

TOWN HALL BUILDING COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING
February 4, 2021

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

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Owner Project Manager (OPM) - Design Technique (DTI), Lee Sollenberger; Designer/Architect - Lerner Ladds Bartels (LLB), Drayton Fair (part-time) and Mark Ritz; Pat Shannon, Assistant to the Town Manager and CPC Coordinator; and Steve Astulfi, abutter to Town hall

Mike Twomey opened the Zoom audio/video teleconference at 1:00 PM. Jay then took a roll call of committee members.

Past Meeting Minutes

Jay made a motion that was seconded to accept the 1/28/21 meeting minutes, mentioned getting some typo comments from Lee, and hearing no other comments, recorded a roll call vote of 5 - 0 to approve the minutes. (Patrick abstained, and Jack and Tim were delayed signing on to the meeting.)

Brainstorming Session to Develop Ideas to Educate, Communicate, and Address Reasons Why the Projected was Defeated December 3, 2020 at the Polls

Mike then turned the meeting over to Jay for him to conduct the brainstorming session.

Drayton asked if there were any restrictions on what could be done by the committee with regard to ideas. Jay said that as a private citizen he could do anything he wanted. Darcy and Rosemary said that as members of the BOS they were allowed to educate and communicate information to the voters on such an important project.

Rosemary then described a situation whereby a local couple in their 80's depend on Facebook for all of their news on events, She lamented about the problem given that Facebook was not very reliable for accurate info.

Jay then explained the brainstorming process by first briefly reviewing the results of last week's session to identify some of the problems associated with why the project was voted down on December 3rd.

The following are the group voting results on the 20 ideas that were developed at the 1/28/21 Brainstorming session. The ideas are shown in descending order depending on the number of votes received. We had 11 participants for the idea generation but only 8 who participated in the voting with each having 5 votes for a total of 40 votes.

1. There was failure to communicate on many levels concerning the project, despite the many committee meetings and many decisions made. **10 VOTES**
 - a. The committee failed to provide information on the various alternatives on the project – build new, relocate, design options.
 - b. No full communication of need, e.g., rotting woodwork, ADA concerns, need for more photos demonstrating the deteriorating conditions.
 - c. Some have misinformation on the project and think the project is just a beautification project.
 - d. No adequate communication that the renovated Town Hall will offer a community space.
 - e. General lack of communication on project details.
 - f. Many detailed project issues that had been resolved for the project keep coming back up for debate, e.g., addition, grand staircase, new vs. old, etc.
 - g. Need to show that the design and cost of the building are the most effective and conservative.
 - h. Many different building configurations have been suggested, studied, and discarded in favor of other more attractive options but these details were never properly communicated to voters.
 - i. We need better communication on all building options considered, i.e., renovate vs. build new with no CPC support, use of other Town buildings, i.e., the Patton Homestead.
 - j. Voters need info on the process of elimination used in consideration of different building options.
 - k. Many have had questions over the cost per square foot of the project.
2. We have not shown how the Town Hall need fits in with all other projects facing the Town. **6 VOTES**
 - a. Many think that there are more important projects integral to the Town than Town Hall.
 - b. No appreciation that some of the Town's debt obligations will be coming offline in the near term.
 - c. There is no information or distinction between "shovel ready" projects, medium-term projects that are 5 – 8 years out, and long-term projects that are over 10 years out.
 - d. We have a failure to communicate needs beyond those of the schools and therefore need a multifaceted approach to define needs of the Town.
 - e. Some voters have concerns over other town financial obligations, e.g., unfunded school dept. retirements, school budget caused overrides.
 - f. Voters were concerned that a vote for Town Hall would take away from funds available for the high school turf fields.
3. Failure to communicate the importance of Town Hall to the voters. **5 VOTES**
 - a. Voters need to appreciate the importance of Town Hall as it contains birth and death records, deeds, etc.

- b. Voters need to appreciate the importance of such an historic building.
- 4. Lack of understanding of the increased cost on not doing something now and having to do it later. **4 VOTES**
- 5. Many voters are concerned over current town financial obligations, i.e., school budget overrides. **3 VOTES**
- 6. Some voters don't think their votes mean anything or that they will not count. **3 VOTES**
 - a. Some people just feel hopeless these days.
- 7. The pandemic has caused many people to work from home, conduct business online and business owners are rethinking the need for office space, and thus question the need for a Town Hall. **2 VOTES**
 - a. Many voters don't use Town Hall and therefore question the need.
 - b. Many think we could operate without a Town Hall, especially as we all operate via Zoom meetings.
- 8. Failure to involve school leadership who could help separate voter concerns from school issues. **2 VOTES**
- 9. Some think the project just costs too much. **2 VOTES**
- 10. Voters need to understand the utility and flexibility of applying for a mail-in ballot for elections. **1 VOTE**
- 11. Those who question the need for a Town Hall building need to understand that the same question can be applied to school buildings. **1 VOTE**
- 12. The lack of voter participation suggests a need for a "Get Out the Vote Campaign". **1 VOTE**
- 13. There is no community feeling about the project.
 - a. There is no "Friends of Town Hall" group.
- 14. Many older, long term residents are against any tax increases. **1 VOTE**
- 15. Some residents are charged up with anti-government sentiments.
- 16. The recent tax rate increase was not adequately explained.
- 17. The pandemic and the era of contested elections has had an effect with voter thinking long term about the economy, causing them to pause in supporting a large project.
- 18. Concern over Doug Trees negative support for the project.
- 19. Many were not aware of the project.
 - a. There is no town newspaper.
- 20. The Town has little civil engagement.

Jay then explained that we would function as we did last week but today we would develop ideas to counter the problems identified. The list of the brainstorming ideas from the group would then be tabulated by Jay with voting results hopefully received by Jay by Tuesday, February 9, 2021, and then sent back out to the group. Each participant would have 5 virtual votes for them to vote for their favorite ideas. The results would then be discussed at the next meeting. The brainstorming process will continue round and round the group until all ideas are mentioned. Jay then determined that the following persons would participate: Jay, Mike, Darcy, Rosemary, Jean-Pierre, Jack, Mark, Drayton, Lee, Steve, Jean-Pierre, and Pat.

The following ideas were suggested as efforts the committee could use to educate, communicate and otherwise overturn the negative vote on the project at the December 3rd Special Election.

1. **Develop a 10 question, Yes/No, flash online survey** to find out what the voters were thinking and get some idea of how to best approach the next try to get the project approved. - Jay
 - a. Did you vote in the Special Election on December 3, 2020 concerning the approximate \$4.7M request for the final construction funds for the Hamilton Town Hall Renovation, Addition, and Preservation Project?
 - b. Did you vote to approve the project?
 - c. Were you aware that the Total Project Cost was approximately \$8.9M?
 - d. Would you approve the project if the Total Project Cost was lower?
 - e. Were you aware that the recent Special Town Meeting approved a \$3M Community Preservation grant to defer part of the project cost?
 - f. The estimated effect on the tax rate for the completion of the project was an increase of \$0.20. Would you vote to approve the project if the increase to the tax rate were lower?
 - g. Do you think that the Town Hall Building Committee did enough to publicize the project?
 - h. Do you think the Town Hall Building Committee acted with enough transparency while working on the project?
 - i. Are you aware of the litany of outstanding problems with the current Town Hall, including: lack of a fire protection system; plumbing and electrical code issues; deteriorating exterior; building structural concerns; and widespread lack of ADA compliance within the building?
 - j. Do you feel that there are more important capital projects facing the town than the Town Hall project?
2. Develop a Facebook presence and a Friends Group. – Mike
3. Using Facebook, and embracing an experienced professional, not only educate and communicate on the project, but actively head off any misinformation by providing the current information. – Tim
4. Use the electronic sign outside the Public Safety or a banner on the side of the Patton Park tennis courts to direct people to the Facebook page. – Darcy
5. Send informational flyer out to all households. – Rosemary
6. Develop a video presentation showing the current conditions at Town Hall and show repeatedly on Hamilton Community cable channel. – Jean-Pierre
7. Use Facebook and other social media, e.g., Instagram, Twitter and our consultant, to establish a “give and take” discussion forum on the project. – Jack
8. Use local TV station to promote project. – Lee
9. Establish dedicated website for project. – Pat
10. Ensure we have response to all negative Facebook comments. – Drayton
11. Using a high school student, develop a video showing town hall conditions. – Drayton

12. Direct mailing to voters. – Mark
13. Develop a stand-alone website, independent of the Town website, that can be linked to different accounts and provide easily accessible information. – Steve
14. Develop a short summary on the status of the turf field project at the High School including details of current activities: current engineering studies; Friends Group activities; fundraising; issues that need resolution; potential CPC support; and an estimated schedule and cost. - Jay
15. Prepare some newspaper releases and provide to the Salem News and Chronicle & Transcript for publication. – Mike
16. Identify someone amongst the 440 voters who supported the project on December 3rd and have them help us verbally or provide social commentary. – Tim
17. Take advantage of local organizations to promote the project, e.g., League of Women Voters and the new Human Rights Commission, emphasizing the ADA issues. – Darcy
18. Utilize You Tube to promote project. – Darcy
19. Emphasize Town Hall as a place for community inclusiveness with space for community activities. – Rosemary
20. Find a permanent corner in the library or Town Hall or rented space at the Shopping Center to display photos, articles, building designs and other information. – Jean-Pierre
21. Emphasize the \$0.20 increase in the tax rates for the project as small price to pay for a new Town Hall and move away for the \$8.7M Total Cost focus. Set up a “sandwich board”. – Mike
22. Set up a Friends of Town Hall committee that can spearhead and promote the project, and potentially raise money. – Lee
23. Send some stories to the Boston Globe for publication. - Pat
24. Start a “Save our Town Hall” effort. – Steve
25. Develop answer to the question as to why we are pursuing a second vote on the project when the Town has already spoken. – Steve
26. Develop a short summary on the status, estimated cost, and estimated schedule for building a new school, including potential renovations of others, and the availability of state support. - Jay
27. Consider using Twitter for communications. – Mike
28. Create a survey using Survey Monkey to solicit information from voters. – Tim
29. Let people know how serious things are at town hall and explain that delaying the project until later will cost more. – Darcy
30. Rent a storefront as realtors do or a window of a business to promote the project with photos and diagrams. – Rosemary
31. Use the windows at the Black Cow for promotional materials. – Jack
32. Tell the voters that the conditions in Town Hall are not a threat to life. – Mark
33. Publish a list of future capital costs facing the town in the next five to ten years, including school projects. - Jay
34. Emphasize the lack of code compliance conditions at Town Hall as well as lack of ADA compliance as Town Hall is the biggest offender in these areas yet we force other organizations to comply. – Mike

35. Develop a short summary what types of projects that CPA funds can support vs. those they cannot as well as explain the potential funding and cost implications in increasing the CPC surcharge from 2% to 3%. - Tim
36. Explain that the Town's debt capacity will get some relief in the near future as some large debts are paid off. – Darcy
37. Develop a short summary of the unfunded retirement obligations facing the School Department and planned resolution. - Jay
38. Reach out to organizations in Town, e.g., American Legion, Council on Aging, Historical Society who offered support to the project by asking them to be more vocal in their support, perhaps by publishing that support in their publications. – Mike
39. Investigate how many people subscribe to the Town newsletter and use that medium. – Rosemary
40. Develop a short summary of future financial issues with the Town water supply. – Jack
41. Publicize that the School Department is not sponsoring any capital expenditures for the Annual Town Meeting. – Jack
42. Encourage school officials to stand up and support the project as an educational opportunity as ADA compliance is a significant aspect of the project. – Darcy
43. Develop a summary of the mail-in ballot process available for all elections especially noting the flexible options. - Jay
44. Update and publish the list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) on the Town Hall project. – Jay
45. Ask the Historic District Commission for their active endorsement. - Mike

Finally, with all ideas for solution exhausted, Jay indicated that he would first group similar ideas and then send the list out to all who participated and ask them to immediately use their five virtual votes by sending an email only to Jay directly by Tuesday, February 9, 2021 with their selections. He then will tabulate the results and send them out prior to the next meeting.

Next Meeting

Mike mentioned that he would like to invite the newly hired consultant, Kirsten Alexander to the next meeting. Darcy made a motion for the committee to invite her to the next meeting. Jay took a roll call vote that was approved 6-0 (Jack had left the meeting and Patrick had stepped away). Mike then tentatively set the next Zoom meeting for Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 1:00 PM. This date may change if the consultant can't make it.

Increased 3% CPC Surcharge

Jan-Pierre asked if increasing the CPC surcharge to 3% would allow the CPC to pay for the Town Hall project. Jay said it would but that there are many moving parts to that effort as noted by Town Manager Joe D. at our last meeting. The cost to the average taxpayer (\$613,400 property) would be \$31 less annually as compared to increasing the tax rate by \$0.20 if the Town assumed the cost of a bond for \$4.7M for the construction costs of the project. He also noted that while the surcharge increase would be permanent, a 30-year bond was more or less a lifetime for most people, even those with young children. The biggest obstacle he has uncovered in his investigation into pursuing the increase is the fact that if the surcharge increase were approved at the May 1, 2021 Annual Town Meeting and a following Special Election, both by

simple majority, that the earliest that the funds would be available is July 2023. The time involved has to do with when the Town collects the surcharge increase, when the state acknowledges the increase to 3%, and finally a successful 2/3's majority vote at the Spring 2023 Annual Town Meeting, resulting in funds available in July 2023. The recently approved \$3M grant would need to be revoted for this timeline as well.

Tim asked about the potential for the CPC to fund the Turf Field at the high school. Jay said they could but there were many issues that needed to be addressed. These issues include:

- the need to first use the \$500k in escrow for recreational fields that resulted from the sale of property at the Patton Homestead. Wenham needs to match this fund according to the latest financial payment ratio between the Towns
- The CPC cannot pay for the turf material per se nor could they fund a stadium if the design gets too complex
- The issue with past abutters objecting to lights on the field needs to be resolved
- How much fundraising will be done by the Facebook Friends group needs to be determined

Tim asked if the CPC could max out its contribution to the project under the current 2% surcharge and increase the \$3M grant, and then build back up their financials in a couple of years by increasing the surcharge. Jay made some rough calculations and noted that there was room for an increase but that it would mean that all other future bond requests in the near term could not be approved. Jay then wondered about other future grant requests such as from the Affordable Housing Trust. Pat and Rosemary then got involved in a discussion of potential need for money for the Willow Street, Asbury Street, and Gordon Conwell housing projects. The Willow Street project is all set, and no monetary need has been mentioned for Gordon Conwell. Jay did acknowledge that if the CPC were unable to approve a request from the AHT due to lack of funding that the chances for approval of a surcharge increase would be better. Jay agreed to raise the issue of increasing the \$3M grant for discussion at the next CPC meeting on February 11, 2021.

Darcy made a motion to adjourn at 2:20 PM that was seconded and voted by roll call vote 6 - 0. (Patrick had stepped away and Jack left the meeting.)

A True Record,

Jay Butler, Secretary

