

**MINUTES of the FREEDOM TOWN OFFICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING FOR 05/04/2022**

Anne Cunningham called the May 4, 2022 meeting of the Town Office Advisory (TOA) Committee to order at 10:00 am at the Freedom Town Hall. Karrie Buttrick, Mark McKinley and Ernie Day (BOS) were in attendance. Denny Anderson was absent. Committee members present represented a quorum. Shawn Bergeron and Kate Richardson from Bergeron Technical Services (BTS) were also in attendance.

Review the Agenda & Discussion

Prior to the meeting, the committee members were sent the Staff Interviews conducted by Kate Richardson which are part of the Feasibility Study (attached). Shawn Bergeron and Kate Richardson were present at the meeting to review the interviews and discuss next steps for developing possible options for refurbishing the Town Office Building.

Anne asked Shawn or Kate if they had any comments about the interview results. Kate thanked the town staff for taking time to meet with her. There were a few staff members who were unable to meet with her on the day that the interviews were conducted but sent her some information via email. Kate stated that the staff had concerns regarding the existing building but nothing surprising. There was a lot of concern regarding storage, the need to protect documents from environmental elements and fire damage. More office space, privacy and security were other concerns expressed by multiple staff members. Staff members also expressed air quality concerns in the building. The current heating system in the Town Office Building is old and has no ventilation system which both could be fixed with a new and modern HVA system. Kate said that there were other concerns but she believed these were the “big-ticket” items. Both Kate and Shawn believe that these issues in the building were not insurmountable.

Anne asked if there is anything in the Staff Interviews that refurbishing the building would not correct. Shawn stated that the bones of the Town Office Building were good, ripe for modernization and could have a really good future. If the decision is made to refurbish the Town Office Building, Shawn recommended moving the staff out of their offices for a period of time, gutting the building back to the exterior walls and then refurbishing the building. Karrie asked if the stairs in the building could be saved because of the historical significance since the building was originally a two-story school house. Kate said this could be addressed. Shawn mentioned the Madison Town Hall and the Wolfeboro Freight House as examples of old building that were refurbished for public use.

Ernie mentioned that the Town now owns the Masonic Building and the thought is that the staff could be moved there during the rebuilding period. Shawn went on to say that they also did an inspection of the Masonic Building and found that the second floor, and particularly the roof was precarious. Shawn said that previous renovations of the Masonic Building, from the original building that was a Church, to a two-story building, severely compromised the integrity of the structure. The main floor system is good, but the second floor and roof are not safe. Kate went on to say that she would not be comfortable with the town staff being housed there unless some improvements were made to the building, particularly the roof, before anyone occupies the space. Anne asked Kate about her concerns with regards to the roof. Kate explained that the roof originally had crossmember beams that went down the length of the entire building. When the second floor was installed, those beams were taken out. The king posts were cut off at the ceiling level of the second floor and were sandwiched between the ceiling joists.

Ernie asked if the first floor could be used strictly for storage. Shawn said that, it may be possible from a code perspective, but Town Staff should not work in there. Shawn stated that Masonic Building could be saved with time and money.

Ernie explained to Shawn the Town's main purpose for purchasing the Masonic Building from the Masons. The Town did not own the parking lot or the area that the Town Office's handicap ramp is located, and by purchasing the Masonic Building for \$1.00, the Town now has ownership of those areas.

Mark stated his concern that he was not aware that the Masonic Building was in such poor condition. He envisioned that the Masonic Building might be used as additional Town Office space and storage. So, if the Masonic Building is not going to be used as additional office space, would considering incorporating an addition to the Town Office Building be an option? Shawn addressed this by saying that when the Silver Lake Grange Building was refurbished and moved to become the Madison Town Office, the Grange Building was very similar to the Freedom Town Office Building. When the building was moved, it was put on a full basement foundation which now houses the Madison Police Department and meeting space. So, the Freedom Town Office Building could be lifted, and placed on a new foundation, giving the Town Offices more space.

The committee moved on to discuss the options for the building. Shawn spoke of the current building configuration of the Town Office Building. The back of the Town Office Building is an addition, which houses the maintenance room and some storage. This area could be converted to make it two stories allowing for improved space. With the second story, Kate believes that there is a need to have a functioning lift or elevator in the Town Office Building. Kate asked for the Committee's direction as to what would be the function of the second floor of the Town Office Building: Will it be for office and meeting space or will it be just for storage? Kate mentioned that she didn't interview the Selectmen and would still like their input. Kate went on to say that using the information that they have collected, they will come up with a couple of options, and if the thought was to use the Masonic Building, then it would be quite an undertaking to bring the building up to safety standards for building occupancy.

Ernie asked that if the staff is temporarily moved from the Town Office Building during the refurbishment, what would the timeframe be? Shawn said once you get your plans developed and have hired a good contractor who is capable of doing a project of this magnitude, he estimates the work to take 10 to 12 months.

Mark asked if Town should consider whether we need to account for possible town growth in determining the square footage needed for the Town Offices. Shawn said that this is a difficult question to predict. Shawn did say there is a balance, it takes good planning, but we don't want over build.

The committee, along with Shawn and Kate, discussed possible options for the Town Office Building to consider: Option 1 – Refurbishing the Town Office Building, keeping the current footprint with no additions; Option 2 - Refurbishing the Town Office Building and constructing a full basement under the building, as well as adding a second story to the back addition, giving the building more space. The committee believed that the refurbishment of the Town Office Building, with the use of the first floor of the Masonic Building as office space and storage, might have been Option 3, but now questions the viability of such an option.

Anne asked if there was a way that we could still consider an Option 3, which is the refurbishment of the Town Office Building, with the use of the first floor of the Masonic Building as office space and storage. Kate said that the first step if you are looking at this option would be to receive a cost estimate to see how much it would cost to make that building safe. Shawn said that he and his structural guys would do another walk-through the Masonic Building and get some cost figures back. The committee will consider if Option 3 will remain a viable option once the committee receives the cost estimate from BTS.

Anne asked that based on what the committee had learned during today's meeting, the condition of the Masonic Building, is the Town obligated by the agreement made between the Town and the Masons to make that building safe for them to use? Shawn stated that we should get with the Freedom Fire Chief to see if there is an assembly permit for the Masonic Building. He believes that there should be a maximum number of occupancies on that second floor, because of the safety and fire issues that exist in that building. Ernie said the Selectmen would talk to the Fire Chief about an assembly permit for the Masonic Building.

Anne asked about timeline for the next step in the Preliminary Planning & Design Phase. She would like to know whether or not it will be possible to have some conceptual models ready for public discussion by late summer. Shawn said that the first step would be to get the concepts out, get some feedback and expand on them. Kate said that BTS has the shell of what they are trying to fit into each concept. The initial conceptual models would be shared first with the Town Advisory Committee, the Selectmen and the Town staff utilizing the building. We can then share these with the public once we get into more finalized schematic drawings.

Anne asked Shawn if he could provide a written narrative about the condition of the Masonic Building that could be given the Selectmen. Shawn said that he could. This concluded our meeting with BTS.

Minutes from the last meeting on February 5, 2022 were reviewed. Ernie asked that the sentence "The repairs are for sandblasting and repainting the roof, repointing the chimney and replacing the electrical panel" be corrected to "The repairs are for power washing and repainting the roof, repointing the chimney and replacing the electrical panel." Anne made a motion to accept the minutes with correction. It was seconded by Ernie and approved by all.

Anne said she would reach out to Denny and give him an update.

Other Business:

With no further business, Anne made a motion to end the meeting. It was seconded by Ernie. The meeting was adjourned at 11:18am.

Next meeting to be determined.