

Investigative Study

By Rex H. Wooldridge

25 April 2022

Proposed Location for Future Washington and Lee University Museum

General C.V. Background

Academic/Professional History:

Graduated 1964 from Washington and Lee University, B.S.

Graduated 1968 from University of Oklahoma, Bachelor of Architecture.

Third person to join Kendall/Heaton Associates in July 1978 (firm founded June 1978).

Upon retirement from Kendall/Heaton Associates in January 2016; was 1/3 owner of a 100+ (size) firm.

For reference of projects see website: www.kendall-heaton.com.

Similar museum/performance projects that my firm, Kendall/Heaton Associates, has been associated with are listed below along with the design architecture firm. These buildings can be seen on Kendall/Heaton Associates website: www.kendall-heaton.com.

Audrey Jones Beck Building, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, located in Houston, TX (Rafael Moneo – Spain)

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, located in Fort Worth, TX (Tadao Ando – Japan)

Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion, located in Toledo, OH (Sejima and Nishizawa, SAANA, Ltd. – Japan)

Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House, located in Dallas, TX (Foster + Partners – London)

Dee and Charles Wylie Theatre, located in Dallas, TX (REX-Architecture – New York City and Office for Metropolitan Architecture, P.C. – Netherlands)

Asia Society Texas Center, located in Houston, TX (Taniguchi and Associates – Japan)

Kimball Art Museum Expansion, located in Fort Worth, TX (Renzo Piano Building Workshop – Italy)

Discussion

I.

Lexington City Zoning and W&L’s Institutional History Project

The W&L’s Master Plan to build an Institutional History project on Lee Avenue between Preston and Washington Streets is described in the W&L Master Plan. [1].

This project has met with strong opposition among residents and commissioners. I have reviewed the minutes of a March 2022 zoning board meeting [2] and have listened to the audio record for the April 14, 2022 meeting. [3]. The Institutional History project description, found in the planning minutes from March 21, 2022 is footnoted below. [4].

Current university action to relocate Lee related items from the interior of the Chapel to the Lee Avenue Institutional History project have put those items in limbo, due to public zoning opposition. That opposition turns on historic resentments where W&L has been perceived as overreaching its grasp of property in the City. One citizen speaker at the April 14 planning meeting quoted the statistic that 65% of the land mass in the City is already held by nonprofits, with a substantial loss of possible tax revenue to the City, impacting its ability to perform its civic responsibilities. [3.- See 4-14-22 Various speakers, highlights-recording points marked.]

Design Weaknesses of Building at the Lee Avenue Site:

- Parking will be at a premium.
- Traffic will be difficult to handle.
- This will be structurally more expensive because of site terrain.
- This site is being shoehorned into the location, failing to architecturally blend into the centuries-old campus. This will not have the WOW factor needed to attract people from all over the world. This will not outwardly say, “WOW this is a museum”.

II.

On Campus Alternatives to Master Plan

I understand that the central reason for W&L's shifting position on Lee Chapel to University Chapel is because some students feel very uncomfortable when required to attend university gatherings there. This message was recently reaffirmed to alumni by Beau Dudley at an April 14, 2022 fund raising gathering in Jacksonville, FL. [5]. Apparently, this is the administration's impetus to propose the Institutional History project on Lee Avenue.

The Chapel has served several roles.

1. A mandatory attendance student venue for certain university functions.
2. A non-mandatory venue for speakers and university events.
3. The Lee Family Museum and burial location for R. E. Lee.
4. Related to #3, tourism attraction, estimated at 35,000 to 40,000 visitors annually.
5. Other elective activities, weddings, etc.

A. Solutions, Overview:

Given these zoning obstacles, I recommend the following, which involve both the Chapel and a new Institutional History Museum to be built near the Back Campus [Liberty Hall Academy-Law School]. This means moving mandatory attendance to another venue on campus to relieve the former Lee Chapel from that duty.

This can be accomplished in two steps.

1. Restore the Chapel to its prior interior condition as Lee Chapel, with museum contents returned and main sanctuary restored, with plaques and portraits put up on the walls and a sight line from the auditorium to Valentine's *Recumbent Lee*. If you return the Chapel to its prior name, Lee Chapel, this comports with National Historical Landmark designations. This will continue a large visitor following, and will confine visitor and traffic to the Chapel areas, away from Lexington City C-1/commercial zoning that will arise at the current Institutional History project proposed for Lee Avenue.

2. Build an on-campus University Museum with generous gathering facilities for students, alumni, etc. to attend mandatory and voluntary events; to showcase significant collections relating to Washington and to Lee and to all other arts and collections not utilized, which are currently stored in various locations on campus.

B. Alternate Back Campus Discussion:

Assuming restoration of the Chapel to former status with interior features restored including wall plaques, museum items downstairs, etc, the opportunity opens for a separate museum and large gathering venue to serve all the collections and art W&L has accumulated. This will become a world class facility drawing significant regional, national and global visitor traffic and will serve the university and Lexington community for social, speaker and other innovative events.

From an architectural perspective, the ideal location for W&L's new Institutional Museum should be close to the 'Back Campus' [Liberty Hall Academy- Law School]. The Law School is somewhat removed from the campus and architecturally has never fit in with the historic campus architecture. This provides a world-renown architect freedom for designing a unique building on a fresh piece of paper that would attract people from all over the country and the world. This Back Campus location would also provide plenty of parking space and would help relieve traffic problems that would be caused by placing the Museum at the Lee Avenue proposed location.

W&L is not only in possession of invaluable historical artifacts, but also an invaluable art collection, much of which is stored in basements around campus not suitable for the protection of fine art.

From my personal experience of working on many high-profile museum and performing arts type projects, cities have used these project types to be a destination and attract visitors and revive their economy.

III.

In Closing:

If the University chose to revisit its Master Plan with the above suggestions in mind, I believe it will succeed in overcoming three problems while gaining several advantages among the alumni, the university greater community and the City of Lexington.

1. If it were to restore the Chapel as Lee Chapel, drop any mandatory attendance there by students and faculty, the students will be provided with a venue not dominated by the tomb of R. E. Lee.
2. If the University withdraws the current Lee Avenue Institutional History proposal, this approach will gain favor with the City for avoiding massive traffic disruption on Lee Avenue.
3. If the University proposed a spacious 'new build' facility near the Back Campus [Liberty Hall Academy- Law School] area for an integrated

Institutional History Museum and large gathering location agreeable to students and faculty, this multipurpose facility would be a prime venue for alumni and student events within a general institutional history museum environment.

4. This new build will finally display and safeguard many valuable art and other collections which as of 2018, were still stored without adequate safety to natural deterioration or accidental water or fire damage.
5. This will go a very long way to repairing the loss of faith among alumni donors who have expressed great reservations to future financial support for the University.

I hope this letter is helpful to bring peace and prosperity to our fine University.

Let the future be ours!

Rex H. Wooldridge

Rex H. Wooldridge, W&L, Class of 1964

FOOTNOTES

[1] Excerpted, Institutional History project described, W&L's Master Plan:
Source: See Fn. [2], see PDF pp. 18-19/ Plan pp. 11-12. [LINK 3_17_22_Draft.pdf - Dropbox](https://www.dropbox.com/s/ahu5vtknxhs3n09/3_17_22_Draft.pdf?dl=0) or
https://www.dropbox.com/s/ahu5vtknxhs3n09/3_17_22_Draft.pdf?dl=0
found at City of Lexington Planning webpage.

[2] March 24 Lexington City Planning Commission minutes. Appended.

[3] Link to zoning hearing audio presentation [4-14-2022 PC Audio.mp3 \(dropbox.com\)](#)
[Paraphrased];

[3-minute speaker times were allowed. Name spellings may not be accurate.]

Audio MARK 32:59 minutes/ W&L said the cost for traffic study would be \$1.5 million dollars. >>*Rex W. comment—I find this surprising. My experience with museum projects has been that traffic studies cost roughly \$100,000.00-\$250,000.00.*

Audio MARK 47-48:00 minutes/ Elizabeth B./ Institutional Museum will loom over Lee Ave, ...poor design... High traffic congestion... W&L should go back to the drawing board.

Audio MARK 49:35 minutes/ David Cox, prior City Council member, made excellent presentation concerning the fact that 65% of land in City of Lexington, according to the Commissioner of Revenue is currently exempt from the tax rolls. Understands that W&L is free to purchase what it wishes and that VMI is free to take what it wishes. Lowering tax base affects quality of City schools and everything else.

Audio MARK 55:00 minutes/ Molly McClure; W&L ‘flexible’ process is really ‘spot zoning’, not allowed, circumventing zoning impact, ad hoc, changing the City face piecemeal [56:00 minutes]; ‘flexible’ approach avoids City Comprehensive Plan. / 56:18 minutes-W&L’s 2003 verbal offer to limit zoning requests to only on campus grounds is meaningless]; / 56:36 minutes-latest plan is not masterful, is haphazard bunch of requests. Alternatives—build new law school and move Williams Bus. Sch. To the old law school. / 58:07 minutes-Planning commission should vote NO to an ad hoc, mish mash of contradictions and bad ideas so riddled with errors it is hard to imagine the (planning staff) recommended it. / 58:15 minutes-City approval would be...in defiance of public consensus.

Audio MARK 58:44 minutes/ Lisa Tracey/ **59:28 minutes**-plan is disingenuous...W&L is nibbling the City to death in slow individual bites, City Gov. has W&L employees in it...buying and receiving gifted City property....

[Several others. All speakers had serious objections to the Plan.]

[4] Source: See Fn. [2], see PDF pp. 18-19/ Plan pp. 11-12. Excerpted, Institutional History project described, W&L’s Master Plan:

“ 5) *Institutional History Museum* and 6) *Parking Deck*

A modern museum is included in the Campus Master Plan to present W&L’s history comprehensively and accurately. The Museum is planned on the street level of the proposed Lee Avenue Parking Deck on the site of the existing Chavis House and Casa Hispanica, both of which are planned for demolition. The adjacent Mattingly House may become part of the Museum pending future architectural programming 18 Staff Report & Recommendation Rezoning and Master Plan Amendment CPA 2022-01 / RZ 2022-02 / MPA 2022-02 - Washington & Lee Campus Master Plan update prepared by the City of Lexington Department of Planning and Development for the City Council Hearing on April 14, 2022 Page 12 of 31 and design studies. The Campus Master Plan Proffer Statement provides a maximum building height of 54 feet for the new Institutional History Museum and Lee Avenue Parking deck while the underlying zoning of C-1 limits height to 45 feet.

The conceptual design for the Museum illustrates a three-story building over a two-story parking garage that extends past the eastern boundary of the museum building and occupies a significant portion of the

middle of the block bounded by Nelson, Jefferson, and Washington Streets, as well as by Lee Avenue. The location of the parking garage in the middle of this block requires additional, privately owned parcels be acquired, in conflict with the Comprehensive Plan policy encouraging W&L to stay within its present holdings for future growth rather than acquiring additional land. The addition of the Museum and the Parking Deck to the Campus Master Plan necessitates the submittal of a traffic impact study prior to or concurrent with the required site plan submittal and a conditional use permit is required for a parking facility located in the C-1 zoning district.

There are four existing parcels to be utilized for the museum/parking structure in addition to the aforementioned privately owned parcels to potentially be acquired. This entire block is located in the C-1 zoning district which coincides with the boundaries of the Downtown Historic Preservation District. This signifies the proposed demolition of the Chavis House, Casa Hispanica, and Mattingly House structures must be reviewed and approved by the Lexington Architectural Review Board prior to demolition. A fourth parcel that is currently vacant and already owned by W&L comprises the last parcel along Lee Avenue that is to accommodate the proposed museum/parking deck. While the other three parcels were included in the 1998 Campus Master Plan, this fourth parcel at 12 Lee Avenue was not, and needs to first be rezoned to the I-1 overlay district in order to be considered for inclusion in the current Campus Master Plan amendment. A rezoning to the I-1 overlay district, however, is not in compliance with the Lexington Comprehensive Plan. The University is therefore, also requesting a comprehensive plan amendment to change the Future Land Use Designation from Downtown Center to the Civic/Campus/Post designation to support the request for the rezoning of 12 Lee Avenue to the I-1 overlay district. The proposed museum/parking deck is not located in the academic core and will impact travel along Lee Avenue. Further review and approval of the proposed Institutional History Museum and Lee Avenue Parking Deck will benefit from the University's offer to conduct a traffic impact analysis to be submitted with any conditional use permit application or site plan application for the proposed Museum and Parking Deck."

[5] Link to zoning hearing audio presentation [4-14-2022 PC Audio.mp3 \(dropbox.com\)](#)

[6] Notes---Rex Wooldridge and Neely Young arranged meeting with Dennis Cross last week of June 2018:

During last week of June 2018, Rex Wooldridge brought a highly experienced Security Consultant, John Hatcher of HMA, whom he had worked with for 25 years on high profile buildings and museums, to Lexington, VA. They flew in from Houston, TX. Rex Wooldridge personally paid for John Hatcher's flights and hotel accommodations and was pleased to do so. They were in Virginia 4 days.

The TGR group met with Dennis Cross and his staff to primarily discuss the security of Lee Chapel and how to get the gates in front of the Recumbent Statue back open so that visitors on tour could easily view the magnificent statue.

The following attended this meeting: Dennis Cross, Sidney Evans, Jessica Willet, the W&L Art Curator, 2 W&L security employees, 2 other W&L attendees, John Hatcher (HMA), Rex Wooldridge, and Neely Young.

The meeting lasted 6 hours and included a nice catered lunch with the group.

Considerable time was spent at Lee Chapel and then Dennis Cross took the W&L Art Curator, John Hatcher, Neely Young and Rex Wooldridge on a tour of the campus, to the various buildings.

The group visited one basement art storage facility which John Hatcher pointed out in his report had numerous problems that put the valuable art at risk. Rex Wooldridge said he would not be able to estimate the value of the art that had been gifted and stored but it had to be considerable. The art curator knew that the valuable art was not being properly stored and told me she had been begging for proper storage for some time.