

MINUTES of the FREEDOM TOWN OFFICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE PUBLIC PRESENTATION FOR JANUARY 11, 2024 (Final)

Anne Cunningham called the January 11, 2024 public presentation of the Town Office Study to order at 3:00pm at the Freedom Town Hall. Anne introduced herself and the remaining Town Office Advisory Committee members; Denny Anderson, Karrie Buttrick, and Ernie Day (BOS). Anne also introduced Shawn Bergeron and Kate Richardson with Bergeron Technical Services (BTS) who would be presenting the material on renovating the existing Town Offices. Robert Turpin with Misiaszek Turpin Inc, could not attend today due to illness. Anne and Denny would be presenting Rob's material on the new building proposal. Members of public was also in attendance.

Review the Agenda & Discussion

Anne explained the history of the Town Office Study which started back in 2009 using a slide presentation. The slides will be available on the Town website for viewing. Anne explained that Warrant Article 30 (March 2020) proposed funding to study the restoration and/or addition to the existing Town Office and this committee was established. Bergeron Technical Services (BTS) was selected and provided to the committee, the design and cost estimate for renovation the existing Town Office building in December 2022. The committee believed there was a need for a cost comparison of a new building in order for town's people to make an informed decision. Warrant Article 28 (March 2023) proposed the costing of a new building in preparation for a vote on the two options in March of 2024.

- Option #1: Renovate the existing town office building, presented by Shawn Bergeron and Kate Richardson, Bergeron Technical Services (BTS)

Anne introduced Shawn and Kate. Kate explained the company's qualifications and their prior history working with the Town with regard to the existing Town Office Building. Using a slide presentation, Kate addressed the exterior and interior designs for renovating the existing building with the goal of preserving those portions of the building that have historical significance. In addition to the slide presentation, Kate explained that the current interior design of the building does not account for the recently completed exterior fire escape. This now gives more useable space to both the first and second floor. Anne added that this will provide for an additional 190 square feet of office space to the building design. Before beginning his presentation on the cost estimate, Shawn commented on the condition of the existing building. Shawn conducted an evaluation on the Town Office building back in 2010 and recently reevaluated the building to determine updates needed on it since 2010. Shawn said that the structure or "bones" of the existing Town Office building are very good. Using a slide presentation, Shawn presented the cost estimate by drawing from 12 steps for renovating the existing building. The building will be completely gutted and the exterior stripped to sheathing. While maintaining the historical look, the exterior will receive new painted wood clapboards, new windows, and doors, and improvements to the accessible ramp, if need. The interior will receive new electrical, new plumbing, new heating and ventilation, new flooring, new insulation, new double ceiling, new water heater and a new platform lift. The estimates for this project, which were completed in April 2023 included a 10% contingency, and comes in at a cost of \$1,145,164.00. Shawn also recommended that if the project should proceed later this year, building cost will increase, and the cost of \$1,202,000.00 would be more realistic. Shawn also believed that if this project were to proceed, hiring local tradespeople can help maintain the budget. The meeting was open to the public for questions following the BTS's presentation.

(Q) Paul Olzerowicz – Had two question; was there any consideration to radon in the area and any other consideration to siding other than clapboard?

(A) Shawn Bergeron – Radon, was not considered. The current condition of the building is very drafty but, in the budget, there is ventilation and once the building is complete and closed up, it can be addressed and the ventilation modified. As for siding, if you look around Freedom, most of the old buildings have painted hemlock siding. This was the consideration when deciding on siding. There are some good alternative siding materials that could be considered.

(Q) Rick Holt – My understanding is that a platform lift cannot be substituted for an elevator per the ADA. Are some of the area around the doors clear of conflict for wheel chair access. Did you receive any consultation from the State’s Accessibility Board regarding your design as it relates to the ADA?

(A) Kate Richardson – Accessibility is extremely important to our company. I am a current Representative for the Governor’s Commission on Disability to NH Building Code Review Board. With regards to any new building, a platform lift cannot be a substituted for an elevator. With an existing building, a platform lift can be put in if the floor to ceiling space is 12 feet or less. The Town Office building is at 11.6 feet. With regard to the floor space clearance, any overlap was addressed and meets required standards.

(Q) Marcia Santner – Has the building been tested for asbestos, lead, or any other hazardous items?

(A) Shawn Bergeron – We did have a contractor do a full analysis on the building for asbestos, lead & PCBs. There is no asbestos in the building but there is lead from old paint and the abatement budget will address this.

(Q) Kate Chaput – How long will the renovation plan take?

(A) Shawn Bergeron - Approximately, one year from start to finish.

(Q) Brian Chaput – These are all estimates for building cost, what about the other costs associated with project. People will have to be moved out of the building; systems will need to be moved out & back in. How are those costs determined and estimated? If the plan is to use the Town Hall during the building renovating, because of security, that would mean that this building would also not be available.

(A) Anne Cunningham – The committee was tasked to do the building estimates but that is a valid concern.

(Q) Scott Brooks – Has the foundation and issues with the first floor been addressed? I have read the report and if you are going to spend \$1,300,000.00 that you should start with the foundation and not maintain a granite stone foundation. Also, what is the condition of the floor joists?

(A) Shawn Bergeron – I have been under that building and structural framing system is in very good condition. There is enough air flow and the soil condition under the building is dry. Around the mechanical room, bathroom, and storage area, the floor has dropped down. Those areas will come out and be reconstructed back up. As for the foundation, the exterior framing is heavy timber and bears the weight and there are a few granite pieces in the foundation that will need to be re-positioned and pointed. From a code and structural perspective, I do believe that it is not necessary but if the Town would like to put in a concrete foundation, it certainly can be done.

(Q) Scott Brooks – What about for energy efficiency?

(A) Shawn Bergeron – The current flooring system is sprayed foamed but within my budget I have additional spray to finish the depth and will meet the energy code requirement.

With no further questions on the renovation, Anne moved on to the proposed new building presentation.

- Option #2: Construct a new building on town-owned property, material provided by Robert Turpin with Misiaszek Turpin.

Anne and Denny presented the material since Rob Turpin could not attend due illness. The proposed property is located at 50 Eaton Road and consists of 30 + acres with road frontage on Eaton Road and the Village Road and water access to the river. Using the slide presentation, Anne presented the exterior and interior design of the proposed new building. The slide presentation will be available on the Town website. Denny presented the cost estimate provided by Rob Turpin. Rob Turpin contracted Turnstone to do the cost estimate. The project will take approximately seven months. Denny explained the cost estimate. The estimate from Rob Turpin for the proposed new building is \$1,356,156.00. The total square footage of the two office building proposals are almost equal size. Denny opened the discussion to the public.

(Q) Paul Olzerowicz – Two questions, the new building has areas inside of it that allow for separation from the public, does the renovation proposal also allow for this. Second, is there plans for a basement in the new building proposal.

(A) Shawn Bergeron – Yes, to the first question. (A) Denny Anderson – No, to a basement; it will be a concrete slab.

(Q) Paul Elie – Given the fact that there is a flood plain behind the proposed building, and wetlands across the street and there is a drainage ditch that runs in front of, and along the property, has there been any thought given to possible water damage due to a catastrophic rain event to the new building?

(A) Denny Anderson – I am not a FEMA expert but the area that FEMA does give us, we can build on it. Is there a concern - sure, but that can be said for all the houses along that road.

(Q) Janice Zecher – How far is the setback from the edge of the wetlands to the building?

(A) Denny Anderson – To properly give you the exact amount, the property would need to be surveyed. However, the estimate from Rob Turpin was 150 – 200 feet.

(Q) Randall Cole – One question and two comments. What will happen to the existing building if the Town decides to build a new building? My first comment, is that you will lose some of the synergy that bring folks into the village, which would be unfortunate. Second, I do not find that the proposed new building has the personality that reflects our town. It looks like something in a strip mall.

(A) Anne Cunningham – In 2010, there was a committee that looked at further uses of the building if it was not used as a municipal building. The report had 8 possible options which were all non-municipal activities. Once you change the building use, you would have to bring the building up to code. Back in 2010, the estimate to bring it up to code was costly. I am going to ask that this report be put on the Town's website so people can view the material.

(Q) Janice Zecher – Now that the Town owns the Masonic Building, has there any thoughts to adding that building to the renovations as office space?

(A) Anne Cunningham – That was one of the options, but when Bergeron looked at the structure of that building and the cost to bring the building up to code, the committee believed that because of the cost this would not be a feasible option. Also, the Town took ownership of the Masonic Building was for the parking lot.

(Q) Janice Zecher – When the Town took over the Masonic building, my understanding was that it only needed some roof repair. Is that not, correct?

(A) Shawn Bergeron – The Masonic Building was constructed as a church and it did not have a second floor. At some later date, modifications were made to the inside of the building to add a second floor. Unfortunately, these modifications were not suitable for the long run. For safety reasons, I had structural concerns for that building. The Town had Horizon engineers look at the building and they seconded my opinion.

(Q) Paul Tung – Are the square footage of both of the building approximately the same? What is per square foot cost comparison between the two buildings?

(A) Shawn Bergeron – With Denny's help, to renovate and adding a 5% increase for inflation, the cost for renovation would be approximately \$411 per SQ FT and the new building costs would be approximately \$511 per SQ FT.

(C) Scott Brooks – In the new building, we are getting a new septic and new paved parking lot and driveway. In the renovation, the cost does not include replacing a 40+ old septic system or repairing and repaving the existing driveway and parking lot. That is the difference in your square footage cost.

(A) Shawn Bergeron – As part of our work, we did have the septic system evaluated and it was found that system is in good working condition so there is no replacement cost and our cost estimate does not include paving.

With no further questions on the proposed new building, Anne went on to discuss what will happen at the Town Meeting in March. Using a slide presentation, Anne explained that we are a traditional town meeting Town. Our Town Moderator, Don Johnson, is with us today and explained the process.

Don said that both bond issues will be discussed. Once discussions are completed, voting will take place. There will be a ballot for the first bond issue and a ballot for the second bond issue. Town's people at Town Meeting will get both ballots. Ballots will be different colors and there will have an opportunity to mark on both ballots. The completed ballots will be put in the appropriate ballot box. Then approximately one hour later, we will call a recess, count the ballots, and announce the results. For a bond to pass, it must have 2/3 of the vote of the people attending the Town Meeting.

Anne went on to the next slide which shows the cost comparisons from both Bergeron and Turnstone and the possible additional costs. Denny discussed the additional items that may or may not be on the original estimate for both. As an example, that could be added might be the additional costs associated with paving at the existing Town Office building. The committee is still working to get some of these additional costs.

(Q) Paul Olzerowicz – I am hoping that some of the issues brought up and discussed today will be addressed before Town Meeting. Do we know if the Town or Select Board are looking at things that could offset the cost of bond?

(A) Ernie Day – This is something I cannot answer at this time since we do not know which way this will go.

(Q) Janice Zecher – So who would be the appropriate person to ask? It will be hard to decide on a new building or fix up the existing if we do not know what is going to happen to the existing buildings on the hill. If we decide to build new, does that mean we are giving up on the Village? We are being asked to make a blind decision. Would the committee supply this information or would the Selectmen?

(A) Anne Cunningham – Would the Heritage Commission like to comment?

(A) Alan Fall – The Heritage Commission fully supports the renovation of the existing Town Office building. The 2010 Study Committee concluded that there was no other useful purpose for the building other than what it is being used for now which is a municipal building. If the town decides to build a new building, then you will see two more historical buildings in town fall into disrepair.

(C) Bill Carney – That is a possible scenario but another one is that someone could come in and buy both building and turn them into a business. Both sides should be presented.

(C) Brandy Buttrick – I am Co-Chair of the Historical Society and Vice President of the Heritage Commission. I volunteer my time to protecting and preserving Freedom’s history. There are seven historical building in Freedom, four of the five building on Schoolhouse Hill are designated by the State of New Hampshire as historical structures, so we need to do all that we can to protect these buildings. I read the study that John Shipman and his committee did on the repurposing of the existing Town Office building, and there was no definitive answer on how the building could be use if not as a municipal building or could the building be sold. There is possibility to receive grant money from the State of New Hampshire to help preserve that building since it has already been designated as a historical building, but the Town of Freedom will have no chance to get money from the State for a new building. As stated earlier, the property at 50 Eaton Road could be sold and the money from the sale could help with the renovation costs. Another issue that has not been brought up is the increased traffic on Route 153. Making a left turn on to that property, could back up traffic on that road and cause accidents. Lastly, this is not the place to discuss this since the Town of Freedom is not here and represented. The committee has given us some good numbers, now it is up to the Town and the Selectman to determine how we want to move forward. I thank the committee for their hard work.

(Q) Paul Olzerowicz – When is the appropriate time to apply for a grant.

(A) Karrie Buttrick – The 2024 Grant application process starts in March, with a letter of intent due by May 22, 2024. What helps us in the process, is that existing building is already designated as a historical building and with Bergeron’s renovation proposal, we know the estimated cost of the work to be done.

(Q) Paul Olzerowicz – So if you start the application process but do not go forward, do you just withdraw?

(A) Karrie Buttrick – Yes, we would just withdraw our letter.

(Q) Donna Tung – If these proposals fail at Town Meeting, could the Town sell the property on Eaton Road and use the money next year and put the warrant article back in?

(A) Ernie Day – There is nothing stopping the Town from selling the property.

With no further question, Anne thanked Shawn Bergeron, Kate Richardson, and the public for attending. The meeting was adjourned at 4:46pm.