

**Public Hearing
Land & Building Acquisition
Monday, June 7, 2021**

Present: Selectmen Leslie Babb, Ernie Day, Melissa Florio; Ellen White, Town Administrator; Linda Habif, Joyce Watson, Anne and Scott Cunningham, Alan Fall, Jeff Nicoll, Roberta MacCarthy, Rachel Sharples, Barbara McEvoy, and several other unidentified attendees.

Chairman Babb opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 PM stating the Board was able to obtain information on several questions raised at the last public hearing and reviewed those as follows. The cost to add the building onto the Town's policy will be \$259.00 annually. Preexisting items such as lead paint, asbestos, mold, etc. will not be covered. Items noted for repair include a recommended electrical panel upgrade, chimney repair, and to pressure wash, paint and re-screw the existing roof.

Babb then opened the hearing up to public input.

Joyce Watson questioned the items that will not be covered under the insurance. Babb responded that mold, asbestos, lead paint, etc. are not covered like in other older buildings.

Babb announced a market analysis has been completed on the property and another may be sought. This was in an effort to come up with an amount to provide compensation to the Masons if a catastrophic event occurs that would render the building useless for their meeting.

Babb also stated that an operating budget line item in the amount of \$4,000 will be added to the budget whereas any building improvements/repairs, etc. would go on a separate Warrant Articles.

Linda Habif questioned what has to be done to the building? Day responded that quotes have been received to replace the roof for \$23,000 or for \$6,800 the roof could be pressure washed, painted, and re-screwed, the chimney repair is estimated at \$1,522 and electrical panel upgrade for \$1,000.

Watson questioned if the acceptance is by the Selectmen or vote of Town Meeting. Babb responded that it is a decision of the Selectmen after hearing from the consensus of the people. It will work out great for the Town by obtaining the needed parking lot for the Town Offices, great for the Masons to retain their meeting space, and to preserve a piece of Freedom history. The Board is working on incorporating the proper language added into the agreement preserving the Mason's right to use the building as they always have while holding the Town harmless for unknown circumstances that may come up such as air quality, etc. He added that there has been strong support received for preserving the building as a part of Freedom, with many questions on the cost of upkeep, but the main need for the property is the parking lot it contains. There is a lot of fear over the unknown costs much like what happened with Durgin Hill. Alan Fall stated similarities in unknown with the Town Hall and Town Office buildings.

Anne Cunningham offered thanks to the Masons for the offer as a gift to the Town. For a building with an assessed value of \$370,000, they could have requested negotiation at half the building for the need of the parking lot. Cunningham also expressed concern if the Town does not accept the building, and it sold elsewhere, on the date of the closing the Town Office staff and records would need to be relocated to where they are available for inspection as required by State law.

Babb stated the initial appraisal received on the building is less than the cost of taking the parking lot by eminent domain.

Jeff Nicoll questioned how much the appraisal came in at? Babb responded that it was approximately \$90,000-95,000 but he and Day feel the value is closer to \$150,000-180,000. If an agreement can be signed with the Masons for anything less than \$180,000, it is a win for the Town. Day agrees.

Scott Cunningham strongly supports the acquisition. Having served on the Heritage Commission and Historical Society Board, the building and hill embodies the core history of Freedom. Cunningham applauds the process that this acquisition has gone through.

Roberta MacCarthy seconded Scott's comments stating at the May 25 meeting, the Historical Society voted in favor of the acquisition and forwarded a letter stating such. Babb acknowledge receipt.

Being no further input, Babb closed the public hearing at 7:11 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellen White, Town Administrator

Approved by the Board of Selectmen on _____:

Leslie R. Babb

Ernest F. Day, Jr.

Melissa M. Florio