

OPM Steering Committee
Meeting with the Finance Committee meeting
Wednesday, January 16, 2020
Town Office, 141 Main Street, Haydenville, MA
2nd Floor Auditorium and Planning Board

Present: Jim Ayres, Dan Bonham, Brenda Lessard, Jean O'Neil, Paul Wetzel, and Kim Boas

Absent: Mitch Cichy, Denise Wickland, and Jason Connell

Others: Paul Wetzel, Jacqueline Dufresne, Gil Loud, Charles Dudek, Eric Cerreta, Linda Rowley, and Dick Kisloski (Finance Committee); Robert Cayo (Capital Planning); William Sayre (Selectboard), Robert Todisco (P3) and Charlene Nardi (Town Admin), Stacey Jenkins (Principal) and Cindy Kassell (School Committee Chair)

OPM Steering Committee – Public Safety Complex: The meeting was called to order at the 6:04 p.m. Jim Ayres, OPM Steering Committee Co-Chair, gave an overview of the work that the Committee has done leading up to the request for a Special Town Meeting article to move forward with the Public Safety Complex.

Jim Ayres summarized the OPM Steering Committee work prior to and since the two public forums it held this fall. He noted that the forming of the OPM Steering Committee came on the coat tails of the work of many other committees such as the public safety complex committee, facilities master planning committee, and repurposing committee. Over the two years of work the members came to the following conclusions:

1. Undeniable need for facilities to be upgraded / replaced
2. After looking at over 100 sites and confirming by RFP that there are no private sites available, the James lot is the most affordable site that meets the criteria
3. The James building and a decision on its future is integral to deciding this project
4. That the town won't support any project which it views more than we need and beyond our financial means

The Committee held two public informational forums, which went well, but following those meetings, the Committee heard that the public wanted a more in-depth look at the Helen E. James building and the costs for upgrades and demolition. To move the project forward, keep the momentum going, and continue with its due diligence, the OPMSC is asking that the Board of Selectmen put forth a special town meeting article with a request of \$385,000. The funding would allow the Committee to do all the remaining work including the environmental and engineering studies on the James, schematic designs and go out to bid for construction. The hiring of an architect would allow three schematic designs and costs associated for each scenario – standalone Public Safety Complex building & minimal upgrades to the James but no public safety use of the James building; a standalone Public Safety Complex building and demolishing the James building, a public safety complex with some uses in the James building.

Question / Comments: Will the building design include energy efficiencies? The current Massachusetts stretch code has many energy requirements in it, and there will be conversations later in the design process if the community wishes to do more. There is also a desire to have a pleasing design that fits with the character of the town.

It was noted that many residents have just received their tax bills and are shocked by the increase. Williamsburg is listed as the 16th highest tax rate per \$1,000. (Note: many western mass communities have high tax rates, you must also take into consideration the average home appraisal value) It was asked how the building will affect the tax rate and that needs to be part of the conversation with the community? The defining of the scenarios will give firm numbers in which we can determine the effect on the tax rate. It was suggested that before the town go forward with an article for \$385,000, that an all day non-binding ballot vote be asked of the voters whether they wish to move forward with a public safety project for X amount, because it was noted that many folks don't come to town meeting to vote and it may get passed but it will divide the town. The comment was made that outside of town officials the residents do not have any appetite to move forward with this project mostly because of cost. Another comment was that it is the location and James building that slowed the project and made it a tough question for the community. Removing the James allows for the best siting of the Public Safety Complex. Others thought the James should be reused or at the very least sold to bring in tax revenue in the form of a developer putting it on the tax rolls. Discussion was about the value of the building if you subdivide the land. The feedback the OPM Steering Committee got from a developer and looking at similar situations in neighboring communities such as Easthampton, was it didn't work well. One member noted that Hampshire Regional was also going to come forward with a capital plan that will replace some of the debt that was paid off this last year for the HRHS.

Discuss the referendum option – a non-binding ballot question: Stated reasons for doing the referendum: it's an all-day vote, it is private, gets more folks to weigh in on the project and its cost. Disadvantages or concerns – there is no opportunity to share details on the project and costs and the details that either way you are going to spend money – either to repair the building or to replace – we can't just leave them as is and spend nothing. Spending nothing isn't an option and the ballot referendum doesn't ask the full question. The town needs to take action on both questions – the emergency buildings and James building. Other thoughts – use the yes / no ballot vote on town meeting floor and advertise it. Town meeting is the way we govern – encourage folks to come. The spending of the funds, gets more information that the community says it needs to decide the question on the James building.

The OPM Steering Committee moved to the Planning Board room to continue their meeting at 6:42 p.m.

The Committee members discussed what they heard at the Finance Committee meeting. It was suggested based on the comments that the Committee reduce the request to \$180,000. This would allow the hiring of an architect for JUST a schematic design phase. At the end of schematic design, the Committee will have the important information including cost of using or demolishing the James building, and the Committee will have architectural plans for whatever the chosen or preferred direction is. This will also provide a professional construction estimate that can be used to go to Town meeting in Fall 2020 to ask for the remaining of the project including construction. The members also agreed to request that the Selectboard advertise the meeting stating that the yes/no paper ballots will be used to allow folks to vote anonymously.

Rob Todisco will do up the narrative and detail the proposed budget of the \$180,000.

The meeting adjourned at 7:04 p.m.