

Future of the Common School Discussion Committee

Summary of Work Memorandum

Date: February 22, 2024

To: Fairfield Selectboard

Cc: Cathy Ainsworth, Town Administrator

From: Julie Wolcott & Greta Brunswick on behalf of Future of Common School Disc. Comm.

Re: Summary of Discussion Committee Work and Recommendations to Selectboard on Next Steps for Future of Common School

In 2023, the Selectboard authorized Julie Wolcott to convene a group of residents to discuss the future of the Common School building and make recommendations to the Selectboard on a plan for the building and next steps. The group that was convened is referred to as Future of the Common School Discussion Committee for the purposes of this communication.

Julie reached out to Greta Brunswick, who participated and supported Julie and the committee's work both as a resident with vested interest and as staff of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission. Jim Cameron, a resident and local developer focusing on historic restoration, volunteered his time and expertise to prepare initial cost estimates for basic restoration needs. The Committee met 4 times; residents that participated in at least one of the 4 meetings include: Julie Wolcott, Greta Brunswick, Damian Boomhower, Mary Schreindorfer, Ron Bocash, Sarah Allerton, Sorel Chaput, Torrey Crossman, Jeanne Hopkins, Becky Cassel, Paul Pellitier, Jim Cameron, Bill Roberts and Bridget Howrigan. Most committee members participated in all 4 meetings and all were included on all Committee communications. The Committee's meeting minutes (enclosed) document participants for each of the meetings.

The Committee identified the following understandings and purpose to guide their discussion and work:

- The Selectboard is looking for answers on what to do with the Common School building and address high heating costs.
- The Common School Building is currently underused and inefficient to heat.
- The Committee will review options for the highest and best use of the property for the community, considering all costs and benefits.
- The Committee will make recommendations to the Selectboard on next steps.

The Committee reviewed current information on the Common School building, current uses and historic work that has been completed. They brainstormed potential reuse opportunities and needs of the community and considerations that should be factored into the reuse and vision. These discussions resulted in committee consensus on 7 principles to guide reuse/redevelopment of the Common School building and a Vision for Reuse/Redevelopment of the Common School, both of which are outlined in the enclosed report.

The Committee defined 7 potential reuse/development options and considered their costs and benefits, which are included in the enclosed report. Benefits were considered based on the extent each option fulfilled the reuse/redevelopment principles and vision. Disadvantages were considered based on the extent that each option failed to fulfill the principles and vision. To the extent that rough costs were known, they were also factored, although this was done more on the basis of the scale of the cost.

The Committee ranked each option and came to consensus on the highest ranked choice, which was #3 on the enclosed report:

Restoration++: Includes Restoration+ and an addition off the southside with an at-grade accessible entrance. Bathroom and an interior lift located in addition (see Gallup plans).

Changing rooms, storage and team meeting space built into either first floor, basement or a combination. Community flex space on the second floor.

Recommendation: The Committee recommends that, with further input and guidance from the committee, the Selectboard allocate funds or support seeking grant funding to hire an architect to update the Gallup plans and cost estimates for the Common School that would fulfill Option 3. The Committee also recommends that the Selectboard support the community in seeking grant funding that could contribute to the construction of the improvements, and to otherwise more broadly consider funding strategies. Potential funding opportunities are included in the enclosed Funding Opportunities document.

Enclosures:

- Reuse/Redevelopment of the Common School Cost/Benefit Analysis
- Committee Meeting Minutes
- Funding Opportunities for Historic Restoration and Community/Recreation Centers