

**Appendix C**

**News, Notices, Mailings**

- Chronological listing of newspaper articles, notices and mailings

# Committee set to explore uses for flatiron building

Staff report

AUGUSTA — Four city councilors were named to an eight-person committee to study the future use of the flatiron building, most recently used as part of Cony High School.

The 1929 building on Cony Circle is to remain city property after a portion of the high school property is sold to a developer who is to construct a Hanaford Brothers supermarket.

Mayor William Dowling, who earlier named Councilors Donna Doore and Sylvia Lund to the committee, named the remainder of the members last week after receiving a recommendation from members of the City Council.

Dowling named City Councilor Mark O'Brien to head the group. O'Brien is a former chairman of the Augusta School Board and a Cony graduate.

City Councilor Stanley Koski, another

Cony graduate, also was named to the committee.

Others outside official city ranks are Nancy Merrick, representing the Friends of the Flatiron Building group; former city Councilor Mary Mayo-Wescott, a founder of the Friends group, who will hold the citizen-at-large post; and Dave Hassen, a real estate agent who has served on the city Planning Board and Conservation Commission.

Paul Riese of Pearl Street was named to represent the interest of the neighborhood.

The study committee was proposed by City Councilor Donna Lerman and is charged with assessing the building's condition, recommending a budget for improvements and studying neighborhood compatibility and parking issues involved with reuse.

The committee is to report its results to the City Council.

Thursday, September 14, 2006

## Board turns Cony building over to city

By KEITH EDWARDS  
Staff Writer

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AUGUSTA -- The Augusta Board of Education voted Wednesday to turn the old Cony High School building over to the city, meaning, for the first time in 76 years, the brick and granite structure looming over Cony Circle is no longer a school building.

The vote was unanimous but not without controversy.

Board member Suzanne Allarie-Dowling said she was all for giving up the much-maligned newer portion of the former Cony, built in 1965. But she is worried about what the city may do with the historic flatiron section. City officials have said they will keep the flatiron building and seek to find a new use for it.

Allarie-Dowling said she has heard some already have plans for the building, and she doesn't like them.

"I have major concerns about giving the flatiron to the city," she said. "I hear they want to put an older folks home there. Personally, I feel if it's not good enough for our students, it's not good enough for our older people."

Judith Johnson-Marsano, an organizer of petitions aimed at blocking city plans to sell the newer section of the former Cony to a developer who plans to demolish it and build a Hannaford supermarket on the site, suggested the former Cony should remain a school building, perhaps for alternative education or as a middle school, due to what she described as overcrowding at Hodgkins Middle School.

Chairman William Burney responded that one of the major reasons a new Cony High School was built next to Capital Area Technical Center was to get the high school off the crowded Cony Circle site where, he said, students were exposed to outside influences such as drug use on surrounding streets and other unsafe situations.

"It's just not an appropriate site for education," Burney said Wednesday.

Superintendent Cornelia Brown estimated it would cost \$250,000 a year to maintain the old Cony High School if the school department kept it.

"And I didn't budget to maintain two high schools," she said.

Board members also unanimously approved new, higher rates for groups renting school facilities such as gymnasiums.

Resident Barbara Haskell suggested some of the fees, particularly for private, for-profit companies using the new Cony auditorium, should be higher, to help pay for proper maintenance of those facilities.

Board member William Stokes said some of the new rates are already eight to 10 times higher than the old rates and he was reluctant to charge more.

Keith Edwards -- 621-5647

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Days  
Gone  
By

Cay Gallant

## Cony flatiron visit stirs memories

The other day, I visited the old Cony High School auditorium with a group of people who have a common interest in the preservation of the cultural and finer aspects of life.

As we entered, my eyes looked to a place I did not know. I was embarrassed and tried to cover unexpected tears.

What happened to the beautiful balcony and the graceful written scroll of "C" on the sides of the auditorium that now had no seats?

I finally looked at the stage that was in need of care and attention. It was sturdy enough though for Cony graduate and international dancer and instructor Alphonse Poulin to spirit the visiting community leaders to a series of genteel dance steps.

That stage brought back so many memories of my young life. It had been the scene for community concerts that featured vocalists and orchestras performing classics and Broadway medleys. It was a dream that inspired Mabel Tarr, a lady from the New York stage who came to Augusta in the 1930s, to create the Augusta Players and direct its plays until 1961. Fine thespians emerged from that group, thanks to Tarr's dedication and love for theater.

From that very same stage would emerge Chizzle Wizzle shows, filled with talent. It was the deep burgundy stage curtains that proved such a comforting factor for young performers making their stage debuts. When they were pulled for the acts to close, one could make adjustments to costumes or hairpieces. Miss Critchell was our drama coach and we all became her stars in our senior play.

Still looking at the stage and reminiscing, I had to hurry to catch up with the hosts and Friends of the Flatiron building who were leaving the room to go to the old school library.

This room looked very welcoming with the sun shining brightly through its windows. An old grand piano sat majestically in the corner for someone to tickle the ivories, but no sound rang forth. This room, however, was in good shape. I could remember our librarian, Miss Whiting, whose books were always in order.

A framed portrait of Dr. Daniel Cony hangs on the wall in the stairway. He founded Cony Female Academy in 1815. Later it would be Cony Free High School. Reminders of skilled craftsmen still exist in the flatiron, built and completed in the 1930s.

After looking at some of the rooms and remembering some of the teachers and principals, we entered the first floor and walked to the front entrance. Times had changed outside, but in this very vestry we remembered a time of hurrying out these doors and walking home, with books and popular saddle shoes that gave comfort as we caught up with friends.

With interesting discussions by Paul Lessard, host of Friends of the Flatiron, and City Manager William Bridgeo, we could feel the need and purpose of turning this building into a beautiful performing arts center. This would save a historic building and, at the same time, give Augusta a spacious facility for art and rooms for historic preservation.

Former students of the flatiron would be proud of once being a part of its history and seeing it revived in the interests of a new generation.

*Cay Gallant is co-author of Days Gone By & Golden Notes can be reached at 385 Western Ave., Augusta or e-mail: galrick2@mainster.net*

## City sees bids for flatiron proposals

By KEITH EDWARDS

Staff Writer

KENNEBEC JOURNAL Morning Edition

[E-mail this page](#)

[E-mail a letter to the editor](#)

[Reader Comments \(below\)](#)

Wednesday, November 29, 2006

AUGUSTA -- Bids to help determine a new use for the old Cony flatiron building vary by more than \$50,000.

City officials on Tuesday opened bids from five teams of architects, designers and planners.

The lowest bid, submitted by WBRC Architects and Engineers of Bangor, was \$43,100. The highest, at \$94,625, was submitted by Lewis and Malm Architecture of Bucksport in a partnership with Eaton Peabody Consulting Group of Augusta.

The city is keeping the flatiron portion of the former Cony High School, which closed at the end of last school year, at least until it can be determine the best way to reuse the old building overlooking Cony Circle.

The city is seeking to hire someone to conduct the public process to help determine what that reuse might be.

Five groups submitted bids after the city determined they met minimum qualifications, including a requirement they show they are qualified to work on historic buildings.

The Cony Flatiron Committee is set to meet tonight at 6 and again Thursday night for interviews with the five teams of architects, planners and designers that submitted bids.

The other three bids were: Barba and Wheelock Architecture, Preservation, and Design of Portland, \$47,750; Holt and Lachman Architects and Planners of Portland, \$92,000; and TFH Architects of Portland, in association with Ann Beha Architects of Boston, \$72,100.

Tasks to be taken on by the team with the winning bid include facilitating public meetings to gather input; conducting "visioning" sessions; conducting a market feasibility study; reviewing the architecture of the building; and developing recommendations for how the building could be reused.

The flatiron committee, which includes members of the City Council and the public, will then review the work and make recommendations to the council.

The city is selling the other, newer section of the building to a developer who would replace it with a Hannaford supermarket, though a lawsuit has been filed to stop that development.

A new Cony High School opened for students this school year about a mile away.

Keith Edwards -- 621-5647

# KENNEBEC JOURNAL

12/2/06

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## OUR VIEWS

### SATURDAY SHORT TAKES

#### TIME TO MAKE A RUCKUS AT THE LITHGOW LIBRARY

Libraries are supposed to be quiet, peaceful places for reading and research. Yet the hushed confines of Augusta's Lithgow Library are likely to some day resonate with the noise of construction rather than the sound of people thinking, now that a Massachusetts firm that has helped design or renovate more than 40 public libraries in New England has been chosen by the library's building committee to help with the major renovation and expansion of the Augusta landmark. City councilors are slated to vote next week to formally hire the firm, which has pegged its services on the project at \$37,000.

The firm, if chosen, has a somewhat odd mandate. Plans for the renovation and expansion were drawn up years ago — but library officials were advised that money to carry it out would be more likely to be raised after the new Cony High School was built. So the plans have sat on the shelf until now. The firm of J. Stewart Roberts Associates of Somerville will update the designs; once the selection is made official, library committee members expect the plans to be presented to the public about four months later and fundraising to proceed apace.

The library obviously needs work to bring it up to date as a 21st century resource for the city. It's a beautiful building that deserves more care and attention than it's gotten over the years; and its users need more space. But while this part of the state is blessed with some architecturally delightful and distinguished libraries (we're thinking of the Hubbard Free Library in Hallowell and the Gardiner Public Library, as well) we're also aware that the soul of a library lives not in its bricks and mortar, but in its collection of books.

Many of us can remember long and fine afternoons spent in the company of a wonderful volume — Harriet the Spy, perhaps, or The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn — and recall even now vivid details of the book....but we can barely recall the details of the setting in which we read it. That's because a book, says Wordsworth, is all:

"Dreams, books, are each a world; and books, we know,

Are a substantial world, both pure and good:

Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,

Our pastime and our happiness will grow."

#### INCLUDING THE PAST IN THE FLATIRON'S FUTURE

The Cony Flatiron Committee is well into its work of interviewing teams of architects, designers and planners. That means the group is actively engaged in helping plot the future of the historic building on Augusta's east side.

That planning would be better if the committee included a member of the city's Historic Preservation Commission. While various members of the Flatiron committee are sensitive to the issues raised by the reuse of this historic structure, including a member from the commission would give greater depth to the committee's consideration of any preservation issues that arise. Mayor William Dowling has indicated he's willing to consider nominating a historic preservationist to the committee; we urge him to follow through on this.

City Councilor Mark O'Brien, who's chairman of the Flatiron committee, has already gone on record saying that the ability to work with a historic building will be critical in the group's choice of a successful bidder for the project. And two of the committee's members come from the citizens' group, Friends of the Flatiron. But when it comes to the future of this landmark building, there's no such thing as too much expertise, and we would applaud a move to expand the membership of the committee to include the welcome input of the city's designated historic preservation group.

JOHN CHRISTIE Publisher    DAVID B. OFFER Executive Editor

NAOMI SCHALIT Opinion Page Editor

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**OUR VIEW****Flatiron Building  
could become  
gem for Augusta**

International ballet master Alphonse Poulin isn't the only one who sees potential in the old Cony flatiron building.

Poulin, a faculty member at New York City's renowned Julliard School, took a few turns across the 76-year-old structure's stage last Friday while touring the building with a group dedicated to preserving it.

He had danced across the same stage at the age of 6, when nobody, not even himself, could have dreamt he would one day choreograph opera productions throughout the United States and Europe.

Poulin's memories of that building, like those of many other Augusta residents past and present are one reason to preserve the structure, but there are others.

Perched on the edge of Cony Circle, where thousands of motorists travel each day, the oddly shaped structure has endured generations of school children, growing more precious each year as its hallways and stages have been worn by the shuffling feet of new classes of students.

In every community, there are at most a few buildings that are so special they are instantly recognizable as emblematic of a city a town, a place.

The Cony Flatiron Building is one of those structures.

Friends of the Flatiron Building want to preserve the building and use it, among other things, as a performing art center.

That is a good idea, although there are probably other good ideas that should be heard before any decision is made.

City Manager William Bridgeo has said only that it will be preserved and that the city will find a suitable use for it.

In the meantime, the city is spending about \$250,000 to move a boiler from a newer section of the former Cony school into the Flatiron building

*The Flatiron building has endured generations*

*of school children, growing more precious each year as its hallways and stages have been worn by the shuffling feet of new classes of students.*

to provide heat and hot water — proof enough of the structure's future.

The flatiron will survive while the newer addition to the former Cony school will be torn down because the older building not only has deeper roots in the community, it is a better building.

Developers have made careers of bringing new life to old mills and schools that were built at a time when public structures were designed to last forever.

Plans for the old Hathaway building in Waterville and the Kennebec Arsenal in Augusta are examples of the value these structures hold not just for their place in our past but also in our future.

Whatever plan is adopted for the old Flatiron Building, it should fit well with the residential area surrounding it and with the structure's own past. A performance art use for at least part of the building is only one possibility among many that should be considered in a process open to public input.

It is important that the structure be preserved in a way that Augusta residents can be proud of and that is self-sustaining.

Augusta can't afford to saddle taxpayers with the cost of maintaining a building that can and should pay its own way.

# LOCAL and STATE

SECTION B

KENNEBEC JOURNAL

## Portland firm nears flatiron job

By KEITH EDWARDS  
Staff Writer

**A**UGUSTA — A Portland firm is the preferred candidate of a committee charged with helping determine a new use for the former Cony flatiron building.

The Cony Flatiron Committee chose Barba and Wheelock Architecture, Preservation and Design last week as its preferred choice to help conduct a

public process to determine the best way to reuse the former school building.

Details still have to be worked out between the city and the firm before the committee will formally recommend that the City Council accept Barba's \$47,750 bid, said City Councilor Mark O'Brien, who is overseeing the flatiron committee.

Barba's bid was the second lowest, to the \$43,100 bid from Bangor-based

WBRC Architects.

The committee interviewed each firm and debated which to hire over two nights last week.

"They were all very well qualified," O'Brien said of the five bidders. "Folks were impressed with (Barba's) enthusiasm for the project, and the credentials of the team. It wasn't completely a cost-driven consideration. We were looking at someone with the ability and credentials to do the job."

O'Brien anticipated the committee may vote to recommend Barba at its Dec. 12 meeting, if details of the contract and work to be included under it are worked out between the firm and the city by then.

Committee members individually ranked each of the five firms following interviews with each last week, with members eventually winnowing the

PLEASE SEE FLATIRON B5

### Flatiron

from B1

firms down to the committee's preferred choice of Barba.

Locally, Barba designed major renovations to Hallowell City Hall in 1997.

The city owns the flatiron portion of the former Cony High School, which closed at the end

of last school year, at least until it can determine the best way to reuse the old building overlooking Cony Circle. The city is selling the other, newer section of the building to a developer who would replace it with a Hannaford supermarket, though a lawsuit has been filed to stop that development.

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\* Central Maine Newspapers  
**D2** Friday, January 19, 2007

**Legal Advertisement**

**City of Augusta  
Cony Flatiron  
Reuse Committee  
Public Input Session**

The City of Augusta's Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee will be hosting a Public Input Session on Thursday, January 25, 2007 from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at the Augusta Civic Center to discuss the potential reuse of the historic Cony Flatiron Building. The Committee's consultant architect, Nancy Barba of Barba & Wheelock, will be joined by Frank O'Hara of Planning Decisions in facilitating the session. The Committee is interested in hearing the thoughts, ideas and concerns that people may have regarding the reuse of the Flatiron building. The public is strongly encouraged to attend this important session. For further information, please contact Michael A. Duguay of the City at 626-2336.

**Legal Advertisement**



**City of Augusta**  
**Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee**  
*Public Input Session*

The City of Augusta's Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee will be hosting a Public Input Session on Thursday, January 25, 2007 from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at the Augusta Civic Center to discuss the potential reuse of the historic Cony Flatiron Building. The Committee's consultant architect, Nancy Barba of Barba & Wheelock, will be joined by Frank O'Hara of Planning Decisions in facilitating the session. The Committee is interested in hearing the thoughts, ideas and concerns that people may have regarding the reuse of the Flatiron building. The public is strongly encouraged to attend this important session. For further information, please contact Michael A. Duguay of the City at 626-2336.

Central Maine Newspapers \*

Monday, January 22, 2007 **D1**

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**Legal Advertisement**

**City of Augusta  
Cory Flatiron  
Reuse Committee**

**Public Input Session**

The City of Augusta's Cory Flatiron Reuse Committee will be hosting a Public Input Session on Thursday, January 25, 2007 from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at the Augusta Civic Center to discuss the potential reuse of the historic Cory Flatiron Building. The Committee's consultant architect, Nancy Barba of Barba & Wheelock, will be joined by Frank O'Hara of Planning Decisions in facilitating the session. The Committee is interested in hearing the thoughts, ideas and concerns that people may have regarding the reuse of the Flatiron building. The public is strongly encouraged to attend this important session. For further information, please contact Michael A. Duguay of the City at 626-2336.

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11/26/07  
pg 8

CONY FLATIRON BUILDING

# Augusta asks residents how to use school

By KEITH EDWARDS  
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA — Care to have a microbrew in a former classroom in the Cony flatiron building, take in a show in the auditorium, pick up your daughter at a teen center, and, on the way out of the building, check out some artwork in what was once the school library?

At least one other person had those ideas, too, at a Thursday forum held to gather input on potential new uses for the Cony flatiron building.

The ideas offered to the Cony Flatiron Building Committee didn't stop there, either. The roughly 30 people in attendance, who were asked to brainstorm in smaller groups, weren't lacking for ideas.

One group had a casino on its list of possibilities.

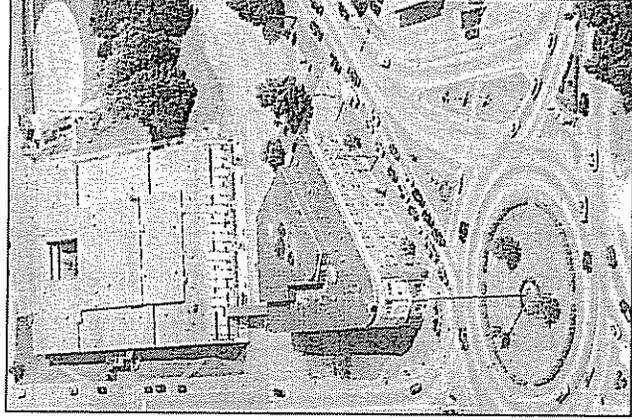
A junior high school came up, due to recent talk about the possibility of closing the city's current middle school, Hodgkins.

So did a day-care center.

A computer cafe. A coffeehouse. A business incubator and training center. High-end condominiums. A performing arts center. Elderly housing. Bookstore. Movie theater. Museum. Municipal offices. Historic preservation archives. And a tourism center.

"I'd use those rooms for office space for social-service organizations, charities and historic preservation organizations," offered Dick Freeman, one of several participants who attended classes in the historic building, built in 1926. "The other thing I'd do is an art gallery or museum."

The meeting was the first of several to be held to help determine how the



File photo

**CONY AERIAL:** This 2002 file photo shows Cony Circle, bottom, the old Cony High School flatiron building, middle, the school's main building, top, and Cony Park softball diamond in Augusta. A new supermarket is proposed for the site after the main building is demolished. The flatiron building will not be torn down.

city-owned former school should be reused. The committee is charged with making a recommendation for a new use for the building to the Augusta City Council.

Thursday night participants were also instructed by consultant Frank

PLEASE SEE FLATIRON A8

## Flatiron from AI

O'Hara of Planning Decisions in Hallowell to list their biggest fears about Cony redevelopment. Those included a county jail, a brothel, demolition by neglect, "financial failure," fast food, housing or that the building be torn down.

The city owns the former school site and plans, at least for now, to retain the flatiron por-

tion. The city plans to sell the newer portion of the former Cony to a developer to be torn down to make way for a Hanford supermarket. However, that redevelopment is on hold pending litigation.

Several participants worried about the building's practical issues, such as the likely lack of dedicated parking.

Michael Duguay, director of development for the city, encouraged people at this point in the process, to look beyond parking issues and "dream a little dream" about what the build-

ing could become.

Mary Mayo-Wescott said she, like others in the room, had many wonderful memories of the former school. She said any plans for reuse should preserve recognition for the building's namesake, Daniel Cony, who donated the land for a school for girls in 1815. "He had this unique idea women ought to be educated in 1815," Mayo-Wescott said. "For that, he'll always have a place in my heart."

Keith Edwards — 621-5647  
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*Michael Duguay, director of development for the city, encouraged people at this point in the process, to look beyond parking issues and "dream a little dream" about what the building could become.*

# Friends of Flatiron Building host celebration

AUGUSTA — The Friends of the Flatiron Building will hold a celebration of their strong advocacy for the Cony Flatiron Building from 6:30 to 9 p.m., Thursday, May 24, in the Lecture Hall at Augusta City Center. Mary Mayo-Wescott, president of the nonprofit organization, announced the event in honor of their two years of advocacy.

The agenda will include a brief business meeting and an open public discussion about the historic preservation and culture in Augusta

with John Richardson, commissioner of the Department of Community and Economic Development. Richardson will talk about the importance of Maine's creative economy and how this relates to the promotion of history and culture in our state.

Frank O'Hara, who is a part of the city's flatiron reuse consulting team, will share his insights on potential reuse of the building and offer an overview of culture and history in the Capitol city.

Senate Majority Leader Elizabeth Mitchell will round off the evening with her thoughts on the redevelopment of the Arsenal, its relationship to Old Fort Western, the flatiron and other historic buildings in the Capital Riverfront Historic District.

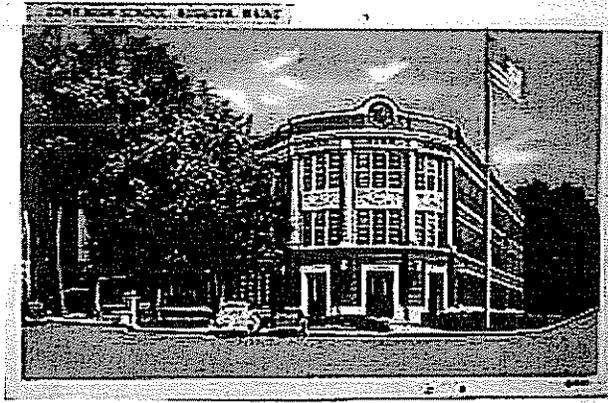
The Friends of the Flatiron Building was founded May 14, 2005 to save, preserve and to find the best use for the historic structure, which was built from 1926 to 1930 on the Old Cony High School

site. In 1930, Alumni Hall was completed and dedicated due to the generous contributions on the Cony Alumni Association.

Alumni Hall is the original home of "Chizzle-Wizzle" and other cultural performances. It is the desire of the FOFB to have the hall restored and used as a major performing arts center. Other parts of the three-floor structure could be used for multi-purpose needs, which would help pay for redevelopment and maintenance.

*Capital Weekly 5/17/09 pg 65*

# *The Cony Flatiron Building*



*Past..... Present..... Future....*

***Come Share Your HOPES And DREAMS***

*Second Public Input Meeting: March 1, 2007(tentative)*

~~City of Albany, New York~~

AUGUSTA

# Flatiron's future discussed tonight

Staff report

**A**UGUSTA — Anyone with views on how the old Cony flatiron building should be used has an audience tonight with the committee charged with recommending a fate for the building.

The Cony Flatiron Building Committee is working to determine how best to reuse the city-owned flatiron portion of the former Cony High School.

The city plans to seek a reuse for the flatiron building, built in 1926, and plans to sell the newer portion of the building to a developer to be torn down to make way for a supermarket.

The redevelopment of the newer portion is currently on hold due to a lawsuit filed by citizens seeking to halt the development of the site.

Tonight, from 6:30 to 8:30 in the Capital/Pine Room in the

north wing of the Augusta Civic Center, the committee is seeking input from the public about how to reuse the flatiron building.

"It is really important that we hear directly from the community as to what their ideas and concerns are for the potential reuse of the Cony flatiron building," City Councilor Mark O'Brien, chairman of the committee, said in a news release.

Cony students now attend a new Cony High School about a mile away. The flatiron remains vacant.

The committee is expected to make recommendations about potential new uses for the former school to the Augusta City Council.

In December 2006, the committee selected Barba & Wheelock architects of Portland and Planning Decisions of Hallowell to facilitate the process and create the reuse plan.

## Flatiron panel to meet tonight on next steps

**AUGUSTA** — The Cony Flatiron Building Advisory Committee meets tonight to discuss citizens' ideas for reuse of the historic former high school.

The committee is to meet from 6:30 to 8:30 at the new Cony High School, Pierce Drive, next to Capital Area Technical Center.

At the committee's first public input session in January, about 30 people participated in brainstorming sessions and listed numerous potential uses for the building.

Tonight's session, according to City Councilor Mark O'Brien, chairman of the committee, will be facilitated by consultants Barba and Wheelock and Planning Decisions.

It is expected to focus on ideas generated so far, and guiding principles for evaluating reuse ideas and their feasibility.

"The committee was appointed by the City Council with the express purpose of ensuring that the flatiron building would be preserved," O'Brien said in a news release.

"This exercise will allow the committee to begin to assess the market feasibility of the best reuse ideas.

Once this occurs, the committee and the public can begin to work with the consultant architect to design the interior layout of the building."

3-1-07  
Compiled from staff reports

# Guiding principles

## Panel develops rules for Cony flatiron use

By GARY REMAL  
Staff Writer

**A**UGUSTA — Consultants hired by the city to help plan the future of the Cony flatiron building have come up with a set of seven "guiding principles" for the reuse of the 77-year-old historic structure.

Frank O'Hara, vice president of Planning Decisions, told a public meeting Thursday these were the themes identified from comments at a Jan. 25 public meeting:

- Make the building financially self-sustaining.
- Honor the building's heritage, historic character and the Cony name.
- Improve the quality of life in the immediate neighborhood.

■ Become a catalyst for economic development in Augusta.

■ Promote the cultural life of the city.

■ Avoid worsening the traffic problems in the area, including on the busy Cony Circle.

■ Make a positive statement about the city.

The criteria developed at this stage, O'Hara said, will be used to gauge the plans and designs developed later on.

"In June, when we come back with designs and ideas, we want to know how it fits in with your ideas," O'Hara said.

Over the next several months, his firm will do market research to try to determine what uses for the building are desired by potential tenants and what they could pay toward its upkeep.

At the same time, architect Nancy

PLEASE SEE FLATIRON B5

## Flatiron

from B1

Barba said she will look closely at the building itself to determine how it might be redesigned and what features of the historic structure must be kept or restored.

Barba showed a series of buildings from the same era from around the country and in Maine that have been renovated for other uses, many of them involving cultural or performing arts venues.

At one point, Barba suggested that an addition to the rear of the flatiron building might both improve circulation on all floors between the V-shaped wings and provide a rear entrance toward the planned parking area. Even more extensive additions might be considered for some uses, she said.

Paul Lessard, from a group known as Friends of the Flatiron, showed the impact cultural centers have had in other com-

*Paul Lessard of Augusta said the 1,000-seat theater in the building could become the focal point of a cultural revival in the city.*

munities, bringing both visitors, nightlife and economic vitality to their downtowns.

"There's a lot of opportunities. There's a lot happening. They just aren't happening here," Lessard said.

He said the 1,000-seat theater in the building could become the focal point of a cultural revival in the city.

"I think we have an opportunity here because it's the state capital," Lessard said. "What if all these (performing) groups from around the state came here once a year for a command performance? We wouldn't even have to leave town anymore."

Former City Councilor Judith Johnson-Marsano pointed out that a joint city-state organization — the Capital Riverfront Improvement District, which

has been planning for the area and the Cony building for several years — has already determined that the flatiron building should be used as a cultural and community center.

"The (City) Council has adopted it and said we will use the (CRID) master plan," she said.

Johnson-Marsano said city officials shouldn't turn around now and head in a new direction when the community has already agreed on the building's use.

She also urged the committee to do whatever it can to provide green space around the build-

ing.

Patricia Marvin, a descendant of Daniel Cony who first gave land and money to establish a school at the site, urged planners not to forget those who might not otherwise take advantage of mainstream cultural arts and institutions.

She said Cony would have wanted to reach out to special education students, for instance, who might not ordinarily find themselves in a theater as a performer or an audience member.

"I think Daniel Cony had a wide perspective of the people who should be served by the school," Marvin said.

O'Hara said his group of consultants would report back to the Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee and at a public meeting in May.

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# Redevelopers see bright future for Cony flatiron

Kf 5/25/07

Pg A1 + A6 By BETTY ADAMS  
Staff Writer

Augusta — The state's commissioner of economic development and the man who's redeveloping the Kennebec Arsenal gave their stamp of approval Thursday to a group seeking to preserve the flatiron building that was once part of Cony High School.

Department of Community and Economic Development Commissioner John Richardson and Tom Niemann, a developer from North Carolina, spoke Thursday night at a meeting in City Center marking the second anniversary of the Friends of the Flatiron Building group.

"I applaud you for having the vision to hold onto something that is so very,

very important," Richardson told the Friends.

He said the flatiron building could be a symbol that attracts people to Augusta and to the downtown. "People come here because of buildings with a heritage like that," Richardson said.

Richardson said he believes Augusta is ripe for economic development and recommended looking at the success-

ful redevelopment of Bangor's downtown.

"You have a great downtown center that is underutilized," he said. "What you do with the flatiron building will help create an anchor to the circle."

Niemann, who is planning a \$9.6 million redevelopment at the arsenal on the east bank of the Kennebec, has volunteered his expertise as a historic

preservationist to work with groups on the flatiron building.

"It's wonderful what you're doing," he said. "You can't give up."

He told the group: "Use historic preservation as an economic development tool."

The meeting, which attracted about

PLEASE SEE FLATIRON A6

## Flatiron

from A1

two dozen people, also featured a presentation by Frank O'Hara of Planning Decisions, who is working with the Cony Flatiron Building Committee charged with recommending to City Council a new use for the historic building that fronts Cony Circle.

Built between 1926 and 1930, the city-owned three-story building houses classrooms, expansive stairwells and a large auditorium renamed Alumni

Hall. The building has been vacant since Cony students moved to a new school last year.

O'Hara said some funding for renovations could come through the Legislature if it approves state tax credits for preservation of historic buildings.

But he said some private developers have told him renovation costs would equal new construction and could run \$200 a square foot — or \$10 million for the building 50,000 square feet.

O'Hara cautioned that the architect charged with evaluating the building is working on a final cost estimate.

He said 13 arts organizations said they could foresee using the auditorium for up to 40 or 50 performances a year. Others have expressed interest in classroom, studio and gallery space.

"Obviously, arts groups can't pay a lot," O'Hara said. "The demand is high, the ability to pay is limited."

And he said using the building for arts exhibits and performances would require staff.

"This needs a regional push and regional fundraising," he said.

He said the committee will hold a public workshop in June to present "as many facts as possible."

# Flatiron future an evolving idea



Staff file photo by Joe Phelan

This August 2002 file photo shows people looking around the old auditorium during an open house at the Cony High School flatiron building in Augusta.

## As data become available, officials look for best balance of arts, commercial uses

By GARY REMAL  
Staff Writer

**AUGUSTA** — Actors, artists and musicians are enthusiastic about the possibility of turning the historic Cony flatiron building into a hub of art and performance.

And a city consultant says that type of activity would benefit the downtown business district by bringing people and enthusiasm to the area.

But, at least for now, artists and performers alone couldn't support hefty anticipated renovation costs for the 56,000-square-foot build-

ing, said Frank O'Hara of Planning Decisions, a consultant hired by a city committee looking at the future of the building.

In fact, rough calculations by Josh Parker, a representative of North Carolina developer Niemann Capital, which specializes in restoration of historic buildings, indicate none of the potential uses could support the more than \$9 million he estimates will be required to renovate the former school building, even if it were turned over for totally commercial purposes.

PLEASE SEE FLATIRON A6

## Flatiron

from A1

Parker, whose company will be restoring the Kennebec Arsenal complex, volunteered to help with the financial planning for the flatiron building project.

### A HEFTY COST

If most of the flatiron building were used for arts and cultural purposes, with some commercial space on the ground level, Parker forecasts the city would have to subsidize the project with about \$6.3 million, with rent paying for a \$2.7 million mortgage.

If the building were turned over to all commercial use, the rents could support a conventional loan of about \$5.7 million, but the city still would have to contribute \$3.3 million.

Parker estimated rents could support a \$4.5 million loan, with a similar sized city contribution with a mixture of arts, educational and commercial uses.

The city contribution could be made up of direct appropriations, private grants, public contributions, a bond issue or some combination of them, said Mark O'Brien, a city councilor and chairman of the committee studying the future of the beloved former school building on the city's east side.

O'Brien said some residents have expressed a strong desire for the building to have a cultural component. He said members of his panel are trying to examine the consultant's alternatives without stating a preference.

"I'm not encouraged or discouraged," O'Brien said of the study's findings. "It just appears whatever happens with the building will be an expensive proposition, whoever runs it. It's just going to involve a lot of money."

And, members of his committee want to know, would it be better financially for the city to continue to own the building or for the city to sell or lease it to a private developer with guarantees to preserve the historic exterior.

### A MUCH-LOVED BUILDING

Augusta Mayor Roger Katz said he and the City Council will withhold judgment until they hear from O'Brien's committee.

He said the citizens of Augusta have a strong emotional attachment to the Cony building.

"There is more public affection for that building than any other in the city," said Katz, who graduated from Cony High School in 1967 while the flatiron was still in active use. "It is a significant building and we want to keep it intact. We have some tough choices in deciding where, within our priorities, it will fit in."

During his first two years at Cony, Katz said students were scheduled in double sessions while the latest addition was built adjacent to the flatiron building. During that time, all classes were held in the 1930s-era flatiron-shaped school.

Classes during his final two years were held largely in the new addition, though some classes still were in the flatiron building until students transferred to the new high school last fall.

City officials have to be realistic about how much taxpayer money they are willing to pay for future use of the building.

"It's safe to say the council has an open mind," Katz said. "We'd like to have at least a cultural component of use in the building, but we also have to be mindful of the financial impact."

We can't have that discussion in a vacuum without knowing the potential impact on taxes."

"I just don't see a scenario where we sell off a significant institution like that," Katz said.

### MEDICAL OFFICES, CONDOS

Before Parker's cost estimates were available, O'Hara's firm looked at the range of potential tenants, including some that might better be able to pay their way than the arts and cultural organizations surveyed.

Retail stores are unlikely to be successful, given the competition from anticipated new stores and the difficult experience of store rentals in adjoining parts of downtown Augusta, Planning Decisions' 25-page report said.

But office space, particularly medical office space aimed at serving doctors and other professionals associated with the nearby MaineGeneral Medical Center, is a potential source of high-end revenue.

Housing of some type also might provide the levels of income necessary to pay for renovations, O'Hara said.

Officials of the Augusta Civic Center have asked that the flatiron building not be used to host conferences because it would compete with the larger complex and possibly prevent it from continuing to pay its own way.

The report also talks about possible use of the building for lower-priced condominiums, low-income subsidized rental housing or housing for students from the University of Maine at Augusta, which has expressed an interest in a downtown location for art displays and classes.

"The educational sector is like the arts," the report said. "It contributes life and vitality to downtown; it provides foot traffic to stores during the day and customers for restaurants at night. But it is not a sector that can bear the market costs of improving or maintaining the building and would need either subsidies or complementary uses that paid higher rents."

The report points to specialized condominiums, aimed at artists, that include studio work space as another intriguing possibility.

## NO THEATER FOR ARTS?

"Because of the high fixed costs of design and legal fees and possibly grant applications; there needs to be at least 20-25 units of apartment or condominium housing to reach financial feasibility," the study said. "This would probably require that the entire building be turned over to housing use with no theater for the arts."

Performing arts groups in particular say they have a great need for both performance and rehearsal space. But they can't promise very high income from those uses, especially in the opening years.

"Based on their past experience, a total of 40 or so performances could arise from this core group," the report said. "However, the revenues from the 40 shows would only be a little over \$20,000" per year.

"This would be a start," the Planning Decisions study said. "David Greenham of (the Theater at) Monmouth pointed out the importance of 'growing the audience,' and as Augusta has not had experience with this kind of facility, it would need to have patience for the audiences to develop. Over time, respondents expected the numbers of performances to increase every year."

Performing arts groups, however, presented their requirements for the auditorium, which might make renovation even more expensive, O'Hara's report said.

The planning committee hopes some grants or contributions will help with the renovation expenses, bringing the cost more within the capacity of some of the arts organizations.

Some of those organizations also have said they would be willing to help with fundraising.

"I don't know enough about all the tax credits and all the other stuff that would go into something like that so I don't have an opinion yet," O'Hara said of the financial feasibility of renovating the building.

Mixing the uses might provide the best opportunity to renovate the building, provide some space for artists and still have expenses at least break even, O'Hara said.

While some of the preliminary figures suggest that commercial uses might not be able to make up the whole difference between what arts organizations can pay and the carrying costs of the renovated building, O'Hara still hopes they might be close enough where historic restoration tax credits, grants and other funding sources could make a mixed use of the Cony flatiron building possible.

O'Brien said the Planning Decisions study "does point in some directions. I think it gives us some guidance at this point."

## 3 POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

The committee asked the consultants to work on three variations of plans for the historic building, he said.

The most optimistic looks at the possibility of using the entire building as a center for the arts and education, focused around a renovated auditorium, O'Brien said, with a small amount of commercial space for added income.

On the other extreme, he said, the consultants were asked to look at what might happen if the city turned the building over to a commercial developer who would be required to preserve the building's exterior, but could do whatever makes money inside.

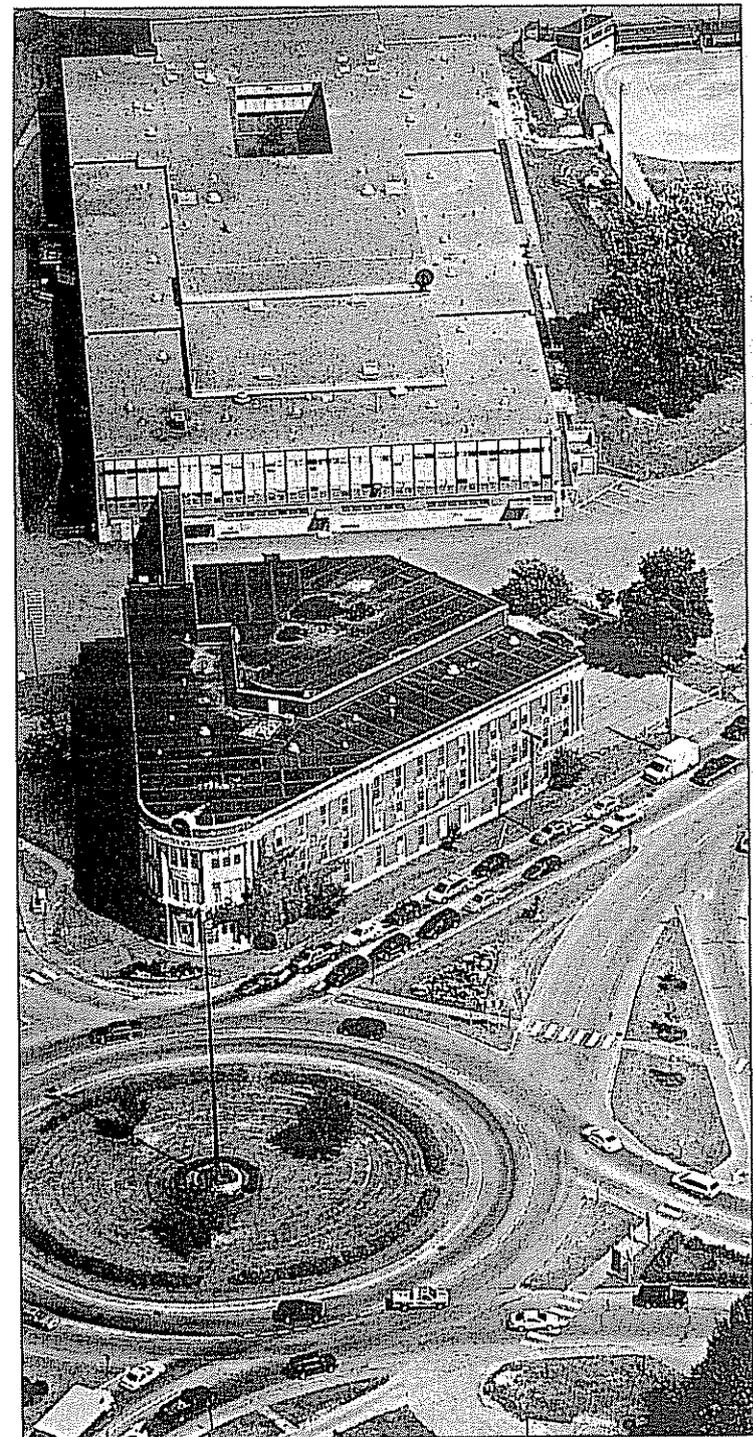
"The middle scenario would set aside the third floor and the auditorium for arts use, but the rest of the building would be used for whatever the developer wanted," O'Brien said.

At least one person who responded to an online survey conducted by Planning Decisions cautioned that the area may become oversaturated with performing venues with Johnson Hall in Gardiner ready to open a 400-seat theater, the nearby Colonial Theater being considered for renovation and several new school auditoriums.

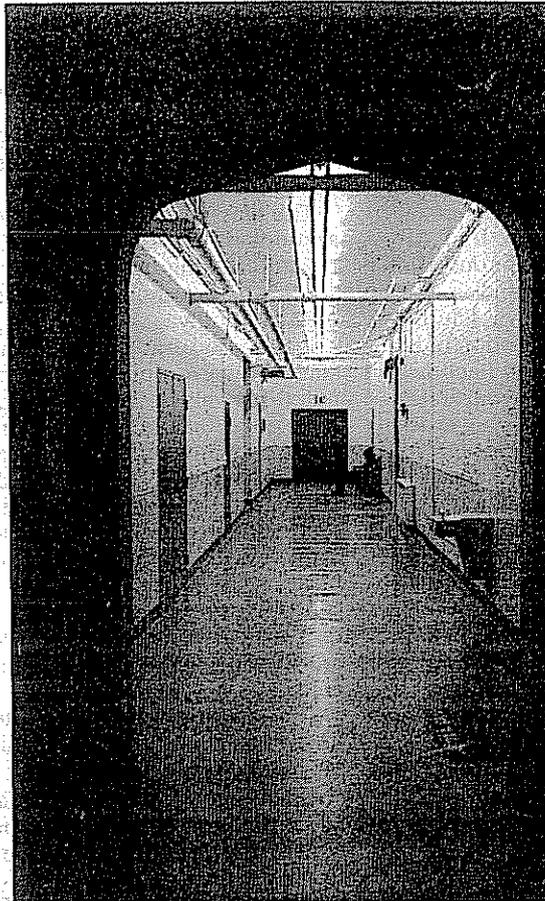
While having the flatiron building and the Colonial Theater competing may not work, O'Hara said more theaters throughout the region may help build a base of supporters that will help support them all.

"It's getting people in the habit," he said. "In that sense, the more the better."

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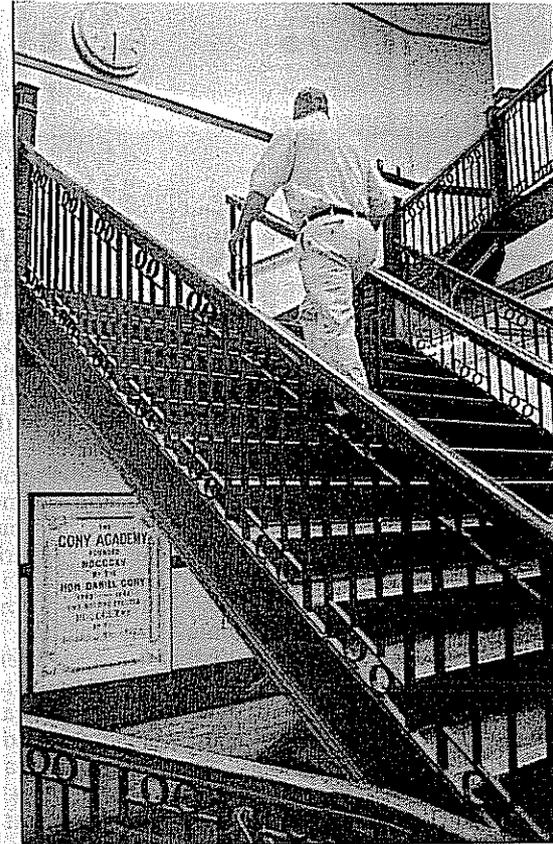


Staff file photo by Joe Phelan



Staff file photo by Jim Evans

This 2002 file photo shows a hallway in the old Cony High School flatiron building.



Staff file photo by Joe Phelan

**UP THE STAIRS:** Security officer Bob Vachon walks up the center steps of the old Cony High School flatiron building in this 1999 file photo. Vachon went to high school in the building.

**CONY AERIAL:** This 2002 file photo shows Cony Circle, bottom, the flatiron building, middle, the former Cony High School's main building and softball diamond in Augusta, top.

# Flatiron options include subsidy

By GARY REMAL  
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA — The expense of renovating the historic Cony flatiron building will require continuing city financial support, says a developer with experience in converting old buildings for commercial use.

That support, however, may not be much more than what the city has been spending to maintain the former high school building in its current condition, Josh Parker of Niemann Capital told members of the city's Flatiron Building Committee last week.

The committee was assigned by the City Council to come up with recommendations for the future of the 1930s-era building that Mayor Roger Katz says holds more public affection than any other structure in the city.

The committee reviewed a consultant report last week that looked at a range of possible uses for the triangular-shaped "flatiron" building and Parker outlined a rough range of costs and revenues based on various uses.

City Manager William Bridgeo said the city is expected to spend \$75,000-\$100,000 per year just to maintain the flatiron building while city officials decide what they want to do with it.

Parker, whose company has renovated historic structures in North Carolina and is preparing to rehabilitate the Kennebec Arsenal later this year, had estimated earlier that the city would have to subsidize the restoration of the Cony flatiron building by \$3.3 million to \$6.3 million to make the finances work, depending upon how much of the building is devoted to higher-paying commercial uses.

If the city invests a little more money annually than it already ex-

PLEASE SEE FLATIRON A10

## Flatiron

from A1

pects to pay to keep the building in its current condition, Parker believes rents might be able to make up the difference in financing renovations.

Committee members questioned whether the finances would work better with the city owning the building or turning it over to a private developer. Parker said restoration could work either way, with the right financing and an ongoing financial commitment from the city.

For the project to have any chance to qualify for a federal historic tax credit, however, the building would have to be sold or given to a private developer, he said.

Federal tax laws also would limit the city's use of the building to 30 percent or less if the historic tax credit is employed, he said. That would essentially restrict public use to the third-floor auditorium and supporting space.

But Bridgeo cautioned that the money being spent for the past year came out of the city's budget surplus. The city's \$50.2

*"It's one thing to wish for a particular use of the building, but we have to be grounded in the reality of what services can go in to pay for it."*

**COUNCILOR MARK O'BRIEN**  
chairman of Flatiron Building Committee

million budget does not include a budget item for flatiron building maintenance so any appropriation would mean an increase in taxes.

"One hundred thousand dollars would be about a half-percent on the tax rate, which has to be considered," Bridgeo told the committee.

Flatiron Building Committee Chairman Mark O'Brien, also a city councilor, asked if \$100,000 per year would be enough to make up the difference if all but the auditorium area of the building were rented for commercial uses.

Parker said his original projections may have been a bit high and he promised to refine his figures both for the cost of renovations and anticipated revenues.

The building's prime location on Cony Circle on the city's east side might command higher

than average rental rates, though a building with an active theater on the top floor might present some management challenges in securing tenants, he said.

"You would still be short," Parker told the committee. "But I think it's more attainable than the prior fundraising goal."

Former City Councilor Judith Johnson-Marsano said plans prepared by the joint city-state Capital Riverfront Improvement District called for the building to be used as a cultural, arts and community center, which she said includes educational uses.

O'Brien, however, said city officials must be practical in selecting uses to keep costs to taxpayers reasonable.

"It's one thing to wish for a particular use of the building, but we have to be grounded in the reality of what services can go in to pay for it," he said.

Architect Nancy Barba said the building has some severe space limitations. Service areas for the theater restrict some uses for the stage and a commercial developer likely would want to make major interior changes to the other floors to maximize useable space.

The committee also considered rental housing or condominiums, but Parker said that use might be incompatible with the noise and activity surrounding the auditorium.

O'Brien said more specific financial information needs to be developed to determine the costs and the levels of public support that would be necessary to pay for the flatiron building's reconstruction.

City officials then must determine how much the public is willing to pay to support the former school.

"I think that's going to be the question," O'Brien said. "The interest expressed so far has been strongly felt and sincere (without knowing the cost). I don't know whether that kind of financing would change that or be affected by the dollars and cents."

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## Group sets forum on flatiron building

AUGUSTA — The Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee is inviting the public to a presentation on potential reuse opportunities for the historic building on Cony Circle, 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. Oct. 13 at the flatiron building.

For more information, call Gerard Roy at 626-2336 or e-mail [gerard.roy@augustamaine.gov](mailto:gerard.roy@augustamaine.gov).

KJ  
10/4/07

## Tour Cony flatiron building on Saturday

AUGUSTA — The municipal Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee has scheduled a tour Saturday of the historic structure and discussion of the findings of a consultant on potential uses for the former school building.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 8:30 a.m. at the Cony flatiron building on Cony Circle, city officials said. The program is to begin with a walk of the building and refreshments.

At 9 a.m., a presentation will be made by experts hired by the city to come up with information and plans for the building. At approximately 9:30 a.m., the committee will look to members of the public attending for their thoughts and reactions, organizers said.

For more information contact Gerard Roy at 626-2336 or by e-mail at [Gerard.Roy@Augusta-Maine.gov](mailto:Gerard.Roy@Augusta-Maine.gov)

Visitors should park at the rear of the flatiron building, enter the door on the left and go to the lower level, Roy said.

*Compiled from staff reports*

*Kennebec Journal*

*Wednesday, October 10, 2007*

**B3**

Presentation  
on the  
**Reuse of  
the  
Flatiron  
Building**



**Date:** Saturday, October 13, 2007

**Time:** 8:30 AM - 10:30 AM

**Place:** Cony Flatiron Building -  
1 Cony Circle, Augusta  
Park at rear of Flatiron Building and enter  
door on left and proceed to lower level.

**The Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee  
invites the public to a presentation  
on potential reuse opportunities for  
the historic Cony Flatiron building.  
Please plan on attending and  
providing your valuable feedback.**

- 8:30** Social and Walk of the Building-  
Refreshments will be served
- 9:00** Presentation by Consultant
- 9:30** Feedback

Contact: Gerard Roy 626-2336 Gerard.Roy@AugustaMaine.gov

# Historic Cony Flatiron Building searches for new lease on life

Capital  
Weekly  
10/11/07

AUGUSTA — The Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee has scheduled a public meeting from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 13 at the historic Cony Flatiron Building on 1 Cony Circle.

Attendees will be able to tour the building prior to the presentation and refreshments will be served. Time has been set aside for community comments and feedback after the presentation. Please enter from the rear parking lot side of the Flatiron Building.

The Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee was formed by vote of the Augusta City Council in July 2006 and has been working diligently since then to develop options for the reuse of the flatiron. The committee is assisted in its efforts by the Portland architectural, preservation and design firm of Barba and Wheelock who will present the committee's findings.

The Flatiron Building is a

unique structure built in the shape of a flatiron to fit the angled area where Stone and Cony streets meet Cony Circle.

It is a landmark structure in Augusta and Maine and is beloved by thousands of its high school graduates, near and far, who have walked its halls since it first opened in 1930.

"The flatiron deserves our best efforts in terms of finding its highest reuse potential," said Committee Chair and Augusta City Councilor Mark O'Brien. "We owe it to generations of students and the community to respect the history and the special architectural features of the building while planning for its future utilization."

Questions regarding the meeting and the reuse of the Flatiron Building may be directed to Mark O'Brien at 623-2930 or to city staff member Gerard Roy at 626-2336.

# LOCAL and STATE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2007

Pg B1 + B5

KENNEBEC JOURNAL

## Panel: Arts key to Cony reuse

By KEITH EDWARDS  
Staff Writer

### PUBLIC FORUM

- **WHAT:** Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee presentation
- **WHEN:** Saturday, 8:30 to 10:30 a.m.
- **WHERE:** Cony flatiron building. Park at the rear of the building, between the flatiron and the newer section of the former Cony High School, and enter through door on the left.

AUGUSTA — Performing arts gets top billing — and the top floor — in all three proposed reuses of the old Cony flatiron building.

But questions remain:

■ What should take place on the two floors below the third-floor performing arts auditorium?

■ How to pay for it all?

■ And should the city keep the building, or sell it to a developer?

The Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee is nearing the end of its yearlong exam-

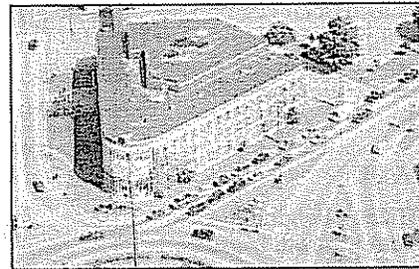
ination of potential ways to reuse the oldest remaining section of the former Cony High School.

Saturday morning, from 8:30 to 10:30 in the Cony flatiron building itself, consultants will present their recommendations for potential reuse of the his-

toric building. Residents and anyone else can weigh in with their views on how the building should, or should not, be reused.

The consensus at numerous public

PLEASE SEE AUGUSTA B5



Staff file photo by Joe Phelan

**FLATIRON:** The flatiron portion of the old Cony High School and Cony Circle are seen in this 2002 aerial photo.

## Augusta

from B1

meetings over the last year has been the performing arts should be a central focus of at least the top floor of the building, which has an existing performing arts auditorium.

"The performing arts was a constant we've heard from the public," said Mark O'Brien, chairman of the committee and Ward 4 city councilor. "The building itself is special and iconic, but the special feature of the building is the auditorium and the opportunities it might provide to the community."

The committee, with input from the community and guidance from consultants, has nar-

rowed the many possible scenarios for reuse of the building to three. All three include plans for use of the top-floor auditorium for the performing arts.

The scenarios:

■ City keeps the building and develops all three floors for arts- and education-related uses. This scenario likely has the least potential revenue.

■ City keeps the building, developing the top floor for the performing arts but mixing in higher-revenue uses on the lower floors, such as office and retail space.

■ City sells the building to a private developer, with stipulations requiring the auditorium be maintained for public performing arts.

O'Brien said the committee is looking for input from the public as it begins finalizing its rec-

ommendations to the City Council. He anticipates making those recommendations by the end of the year.

O'Brien noted the ultimate use of the building could be somewhere in between the three proposed scenarios — or something else entirely.

Saturday, attendees will be able to walk around the flatiron building prior to the consultant's presentation.

Josh Parker of Niemann Capital, whose company has renovated historic structures in North Carolina and is preparing to rehabilitate the Kennebec Arsenal later this year, estimates the cost to renovate the building at \$11.4 million to \$14.5 million.

"It's hard to know whether a building dedicated completely to the arts would ever come to pass," said O'Brien, noting a sur-

vey indicated great interest in the arts in the area, but not a great number of arts groups able to contribute significantly financially. "We felt to present ideas without attaching a cost wouldn't be telling the whole story."

Gerard Roy, city development associate, said all three reuse scenarios would seek to preserve the historical character of the 60,000-square-foot flatiron, a city landmark that overlooks Cony Circle.

Built between 1926 and 1930, the city-owned, three-story building houses classrooms, expansive stairwells and a large auditorium renamed Alumni Hall. The building has been vacant since Cony students moved to a new school last year.

Keith Edwards — 621-5647  
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# Public wants more options for flatiron

By KEITH EDWARDS  
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA — Presented three options for reusing the Cony flatiron building, attendees of a presentation Saturday asked to see what was behind door number four.

Many of the approximately 35 people at a Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee forum wanted a fourth option mentioned by a consultant

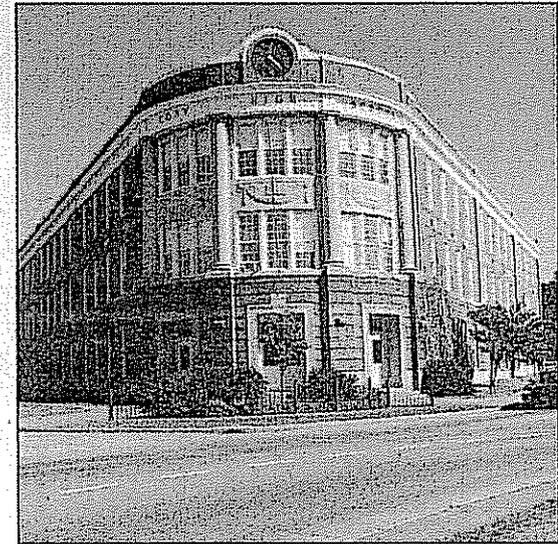
on the project explored more fully.

That option, which was not one of the three formally presented Saturday or previously, would be for the city to offer a long-term lease of the flatiron to a private developer or other entity. A lease, proponents said, would provide the city with more control over the fate of the historic former high school while still allowing a developer to tap into federal tax credits that wouldn't be available to the

city if it redeveloped the property itself.

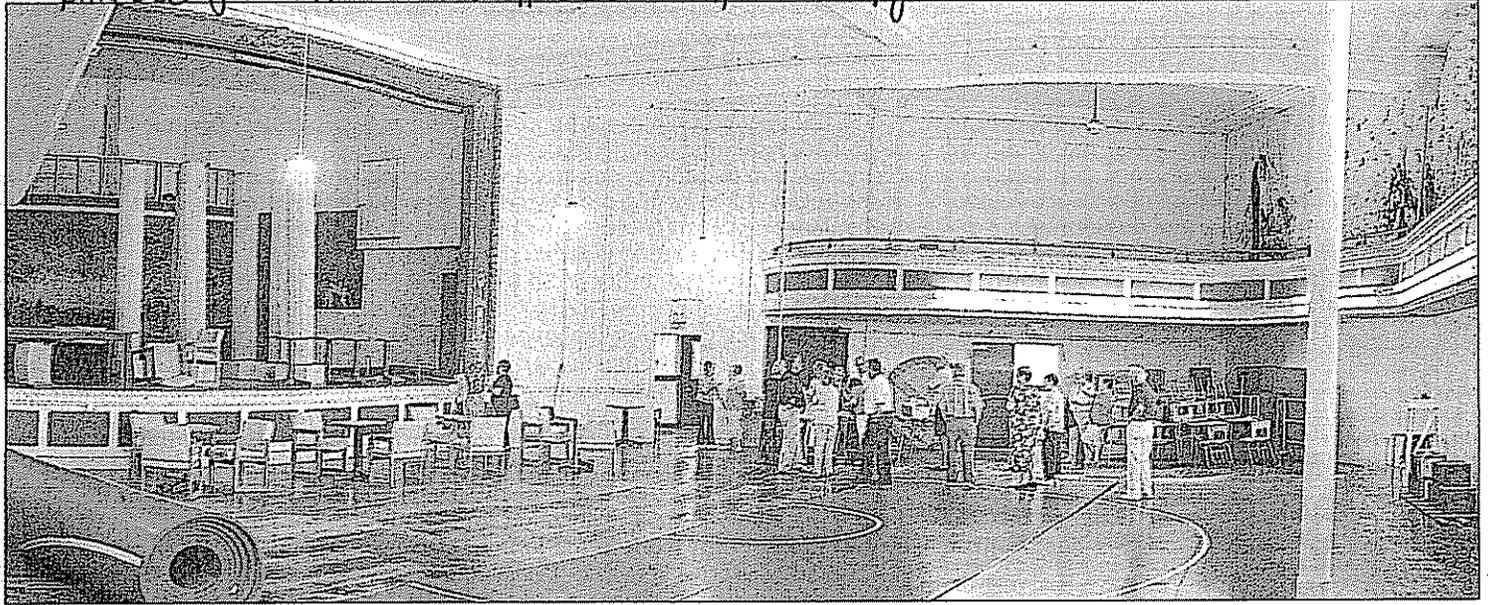
"Why isn't this the number one choice being presented to us?" said resident and local historian Anthony Douin, noting the city has already gone the long-term lease route in the redevelopment of the old City Hall building into elderly housing. "This is what we should be doing with this building."

PLEASE SEE FLATIRON A12



Staff file photo by Joe Phelan

**CITY LANDMARK:** The Cony High School flatiron building in Augusta is shown in this August 2005 photo.



Staff file photo by Joe Phelan

**OLD AUDITORIUM:** This August 2002 photo shows people looking around the old auditorium during an open house at the Cony High School flatiron building in Augusta.

## Flatiron

from A1

The three more formal options for reuse presented Saturday were two scenarios in which the city would keep the building, and a third in which the city would sell the building to a private developer, with restrictions placed on the developer in a deed or other contract stating the third-floor auditorium would be preserved as a public performing arts space.

Some residents, fearful the city could lose control of the building, said deed restrictions on a developer may not be enough. They implied the city did not honor deed restrictions placed on the larger Cony property when it agreed to sell the rest of the former Cony High School site, other than the flatiron, to be developed into a Hannaford supermarket.

"I want you to know the city doesn't honor deed restrictions," said resident Judith Johnson-Marsano. "Look what it has done with the current Cony site. If we lose ownership of this building, it will go."

In all three proposed scenarios, the top-floor auditorium, Alumni Hall, would be preserved as performing arts space open to the public.

Mark O'Brien, chairman of the reuse committee and a member of the Augusta City Council, said using the auditorium for the performing arts seemed to be a constant theme of attendees at previous public forums on how to reuse the flatiron.

The scenarios differ in what takes place in the rest of the building. In what is likely the least revenue-producing scenario, the city would own the building and the other two floors would also be used for educational and performing-arts related uses.

In the second scenario, the city would still own the building but would seek to rent out space on the lower floors, most likely for office space.

And in the third scenario the building would be sold to a private developer who would rent out the lower floors to produce income.

O'Brien said he hopes the committee will have recommendations for the Augusta City Council by the end of the year, then it would be up to councilors to decide what to do.

The three options are expected to cost between \$11 million and \$14 million to construct. The city's share of those costs could vary dramatically based upon which option is chosen.

Resident Paul Lessard suggested whatever the city's share is, it could be a worthwhile investment in the building and in the arts, which could also help revitalize the nearby downtown area by drawing people into the city.

"The city could be making an investment in itself," Lessard said. "If the quality of life improves, so will the opportunities for people in the city. I think it would have benefits for the next 50 years, with an impact that goes way beyond the boundaries of this site."

An obstacle could be parking. Consultant Nancy Barba said all three potential scenarios for the building considered so far would require 354 parking spaces. However there are only expected to be about 140 on-site parking spaces available for the flatiron based upon the current site plan, which includes the proposed Hannaford on the upper part of the lot. However Barba noted 140 on-site spaces is more parking than many other in-town theaters have, and she expressed hope there could be some give-and-take in the parking space requirements.

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KENNEBEC JOURNAL

JOHN CHRISTIE Publisher

ERIC CONRAD Executive Editor

NAOMI SCHALIT Opinion Page Editor

OUR OPINION

# Reach for stars, run numbers on flatiron building

There is more conflict per square foot of the former Cony High School site than most battlefields. Arguments, recriminations, appeals, lawsuits — all have been part of the often-bitter public debate over how to use the property now that it no longer serves as a school.

The current discussion about the future of the part of the site known as the flatiron building, however, offers a chance for the capital city's residents and leaders to work together to realize a beloved building's maximum potential. And in so doing, it's a chance to move Augusta a few steps further along the road to realizing its own significant potential.

Talk to any older Cony graduate and you'll hear the awe in their voice as they speak about the flatiron building's grand staircases, high ceilings and elegant windows. The third-floor auditorium is remembered in especially reverential terms. Preserving the building's beauty, its grandeur and, more specifically, its auditorium, appear to be strongly held goals for community members.

The Cony Flatiron Reuse Committee has been formed to devise a slate of options for the building's future development. At a hearing this past weekend, the committee presented several preliminary options for public feedback. Those options included one scenario in which the city retains ownership of the flatiron building and uses it for educational and performing arts-related activities. Another allows the city to maintain ownership but lease office space on the lower two

floors. Both of these choices require that the third-floor auditorium be refurbished and used for performances. In the third option, the city sells the building to a developer with deed restrictions stating the third-floor auditorium must be preserved for use as a performing arts space.

These options are likely to cost between \$11 million and \$14 million.

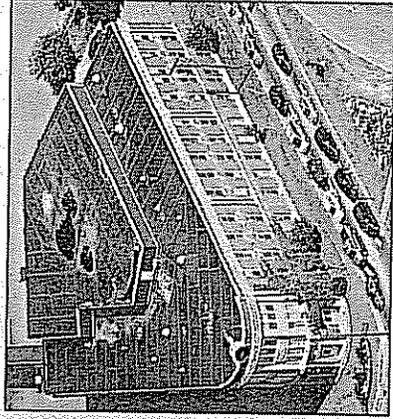
Unknown to reuse committee members until the public meeting, another option exists: to offer a long-term lease on the property to a developer. Such a lease would make the building eligible for substantial federal tax credits.

A similar model was used for the redevelopment of the old Augusta city hall, which is now a beautifully renovated senior citizen residence. Reuse committee members would do well to seriously consider this latter option and investigate whether it offers the city the ability to preserve what is economically reasonable way.

Yet community members need also to be aware that, while the city is soliciting their input, what citizens desire and what is financially feasible and attractive to a developer may be two different things. It may be possible to turn the flatiron building into a showplace that generates income and provides cultural benefits — but it may not.

For the moment, though, it's the reuse committee's job to reach for the stars.

And then run the numbers on what it will take to get there.



Staff file photo by Joe Phelan

*Preserving the Cony flatiron building's beauty, its grandeur and, more specifically, its auditorium, appear to be strongly held goals for community members.*

Our OPINION represents the opinion of the Editorial Board of this newspaper. Publisher John Christie, Executive Editor Eric Conrad and Opinion Page Editor Naomi Schalit.

# Negative report on flatiron stage does not deter building supporters

BY JOHN HALE

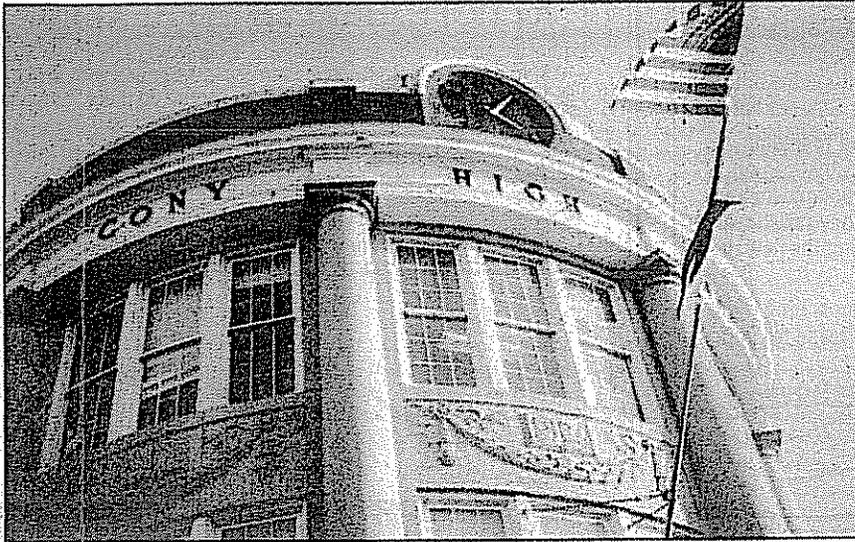
AUGUSTA — A recent report by an assistant professor of architecture at the University of Maine at Augusta has some negative things to say about the stage at the Coney Flatiron Building.

Eric Stark concludes that the stage is too small and cramped to host professional theater productions. And he sees very little hope of fixing it.

But supporters of reusing the flatiron building are not bothered by the negative report.

They point to an earlier, much more thorough, positive report on the flatiron building that was done for the city. And they say a resident theater company could learn to work around the limitations of the flatiron stage.

Stark, who has a background in both theater and building design, wrote, "The existing theater of the flatiron building



The outside of the Coney Flatiron Building on Coney Circle in Augusta is a downtown landmark. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY MAYO-WESCOTT

has multiple space problems in terms of creating a viable, professional theater space. Due to its odd shape, essentially that of a triangle, it is difficult to see a working theater fitting into its current form ... The flatiron building ... has many spatial issues, and as a whole one has to seriously wonder if they are surmountable."

Stark went on to compare the "proscenium," or opening of the stage, at the flatiron building with recommended dimensions for theaters in the United States and Europe. He found the proscenium was too short, too low and too shallow and "lacking in almost every category."

He also cited lack of backstage space and lack of wing space, but in the latter category, he said that might be overcome by using hallway and classroom space.

In an interview, Stark was not so harsh as in his report.

"There's definitely ways around these

things," he said. "A number of them can be fixed. There are potentials for certain kinds of shows. The house (the auditorium) seems to have potential. The stage itself is not suitable for professional theater."

Stark went on, "If a company was based there, they could find ways of working around the limitations all the time. It's definitely possible. It's just not ideal."

Augusta City Manager William Bridgeo said the city's Flatiron Reuse Committee was eager to get some background from someone with a background in theater design and asked Stark for the report, which he did for free.

By contrast, Portland architects Barba and Wheelock completed a 100-page draft report in October for \$52,000.

"It has been a given from the get-go

see **FLATIRON** page A6

that the building would be preserved," Bridgeo said. "The challenge for the committee is how it would be preserved."

Mary Mayo-Wescott, president of the private Friends of the Flatiron Building, said, "It's a good report, but I differ with Mr. Stark. When we began, our major concern was the state of the auditorium. It was the home of Chizzle Wizzle and where Richard Dysart and Alphonse Poulin got their start. We never thought it was going to be a big New York theater."

Mayo-Wescott said, "We just thought it was going to be like the Theater at Monmouth, Johnson Hall and the theater at Waterville. Bunker & Savage, who built the auditorium, said it was to be a centerpiece for the people of the 1930s. No matter where you sit, you can see all the people on stage and you can hear a whisper. The acoustics are magnificent."

She called the flatiron building "a treasure that we should not throw away."

"It's just got so much going for it," Mayo-Wescott said. "I don't want the leaders of the city to lose sight of the jewel that it is. The rest of the building could be used for business, multi-purpose or education. We have something that could be used right now without much effort."

She said the University of Maine at Augusta, or Kennebec Valley Community College, or MaineGeneral Medical Center could use the first or second floors of the flatiron building and the third floor could still be preserved for use of the stage and auditorium.

The Barba and Wheelock report says the auditorium seats 400 people and the balcony, which has been sealed off for many years, seats another 200 people.

There is enough parking for 98 vehicles on site and another 42 vehicles in spaces shared with the proposed Hannaford supermarket. But there is a need for about another 200 parking spaces off-site and this is a major problem that must be overcome, according to the report.

The projected total renovation cost of the Coney Flatiron Building is estimated to run from about \$11.4 million up to \$14.4 million. The city's share, which could be coupled with a private fundraising campaign, is estimated to be from \$3.78 million to \$8.06 million.

The city currently pays \$76,000 a year for maintenance and \$20,000 a year to heat the flatiron building.

The flatiron building was built between 1926 and 1930.

It is triangular in plan with the point of the triangle facing Coney Circle.

According to Barba and Wheelock, "In general, the building is in very good condition ... overall, the building appears to be sound with no major areas of water infiltration or settlement."

In a separate report done for Barba and Wheelock by Becker Engineering of Portland, project engineer Matthew Miller wrote on May 9, 2007: "The existing Coney Flatiron Building is in good condition with minor areas of distress, and is a good candidate for the proposed change of use."

"In order to accommodate the proposed change of use, structural modifications of the floor framing will need to be completed. Roof framing and lateral load system improvements may also need to be improved."

"The extent of the structural modifications will depend on the final configuration and use of the floor space. Additionally, a proactive repair program should be prepared for the exterior masonry."

In another report prepared for Barba and Wheelock, Frank O'Hara of Planning Decisions wrote that several groups could imagine using the auditorium and making it their home, including the Augusta Symphony, Gaslight Theater and the Kennebec Performing Arts Center and they would rent classroom space as well.

Kennebec Dance Center would be interested in doing all their performances there, too.

Thirteen of 16 organizations contacted said they would use and pay for use of the auditorium, generating a total of more than 40 shows a year, but only bringing in a little more than \$20,000 a year in revenue.

Some artists also would be interested in renting studio and gallery space in the classrooms, O'Hara wrote.

The flatiron building was not seen as a good site for a conference center because that would detract from the Augusta Civic Center's business as a conference center.



Mary Mayo-Wescott is president of Friends of the Flatiron Building. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY MAYO-WESCOTT

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Likewise, it was not seen as a good location for retail stores because they would be facing away from traffic.

A possible use for the building was as an antique mall with many vendors.

Offices for Maine General Medical Center were seen as a likely use for the lower levels of the building. Educational uses, including student apartments for

building's stage.

"It's not the Merrill Auditorium (in Portland)," he said. "I never assumed that it was. One of the

**"It's not the Merrill Auditorium (in Portland). I never assumed that it was ... With some minimal modifications, you can solve the problem."  
— Paul Lessard**

UMA students, were another possibility.

Paul Lessard, vice president of Friends of the Flatiron Building, like Mayo-Wescott, was not disappointed by Stark's report on the

things no one has ever mentioned is adding 20 feet to the front of the stage to add more space to the backstage. You can use classrooms for play preparation. With some minimal modifications, you can solve the problem."

Lessard said Alphie Poulin, an Augusta native who is now an instructor at the Juilliard School of Dance in New York City, read

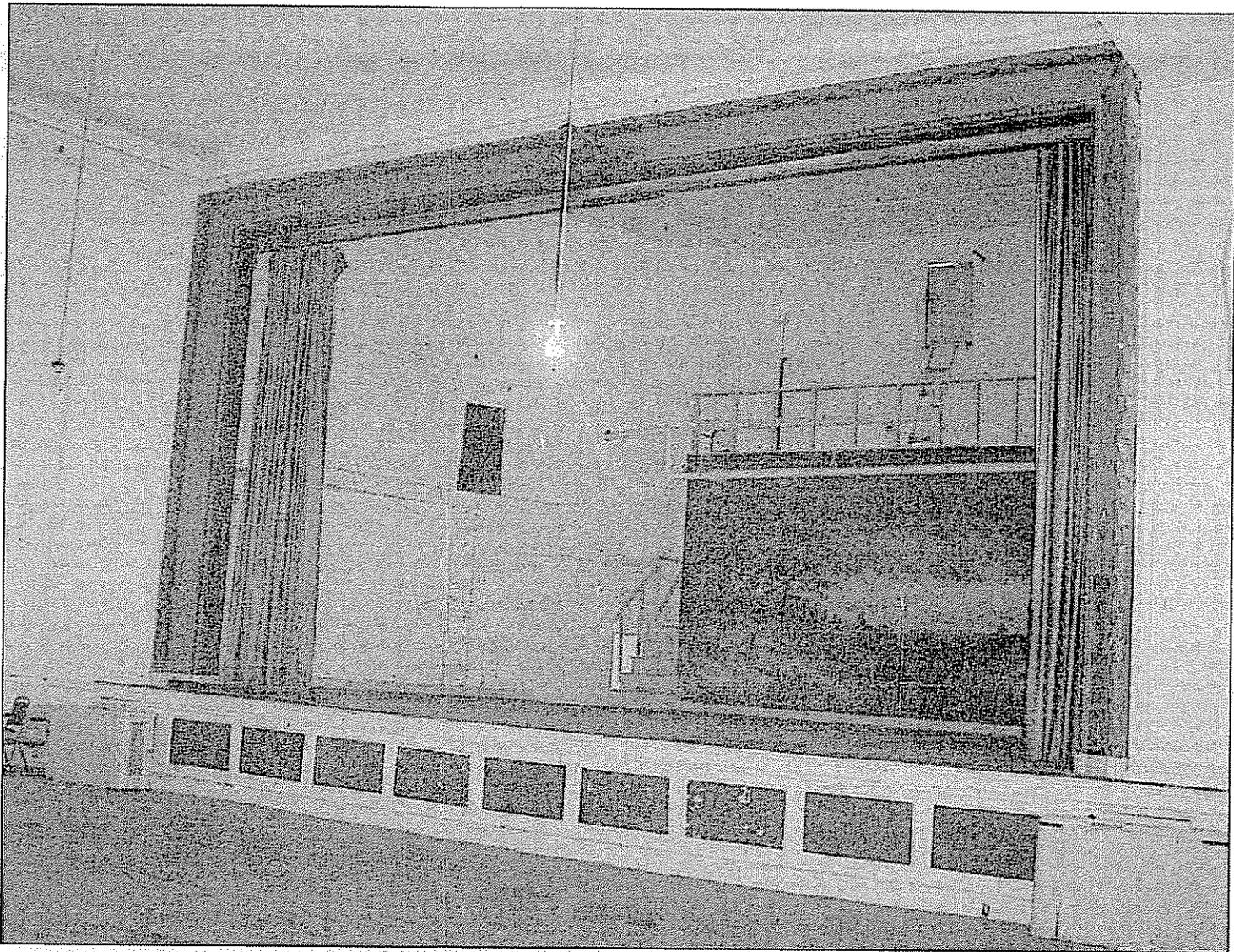
Starks's report and agreed with his conclusions. "But he doesn't rule out the functionality of the stage," Lessard said.

"It's almost identical in size to the Brunswick Music Theater," Lessard said. "I think it holds promise. But will the city want to spend \$3 million to make it an amateur theater for 40 or more events a year? You can't tell what the market will be because there's been no live theater in Augusta for so long."

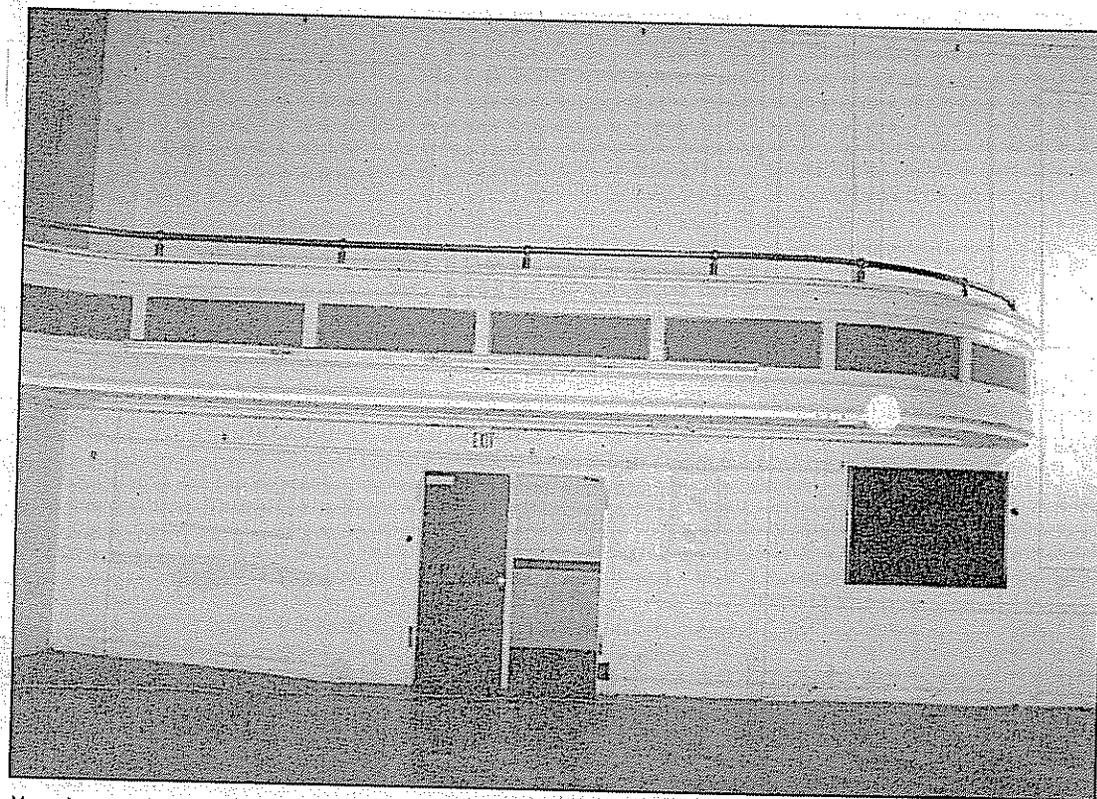
He said the City Council would have to be committed to the whole concept of arts in the community.

"This is one of those things you have to have as part of downtown redevelopment," Lessard said.

The city's Flatiron Reuse Committee is to meet next at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, March 13, in City Council chambers. Ward 4 City Councilor Mark O'Brien, chairman of the committee, said the panel will be attempting to "pull together" a recommendation on future use of the flatiron building to send back to the City Council.



The stage on the third floor of the Cony Flatiron Building was the setting for many Cony High School productions of Chizzle Wizzle and also the place where actor Richard Dysart got his start. JOHN HALE PHOTO



Here is an end of the balcony in the third-floor auditorium of the Cony Flatiron Building. JOHN HALE PHOTO