

**MINUTES – SPECIAL BUILDING COMMITTEE MEETING
TOWN OF BARNET, VERMONT
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2018**

Meeting convened at 6:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Town Clerk's Office.

Committee members present: Chair William Graves, William Biddle, Dylan Ford, Benjamin Gates, Benjamin Heisholt, Catherine Roy, Norman Stevenson, David Warden, and Dana Young.

Others present: Frank Jannarone and Kathleen Monroe.

1. Call to order

Mr. Graves called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Consideration of approval of prior meeting minutes

Mr. Gates moved to approve as presented the minutes of the special meeting held June 18, 2018.

Seconded by Ms. Ford and approved by voice vote.

**Note: This approval of minutes was amended later in this meeting; see item #4.*

3. Discuss and take any action regarding viability and suitability of existing Barnet buildings

- Mr. Graves commented that the Committee had been mostly dormant since June 2018, following the instruction of the Selectboard that it take a summer hiatus.
- Mr. Graves commented that a formal analysis, or worksheet compiling and formalizing completed analysis, of the viability and suitability of existing Barnet buildings had not been completed. Mr. Graves asked if the Committee should perform such an analysis.
 - Committee member consensus was that a thorough investigation of viability, suitability and cost of the McIndoe Falls Academy and of a new structure should be completed, but that formal new analysis, or recapitulation of former analysis, of Town-owned structures is not necessary to the Committee's current task. Ms. Ford suggested that such analysis should be completed at some time to provide a historical record of the status of Town-owned buildings, and to inform decision making for maintenance of structures.

4. Discuss and take any action regarding grant application for funding research and consensus building for McIndoe Falls Academy building

- Discussion was had regarding the status of the post office at the McIndoe Falls Academy, in light of the space requirements of the Academy building, and the proposed non-municipal uses of the building.
 - Mr. Graves and Ms. Ford indicated that their conversations with post office personnel confirm that the United States Postal Service intends to maintain its office in McIndoe Falls for at least the foreseeable future – perhaps fifteen or twenty years from the present time.
 - Ms. Ford identified reasons for retaining the post office in the Academy: 1) Rental revenue for the Town (\$12,500 annual), 2) the McIndoe Falls community has a strong preference for keeping the post office in its current location, and 3) the post office has indicated that if their lease at the Academy was non-renewed they may not retain any office in McIndoe Falls.
- Discussion was had regarding the all-funders meeting that was held at the Academy. Mr. Biddle, who is new to the Committee as the recently appointed Chair of the Planning Commission, asked if any progress had been made with regard to grant funding availability.
 - Ms. Ford indicated that at the all-funders meeting the recommendation was made that the Committee hire a consultant to guide them through the grant identification and

- acquisition process. This is the reason the Committee is moving towards application for a grant to fund a consultant.
- Ms. Ford indicated that the best information available suggests that renovation of an existing historic structure would garner more grant funding than a new building project, but uncertainty regarding this and many other questions relating to grant funding is the reason the Committee is seeking a consultant.
 - Mr. Biddle asked what part the community plays in determining the location of the proposed municipal building.
 - Brief discussion followed regarding the property on which the Barnet School is situated, and the possibility of acquiring a part of this for municipal use.
 - Mr. Graves indicated that the Committee did consider the Barnet School property prior to its conveyance to the Caledonia Cooperative School District on July 1, 2018. The Committee at that time determined that the school property would not be suitable.
 - Ms. Ford spoke about the application for a municipal planning grant for a project involving the engagement of a consultant to assist with community outreach and research. The grant application was already approved by the Committee and the Selectboard, and Ms. Ford and Mr. Graves have been developing the application. Ms. Ford indicated that grant funding available is \$20,000, which the Town would need to match in part. Ms. Ford distributed a table, generated by Mr. Graves, detailing the anticipated project tasks, which include: to develop, perform and analyze a public survey, to research and vet potential grant funding sources, tenants, research construction maintenance costs of renovation and rebuild options, and to bring the project to a final vote. The grant application is due October 1, 2018; the Committee would expect a result of application in November 2018.
 - Mr. Graves commented that he views grants of this nature to be a payment of filial obligation from children of those Vermont sons and daughters who have left the state over the centuries to build the country, and their own wealth, in the western regions of the United States.
 - Ms. Ford noted that if this municipal planning grant is not approved a smaller state grant is also available, which provides less funding for a paid consultant, and would necessitate more work by the Committee.
 - Mr. Graves discussed the concept of Village Center Designation, a tool available to the Planning Commission through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development used to identify and support historic village centers and target training and financial incentives to bring additional public and private investment to spark village revitalization.
 - Discussion ensued regarding the relative merits of locating town offices in a village versus in a geographically central location. Mr. Biddle noted the cultural trend nationally appears to be an expansion outward of community centers, rather than drawing inward to villages and town centers. Mr. Graves noted some local trends in support of village centrality, including Barnet Village community dinner fundraisers, which suggest at least residual village sentiment.
 - Mr. Biddle indicated that he would speak to the Zoning Administrative Officer and other planning/zoning officers regarding Village Center Designation.
 - Ms. Ford referenced the Danville Village to Village Project, which is an effort to create economic benefits by connecting community assets along the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.
 - Resident Frank Jannarone asked if the Committee had inquired regarding acquiring property to the north or south of the current Town Clerk's Office, to investigate the potential renovation of that building.
 - Mr. Graves indicated that the Committee had determined the current Town Clerk's Office to be an unsuitable location, but the owners of the properties to the north and south had not been contacted.

- Discussion ensued regarding the legality, prudence, and community sentiment repercussions of directly contacting owners of properties which the Committee may wish to consider for building a new structure or expanding a current Town property. It was suggested that the Committee could more generally broadcast its interest in considering properties for donation or purchase, rather than directly approaching owners of particularly attractive properties.
- Discussion was had about the qualities of an ideal property for location of Town Offices. It was suggested that three acres or more of relatively flat ground would meet some of these criteria.
- Kathleen Monroe noted that the draft minutes of the meeting held June 18, 2018 incorrectly reflect her asking “if the Committee is still considering 5,500 or 5,600 square feet for the Academy project” whereas she actually asked this question with regard a new building, not the Academy project. Discussion ensued.
 - Ms. Ford moved to amend the minutes of the June 18, 2018 meeting, with respect to the section referenced by Ms. Monroe, to read “Ms. Monroe asked if the Committee is still considering 5,500 or 5,600 square feet for a new building project.” Seconded by Mr. Young and approved by voice vote.
- Mr. Warden moved to approve the application for a municipal planning grant for a project of the nature discussed at this meeting, and summarized on the table presented by Ms. Ford at this meeting. Seconded by Mr. Young and approved by voice vote.
- Discussion was had about the pursuit of design and demonstrable costs for a proposed new Town Office building, as a basis for comparison to design and cost estimates for the McIndoe Falls Academy proposed renovation project.
 - Further discussion was had regarding the logistical difficulties of finding a proposed or “test” site for a new construction project without committing to purchase of property.
 - Mr. Graves expressed reluctance to approach property owners directly, or in any way intrude upon the prerogative of the Selectboard and voters with regard to acquisition of property.
 - Mr. Graves suggested that site acquisition and development for new construction may cost as much as \$300,000 to \$400,000.
 - The consensus of the Committee was that the Selectboard should discuss the matter of prospective property acquisition for possible new construction, and instruct the Committee how to proceed.
- Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Gates discussed their interaction with public sentiment in Barnet with regard to cost estimates for proposed Town Office projects. They indicated their perspective that project cost estimates in the range of \$1.7 million is excessive in the minds of many voters. Mr. Gates suggested that there are some voters who will not support costs more than approximately \$700,000, regardless of the type of project.

5. Discuss and take any action regarding committee membership

Mr. Graves discussed the status of the membership of Dennis McLam, who was not present for this meeting. Mr. Graves indicated that the Selectboard had changed the membership constitution for the Committee, causing it be *ex officio* for certain town offices, including the Chair of the Planning Commission/Zoning Board. Mr. Biddle recently replaced Mr. McLam as Chair of the Planning Commission/Zoning Board. Discussion ensued.

6. Discuss and take any action regarding committee's role as a research and advising committee to assist Selectboard

Mr. Graves asked if the Committee has interest in advising the Selectboard with regard to properties, buildings, and structures not related to the Town Offices project.

- Mr. Stevenson asked about the status of the Town Hall, in connection with Shawn Hilliker, who had expressed interest in purchasing or using the building.

- Ms. Ford updated the Committee with regard to the Selectboard's recent activities relating to the Town Hall. The Selectboard appointed Mr. Hilliker to a new town office of "Recreation Director," which will allow him to use the Town Hall for recreational activities under Town auspices. The Selectboard is also moving toward asbestos inspection and abatement in the building, which would be a prerequisite for sale or other transfer of the property.

7. Other business

No other business was discussed.

8. Consideration of scheduling of next Building Committee meeting

The Committee agreed convene its next meeting in November 2018.

9. Adjournment

Mr. Gates moved to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Stevenson and approved by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

A true copy.

Attest: _____
Town Clerk