

Hamilton Town Hall Renovation Project

2021 Update

Architectural Rendering of Restored Hamilton Town Hall



Background

Hamilton Town Hall, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1898 and has never had a significant renovation. It is approximately 12,500 square feet.

The building's major problems include:

- Significant structural problems inside and ongoing deterioration of the building exterior.
- No fire suppression system, potentially putting at risk both lives and town records.
- Only the first floor is accessible. Town departments are not accessible for those who cannot climb stairs. The “temporary” ramp was put in 30+ years ago. Lack of accessibility violates state law.
- Cubicles take up the second floor leaving no room for the public events that once took place here.
- Secure and accessible storage for the files the Town is required to maintain in hard copy by state law is inadequate or putting pressure on the bowing building structure.

The goal is to create namely a renovated civic center of our town that is ready for its next 100 years.



What's Wrong with Town Hall?

“Temporary” Ramp

This “temporary” ramp was put in in the 1990’s at the State’s insistence and is now in very poor condition. People with the inability to climb stairs must have staff come to them on the first floor. MA law requires public buildings be ADA compliant.

This project will create the following accessible features:

- Main entrance with elevator by dedicated parking
- Bathrooms on each floor
- Access to all floors and the stage

Accessible features benefit everyone moving anything heavy, pushing a stroller or wheeled suitcase, or temporarily disabled. It allows us to hire fairly as well and provide accommodations to staff who, say, break a leg.



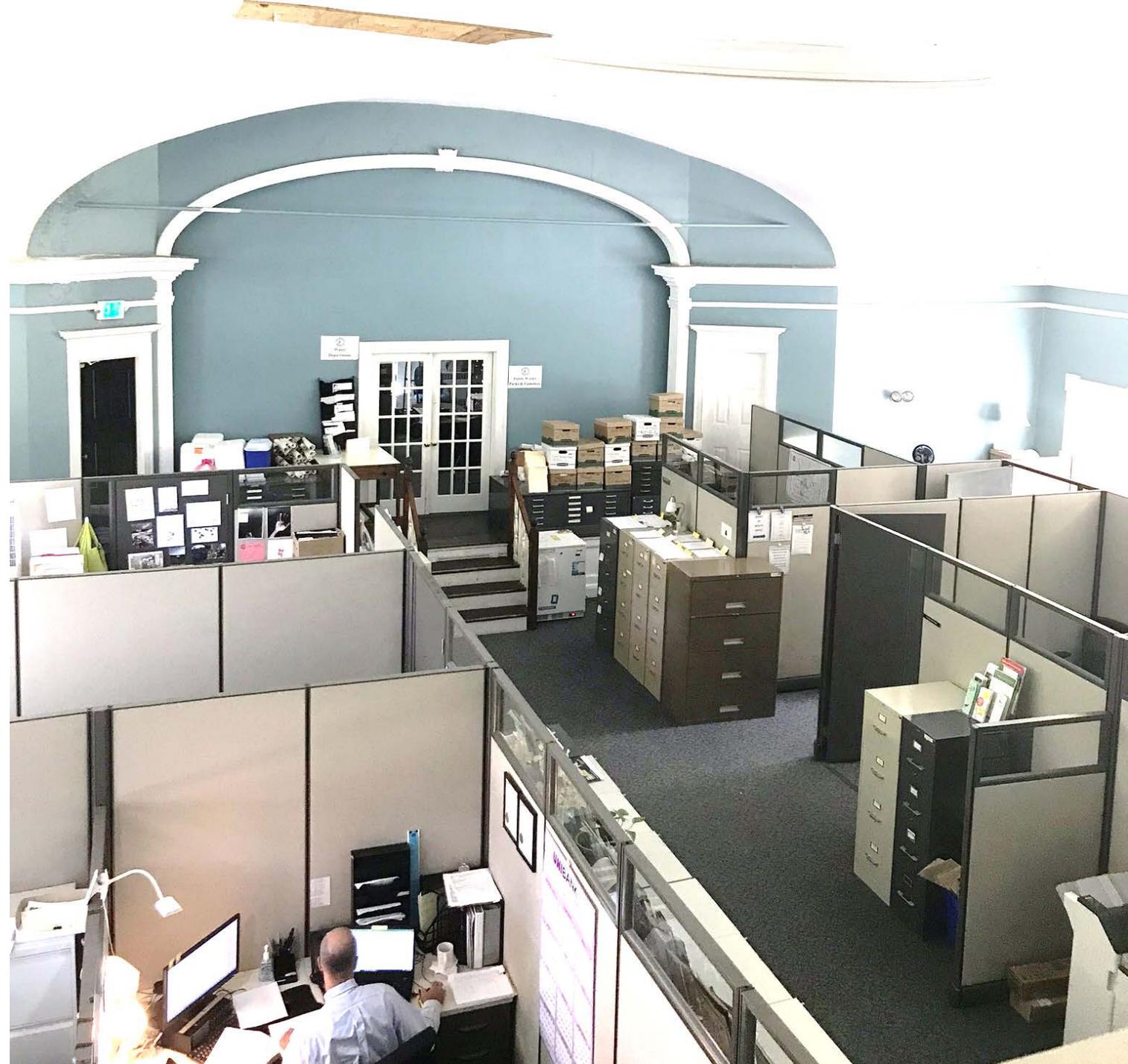
Deteriorated Architectural Features



- The side entrance portico and other wood trim has deteriorated.
- This project will restore the building's aging architectural elements, including the cupola

Second Floor Current Use

- Cubicles with no audio privacy for townspeople, because of acoustics
- No bathrooms on second floor
- Stair access only
- Only community room is smaller and on first floor.
- This space once held school assemblies, dances, community meetings, and performances. The acoustics are designed for events, not shared work space.





Structural Damage

- Weight from above has put pressure on the walls and ceiling, which is especially noticeable on the 2nd floor.
- The walls are bowing out visibly. The 2nd floor hall ceiling has a large hole and many cracks.
- The historic cupola is incomplete.
- The project will stabilize the walls, restore the cupola, and fix the holes and cracks in the ceiling.

Storage, Storage, and More Storage



- Hamilton Town Hall holds official records dating back hundreds of years. By Massachusetts law, the town is required to have its offices in Hamilton and to keep many records in hard copy.
- This project will create a dedicated, organized centralized modern storage area in the basement where the weight will not damage the building. The clerk's vault for official records will be larger and fully accessible.



What is the work to be done?

The project consists of the restoration and renovation of Hamilton Town Hall (approx. 12,500 gsf), a new addition (approx. 1,817 gsf), and complete site work, including new septic and increased parking. Systems include hydraulic elevator, full mechanical, electrical, plumbing, technology and security, and fire protection systems. These updates address the following areas:

- **SAFETY:** Add a fire protection sprinkler system, stabilize the structure, correct deterioration of the building exterior, mitigate water issues, repair the cupola, upgrade systems including adding a generator, address plumbing and electrical code issues.
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** Addition of an elevator to make the building universally accessible. Currently there is a widespread lack of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance within the building, including bathrooms, additional parking for large public meetings/events.
- **SMARTER LAYOUT:** Bring back public use of the large hall with stage (apx. 80 person capacity), plus dedicated office space with privacy instead of an inefficient cubicle space without public meeting space.
- **SECURE RECORDS:** Add sufficient and safe storage areas and a larger, accessible vault for required town records, such as historical records, etc.
- **SAVE MONEY:** Support sustainability and ongoing operating costs by using green technology to lower water and electrical usage.
- **RESPECT OUR HISTORY:** Retain and restore historic architectural details, inside and out, as required in the Hamilton Historic District. Bring Memorial plaques and commemorative materials into the larger Memorial Meeting Room.

Process

- The Town of Hamilton appointed the **Town Hall Building Committee** in 2017.
- The committee and started planning for a renovation of the building to bring it up to code, address structural issues, and make it accessible and adapted for the town's needs today and into the next 100 years.
- Architectural plans were completed, with input from the townspeople on accessible options.
- The project was put out to bid in Fall 2020 following all state procurement regulations. 8 bids came in from general contractors, with subcontractors bidding separately as required by MA law.
- Town Meeting approved the project, but the 30-year bond ask was not approved in December 2020. The Board of Selectmen voted to bring the project back before voters in May 2021 with a requested amount of new taxes that is \$1.2M (27%) less than December, thanks to a \$1M CPA grant, project cost savings, and a grant for a generator.
- The project is ready to start this Summer.
- Town Meeting is May 1. The election is May 6. The project just requires a YES vote at both to move forward.



Second Floor Future Use

- Accessible stage, two bathrooms, and kitchenette, elevator
- New ties will stabilize leaning walls.
- Offering AC and great acoustics
- Offices will be lockable so that community room may be used after hours.
- Rededicated Memorial Meeting Room honoring generations of Hamilton's veterans and fallen soldiers.
- Elevator to stage
- Restored flooring
- Offices hidden

A wide-angle photograph of the interior of Hamilton's Civic Center. The room is bright and spacious, with white walls and a light-colored wooden floor. In the foreground, a long, light-colored wooden table is set up with several grey chairs tucked under it. Behind the table, rows of grey chairs are arranged in a semi-circle, facing towards the back of the room. The back wall features a large, arched window on the left and a central doorway. Above the doorway, there is a balcony with a white railing. Several pendant lights hang from the ceiling, providing illumination. The overall atmosphere is clean, modern, and functional.

Hamilton's Civic Center

A center of community life,
hosting

- Public meetings
- Award ceremonies
- Lectures
- Performances
- Fundraisers
- Community celebrations
- Birthday parties



Memorial Meeting Room

All the plaques will be moved from the present room (pictured) and rededicated.

Let's talk \$\$

- Since 2017, the Committee and Town have worked hard to reduce any increase in property taxes by successfully seeking **CPA funding** for historic preservation (\$4.475M approved), **grants**, and **donated temporary office space**. This will cover 61% of the cost of \$8,671,127.

- 30-year bond for the remaining 39% of the project: \$3.4M.

What will it cost me?

- The proposed project will cost the average Hamilton household (at a \$631K home value) \$94.65 a year in new property taxes. Bond payments are lowered over time, so that amount DROPS to \$50.48.

- For a home valued at \$500,000, the cost is expected to be \$72.75/year dropping over time to \$39.23.

- To calculate your rate, multiply .15x the number of thousands in property valuation. (\$.15/\$1,000, which drops over the 30 year bond period to \$.08/\$1,000)

- NOTE: With our firm bid held only through May, any delay will only increase the costs. Interest rates could also go up.

To find your property value, go here to the Assessor's Database:
<http://hamilton.patriotproperties.com/default.asp>

The average Hamilton household will pay under \$95/year in new property taxes at most, dropping to \$50.48 over time.

Costs and Funding

The 2021 ask is 27% *less than* December (-\$1.2 million).

Town Hall Renovation	2021	2020	Difference
Total Cost of Project	\$8,671,127	\$8,887,282	-\$216,155
Funding already lined up	\$5,271,127	\$4,204,127	+\$1,067,000
New Ask to Taxpayers	\$3,400,000	\$4,683,155	-\$1,283,155

Frequent Concerns

- Other projects are more important, like schools or a turf field.
- Can the CPC money be used for other things?
- Why not just build a new building?
- Was the bidding process fair?
- Couldn't we just do a smaller project?

Shouldn't this Money Go for More Important Things Used by More People?

- *Every* citizen of Hamilton uses the services provided by staff at Town Hall even if they conduct business online or by mail.
- Records for your home and the business of the town are required by state law to be kept by the Town in hard copy.
- Staff have worked on site at Town Hall almost continuously during the pandemic. Taking Town Hall fully digital is not possible in the foreseeable future.
- Hamilton voters have already approved the project in the past as well as several CPC allocations for this project over the last four years.
- These funds cannot just be directed in other ways. CPC funds must be spent in all three categories and are not available for school buildings.

CPC Funding

The citizens of Hamilton voted to adopt the Community Preservation Act on May 12, 2005. This program creates a 2% surcharge on real estate taxes for all residences and businesses, with exemptions for the first \$100,000 of residential property value and for property owned and occupied by any person who qualifies for low-income housing or low- or moderate-income senior housing. This surcharge is then matched by a state fund.

Who's on the Community Preservation Committee (CPC)? The CPC is a nine-member committee with five members appointed at large by the Board of Selectmen (BOS) along with four other members appointed respectively by the Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, Board of Selectmen, and the Housing Authority. Their charter is to administrate the provisions of the CPA, including review and approval of requests for funding which are then placed on the warrant for following Town Meeting.

What type of projects can the CPC fund?

The CPC can only fund projects that fall under three categories: Historic Preservation; Community Housing; and Open Space and Recreation, and there are specific restrictions and qualifications amongst each of these categories.



Can the CPC fund any school related projects?

The only school related projects that could receive funding are those for recreation, e.g., playgrounds and athletic facilities.

To date, the CPC has provided funds for the Winthrop and Buker School playgrounds, and an athletic field study for the Hamilton Wenham Regional High School

The CPC cannot provide any funds for a new school or money to repair existing ones.

School & Recreation Projects

- Our schools do need work! School projects are not expected to happen for several years as the School Department has just requested planning money from the state this year. **CPC funding is not available for the schools.** The state has other funding available for schools.
- The much discussed **turf field** at the high school is still in planning stages as well, with no firm deadline or final plan. That field is managed by the school department. The project, which belongs to the School District, has been estimated to cost \$6-\$9 million, which will also need to be approved by Wenham voters. Hamilton CPC funds can pay for some of the project, and have already been used for planning. The CPC has the project on its list of expected upcoming projects, but there's no date attached yet.
- **This project has been timed to minimize large tax increases. There is no school override or school funding being requested in 2021.**

Why Not Just Build a New Building?

- Hamilton Town Hall is only eligible for CPC funding as a historic building in the Historic District.
- A newly constructed building would **not be eligible** for CPC funding or other future historic preservation funding, and there's little funding for new construction, meaning the FULL cost would likely be born by taxpayers in the form of higher property taxes rather than using CPC funds.

Were there other bids?

MA law for public projects such as this uses a formal bidding process.

8 general contractor companies bid on the project. At the time, the lowest bidder was not then certified to do historic renovations, as is required, so was disqualified. The winning bid was from the second lowest bidder.

In addition, the general contractor is required to use sub-contractors who also go through the bidding process required by MA law. Only one winning sub-contractor was unable to hold their price through May and opted to drop out. The second lowest sub-contractor was then selected.

NOTE: Costs have gone up since the fall. With our firm bid held only through May, any delay on the project will only increase the costs.

Couldn't we
just do a little
bit each year?

The load bearing exterior walls are leaning outwards due to pressure from above, and the building is not accessible.

There is no fire suppression system, putting people and records at risk.

Addressing these needs, which will cost at least 50% of the value of the building, triggers a state requirement to bring the building up to code.

This means that we cannot continue to do renovations piecemeal.

Current Status

This project is now ready to happen with architectural plans and bidders in place. The Town Hall Renovation project was approved at the Fall 2020 Town Meeting. At the December 3, 2020 special election, however, the funding request was not approved at the ballot. Only 19% of voters voted in this election.

It has been endorsed by Hamilton Board of Selectmen, Hamilton Finance and Advisory Committee, Hamilton Community Preservation Committee, HWRSD School Committee, Hamilton-Wenham Recreation Board, Hamilton Historic District Commission, Hamilton Planning Board, and Hamilton Capital Committee.

On March 15, 2021, the Board of Selectmen voted to add this project to the May 1, 2021 Town Meeting agenda and election ballot on May 6, 2021.

Please vote!

- Taxpayers will be voting at the May 1 Town Meeting whether to move forward on the project.
- Voters go to the polls on May 6 on whether to allow the Town to seek a \$3.4M bond to cover the remaining project cost (39%).
- The impact on property taxes this time-- \$3.4M over 30 years--is \$1.2M less than the \$4,683,155 ask in December 2020.
- A YES vote moves the project forward.