

Facilities Master Plan Committee
October 13, 2016 at 5:00 p.m.
Town Offices – Meal Site

Members Present: Robert Barker, Mitch Cichy, Carol Conz, Nick Dines, Fred Goodhue, Charlene Nardi, Eric Weber

Members Absent: Jim Ayres, Kim Boas

Others: Dillon Sussman (facilitator, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)), Caitlin Marquis (Healthy Hampshire, Collaborative for Educational Services (CES)), Dave Mathers (Board of Selectmen (BOS)), Marie Westburg (Senior Center Director) and Dave Chase (Commons Co-working, resident).

Reviewed the minutes of September 8, 2016, moved (RB, EW) and voted to unanimously approve as written.

Reviewed the charge of the Committee from the Board of Selectmen in response to concern that the Committee was going beyond it, specifically related to costs and finances. What is the level of detail needed?

To advise the Board of Selectmen about crucial decisions related to municipal facilities planning. Specifically the committee should evaluate the best use for the Helen E. James building and parcel in the context of clarifying a vision for the town's village centers. The committee should build town-wide consensus for a plan for the Helen E. James building and parcel and key decisions around upcoming major municipal facilities.-- Charge to Committee from Board of Selectmen Objectives • Introduce project and roles of various participants • Set principles/ground rules for committee work and discussion • Become acquainted with key findings of recent facilities planning work • Identify key issues on the table • Agree on preliminary plan for public input (with Healthy Hampshire) Reviewed the draft notes from the September 1, 2016 tour of the buildings.

Members felt that reviewing the previous reports was relevant and that pulling it all together was necessary to meet the charge. It's not the Committee's role to guess at construction costs and what is needed for space needs; however, the first question most likely to be asked of this committee is, "did you consider costs?"

Public Participation in Meetings: Dillon noted that the Committee has been operating informally at meetings allowing public (individuals not on the committee) participation right along with Committee discussion. It was noted in the past that Bill Sayre was the only public in attendance and sat at the table, but the question was how to handle public participation and input with more non-members attending. Decision was made to continue informally as long as the public participation number remained small.

Survey: Caitlin Marquis, Collaborative for Educational Service (CES), presented a report of preliminary survey results. Thoughts:

- Priorities: No surprises but interesting – highest were schools, fire services, police services, and the library;
- Public Safety Complex – surprised with level of ignorance about the project;
- Survey doesn't tie the Committees hands in any way, it was positive, sensible, summary by one member of the survey "do what needs to be done but be careful with our money"
- Need to educate the community on many issues, superficial understanding of issues in town – notably the public safety complex need;
- Noted written comments – appreciation for reaching out for community input, one comment from survey response was that it was a terrible survey, several comments that high taxes will force people out of town;
- 70% in favor of preserving town buildings, compared to 62% for public safety complex;
- Summary – appears majority of respondents are open to reasonable tax increase;
- Surprised how many people were in support of privately funded, community services, housing and a senior center being the community center;

What was missing from the survey? Questions asking who attended the public safety complex forum's, questions that got to the details of how people thought of privately funded & community service programs / groups, and housing.

Need to determine from questions – compare the income level to support for items, compare those that live in Williamsburg to those who feel that there is no Haydenville / Williamsburg divide (survey responses mostly from Williamsburg, not Haydenville).

Noted that there are two non-town entities that will be affected by any decision made about the Helen E. James and Old Town Hall buildings – namely the Commons Co-working Group and Historical Society.

Old Town Hall: In reviewing the study done in previously – the cost to fix it up entirely is estimated at \$939,596 for total construction costs.

Discussion:

If Historical Society can't stay in the Old Town Hall where would it go? Discussed whether Historical Society could use the Grist Mill (Mill Street) which is owned by the Society. Response is that it has more needs than the Old Town Hall building and also has no heat. The visiting season isn't during heating season, heat is needed to preserve some collection pieces. Would the James basement be conducive for storage of the Historical society collection? If it was renovated and heated, yes – that is the question for the Committee to answer. If the James was upgraded then it could be used for anything but housing. CPA funding could be used for any of the work on the buildings because they are in the Historic District. CPA has not been passed by the Town of Williamsburg. Mass Historical Preservation Program Fund Grant (MPPF) is 50% match and may be capped at 75,000. USDA loans are a last resort for communities that can't go out for a regular bond (low Bond rating, poor community) and Williamsburg is able to get a bond. "Old Town Hall has no context, yet there is no use for it at this point." Not preserving the Old Town Hall would feel like "the community has no soul."

Noted that in the survey the responses for preserving town buildings is unclear – "what do people mean by that?" Noted that we can't afford to keep all buildings and that we need to decide how much money we have and what buildings we should address with it and over what time period.

In addressing concerns about the change in look of village center, it was mentioned that if we sell / give away a building we could do it with stipulations about keeping the façade. Suggestions - move the Old Town Hall, could sharing parking space if the right business went in be an option? – in response to concern about the lack of parking space.

Suggested that Bylaw changes could be made to address parking spaces for reuse of buildings and challenges of using the James for housing. Options are to move the Old Town Hall off the site to create park or parking lot or leave it alone and let it decay, or find a use that doesn't require heat and do the bare minimum. Moving the Old Town Hall is an expensive option – not sure that solves the issue of maintenance and reuse. Share parking with other entities, for example getting a business in there that operates opposite the school schedule. To bring the Old Town Hall up to code would be very costly, just under one million dollars per the 2012 Austin report. Comment by member is that the town can't spend a million dollars to keep it. Suggested that buildings should be viewed for reuse with a revenue stream, get a renter in that covers costs, or take off roof and back and just leave front and use it as an amphitheater for weddings and private event which would bring in funds. Thoughts about second suggestion is that while it provides a recreational space, removing the back and sides would be architecturally difficult because of wood frame – although it is creative solution, thoughts were that it wouldn't be cost effective. Since that isn't the main focus, maybe the committee should recommend spending the bare minimum on the building (\$200,000 to do framing and envelope) and kick the larger issue of what to do with it long term down the road. Another creative solution was to create a tool library – staffing was noted as an issue – expensive tools or volunteer staffers don't generally work long term. Another reiterated that we should give it away for a business to determine a use under town stipulations..

Senior Center: Senior Center space needs were estimated at 1700 square feet in the 2010 Town Building Needs report, but currently the Senior Center uses 3400 square feet within the Town Office building. Previous 2005 feasibility study for a regional Senior Center completed under the Community Development Block Grant suggested / recommended location of free standing Center behind Town Offices at a cost of 2.5 million with an estimate of 4,835 square feet. It was noted that Hardwick, population approx. 3,000, estimated its Senior Center needs at 7500 square feet, Shelburne, population 1,893, estimated its regional center needs at 8,313 square feet. Comment was that it answers the question that the Town Office building as is doesn't have enough room.

General Discussion:

Concern is we keep mentioning new buildings when we need to deal with the buildings we have first. We shouldn't build new before we determine how to take care of ones we have. Does it make sense to keep buildings alive for another 10 to 15 years or should we look at 75 year plan for buildings / needs?

Discussed that Helen E. James needs to be gutted before you could use it efficiently and effectively – you can't just move in as is. Noted that all departments should be looking at needs not "wish" list – needs should be realistic in what town can afford financially in renovations and also maintain.

Four things summarize use for James Building:

1. Use as town government operations 'current Town Office functions' – a town use is probably more of a priority for the Town. Question is which building is best suited – current Town Office building or James building?.
2. Use part of the James building for part of public safety complex (police / fire administrative offices).
3. Use for economic development
4. Sell it

For many members it seems to be a clear path over time – renovate the James building, move town government functions to James, renovate the current Town Office building for a Senior Center. The plan should be done over time – time estimates for completion ranged from 10 to 30 years. By all discussions the James building appears to stay in the mix – a feeling that it shouldn't be sold.

How long is the view to make it all happen? Some suggested 3 to 6 years, others 20 to 30 years. Concerns by some of how long out the plan would take to accomplish, the cost if you condense the plan down into a shorter time frame, concern about whether a long-term plan stretched out over decades could be adhered to or is useful.

Suggested that need to determine what town can afford and what time frame we are really looking at. Another suggested that the Town should focus on existing buildings not keep adding buildings. Questions about whether the James can be renovated a floor at a time. Answer – yes architects say it can be done – thought is that it makes it affordable – a little at a time, but you pay more in the end. Need to develop a plan and implement in phases.

Set another October meeting to finish agenda items. Tentatively October 20th at 5:00 p.m.

- Senior Center – Discuss current needs, vision
- Community Uses for the James – Commons Group, etc.
- Continue Discussion of scenarios for James school
- Public Input
 - Smart Growth America Workshop – November 29 & 30
 - Focus Group planning

Adjourned at 7:08 p.m.