

## **Preface to Part B Project Description**

At the September 21, 2021, the City of Clifton Council meeting, it became evident that some people in Clifton were not aware of the Clifton Adult Opportunity's presence on the Historic Quarantine City Hall property.

Therefore for the first time in 41 years we felt it necessary to explain who we are and how we became part of the City Hall Compound 41 years ago. "The History of the CAOC and Its People " is our explanation of who we are.

### **THE HISTORY OF THE CAOC AND ITS PEOPLE**

Around 1980 the Clifton schoolteacher of a class known as the Trainable Mentally Retarded along with a couple of other teachers and parents started the Clifton Adult Opportunity Center (CAOC). These students all had an IQ between 25 and 50 and were the lowest ability levels that the public school systems handled. They were mandatorily graduated from the Clifton school system the year of their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. (It took almost 20 years for society to make it politically incorrect to call our people "mentally retarded." They are now referred to as "developmentally disabled.")

They usually had no place to go after the school system met their educational requirements. They failed in workshops because of their low ability levels and were staying at home with their families, becoming agitated, bored, and more difficult to deal with. Their teacher and some parents appealed to the City of Clifton to give them a place to go each day to continue their work on becoming functional citizens in our society.

Through the efforts of true civic-minded leaders, such as Joe Kolodziej Sr., Joe Grecco, Gloria Kolodziej, and many others of this benevolent city who at that time saw the desperate need of the CAOC and met it.

The City Council gave us a place to go each day provided we renovated all the areas we were given. Through fund-raising, selling our craft items, soliciting donations, and appealing to service groups like the Alhambra and Knights of Columbus we meagerly survived.

After 7-8 years it became apparent that we could no longer independently financially exist. We turned to the State Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) for finances to survive. Edward Moore, the head of the Division at that time, came from Trenton to Clifton to survey our dilemma. He immediately, upon seeing our work, came to our rescue. He expressed appreciation for all the efforts that we had given to our people.

The requirements attached to the DDD monies were many. One specific requirement was that the CAOC had to open our enrollment to the Passaic County disabled people who had similar needs as the Clifton people already enrolled.

To this day, the CAOC predominately services all the Clifton people they can, plus others. For example, we have two group homes. 10 of the 12 residents in these two group homes are Clifton residents who previously lived with their families in Clifton. (Many of their family members are no longer living.)

Prejudice against the “retarded” was very high years ago. We were blocked from many field trips, restaurants and places we wished to go. School systems resented us as a drain on their budgets.

Interestingly, however, after the Kennedys admitted to having such a family member, it became fashionable to not only accept but also to help these people.

The CAOC participated and worked for the establishment of the Special Olympics in the State of NJ through meetings with Eunice Schreiber and Professor Tim Sullivan of Montclair State College (now a University). Tim Sullivan made us a part of the college’s physical education swim instructor program. We attended swim classes at Montclair State each week until just before the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Since our beginning, the CAOC worked hard to prove that we could be functional citizens in our community. During the early years and until the Covid-19 pandemic, we worked on cleaning the grounds of debris, paper, bottles etc. at Clifton City Hall and worked at the Recycling Center. We even delivered food to shut-ins and needy Clifton families. We also performed other services to help the City of Clifton people...mostly seniors or ill people...by doing their food shopping and delivering the needed items to their doors. For years we offered a drop off and pick up service to people needing to be taken to their doctor appointments. We volunteered at several Clifton Schools and area nursing homes.

Annually, we continue to offer our buildings, bathrooms and equipment to functions of other groups held on City Hall property, such as Clifton Recreation, the Garden Club, and other City functions. In our efforts to keep our people the safest they can be, we fog our buildings and vehicles daily with hospital grade sanitizing solutions.

The CAOC has always been grateful for the benevolence of every City Council since our inception and to the citizens of Clifton. We have always tried to show our gratitude in this manner by returning the kindness they have shown to us.

In very recent years, we no longer receive our budget from the DDD but rather from Medicaid. We have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars renovating each building we use. We now have an enrollment that exceeds the amount of space that we have to properly serve all our people, as we continue to try to help as many people in need as we can.

Hence, our appeal to the present City Council to use our own money to build a building adjacent to our Center. This new building will house the increased enrollment for our Day Program. The space we have requested is right next to our existing buildings. This facilitates our clients being able to walk from one building to another safely supervised by our staff, and also for the ability of our staff to immediately meet any emergency such as a seizure or fall, etc. The building will actually be hidden away from the rest of the City Hall Compound and look like the adjacent buildings so as not to change the historic look of the City Hall Compound. We intend to plant a row of trees between the new building and the parking area near it.

Since our appeal to build, it has been hurtful to hear some people not only denying this permission but also insinuating how much they think we have taken from the City and its historic integrity and property. The fact is just the opposite. We have taken buildings that didn’t have certificates of occupancy and totally renovated them to meet not only all the City’s Building Department codes but especially the

Historic Preservation regulations. We have always tried to preserve the historic integrity of wherever we are.

Each building the City gave to us was in disarray or totally empty of walls and floors until we took over...even the large Victorian house in front of City Hall, which was the home of the Superintendent of the US Quarantine. It is now one of our group homes. Even this large Victorian house was in bad condition and needed a great deal of interior and exterior repair, from rotted wood porch pillars right down to the pavers that were purchased and installed in the area in front of it.

To date, there are approximately 8 years left on our original 50-year lease from the City of Clifton on our buildings. The request to build a new building has prompted the need for a new lease. We have also informed our City leaders that we shall build the building all with our own money and we shall "will it" to the City of Clifton if the CAOC should cease to exist.

In the forty years that the CAOC was here, to our knowledge, no other non-profit agency has asked for space on City Hall property. A former City Manager, Bob Hammer, made the statement that he wished the City would give us all the other outlying buildings since every time we received a building, it became totally improved and was brought back to its historic height. In fact, two small brick buildings offered to the CAOC fell down before the we could attempt to rebuild them.

To date, we have never had a need to put down on paper our history with the City of Clifton. The recent opposition to our existence here has truly offended us. It has created a need in us to explain to the many who are not aware of exactly who the City has been to us and who we have been to the City and its historic buildings.

Every one of our Board Members has been a concerned Clifton citizen and either a Clifton resident or former resident who cares deeply for our cause and the historic value of the City Hall property. Therefore, the CAOC is a Clifton-born non-profit organization dedicated to the cause of servicing primarily Clifton citizens.

Our 41year relationship of successfully working together with the City of Clifton makes us a definite part of the history of the Clifton City Hall Complex.

## **PART B: PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

This proposed undertaking by the City of Clifton and the Clifton Adult Opportunity Center entails the construction of a new building on an extremely small portion of the 26-acre grounds, all of which are considered historic and listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places under U. S. Animal Quarantine Station.

The proposed building will be small, non-obtrusive, and on the extreme periphery of the site of our existing buildings. This building would be on the most eastern edge of the Historic District and out of the historic grid. Further flanking than this patch of land is a cargo/freight working Erie-Lackawanna railroad track on one side and one of the City of Clifton's parking areas on the other side.

It shall be an extension to the current Clifton Adult Opportunity Center (CAOC), which consists of two historic buildings (designated L-1 and L-3) awarded to the CAOC from the City of Clifton in 1980. The purpose of this new construction shall be to house the CAOC clients currently housed in L-3 and used as the CAOC Day Program. The current enrollment of this Day Program now requires greater space to meet the clients' needs. The proposed building will adequately serve the CAOC population whose current building they have outgrown.

The CAOC community seeks to maintain historical integrity while meeting the need for clientele size. The CAOC proactively gathered professional services of an architect and an historical preservation architect and site engineers and other resources in 2019 to best pursue proposed project authorization under NJ Historic Place Act, but time frames have shifted due to the current pandemic. All existing historic structures are listed in the NJ Register of Historic Places under the U.S. Animal Quarantine Station. Proposed project plans maintain historical structuring and materials.

The new 2-story building, of 100-foot by 40-foot dimensions, will be used as a larger educational and activity center for our clients and which will be within a very short walking distance from our existing buildings. It will feature an elevator to meet the ADA requirements and best serve our disabled clients. These are the smaller architectural plans than we first intended. Upon your committee's suggestion we decreased the building's size.

To further ensure historical integrity, a row of trees shall be planted parallel to the entrance and provide a buffer between the new construction and the westward City-Hall parking lot.

The rest of the landscaping around the building and the property shall be addressed after the building is completed. This shall be decided by need and existing funds at the time. This part of the project shall be ongoing as it has been with all our other buildings all these years, since 1980. The design and materials to be utilized have been assessed to meet SHPO standards and are consistent with existing historical buildings on the grounds. The greenery east of the existing parking lot is isolated. Current buildings and structures will not be affected by this proposed construction.

The exterior of the anticipated building will mirror that of the existing CAOC buildings...that is, it shall have a white-clapboard look exterior, with the same roof shingles and the same window trims. There is not a need for parking lot expansion at this time as the CAOC has already enough areas assigned to them by the City of Clifton.

The CAOC is a center for developmentally disabled individuals. Most of our people have multiple handicaps. Not only are they developmentally disabled, but most have other physical problems. These problems range from heart disease, high blood pressure, obsessive compulsive behaviors, occasional elopement issues, blindness, speak-comprehension, difficulty in walking, emotional issues, multiple sclerosis, seizures, autism, diabetes, etc. Use of wheelchairs to assist these people at times is eminent.

Therefore, the safe walking from one building to another is imperative. Safety measures have been incorporated into the current CAOC walkways and proposed designs for the future building are consistent with the existing ones that we already have from one building to the next. A 6 foot sidewalk installation shall allow clients to safely move from one location to another. Clients constantly move from each location of our Program throughout their workday as projects ensue. Current walking conditions cater to each varied ability and disability of the clients at the Center. This includes the need for CAOC staff to double-team an individual who needs greater assistance in walking, such as our blind people, or to use a wheelchair to move someone who is not able to walk from one building to another.

Expanding the CAOC with the proposed project would enable clients to be safely supervised and serviced in one centralized location. The close proximity allows accessibility from one building to another as each client has varying developmental needs. The need to be able to walk safely from one place to another throughout the day within the view and protective eye of CAOC staff is imperative to the success of the clients to achieve the greatest benefits from our program. Proposing off-property expansion would be a disservice to our clients and cause unusual hardship. Using transportation in vehicles and separating the staff and clients disrupts their current progress and sense of normalcy.

Safety again is the most important factor in dealing with clients who have enrolled into our program within its 41 years of existence.

The proposed building shall be funded entirely by the CAOC. This is in the same manner in which the CAOC has completed total renovations of the other historic buildings awarded to us by the City of Clifton City Councils. No other monies other than CAOC monies have ever been used for renovating the historic buildings that the CAOC was ever awarded.

To address the ongoing existing flooding on this site and on the existing City Parking Lot, the CAOC's engineers, architect and Historic Preservation architect have done surveys and worked together to develop plans to rectify these problems for both, the land and the parking area.

We recently received the waiver for the Public/Private Partnership statute, stating that this rule would not be applicable to the Clifton Adult Opportunity Center and its buildings and leases and its Partnership with the City of Clifton for over 41 years.

We are happy to say that we have received all the Clifton Board of Adjusters approval along with all but one Clifton Council members for the approval to move forward with our project and for receiving their permission to submit our application to the NJ Historic Preservation Office.

In fact, in our more than 41 year history with the City of Clifton and its many past governing bodies and city councils who governed over all our projects we never received a negative vote until recently from only one member of this current City council.

The Clifton City Council has voted to renew our lease for the present buildings we now occupy. The new lease will be for 25 years extension on the original lease and will include the proposed building, per authorization, if the NJ Historic Preservation approves that building.

If the CAOC should ever cease to exist, all CAOC buildings on the City Hall Property will again become the sole property of the City of Clifton.

Point of information; The City of Clifton, Mayor James Anzaldi, closed the most recent November 15, 2021 City Council meeting by praising The Clifton Adult Opportunity Center and its' work on Clifton's Historic Property with its quote from former Vice President Hubert Humphry.

"The moral test of government is how that government treats those are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped."

He then stated that the Clifton Adult Opportunity Center falls in to this last category and the government of the City of Clifton has always met its moral test in this matter.

We have attached the link to the section of the council meeting

November 15, 2021 Time 2:11:55

[https://videoplayer.telvue.com/player/xAkU\\_1Eb4e9C1-YCioqZmvaGx4GumMyB/playlists/5715/media/682049?sequenceNumber=1&autostart=false&showtabssearch=true](https://videoplayer.telvue.com/player/xAkU_1Eb4e9C1-YCioqZmvaGx4GumMyB/playlists/5715/media/682049?sequenceNumber=1&autostart=false&showtabssearch=true)