

**Community Awareness Meeting**  
**December 12, 2024**  
**Summary Notes**

**WELCOME** – The meeting opened at 7pm with introductions of the “Save the Fox” advisory members, and purposes of the meeting.

Meeting Purposes included:

- To inform the community members the uniqueness of the five community assets, how heavily they are used and what is at stake as UWO pulls out
- Community members that support the campus and its auxiliary will have a chance to meet each other and connect
- Information will be shared regarding what is known ‘to date’
- Notification of website
- Next steps

**CAMPUS HISTORY** – Jim Perry showed a brief video which highlighted the history and development of the campus, including the Planetarium, Weis museum and CAC. All of these assets were supported significantly by community funds.

**Jim pointed out that this is the only 2 year campus in WI that has leveraged community funding to build community assets, which is one reason this is such a special place, and why it is critical to save the community assets for the community.**

All 5 of the assets we are discussing this evening (CAC, Barlow, Weis, Child Care Center, Garden) are reliant upon UWO paying for utilities, custodial staff, and sometimes additional staff. Their success is linked to the campus, and these expenses will need to be picked up in order to keep these community assets.

**Our purpose is to ensure the continuity of these community assets after UWO pulls out.**

**BARLOW PLANETARIUM** – Rick Beal, President of NEWSTAR, provided an overview of the Barlow Planetarium. NEWSTAR was founded in 1986 by UW Fox students and professors to inspire curiosity of the night sky. NEWSTAR partners with the campus and Barlow on astronomy nights and educational opportunities. When it opened in 1998 the Barlow was the largest state of the art planetarium in WI. Rick shared data on the number of students, field trips, schools, and public attendance at educational events held at the Barlow.

Rick emphasized that the Barlow and the Weis Museum function together. The proximity allows schools to get a 2-for-1 field trip experience that provides unparalleled educational programming. Rick shared that the Fox Valley was ranked 18th best place to start a technology hub, stemming from its combination of workforce, short commutes, and access to science research such as found at the Barlow and Weis.

**WEIS Earth Science Museum (WESM)** – Cindy Duckert, volunteer with the WESM shared that the WESM works to educate people about science, minerals, and the natural world. We all use minerals, and need to know their value and importance. The WESM frequently partners with the Barlow on field trips and other activities. All school districts have utilized the WESM (and Barlow), in both counties, and beyond.

WESM serves as the State Mineralogical Museum, and hosts a rock club, and mineral shows. Income comes from the shows, field trips, and a partially endowed director position.

One concern is that the endowment that supports the WESM includes a clause that indicates the endowment funds would move to the Weis Nature Center in NJ if the campus closed. The group is actively working to clarify this clause to ensure the funding stays with the WESM.

**University Children's Center** - Parents Ashley Heise and Aubrey Schroeder shared their experiences with the CCC. Both have young children that utilize the center. They spoke to the value it provides, the excellent teachers and staff. Teachers have longevity and are incredibly dedicated to their work and kids. The Center has a 5 Star rating from Young Star and provides very high quality child care.

The staff are UWO employees. A potential closure would impact 15 staff teachers, and 25 families. The Center maintains a waiting list of roughly 60 families.

**Community Gardens** – Theresa Granados, gardener, shared photos and videos providing a 'virtual tour' of the gardens. The gardens, and the gardeners, are self-sufficient, and only rely on UWO for a water supply.

The gardens contain 37 plots, serving 24 families. In addition to providing a food source, activities at the garden include seed sharing, project days, sharing knowledge and working together to maintain the garden plots. Rental fees are used for maintenance and upgrade expenses at the garden.

**Communication Arts Center (CAC)** – Susan Rabideau, theater director, shared her experience sitting on the planning committee for the CAC, as well as using it for theater productions. The CAC boasts 51,000 SF of unique spaces - 2 theaters, reception areas, gallery space, and places for public meetings, banquets and functions.

Perry Hall, which seats 362, is acoustically perfect and the only theater of its size in the Valley. Its audiences have been made up of tens of thousands of community people who have supported arts, theater, music and dance productions there. The whole facility has been utilized by over 17 unique arts groups. Over \$2 million was raised in community donations to build the \$13 million CAC.

**Reflections and Next Steps –**

There was a large number of audience members present - the Barlow was nearly full! Both County Executives attended, as well as one UW Trustee, state representative Alfheim, and many donors, users, and school district representatives.

Jim Perry and Tom Frantz shared some next steps:

- Visit the savethefoxcampus.com website (<https://www.savethefoxcampus.com/>)
- sign up for a mailing list
- voice your opinions to your county board supervisor

**Question and Answer Time: It was noted that since the counties are currently in discussion and negotiations with a potential partner, no answers can be provided regarding what is going to happen to campus. The counties hope to know sometime in January.**

Question: What has happened to the UW Fox Foundation Funding?

Answer: Tom Frantz shared that this funding was all turned over to the Community Foundation of the Fox Valley Region to manage. None of the campus foundation funds went to UWO. The campus foundation played a significant role in fundraising for all of the community assets.

Tom Nelson offered clarification to the audience that the buildings are owned by the counties. While the educational programming provided by UWO will end July 1, the physical assets remain the counties, which is why they are looking for a buyer/user to take over.

Question: Have alumni been tapped for donations to support this effort?

Answer: We actually don't have records for most alumni, so please help by spreading the word with any that you know. Alumni have definitely supported the campus in the past. We would also need to form a 501c3 in order to ask alumni for donations, and that hasn't been done yet.

Question: Will the community still have access to the spaces after negotiations are done? What happens if the negotiations fall through?

Answer: Thomas Nelson responded that they are in serious conversations with a partner, and he shared that there is sufficient interest to maintain them as a public facility. This process will require going through county committees, and 2 county boards, so it will be important to follow the process.

Question: What are the costs to the county?

Answer: Both county executives responded. It costs approximately \$300K for maintenance, which is split between the 2 counties. Any capital investments are above that. UW Oshkosh pays for \$800K in utilities, as well as provides all the staff salary and benefits (some of which come from the Weis Endowment or program revenue that the assets generate).

The meeting wrapped up by 8:30. A handout was provided with links to the website, and to the county supervisors contact information.