

Common School Discussion notes 1-12-2024

Present at BNML: Greta Brunswick, Julie Wolcott, Mary Schreindorfer, Ron Bocash, Sarah Allerton, Sorel Chaput, Damian Boomhower, Jim Cameron, Becky Cassel

On ZOOM: Torrey Crossman, Bill Roberts, Bridget Howrigan

Site visit after meeting: Greta, Julie, Jim, Ron, Becky, Mary and Lila!

1) **Recap of Purpose.** The group summarized the intent and purpose of this discussion.

- Selectboard looking for answers on what to do with building and address high heating costs.
- Building is currently underused and inefficient to heat.
- Review options for highest and best use of property for the community, considering all costs and benefits.
- Make recommendation to Selectboard on next steps for 2-12-2024 meeting.

2) **Vision for Future Use of Building/Grounds.** The group reviewed the preliminary vision for future use of the common school.

There was discussion on whether the vision is driving plans for the building or vice versa. It was generally preferred by the group that plans for the common school should be tailored and adapted to meet a specific community need and vision, as opposed to trying to find a use that will work within the confines of the current space (improved or not). However, it was noted that the vision is very much tied to the importance of the historic landmark both culturally and in terms of creating the physical character and place of Fairfield Center.

Preliminary Consensus for use of the Common School from 12-08-2023 meeting:

The “building” and grounds, new or restored, should be used primarily to support recreation opportunities with space for auxiliary programming such as afterschool, home school, historical displays, general meeting space.

The group discussed what “recreation opportunities” were needed. Feedback included bathrooms and locker rooms for community and school athletics, recreation related storage, and an indoor basketball court (potentially replacing the existing outdoor court). It was noted that the basketball court in the school gym/cafeteria was not fully meeting needs.

The challenge of managing the use and upkeep of additional community recreation facilities and programs was noted. Currently it is entirely done by volunteers and there is a shortage of volunteers. It was suggested that the community could consider a recreation director that is shared between area towns.

The current municipal recreation budget was noted to be \$5,000 dollars (this needs to be validated). There was some consideration by the group on whether this was an adequate amount.

The group identified additional community uses not noted in the preliminary future use, including senior activities, extracurricular activities and clubs.

Other future use ideas that should still be on the table:

The group brainstormed other reuse ideas that should still be considered. It was suggested that the building could be well suited for senior or single occupancy housing units. This would involve the town parceling off the building and adjacent land and selling to a private entity for the purpose of housing.

- 3) Restoration Feasibility.** Additional information is needed on the building in order for the Selectboard to make an informed decision on the feasibility of restoration versus demolition of the structure. Greta proposed several considerations, including consulting a local professional/expert for assistance and/or hiring an engineering/architect team to complete a structural assessment, preliminary engineering and architectural schematic design. There was a structural assessment completed in the late 1990s that will provide a basis of information but that will need to be updated.

Jim Cameron, a resident of Fairfield and local developer specializing in historic building restoration, graciously accepted Julie's invitation to attend the meeting and offer his advice. Jim has completed many projects including the St. Albans House and the Franklin County Courthouse in St. Albans City and the Quincy Hotel in Enosburg Falls (just to name a few).

Jim noted that the building has potential for restoration, based on his initial assessment. He offered to put together a restoration budget for the group to consider at their next meeting on February 2nd. This would be the base number for an estimate to restore the building – the cost of any specific renovations or fit-up would be need to be added.

He also provided a few names of individuals that could be approached for a comparative demolition estimate. He noted that the disposal of the vermiculite in the attic would add to demolition costs.

- 4) Identify next steps, needs, schedule:**

Recommendation to the Select Board for their February 12,2024 meeting.

Next meeting: Friday February 2, 2024 (2-02-2024) at 2:30 at BNML and ZOOM