on the following pages. Overall, the responses show a strong preference for the building to be renovated to accommodate community events. There are a variety of opinions about what type of events it should host but most responses point to larger events with over 50 people such as concerts and wedding banquets. Although there is not a clear preference on how the building is managed, the majority of respondents said that they wanted some kind of non-profit ownership, either in partnership with the city or alone.

Next steps. The city will be following up with the respondents who expressed an interest in a specific use for the building. The McGregor Historic Preservation Committee and the City of McGregor will investigate the structural and organizational feasibility of the preferences expressed in the survey. They will also look into potential partnerships with community groups such as the McGregor Historical Museum and determine the organizational structure that makes sense for the renovation and management of the building with a focus on obtaining outside funding.

1. What would you like to see happen to the Old Hardware Store / Sullivan Opera House in its next stage of life?

64 people responded to this open-ended question. Of those that responded, the overwhelming majority (83 percent) of them wanted to rehabilitate the building in some way. The graph below shows the variety of types of uses that respondents imagined for the building after renovation. A minority of 14 percent said they wanted to tear it down although they were vague about what should be built on that location and therefore the responses are not included in the graph below. The respondents indicated a variety of uses for the building, many mirroring the responses to the second question. The most popular response was a community space although respondents had different ideas about what types of activities would be included in a community-focused space. There were a few uses mentioned that had not been considered such as living space on the second floor and a fitness area.

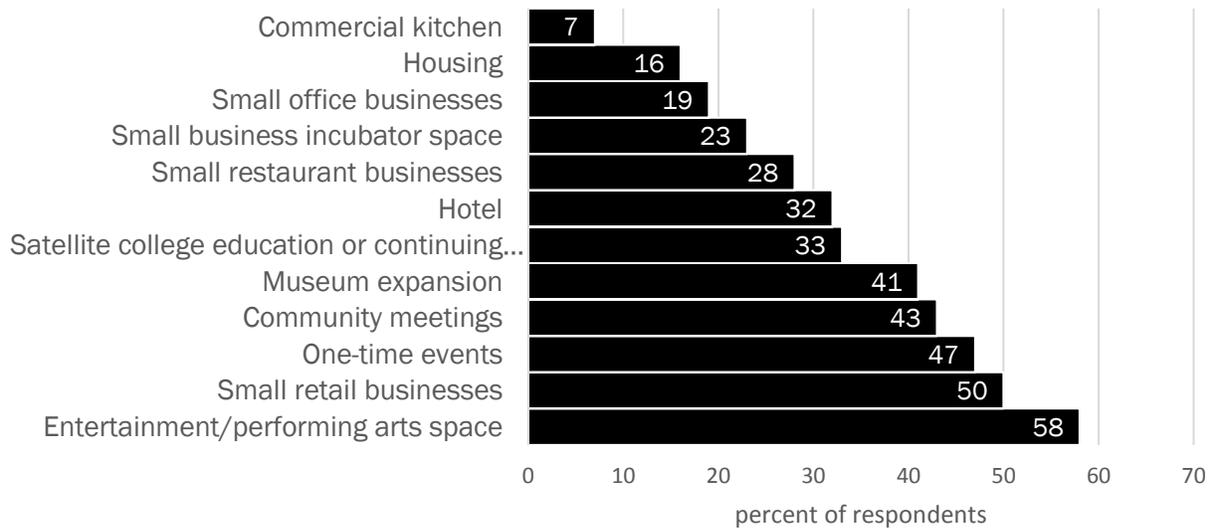
1. What would you like to see happen to the building in its next stage of life?



2. The renovated building could be put to many different uses. What are the 5 best uses of the building?

The selections in this section echo the comments in question 1. The top five (entertainment/performing arts space, small retail businesses, one-time events, community meetings, and museum expansion) were all mentioned frequently in the narrative comments. One difference is that adult education was selected much more frequently in this question than in the comments to question 1. It may be that there are other uses that have not been considered by the wider community but would be supported if they were suggested.

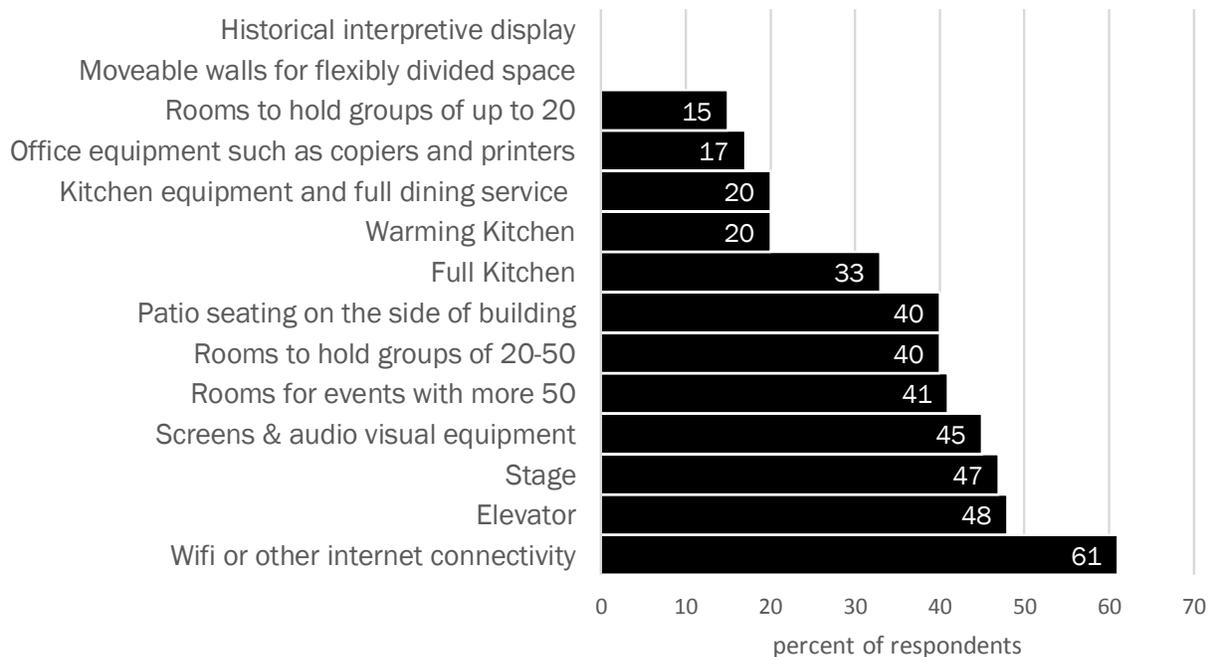
2. What are the 5 best uses of the building?



3. What amenities or features should the renovated building include?
(select all that would be useful)

The preferred amenities reflect the ideal uses of the building described in questions 1 and 2. A stage is preferred by about half of the respondents as would be expected from the large percent who responded to question 2 by selecting an entertainment venue would be one of the 5 best uses. Interestingly, the respondents selected large rooms more frequently than small rooms as a desired feature, perhaps indicating that a community center would be a place for larger events instead of committee or small group meetings. It could be that there are enough small meeting places in the community to meet the needs of residents. In contradiction to the response to question 2, indicating that an expansion of the museum would be a desired use, nobody selected a historical interpretive display as a desired feature of the renovated building. A few people selected the “other” option. Those responses included uses that would require the demolition of the building (such as a parking lot), personal space (such as lockers), and a request for designing the space with flexibility in mind.

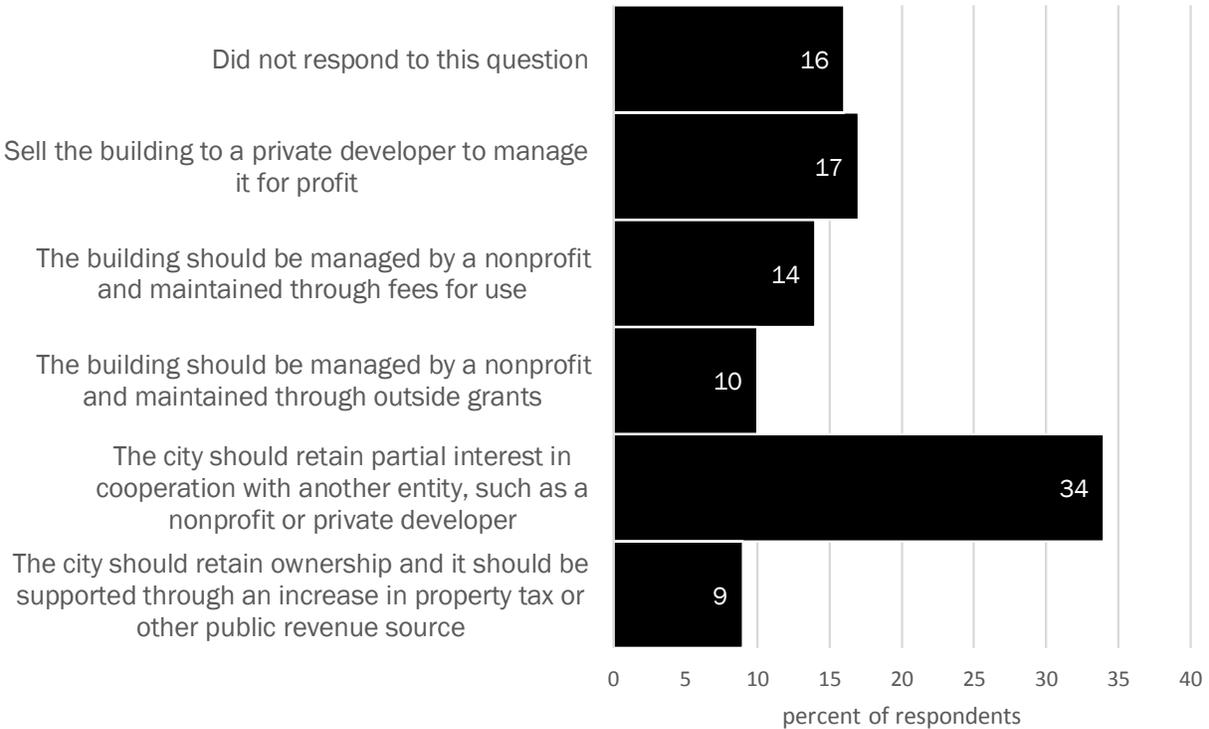
3. What amenities or features should the renovated building include?



4a. How would you like to see the Old Hardware Store / Sullivan Opera House supported in the future?

Very few respondents wanted to see the renovation and operation of the building supported through public revenue. Most people preferred the involvement of a non-profit and revenue coming from outside grants or fees for use. Some people also supported a for-profit business owning and operating the building. Most of the people who selected “other” indicated that they were not sure what the best way to support the building would be and that it would depend on the use it was put to.

4. How would you like to see the building supported in the future?



5. Are you aware of any organizations that are in need of space?
5a. What is the name of the organization?
5b. What kind of space would be helpful?

Nine respondents said that they were aware of organizations that are in need of space. The City of McGregor has retained a list of these names. The types of space that would be helpful to these organizations include:

- Space for events and performances
- Community meeting space
- Gallery space for exhibits, art or other interests
- Parking

6. Do you have a business or an idea for a business that could use this space?
6b. What type of business?
6c. What kind of space would be helpful?
6c. If you would like to be contacted, please provide your contact information?

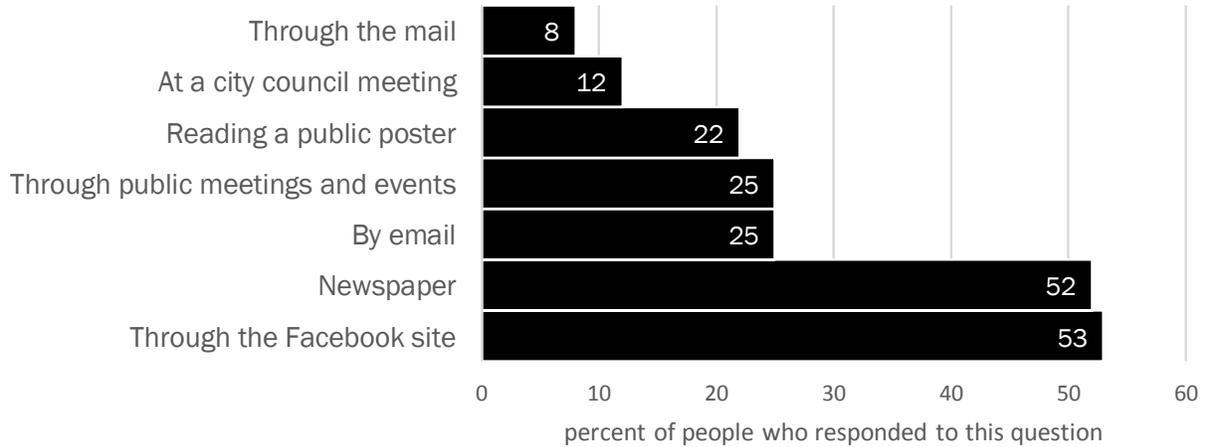
There were 14 respondents who said they have a business or an idea for a business that could use this space. Three people provided their contact information to the City of McGregor who will follow up with them. The other ideas were more general, not businesses that the respondents wanted to start themselves. They included:

- Co-working space
- Small restaurant
- Hotel
- Community center with a large entertaining area
- Cooperative retail space
- Education for teens or adults
- Museum expansion

7. If you would like to receive updates on the progress of the renovation or information about volunteer opportunities, please let us know how you would like to be contacted.

60 people said they would like to receive updates on the progress of the renovation or information about volunteer opportunities. Of those 60, over half said they would like to receive information through the Facebook site or the newspaper. The email and postal addresses of respondents that provided them have been retained by the City of McGregor to contact in the future.

7. How would you like to be contacted?



8. Where do you live?

Over half of the respondents said they live in McGregor. 83 people responded to this question (94 percent) so it is likely to reflect the respondents overall. Only 2 percent said they live in the area seasonally but several of the people who selected “other” could be categorized as seasonal residents as well.

8. Where do you live?

