

Future of the Common School Discussion notes

Date: 12-08-2023 3pm on zoom

Present: Greta Brunswick, Julie Wolcott, Mary Schreindorfer, Ron Bocash, Sarah Allerton, Sorel Chaput, Torrey Crossman, Damian Boomhower, Jeanne Hopkins

1) Purpose of 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

2) Review details of space, identify relevant studies/reports, overview of annual upkeep expenditures.

- Have recent Energy Audit (4/27/23): vermiculite in attic, no insulation in walls, old windows. Est energy upgrades: \$69,000
- Heated Area 3456 sf, Total 4456 sf. \$11,200 for 2022
- There was a structural engineering assessment from 1995 completed with funding from Preservation Trust of Vermont, many of the recommendations from this report have been completed piecemeal over time and with volunteer support.

3) Current uses of building: Fitness/Exercise Classes 3 times per week; Recreation committee storage and meeting space.

4) Identify potential uses: Municipal plan describes the building and expresses community value but not specific to uses. Housing is not a viable option given location, access to parking and proximity to recreational fields and Fairfield School.

There was a discussion on whether the building should be demolished and potentially replaced with new construction, or whether the building should be restored for reuse. Various uses were identified that could be viable in a new construction or restoration scenario. There was general consensus that the land/building should remain in town ownership; however, there may be opportunities for renting space or other public/private partnerships.

Group brainstorm (in no particular order):

- Meeting and special event space;
- wellness and recreation classes,

- satellite space for NCSS, Howard Center;
- recreation center similar to Cambridge Community Center;
- fieldhouse with bathrooms and changing space for teams;
- promote and sustain art programming;
- historical displays;
- afterschool programming (potentially move community center program);
- home school meeting space;
- and day care (i.e. renting to a child care business).

Needs to evaluate current building:

- Test vermiculite above 2nd floor ceiling for asbestos
- Structural Engineering assessment
- Fire Safety requirements
- ADA Compliance
- Bathroom suitability
- Basement mold and moisture

Preliminary Consensus for use of the Common School:

After discussion, the group agreed that 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.

Excitement was expressed around building a new structure that would expand the recreational opportunities for towns people as well as meet other community needs while retaining some of the historical features of the present structure. A recent example of new construction built to reflect the pre-existing historic architecture is the Bent Northrup Memorial Library.

Next Steps:

- Evaluate costs vs benefits of restoring building versus demolishing and reconstructing (from a fiscal, physical and use perspective). Develop scope of work and budget that would include necessary engineering/architectural analysis to support decision. Very preliminary estimate of funding need: \$40,000 - \$60,000.
- Potential funding sources: Vermont Community Development Program Planning Grant; Town ARPA funds
- Gain additional feedback, buy in and further develop the preliminary consensus for use of the Common School.
- Develop consensus on recommendation to Select Board.

Next Meeting date: Friday January 12 2024 2:30 pm

