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Courtesy of Lee C. Olsen | Lee C. Olsen, a Reading architect and president of the Pagoda Foundation, created this rendering of what a Pagoda annex or conference center building might look like. Olsen created the drawing in 2005 during a fundraising campaign for Pagoda maintenance and improvements.

What Do You Think?

Which of these is the act of changing?

- Affect
- Effect
- Tell me the answer

Next

Kelly's Korner: Fans envision a bigger role for Reading's mountains

By Dan Kelly

Monday March 6, 2017 12:01 AM

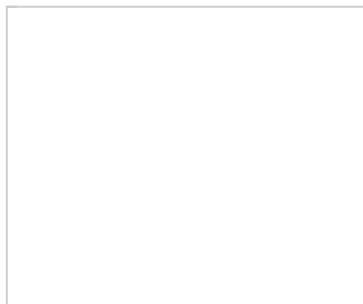
READING, PA — Every now and then it feels good to daydream about things that might be.

I caught myself doing that the other day when I was talking to Reading architect Lee C. Olsen about the Mount Penn Preserve.



| Dan Kelly

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For the uninitiated, Mount Penn Preserve is a notion of fans of Mount Penn, Reading and Berks County who want to develop the Pagoda and other amenities on Mount Penn and Neversink Mountain.

Parks, lakes, bars and restaurants, walking, hiking and biking trails and other uses for the natural resources of the city and suburbs all could be included in the concept.

Olsen and county Commissioner Kevin S. Barnhardt are spearheading a communitywide exploration of what the future of the Pagoda and environs might be. They held the first of four public meetings on Saturday, Feb. 25, in City Hall.

About 25 people brainstormed on that Saturday morning in City Council chambers about how to make Mount Penn a flourishing cultural and economic destination.

Ideas ranging from simple things like litter clean-ups to Mayor Wally Scott's dream of having a cable car up to the Pagoda, were aired.

"There is so much potential," said Olsen, who is an architect and president of the Pagoda Foundation.

The first session was intended to gather ideas from the general public and from folks who use the mountain on a regular basis, whether it's to hike, bike, walk their dogs, or other diversions. The goal is the development of a master plan.

The next meeting is set for Thursday, March 9, at the Reading Liederkrantz, 143 Spook Lane. The second session will be used to present initial design concepts and have further discussion and feedback. A draft master plan will be presented at the third meeting on Saturday, March 25, back in City Hall.

The fourth and final meeting will be held on Thursday, April 20, at Stokesay Castle and Knight's Pub, 141 Stokesay Castle Lane. The plan right now is for a final master plan to be presented at the Stokesay meeting.

While Olsen and I were talking about the Mount Penn Preserve, I said I thought there was room for a rectangular building behind the Pagoda. The area already is hollowed out and about a story and a half below Skyline Drive and the parking area next to the Pagoda.

"You could put a two-story rectangular building back there and no one could even see it," I said.

Olsen could barely contain himself. Back in 2005 during the Pagoda Pennies fundraising program, Olsen created a drawing of what an annex or addition to the symbolic edifice might look like.

Olsen isn't the only one with a vision for how the Pagoda and Mount Penn could be developed. Both Olsen and Barnhardt have ideas about how they would like to see what may be the county's biggest asset developed.

When they say developed, they don't mean dividing the mountainside overlooking Reading and Lower Alsace Township into parcels and putting in single homes, condominiums and apartments. And they don't mean putting in a strip shopping center on Skyline Drive.

What they're talking about is something like a Pagoda conference center. Something that would attract people to the area. An annex building could house a Pagoda museum, shops, a bar and restaurant and a walkway from the second floor of the annex building to the Pagoda.

"It's why I play the lottery," Barnhardt said. "So, I can give someone \$3 million or whatever it takes and ask them to build it."



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