

# Findings and Recommendations of the Astor House Alliance (AHA!)

June 10, 2020

The Astor House Alliance (AHA!) is an ad-hoc group of citizens concerned for the preservation and future use of the Astor House. We originally had planned to hold two public meetings at the end of March and early April, but with the pandemic shutdowns we switched gears to an on-line survey. We began by asking people to “Dream Big”. We had 146 responses and a lot of thoughtful answers. After summarizing the results, we followed up with a second survey – “Get Real!” – that narrowed ideas by factoring in practicality and cost. There were 124 responses to this survey. You can find results of both surveys at [astorhouse.org](http://astorhouse.org).

## Findings

Top take-aways from the Astor House Alliance Surveys

1. Almost everyone supports preservation of the Astor House historic property.
2. There is very strong citizen interest in some form of public use and access, whether it’s community meetings and events, art displays, or a brew pub and beer garden. There is no shortage of ideas, but most want a very public and dynamic use.
3. Citizens are very interested in the public space behind the Astor House and its continued access as a public park. Again, there is no shortage of ideas for improving the park.
4. Most do not expect the City of Golden to shoulder all responsibility for the maintenance and management of the Astor House.

## Principles

Basic principles to guide planning and decision-making for the Astor House

1. Time – The Astor House has been part of central Golden for 150 years. Decisions should be made that keep options open for future generations.
2. Preservation – Most of the important physical characteristics of the Astor House property should be protected through easements and local landmark designation.
3. Use – The building should not remain vacant. Active use within the constraints of the easements will provide maintenance and preservation through time.
4. Public – The Astor House Property has always had a public role in the heart of downtown Golden and should continue to do so. Allowing citizens to continue to use and engage with the Astor House property in a dynamic way is the best route for ensuring its preservation into the future.
5. Decision-making – The citizens of Golden are the owners of the Astor House. Decisions will be made by Golden City Council, with the advice and support of City staff, that best represent the interests of citizens.

## Open a New Process

The City of Golden should open a new process to accept applications for proposals from non-profit organizations or businesses to manage a viable use within the Astor House Property. The surveys this spring by Astor House Alliance tapped into a strong vein of community interest in the future of the Astor House. Concurrently some well-established local non-profit organizations (Golden Civic Foundation and Foothills Arts Center) have begun to develop proposals for the property and have consulted with AHA about their ideas and our survey results. There may be more entities that are interested, and a new process should begin now to activate the Astor House.

The Astor House Alliance has the following recommendations for a new process.

- Design a new process that has community input from the start. The very act of establishing a decision-making process will affect the outcome. Get buy-in from the start.
- Follow Golden's *Community Engagement Plan*.
- Appoint and utilize another advisory group to help design and guide the process. It should include representation from GURA/DDA, downtown business, City Council, AHA, HPB, GLA, community leaders, experienced managers of historic buildings (such as American Mountaineering Center or Armory), etc. It should not exceed 10 people.
- Provide potential applicants with consistent information about the basic facts of the situation
  - Floorplans and square footage
  - Easements that will be in place and Golden Landmark status
  - HPB Astor House Historic Structure Report
- When developing the new process with the advisory group, determine in advance other goals or constraints that will help applicants shape proposals that will meet community expectations.
  - Get a firm commitment from GURA for how much funding will be provided for some basic rehabilitation of the structure and an endowment fund for future maintenance. AHA recommends that the amount of funding committed should bring the building to certificate of occupancy. This lets all applicants know a baseline level of the building condition when they calculate their proposal.
  - Without pre-weighting criteria, do let applicants know some of the general factors that will be preferred in differentiating proposals based on the known municipal funding environment, recent community interest, and advisory group recommendations. This may seem pre-decisional, but based on the previous RFP experience and a ripening of community interest, it would be helpful to applicants to know more about what the community is looking for rather than respond with "we'll know it when we see it."
    - Public Use. Proposals should provide opportunities for public use and appreciation of the Astor House, with at least a portion of the programmed use of the building open to the public with little or no cost to the user. The Astor Yard should remain open to the general public as open space for a substantial portion of the time.
    - Financial neutrality. Proposals should be at least financially neutral to Golden taxpayers over time. A baseline for initial restoration work funded by the Legacy Fund has been identified above. Additional finish costs, ongoing maintenance, management, and day-to-day operations should be funded by the applicant.

- Proposals that meet the basic identified needs of public access and financial neutrality will be further judged by looking at how much the proposal exceeds these expectations as a package of advantages for the whole proposal.
- Consider a two-step process. Keep the initial request for proposals tight and not too burdensome for applicants but enough information to screen for finalists. Then request the necessary detail of the finalists to make a good decision.

### **Astor House: Proposed Criteria for Solicitation of Proposals**

#### **1. Applicant Background and Capacity**

Summarize relevant background information concerning the applicant and key personal.

- History of the entity
- Experience of entity with similar projects
- Key personnel background and experience

#### **2. Historic Preservation and Interpretation**

Explain how the important historical aspects of the property will be identified and how will they be preserved and interpreted.

- Exterior
- Interior
- Yard
- Preservation Easement options

#### **3. Proposed Uses**

Describe the proposed uses for both the building and the yard.

- Short-term
- Long-term (if different)
- Revolving uses/exhibits

#### **4. Public Benefit**

Summarize the public benefits of the proposed uses of both the building and the yard including type and extent of benefit.

- Public access
- Educational outreach
- Use by non-profits
- Use by commercial enterprises

#### **5. Integration with Planning and Vision Documents**

Explain how this proposal addresses aspects of the Heart of Golden vision and other planning or vision documents.

- Downtown plans
- Historic preservation goals
- Non-profit missions (if applicable)

**6. Ownership**

Describe who would own the building and yard and under what conditions.

- City of Golden
- Non-profit
- Private / Commercial
- Combination

**7. Budget and Funding Sources**

Provide a detailed budget concerning both short term and long term anticipated expenses and income. Cite funding sources and anticipated amounts. Include purchase funding if applicable.

- Sources could include Private funding, Non-profit sources, City of Golden, Use fees, Sales of items or food/beverage
- Budget should include initial build-out, short term and long term expenses and income, operations and maintenance

**8. Proposed Schedule**

Provide a schedule for completion of key aspects of the proposal.

**9. Additional Information**

**10. Letters of Support**

**Specific Recommendations of Astor House Alliance for Evaluating Proposals**

Baseline Requirements and Conditions – AHA recommends that all of these criteria be met for award to a proposing submission:

1. Golden citizens (City of Golden) retain ownership of the Astor House Property. This is the best way to protect the public role of the property over time. While easements can protect the physical aspects of building, selling it to a private interest cannot guarantee some form of public access over time without a cumbersome additional deed restriction. The first private owner may have a very popular and public brew pub or juice bar, but the next owner may use it for offices or an exclusive vacation rental that would have little or no public access. Negotiate a lease or agreement with a new user/manager.

2. Other than managing a lease or agreement, The City of Golden will not be the management entity for programming and day-to-day operations of the building.
3. The lease/agreement holder user will abide by all easement protections.
4. The Golden Legacy Fund will pledge sufficient funds toward the rehabilitation costs to bring the building to a level of certificate of occupancy. The lease/agreement holder will be responsible to provide the remaining costs to suit their intended use.
5. Other than the above Legacy Fund assistance with initial rehabilitation costs, the ongoing building maintenance and management costs will be the responsibility of the lease/agreement holder.
5. The City of Golden will rehabilitate and maintain the Astor Yard for use as a public park as they do other parks and allow occasional permitted events.
6. The Astor House will have at least 20% of its programmed use time open to the general public with little or no cost to the user.
7. The Astor Yard will remain a City of Golden public park. It will not be encumbered by events or private bookings more than 20% of its usable time. Events would be booked through the City similar to any other City park.

Criteria or factors to compare how much proposals exceed baseline requirements:

1. The proposal offers opportunities for public use and appreciation of the Astor House's history and surrounding property. The proposed use or combination of uses aligns within the top tier of ideas identified in the AHA survey (community use, arts, hospitality, museum).
2. The proposal complements Golden Vision 2030, downtown development goals and Heart of Golden plans and also enhances Golden's sense of community.
3. The applicant has experience and skill to implement the proposal and will offer stability to the maintenance of the property and management of its proposed activities.
4. Over the life of the agreement/lease, the proposed use would generate income to the City of Golden.
5. The applicant can contribute an additional amount of money toward the initial rehabilitation of the building and/or toward the rehabilitation of the Astor Yard.
6. Additional benefits provided by applicant (describe).

Use Choosing By Advantages as the selection process:

Choosing By Advantages (CBA) is a better system for choosing between alternative proposals than weighted criteria. It is a decision-making process used by government (especially the National Park Service) and the construction industry to choose alternatives based on how well they meet goals. Weighting criteria in advance results in "unanchored" choices and false choices. As a package, an alternative may more fully meet goals by its advantages than simply deciding in advance that a criteria such as historic preservation may be the most important factor. In this case, all alternatives will have to honor easements to protect the property. This process focuses on the advantages of the differences. The process requires a CBA facilitator (there are contractors available) to take a selected group (which

would be the new advisory group) to participate. It takes ½ to a full day. The decision can be well documented.

- [https://www.leanconstruction.org/media/docs/chapterpdf/israel/Choosing\\_by\\_Advantages.pdf](https://www.leanconstruction.org/media/docs/chapterpdf/israel/Choosing_by_Advantages.pdf)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dknJDclJNCU>

Members of Astor House Alliance who prepared and administered the two surveys and made these recommendations:

- William Litz, Golden Landmarks Association
- Sarah Litz, Golden Landmarks Association
- Barb Warden, GoldenToday.com and author of local history publications
- Meg Van Ness, historic preservation professional and served on Golden boards and commissions
- Janine Sturdevant, concerned neighbor, Past HPB Chair, Past President GLA, Past President Foothills Arts Center
- Kristen Wrona, HPB, GLA, and Golden History Parks volunteer
- Joe Wrona GLA, and Golden History Parks volunteer
- Suzy Stutzman, past and present service on Golden boards and commissions
- Rick Gardner, Gardner History, Golden Landmarks Association, Jefferson County Historical Commission