

# DRAFT

## MINUTES – SPECIAL BUILDING COMMITTEE MEETING TOWN OF BARNET, VERMONT MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2017

**Meeting convened at 6:30 p.m. in the second floor of the McIndoe Falls Academy.**

**Committee members present:** Chair William Graves, Dylan Ford, Benjamin Heisholt, Dennis McLam, Jeremy Roberts, Stanley Robinson, Norman Stevenson, Laurajean Stewart, David Warden and Dana Young.

**Others present:** Various invited town officers, town employees, fire department volunteers, historical society members, and school district employees.

### **1. Call to order at 6:45 p.m.**

Mr. Graves called the meeting to order at 6:45 p.m., after those assembled were allowed an opportunity from 6:30 p.m. to 6:45 to tour the building, view available prints, and discuss the project with Committee members and the architect.

Mr. Graves then gave some introductory remarks, discussing the journey of the Committee to consider the McIndoe Falls Academy building as a potential future space for town offices, and a feasibility study to assess the merits of that proposal. Mr. Graves indicated that the Committee hopes to bring the project to the Town voters to vote on some time in the next three to six months.

Ms. Ford then gave some remarks regarding the history of the McIndoe Falls Academy, and the building's significance to the Town.

### **2. Presentation by Rebecca Arnold, of architectural firm Arnold & Scangas, of proposed plans for renovated facility and current status of feasibility study**

Ms. Arnold discussed several aspects of the feasibility study, as summarized below.

- How the Committee and Arnold & Scangas foresee the building being used.
- The inadequacies of the current town offices, particularly the size of the vault, the size of the conference room, and the lack of office space for various town officers.
- Review of the proposed floor plans. The current plan is for the Post Office to remain in the building; a library is also incorporated into the second-floor plan. The main feature of the second-floor plan is a large open meeting space.
- Review of proposed site plan. The Committee requested the access from the rear of the building be changed to enter the building at grade. Changes to the plan were made to partially accommodate this, allowing easier and more accessible entry.
- The current plan for the basement is for little renovation in the short-term. The lower level of the vault, and a boiler and maintenance room occupy the basement portion the proposed addition.

### **3. Hearing of public comment regarding proposed renovation of McIndoe Falls Academy for public office use, proposed plans for renovated facility, and current status of feasibility study**

Public comment was made, and a question and answer session between the public, the Committee and Ms. Arnold was had, as summarized below.

- Lister Sally Cook asked about the size of the vault in the proposed plan, indicating that the vault at the current Town Clerk's Office measures 21 feet by 10 feet, or 210 square feet.
  - Ms. Arnold replied that the upper level proposed vault on the floor plans is approximately 15 feet by 17 feet, or 255 square feet. The plan includes research space

- outside of the vault (the current vault houses the only research space at the Town Clerk's Office), incorporates space-saving movable shelving, and has a lower level with square footage equal to the first level. The public would not have access to the lower level of the vault, but this area can be used for less frequently-accessed records.
- Zoning Board/Planning Commission member Bruce Denio asked about the historic building status of the McIndoe Falls Academy, particularly as regards the large space on the second floor.
    - Mr. Graves responded: The large space in the second floor would need to remain largely as it is for historical preservation reasons. An historical review of the building is currently underway. Early feedback from this review has been positive. Some changes can be made, but the Town must do so without harming historical elements of the building. The large meeting space on the second floor, with its high ceilings, would indeed be costlier to heat than some other rooms, but it is foreseen as an occasional-use room.
    - Ms. Arnold responded: Windows are a primary concern in historical preservation, and would need to be retained, although storm windows can be installed for better efficiency. The exterior of the building is also a priority. After these two areas are addressed, the historical review focuses on the major interior spaces.
    - Mr. Graves responded: The Academy Trustees have taken good care of the building in the interim between its use as an educational facility, and its future use. They have protected the structure by performing routine maintenance, and have created an income stream by housing the Post Office to ensure the long-term viability of this maintenance. They have spent a good portion of their lives in preserving the building for some future on-going use.
  - Zoning Board/Planning Commission member Mark Bowen asked if the Committee is confident that the proposed addition will meet historical requirements.
    - Ms. Arnold responded: Early feedback from the historical review has been positive with regard to the proposed addition, but does mention the connection between the proposed addition and original structure, which should attempt to preserve the existing windows and have less impact on the exterior.
  - Harvey's Lake Dam Committee member Joseph Mangiapane asked if the vault is planned to be in the proposed addition, and if it would be fire-rated.
    - Ms. Arnold responded: Yes, the plan proposes a vault in the building's addition. It would be fire-rated for four hours. There would be a fire-wall between the addition and original structure. Arnold & Scangas and the Committee are researching the possibility of installing a sprinkler system.
  - Zoning Board/Planning Commission member Benjamin Adams spoke: A single floor building may be more functional and economical than the proposed renovation. The elevator will be a major expense, and will make moving around the building less efficient for employees. Did the Committee consider building new rather than renovating?
    - Mr. Graves responded: The possibility of obtaining funds from outside the town tax base, through grants and other sources, are much greater when renovating an historic structure than when building new. Either route will be expensive, but the proposed project will have broader revenue sources, especially if the building is used as a multi-function public facility. Mr. Graves and Mr. Young, who are building contractors, produced a rough estimate of the cost of a new structure according to the Committee's space specifications. It would seem to be of the same approximate cost as the renovated facility.
    - Ms. Ford noted that there is federal Americans with Disabilities Act grant funding available for elevators. Also, the Committee's change to the proposed plans to improve the grade entering the building allows the plans to incorporate a three-stop elevator, rather than four-stop.

- Historical Society member Roseann Leute spoke, suggesting that the Town will need a new vault for its records, no matter whether the construction is renovation or building new.
- Mr. Denio asked if the Committee had considered exploring the Edney property, which is located on Bimson Drive and currently listed for sale.
  - Mr. Graves responded: The Edney property was not on the market at the time the Committee began to explore the McIndoe Falls Academy. Prior to that the Committee did consider a number of properties, both town-owned and not, in various locations in Barnet Village. The Committee did not find an available site that was suitable for the project. The Selectboard in particular was not in favor of using the Town Garage site, as they believe in the course of time the Highway Department will use of most of that land for its own operations.
- Mr. Denio spoke: It seems that the town could design and build a single-floor structure with the design and construction talent available in town.
- Lister John Cook spoke: The Committee seems to be basing much of its decision-making on potential grants. Most historical grants are small; the Committee should not be relying on them as a funding source. The Committee must be careful with spending regardless of the source of funds: grants are taxpayer money also. The taxpayers need to see more definite numerical cost estimates. There seems to be interest in other options from the those present.
  - Mr. Graves responded: The Committee has looked at the cost of a new building versus a renovation, and has discussed these numbers publicly in open meetings. The current plan is to complete this feasibility study, obtaining cost estimates for this structure, then to move forward with a more thorough analysis of the cost of a new structure. The project currently under consideration is subject to rejection by the Committee and or the voters based on public sentiment or unfeasibility.
- Mr. Bowen asked if the proposed renovated structure will be big enough for the Town's purposes.
  - Mr. Graves responded: The renovated structure would be much larger than the current Town Clerk's Office, would more adequately serve all the functions the current office serves, as well as a number of others.
  - Ms. Ford responded: The Committee is investigating the possibility of amending the lease agreement with the Post Office to allow for a shared corridor in the space that currently serves as the Post Office lobby. This would allow extra space for the offices of the Town Clerk, Listers, and Zoning Administrative Officer.
- Historical Society member Kathleen Monroe spoke: How was the space for the proposed vault determined?
  - Mr. Graves responded: The Committee hired an architect who provided expert guidance for these decisions.
  - Ms. Arnold responded: The plan incorporates data from other projects in towns of size similar to Barnet, including Bristol, and Fletcher.
- Ms. Monroe asked if a similar approach was used to determine the space needed for the Listers.
  - Ms. Arnold responded: The current plan is Plan H, so it has been through many iterations. The entire process was guided by a square-footage estimate provided by the Committee.
- Ms. Cook spoke: There seems to be a large risk taken in light of the fact that the Post Office may or may not continue to occupy a portion of the first floor of the building for the foreseeable future. If the Post Office was to vacate, the second floor of the building may not be needed.
  - Mr. Graves responded: The Committee has been careful to not give the impression that the Post Office is no longer welcome in the building, particularly in light of the fact that the Academy Trustees rely on this revenue source, and will continue to do so if the

- proposed project is not pursued. The Committee has, however, approached Tom Page, the regional postal supervisor, about the long-term plans of the Post Office with regard to McIndoe Falls. Mr. Page indicated that the Post Office is committed to retaining its retail postal facility in McIndoe Falls for the foreseeable, even though the office is a money-losing proposition.
- Ms. Leute asked if, in the case that the project is completed, the revenue from the lease to the Post Office will go to the Town.
    - Ms. Ford responded that the revenues would go to the Town.
  - Library Trustee Rebecca Boardman spoke: It is appreciated that the Committee values the Academy building and the history of thereof. This is a solid building, and of better building quality than a new building.
  - Ms. Monroe asked what the status of the library in the building would be in the proposed renovation.
    - Mr. Graves spoke: The McIndoe Falls Academy Association is required to maintain an educational purpose; the library fulfills this purpose. The proposed renovation would retain a library, albeit a smaller one in the second floor of the building.
  - Recycling Center Attendant Donald Nelson spoke: The second floor of the current Town Clerk's Office is used for storage of documents. Will there be a similar storage space in the proposed renovation?
    - Ms. Ford responded: The architects measured the cubic space of materials actually stored in the second floor of the Town Clerk's Office and found that it is a small percentage of the total cubic space available.
    - Mr. Graves responded: The lower level of the vault could be utilized to fulfill that storage requirement.
  - Mr. Cook spoke: As a Lister, inquiries are regularly received from the State regarding qualifications for property tax-exempt status. For this reason, at least, the Academy would want to retain an educational aspect. If the Town acquired the property it would be property tax-exempt on the basis of Town ownership.
  - Mr. Denio asked if the septic system for the building would need to be replaced.
    - Ms. Arnold responded: The proposed site plan incorporates a new septic system in a new location – moving the location from the south lawn to the front lawn.
  - Historical Society member David Anderson spoke: The Historical Society needs more space outside of the Goodwillie House, and supports the project because it would allow for this on the second floor of the building.
  - Library Trustee Julie Roos spoke: It is appreciated that the Committee looked at all of the historical structures in all of the villages and gave all consideration – including the Town Hall and the Library Building. It is important that the Town consider efficiency and cost, but also needs to value history. The Committee has done a good job of asking hard questions.
  - Mr. Mangiapane asked what the plan would be for the current Town Clerk's Office in the event that this project or some other project to create new office space is completed.
    - Selectboard member Jeremy Roberts responded: It would be the Selectboard's intention to sell the Town Clerk's Office. It is not a historical building, and its sale would allow the property to be added to the Grand List.
  - Justice of the Peace Maurice Roberts spoke: Cost will be a major factor in voters' decision-making. The Committee must prepare reliable and supportable cost estimates comparing building a new structure to this proposed project.
    - Mr. Graves responded: This has been the approach of the Committee. The Committee believes the proposed Academy project to be possibly the best path forward. It has spent a good deal of time brain-storming a site for a new structure, without much success. The Selectboard has adamantly maintained that it does not wish to add more acreage to Town ownership. The Academy Trustees have indicated that they would be

- willing to give the property to the Town for \$1.00. Those questioning the value of grants should consider that this would be the largest grant of all in the proposed project.
- Ms. Roos asked what would be the Town’s purpose for the large open space on the second floor of the Academy building.
    - Mr. Graves responded: The space would be used for board and committee meetings, elections, and perhaps even Town Meeting.
  - Building Committee member Laurajean Stewart spoke: Ms. Boardman’s and Ms. Roos’s points are valid: historical buildings have value. Also, the Town does not currently have an adequate space for public meetings; this building can provide that.

**4. Other business**

No other business was discussed.

**5. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

*A true copy.*

*Attest:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Town Clerk*