

# DRAFT

## Common School Discussion Meeting Notes

Friday January 17, 2025 11:30AM – 1:00PM

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**\*Notes from meeting in Bold text.**

Attendance: Ron Bocash, Bridget Howrigan Rivet, Crista Driscoll, Jeane Hopkins, Bill Roberts, Julie Wolcott, Greta Brunswick

1. Additions/Changes to Agenda. **None**
2. Welcome and Introductions.
3. Check in on Process: Where have we been and where are we going from here?
  - Reference Background and Summary of Discussion from 2024 (enclosed)
    - o Priority uses identified for building - afterschool programming, recreation programming support, community space (classes, events), income generation
    - o Commitment that reuse should drive investment in restoration and rehab
  - Status of tasks identified last spring:
    - o Julie is meeting with MRUSD and Afterschool Program. COMPLETE. MRUSD is supportive of renovations to support after-school programming but is not interested in locating any administrative offices in Fairfield.
    - o NRPC will assist in inventorying existing community spaces. IN PROGRESS. Draft list of community spaces enclosed. **Bridget volunteered to build on the list of community spaces.**
    - o Liesl will support the town with a website for community spaces. Need update from Liesl. Still a priority?
    - o Ron will follow up with Selectboard about the status of wastewater at the site. **Ron Bocash provided an update on a site visit conducted by a wastewater civil engineer. He shared the report with Julie and will forward to the working group. It estimated gallons per day capacity based on 60-80 people that were occupying the building when the school was using it. The report states that a change of use may be permissible depending on the wastewater flows, but the report lacks detail.**
    - o Julie, Greta and Liesl work on submitting an application to the Community Trust Initiative in coordination with the Community Center and Town. COMPLETE. Application was not funded. There may be another round in the spring.
4. Debrief from Working Group. Roundtable on thoughts about where groups efforts should be focused next.

- Julie met with Tim Smith and identified that the building is on the State ACCD project priority list, which creates awareness about the project and provides extra points for certain grants, mainly Northern Border Regional Commission.
- Julie noted other ideas provided by Tim Smith including considering condo ownership structure, perhaps by floor of the building.
- Demolition of the structure needs to remain on the table if restoration and reuse does not move forward.
- Afterschool program run by Black Creek Adventure Camp (Fairfield Community Center), still strong option for use of building – however, rent is not currently built into business plan.
- With limited options on the table as income generating use and need for senior housing, should housing be reconsidered as a use?
- Past discussions focused on the conflict between housing or commercial use with the athletic fields, parking and bussing.
- Could parking and bussing be moved to the other side?
- Could the athletic fields be relocated to the other side? Certainly not without cost or challenge, but should this be considered and investigated?
- Other uses noted included adult day programming and childcare.
- The VHCB REDI (Rural Economic Development Initiative) program was mentioned as an avenue to receive grant writing support.
- Consider what folks are outsourcing as potential needs – childcare!
- Consider aligning projects with social and health services and other partners – connect with Kristin Power, the AHS field services provider, NOTCH, Paul Dragon of CVOEO, Preservation Trust of Vermont, Denise Smith now Director of Vermont Council of Rural Development.
- Note that there is a local grant writer – Alex Barkley of Forward Written

## 5. Refine Next Steps:

List of preliminary next steps (to be refined with input)

- Refine reuse priorities and goals with community and stakeholder input.
  - o **Complete community facilities inventory**
  - o **Update reuse priorities based on inventory of community facilities underway, childcare, afterschool and other potential income generating options.**
- Prepare a fundraising plan that will include grants and capital campaigning with the intent to reduce as much as possible any ask from taxpayers. Determine leaders/volunteers for this effort.
  - o **Greta will reshare the list of funding sources. Continue work on this. Identify community leaders interested in this effort.**
- Identify and seek grants
  - Village Trust Initiative Effort (federal) – may be another round in spring 2025
  - Vermont Community Development Program (federal) – next preapplication due date is xxxx
  - Foundation/private sources. Vermont Community Foundation? Others?

- **Confirm next steps in planning, such as whether there should be further consideration of moving athletic fields, more information on wastewater change of use process and limitations, update design of building that includes ADA accessibility and new bathrooms. Review potential funding sources. Continue work on this.**
- **Identify and share imminent grant opportunities, including MPG, REDI and VCDP.**

**6. Other Business**

**Greta and Julie will coordinate the next meeting outside of working hours.**

## **BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION FROM 2024**

**Background on Common School Working Group:** 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 building is currently underused and inefficient to heat and the Selectboard is looking for options. The purpose of the Common School Working Group is to review options for the highest and best use of the property for the community, develop pre-construction plans and secure funding for restoration.

**Reuse/Restoration Principles:** The following principles for reuse/restoration were identified:

- Retain and/or respect the historic character of the 1809 community landmark as a prominent component to the character and sense of place in Fairfield Center village.
- Remain in town ownership as a community public space for all ages.
- Recognize the importance of its place proximate to the school campus.
- Adequate management of the space may require additional staff capacity; there may be opportunities to share resources with other communities.
- The impact on the taxpayers both for the cost of the project and for maintaining what is built must be factored into the decision.
- Revenue generating uses should be prioritized to support the buildings upkeep and maintenance.

**Community Needs:** The working group identified the following uses as community needs:

- Afterschool and/or Child Care Program Space. Due to its location adjacent to the school, the town could fulfill a local need for convenient after school and childcare programming by renting space to private or non-profit businesses for this purpose.
- Fairfield Community Recreation Programming Support. The property could support community and school recreation programming with changing rooms, bathrooms and general storage.
- Multi-Purpose Flexible Space for Community Programming. The property could provide space for adult and senior classes and activities and extracurricular activities and clubs for school age children. Other ideas include space for historical displays. Also, the space could be rented or reserved by community members for special functions or events.

**Next Steps:**

- Refine reuse priorities and goals with community and stakeholder input.
- Prepare a fundraising plan that will include grants and capital campaigning with the intent to reduce as much as possible any ask from taxpayers. Determine leaders/volunteers for this effort.
- Identify and seek grants
  - Village Trust Initiative Effort (federal) – may be another round in spring 2025
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## Inventory of Community Spaces in Fairfield Vermont

Facility	Description	Ideal Uses
Town Offices – Chester Arthur Room		
BNML Community Room		
Fairfield Community Center		
Common School		
Fairfield Center School		