1. Comments from the Chair

Committee Chair Larry Maslon called the meeting to order and began with an overview of the time line for stewardship mentioning two charges for the committee: Governance/Representation and Open Spaces.

Alison Leary, Executive Vice President of Operations, commented that for her office to implement any issues addressed by this committee for spring 2016, they would need to receive the recommendations by mid-September 2015.

It was noted that the next meeting would encompass an update from the architects regarding the programming phase of design.

2. Legal Update

Lynne Brown, Vice President of University Relations and Public Affairs, provided an update on the legal appeal and noted that oral arguments took place and a decision was expected before the court goes to summer recess. Brown clarified that the media often refers to the entire plan, with the development of four buildings on both the north and south superblock. Brown explained that the University is only planning the redevelopment of the Coles site at this point since work cannot begin on the north block until 2022 at the earliest. If and when the University begins planning for the redevelopment of the north block, Brown explained a similar process, like that with the University Space Priorities Working Group (“USPWG”), would be convened.

Brown proceeded to outline the progress of the Coles project to date; we have chosen our architectural partnership and a general contractor has been hired. The architects have been in active and extensive conversations with groups of the building’s end users to get accurate input.
for design. This programming process has led to a new phase of choices and decisions on space. With an understanding of the needs and priorities of the building’s end users, the architects are beginning the schematic design process; where they work through ways to meet needs given their volumetric requirements (i.e. theaters require several floors of height) and design features.

Brown explained that there is approximately a 20% deficit of space compared with need at this point in the process. The architects explained that this is not unusual for this point in the process. Brown explained that the architects have a three-pronged strategy to work with the building’s end users on tradeoffs, while keeping their eyes on the USPWG’s recommendations as a guide for closing the square footage gap. The architect’s strategy is as follows:

1. Return to the end users to press their space priorities and to identify critical needs,
2. Examine design solutions to identify efficiencies, and
3. Reviewing alternate was to address space goals that cannot be accommodated in the new building.

The architects have found that many end users are looking to be located in the podium (right below and above ground level) and their challenge will be to see where the various uses will fit best in the building. It was restated that final decisions about design and space allocation had not been made, but that the architects had preliminary ideas about the direction the above strategy may take.

Brown explained that it would be helpful for the Committee to provide input in terms of guidelines and principles that University leadership can consider when making final programming decisions. Brown recommended six principles the Committee could recommend the University use when making these decisions:

1. Adhere to the requirements of the ULURP (i.e. requisite community space in the new building) and make decisions that make programmatic and fiscal sense.
2. Prioritize uses that are hard to meet by renovating existing spaces.
3. Follow the spirit of the USPWG recommendations.
4. Maintain an allowance for design excellence.
5. Avoid simplistic, across the board programming cuts that will result in spaces that fail to fill programmatic needs well.
6. Consider the impact of the new building on residents and the community.

The Committee agreed with Brown’s recommendations.

Bob Berne, Executive Vice President for Health, commented that he feels confident that we have a good team in place and acknowledged that there would be hard decisions to make. Berne was confident the architects would find ways to incorporate efficiencies and added that there are options to use existing University spaces, like the fitness center at 404 Lafayette Street, for renovation opportunities to meet some programmatic needs not met by the new
building. Berne thanked the Committee for their work to date and expressed that they had been very helpful in shaping the building and keeping to the spirit of the USPWG recommendations.

Malson asked how the presidential transition could impact the project. Berne responded that the directive has been to keep the project moving along. He added there is a leadership team coordinating the project with input from various constituents including end users and the SSAC.

Other design and space issues were surfaced including security, open spaces, community space, and “green” building requirements.

3. Silver Towers Open Space Issues

Brown provided an update on the Urban Farm, which is located behind Silver Towers. Once the window installation project begins, the Urban Farm will be allowed to go fallow to protect users from the work going on above the Farm. Brown also explained that the University received a special variance permit from the Landmarks Preservation Commission, which has expired. Brown recommended the University not seek to extend the permit at this time since it will require a public review. Brown acknowledged that the farms’ users would most acutely experience this loss, but identified the Committee’s upcoming open space stewardship evaluation as an opportunity to identify the needs and wants of the community at large. At that point the University can re-engage Landmarks about future changes. The Committee asked that a communication about the closing of the farm be distributed.

It was noted that the Rocket Ship Play Area would remain open until at least mid-August. At that point the play area will be renovated into dog run where the Mercer-Houston Dog Run Association would relocate from their current location on the southeastern corner of West Houston and Mercer Streets.

4. Coles Redevelopment Update

Brown confirmed that Coles would definitely reopen at the start of the fall semester. Leary commented that a closure date for Coles has not been set since so many pieces of the project were still pending. Brown and Leary agreed the University would communicate once a firm date was set.