

TOWN HALL BUILDING COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
January 21, 2021

Members Present: Mike Twomey, Jay Butler, Darcy Dale, Jean-Pierre Minois, Jack Lawrence, Rosemary Kennedy, Tim Olson, and Patrick Reffett

Members Absent: None

Others Present: None

Mike Twomey opened the Zoom audio/video teleconference at 1:04 PM. Jay then conducted a roster call to validate the attendance.

**Committee Name and Charter**

Jack asked if there was a new committee name and charter going forward. Rosemary indicated that the committee name will stay the same but the charter may be modified. Mike said that the direction he received was to forge ahead with plans to bring up the project for consideration at the May 1<sup>st</sup> ATM but to recognize that if other financial issues arise beforehand that the project may be delayed for consideration until the Fall 2021 Town Meeting or even the Spring 2022 Town Meeting. HE hoped that all members of the committee will continue.

**Brainstorming Session**

Mike mentioned that Jay had offered to facilitate a brainstorming session to help develop ideas to get the project approved at Town meeting and then asked Jay to explain. Jay briefly explained the use of brainstorming in industry and then went over the rules and process for conducting a formal brainstorming session. He explained the process as having each person in turn be asked to suggest an idea for consideration. The process continues around and around the group with those unable to think of an idea when it is their turn to pass and then allow others to contribute until all ideas are exhausted. Once all ideas have been collected, the committee will then group similar ideas. Jay will then take his handwritten list of ideas, type them up and then send them out via email to the committee and assign each person 5 virtual votes with which they can attach to one or several ideas. Each person will then return their vote preference to Jay who will tabulate the voting and develop a list of ideas in order of voter preference. The ranked list will then be sent out to the committee for discussion and consideration at a future meeting. Names of committee members associated with specific ideas will be omitted from the final list. Mike asked when we should conduct the session and then suggested next Thursday, January 28, 2021 at a 1:00 PM Zoom meeting. Jay agreed to send out pertinent info by email in advance.

Jay then noted that the committee first needed to agree on the problem to be solved before brainstorming could begin on ideas to solve it and then he proceeded to list the following:

**Facts of the Problem - The negative voters were a diverse group segmented into categories and over 80% of eligible voters did not vote:**

- those who oppose tax rate increases in general
- those who are misinformed about the project and other Town financial issues
- those concerned over the Town's current debt obligations
- those who are concerned over the need for more funds for the schools
- those who would rather spend money on a Turf Field at the High School
- those who don't use and therefore don't feel a need for a renovated Town Hall
- those who think other large, looming capital projects are more important
- those who just think the project just costs too much at \$8.9M
- those who did not vote, given the Special Election vote of 669 No to 441 Yes for a total of 1130 or 18.9% of the total of 5967 eligible voters

Jean-Pierre asked for clarification on what we would achieve from brainstorming and a discussion then ensued.

Tim offered his insight into the problem by suggesting that the COVID 19 pandemic played a major role in causing many voters to not bother voting and others to question the need to vote for Town Hall. He observed that many people are working from home and many companies are thus rethinking the need for all of their office holdings. He continued by noting that people are quite accustomed to paying bills online and attending meetings via zoom and thus having less reliance on places to meet or work, e.g., Town Hall.

Darcy insisted that Town Hall is a necessary collection of business offices and we will hopefully get back to normal in the near future. She insisted that Leaders don't quit and should do what is best for running the Town.

Jack started by referring to a current personal problem of his where he was frustrated by his inability to get a pickup truck registered at the RMV due to the fact that he needed to do so in person and could not do it online. It seems there were no available appointments for over 3 months, and it was only for the fact that he was over 75 years old that he was able to get an appointment. His reason for the preface was that he wanted to note that many things need to be done in person. He then referenced the planned Capital Committee meeting scheduled via Zoom for next Monday evening. That meeting will be a discussion of the major financial issues which the Town will face in the next five years, including discussion of potential overrides. He lamented the issue of not being able to have that meeting in person. Jack then mentioned that the Turf Fields at the high school were 5-10 years out and that the proposed \$0.20 tax rate increase for Town Hall is a drop in the bucket compared to what will come in the future for financial needs.

Jack then switched subjects and brought up the Q & A sheet on the project that Mike had developed for his use during the Town Hall public Zoom meeting. Mike had sent it out just prior to today's meeting and Jack offered to tackle the effort required to eliminate some duplicate questions and add needed info to the document. Mike readily agreed and tasked Jack

to update the document. Jack noted that this was likely one of the ideas that would likely come from our planned brainstorming session.

Rosemary next brought up the subject of using the media to address the project. At Mike's suggestion, Rosemary proceeded to explain her initial introduction to media consultant and Wenham resident, Kirsten Alexander and noted some pertinent facts about her. Kirsten is very familiar with both Hamilton and Wenham, owns property in both towns, is one of the founders of the Wenham Human Rights Commission, and spends lots of time trolling on Facebook monitoring and correcting misinformation regarding the Town Hall Projects and others. Kirsten recently attended a meeting with Rosemary, Mike, and Joe D. where she presented some media ideas for the project and convinced all that she could definitely help our project. At that meeting, she mentioned getting the message out via visuals included developing a video, creating a Facebook page dedicated to Town Hall, and developing press releases. The decision at the end of the meeting was to hire her using funds from Joe D.'s existing consultant account. Rosemary did not know the cost but indicated it had to be less than \$10k. Jack suggested caution in telling everyone we were spending yet more money in these times. Rosemary insisted we want everyone to be informed about her project and Mike said it will take the load off our shoulders. Jack agreed by noting that many don't listen to info coming from Town Hall. Rosemary noted that Kirsten needed info from the committee on the problems so that she could formulate the approaches to the problem.

Jay suggested that with the hiring of this consultant that perhaps his suggested brainstorming for ideas might not be appropriate since his brainstorming was to develop ideas for solving the problem and not develop ideas for defining the problem as needed by the consultant. After some back and forth discussion amongst Rosemary, Jay, and Mike all were in disagreement and confused until Jay suggested that two separate brainstorming sessions were needed – the first one to define the nature of the problem and the second one to develop ideas for the consultant to consider but also to develop ideas that the committee could embrace much like Jack's idea of updating the Q&A document on the project. Our consultant could then see to getting it published somewhere.

Responding to a comment from Darcy about voting and the pandemic concerns about going to the polls, Jay noted that he had voted for the Special Election several weeks before the December 3<sup>rd</sup> election using vote by mail provisions. Jay explained that mail in voting was available to everyone, as was early voting and that even if you asked for mail in voting you were not required to use it and you could decide to vote in person if one decided to do so. Jay noted that this might be one of the problems to address in terms of info needed for the voters.

### **Project Funding Status**

Mike asked Tim how much money was left in the coffers. Tim reported that we had \$156k left but he was not sure we could use it going forward. Mike noted that it would be helpful to have John @ DTI and Drayton @ LLB involved in the brainstorming sessions. Tim said he would consult with Marisa on the matter. Jay suggested that he check with Marisa as to whether or not we need to revote the project at Town Meeting in addition to another Special Election. Jay

felt we did not need a revote on the Town ask or the CPC grant. Tim then asked if we needed a presentation at Town Meeting. Rosemary said it was TBD.

### **Project Bid Status**

Tim asked about the bid situation as we move forward, i.e., how long are the current bids alright until we have to rebid? Mike said it was likely 8 or 9 months after the bids were received but admitted that he did not have that in writing. Tim will pursue that from John at DTI. Jack asked if it would be competitive if we went beyond the bid validation date and several said it would be and that Windover would then get involved.

### **New Suggestion on CPC Grants**

Jay made what he called a very controversial statement by saying that if the CPC surcharge were raised to 3% from the current 2% that he felt that the CPC could pay for the entire project. Jay reported that over the last few weeks he had been thinking about the cost of the project and began looking at the effect of raising the surcharge to 3% from the current 2%. He reported looking at the Town's Five Year Capital Plan and the School Department's Capital Plan to try and identify future projects that might be eligible for CPC grants. He identified only the Turf Field at the high school as a possibility but noted it was out 5 or 6 years. With questioning from Rosemary and Darcy, he reported that the increase in the tax rate to increase the surcharge would be \$40 less annually than raising the tax rate by \$0.20 for the \$4.7M bond for construction costs, \$122 vs. \$82. When asked about the downside to his suggestion, Jay said that in the near term that the CPC would not be able to grant any more multi-million grants that need bonding. Jay said that he had not told anyone about his idea until today and suggested that the assembled pass the word. Rosemary and Darcy said they would inform Marisa and the BOS. Jack said he would inform the Capital Committee. Jay went on to say that he would NOT provide his calculations to anyone but suggested that those in the know do the same calculation to validate his suggestion. Darcy suggested that Marisa do the calculation.

### **Past Meeting Minutes**

**Jay made a motion that was seconded to accept the 12/17/20 meeting minutes that was then seconded. He noted that he had received comments from Lee and Jack and hearing no other comments, Jay recorded a roll call vote of 8 - 0 to approve.** Mike noted that he still had to get the Zoom record so he could complete the 9/2/19 meeting minutes.

### **Future Meeting**

Mike said he would set up a Zoom meeting for Thursday, January 28, 2021 at 1:00 PM for the brainstorming session on problem definition.

**Darcy made a motion to adjourn at 2:21 PM that was seconded and voted by roll call vote 8 - 0.**

A True Record,

Jay Butler, Secretary