

**MINUTES of the FREEDOM TOWN OFFICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC PRESENTATION FOR 08/28/2023**

Anne Cunningham called the August 28, 2023 public presentation of the Town Office Study to order at 6:30pm at the Freedom Town Hall. Anne introduced herself and the remaining Town Office Advisory committee members; Denny Anderson, Karrie Buttrick, Mark McKinley, and Ernie Day (BOS). Anne also introduced Kate Richardson and Shawn Bergeron with Bergeron Technical Services (BTS) and Robert Turpin with Misiaszek Turpin Inc. Members of public and Daymond Steer with the Conway Sun was also in attendance.

Review the Agenda & Discussion

Anne explained the history of the Town Office Space study that started back in 2009 using a slide show. The slides will be available on the Town website for viewing. Anne explained Warrant Article 30 (March 2020) proposed funding to study the restoration and/or addition to the existing Town Office and it established this committee. Because this process had been going on for so long, it was the hope of this committee to bring a solution to this at the March 2024 Town Meeting. The committee also believed that the public needed a comparison cost of a new building. Warrant Article 28 (March 2023) proposed costing of a new building in preparation for a vote on the two options in March 2024.

The goal tonight is to start to understand the two options. There will be a second presentation given in January or early February that will show the cost of the two proposed options.

The two options are:

- Option #1: Renovate the existing town office, presented Kate Richardson, Bergeron Technical Services (BTS).
- Option #2: Construct a new building on town-owned property, presented by Robert Turpin, Misiaszek Turpin pllc.

There was a 15-minute question and answer session available after each presentation. The material presented tonight will be available on the Town website.

Kate Richardson with BTS, introduced herself and Shawn Bergeron. Kate explained the company's qualifications and their prior history working with the Town with regards to the existing Town Office Building. Kate presented Option #1. The slide presentation will be available on the Town website.

Meeting was opened to question for BTS and Option 1.

(Q) Carol Stansell: Is there a cost estimate for this Option?

(A) Anne Cunningham: Yes, but the committee has asked Bergeron not to give their cost estimate at this time because the option for a new building is not far enough in the planning stage to give a cost estimate at this time. Both estimates will be given at the next presentation.

(Q) Kate Chaput: On the second floor, how many people can be accommodated in the Selectman's area?

(A) Kate Richardson: The area is approximately 50SF so it could accommodate approximately 30 people, either sitting or standing. If you are looking at sitting, approximately 15 people.

(A) Shawn Bergeron: Building and fire code requirement with regarding to square footage, I am thinking about 25 people.

(Q) Nadine Chapman: I was wondering where the storage of records would be kept?

(A) Kate Richardson: On the first floor there are two main areas for storage. One by the Town Clerk's office, specifically her records and a second storage space for general items, to include records.

(Q) Nadine Chapman: Are the storage areas adapted for climate control?

(A) Kate Richardson: The storage areas do end up with better environmental controls. If you take in air conditioning which is currently not provide which would come with humidity control.

(Q) Daymond Steer, Conway Sun: When was the building built and when did it start being used as an office building?

(A) Anne Cunningham: It was a two-story school building built in 1895 and it became the Town Office Building in the 1970's after the new school building was built.

(Q) Carol Stansell: Follow-up to Nadine's question with regards to the storage areas, will the storage areas be fire proof?

(A) Kate Richardson: It will not be fire proof but will have fire-rated walls and ceilings. There is no fire suppression or sprinkler system design built into this plan.

(Q) Carol Stansell: So, it's not a vault?

(A) Kate Richardson: No, but it does have a level of fire protection.

(Q) Chuck Brooks: Are we to assume the Masonic building is off the table?

(A) Kate Richardson: It has been taken off the table as far as our study. I would caution against using the Masonic building. We do not believe that cost benefit of improving the building to the point where we are comfortable using the building, would be beneficial to the Town.

(Q) Darwin Moulton: You have a slide with a breakdown of square footage of the office space. Several of the office areas are being reduced in square footage which I believe is not beneficial to a town that is growing. You are taking a building designed as a two-story school house built in the 1800's. As a retired engineer, I'm looking at the numbers and they make no sense to me.

(Q) Brian Chaput: As a follow-up to the Masonic building, if the building cannot be used, what is the building intended for?

(A) Anne Cunningham: The Masons were planning to sell the building at the time the Town acquired the building. If the Masons did sell the building, we would have no parking lot for the Town Offices.

(Q) Brian Chaput: So, the Town acquired the building for the parking space, correct?

(A) Anne Cunningham: Correct

(Q) Bill Carney: My question is regarding the second-floor egress. There is currently a bid proposal out for the fire escape, so how does this planned work tie into this renovation plan? Does the planned new fire escape start before a decision is made on renovating?

(A) Ernie Day: The second floor of the Town Office currently cannot be used so we are trying to address this as soon as possible. The egress on the outside on the east side of the building will be moved to the back of the building. So, this will give the floor remodel more space.

(Q) Bill Carney: So, the construction will be on the outside and the plans will be amended, correct?

(A) Ernie Day: Correct

With no further questions, Anne introduced Robert Turpin to present the slide presentation for Option 2, constructing a new building on town-owned property. The slide presentation will be available on the Town website.

Meeting was opened to question for Robert Turpin and Option 2.

(Q) Paul Tung: In your plan, where is the bathroom?

(A) Robert Turpin: It is located here (pointing to the slide) and it is set up in the public access space, similar in size to plan with Bergeron.

(Q) Paul Elie: The current house and garage on the property, will they go away?

(A) Robert Turpin: Yes

(Q) Paul Elie: The area is relatively flat; can you show the map where the current two buildings exist and the flood-plain.

(A) Robert Turpin: This is the approximate FEMA designed edge of the flood-plain and the location of the current building and garage. The line is about 100-125 feet from where the structures are now.

(Q) Paul Elie: So how far from the river will the new building be?

(A) Robert Turpin: The new building would be here (pointing to the slide), approximately a quarter of a mile from the river.

(Q) Nadine Chapman: Are the design plans comparable to the proposed office space plans at the Town Office?

(A) Robert Turpin: The office areas, storage spaces and Selectboard room are within 5-10 percent of what is planned for the renovation project for the existing office building. In terms of gross square footage, this will be a smaller building because of no stairs and better efficiency of circulation.

(Q) Daymond Steer: Are there plans for a basement?

(A) Robert Turpin: No, this will be a slab, single floor building.

(Q) Darwin Moulton: With this design, will this allow for further growth on either end of the planned building?

(A) Robert Turpin: Yes, you could expand the building in either direction.

(Q) Darwin Moulton: With this design, we could add a foot or two of elevation which would raise it up even more than the flood-plain?

(A) Robert Turpin: Yes, and if so, we would have an appropriate civil engineering group come out to help with that.

(Q) Chuck Brooks: If the town decided to go with a new building, is there any discussion by the board as to how the old Town Office building would be maintained so it does not fall into disrepair?

(A) Anne Cunningham: We have not talked about that. Back in 2009, there was a committee lead by Marshall Kendall to try and look at an alternative use for the existing historic building and because there would be a change in use, it would result in a significant cost due to codes and other issues.

(Q) Kate Chaput: If the town decides to renovate the Town Office Building are there plans where the offices will be relocated during that time?

(A) Anne Cunningham: No, not at this time; it was not part of the committee's charter.

(Q) Paul Tung: What are the dimensions of the proposed new building?

(A) Robert Turpin: 32 feet by 84 feet.

(Q) Samantha (Sam) Porter: I am the Tax Collector. I will be having a deputy soon and there is no space to have someone sitting with me. I also deal with sensitive topics with other people that require them to sit with me, will there be a space in the office areas to accommodate that.

(A) Robert Turpin: If we move forward with this project, we would incorporate this level of detail and bring it into the designs. The intent here was just to bring a broad scope schematic of a building and a general working plan of the building.

(Q) Sam Porter: So, this design shows a copier room, how far will that be or will we have our own printer/copier?

(A) Robert Turpin: You could be walking up to 30 feet from your office space.

(A) Anne Cunningham: I believe there will be a printer in your office.

(Q) Jayne Britton: Did you talk to the workers in the Town Offices when you decided on this plan to get our opinion on what is needed in a particular office?

(A) Robert Turpin: I was given prior information to start this process but as I mentioned, if this plan moves forward we would address these issues in the next phase.

(Q) Jayne Britton: And who gave you the prior information?

(A) Anne Cunningham: The committee gave the information to Robert. BTS interviewed the staff and information collected by BTS was shared with Robert.

(Q) Doris Sirosis: If this plan does move forward, is there a possibility of solar power?

(A) Robert Turpin: This certainly could be a possibility given the location. It is wide open, south facing.

(Q) Paul Elie: This question is for the committee. How much money has been appropriated by the Town for this study and how much has been spent? At the 2020 Town Meeting, Warrant Article 30 proposed a study to renovate the current Town Office building. How did you get from that vote that passed, to where we are now with these two options?

(A) Anne Cunningham: I cannot tell you exactly what we have spent, I can find out and get back to you. The 2020 Article set aside \$40,000 to examine the renovation the Town Office building and construct a new building on Eaton Road. There was a discussion and the Warrant Article was amended to focus on just the renovation of the existing Town Offices and that was our original charter. Because of COVID and the delay of getting the resources, we needed to work on the project, it is now 2023. The committee believed that when we would get to the 2024 Town Meeting, that without a comparison of a new building that the process would linger into 2025. So, in March at the 2023 Town Meeting, we proposed including the cost of a new building so there would be the two option plans for comparison at the 2024 Town Meeting.

(Q) Nadine Chapman: Has there been any thought given to what happens to the existing office building in the event the decision is not to renovate that building? Once the building is vacated, can the building be sold? And if it could be sold, what would be required of the new owner? Is this something the town could look at now in preparation for next March meeting? My thought was just because the town is vacating the building, it does not mean the town has to keep and maintain the building. Can the building be sold?

(A) Ernie Day: Yes

(Q) Kate Chaput: First of all, thank you for the two presentations, they were very helpful. I understand that there is another meeting in January-early February where the costing numbers will be provided as to the cost per tax-payer dollars and those kinds of things. My question is that this issue is set to be a Warrant Article at the Town Meeting, which will be on a Tuesday, what do we have to do to get the issue on a ballot rather than presented as a warrant article? There are a lot of voters in town that cannot attend that meeting; Town Meetings do not represent the entire town.

(A) Carol Stansell: There is, it requires two-thirds vote, it can be written into the warrant article that it needs to be placed on a written ballot.

(A) Ernie Day: This is something that we can ask the town attorney.

Bill Elliott: I just have a comment. I like the original building that is there. I believe the building to be the center of Freedom. People would need to come into the town instead of staying outside of it.

Darwin Moulton: I agree that it would be a shame to lose the building but this town is growing. If you look at the square footage in the designs that they gave to redo the building, most of the offices will be cut in half. With the continuing growth of Freedom, we are looking at the possibility of a Water Department, a Public Works Department and more. It's sad that we have to go outside the Village but we have no choice given the layout. We have no choice but to build a new building to give the staff the space they need to do their jobs.

Roberta McCarthy: It is not just a two-story school house building; it is the center of our community. The question should not be which one do we choose but how do plan our community so it is the center and that it engages as many people as possible. I don't want us to forget that.

Bill Elliott: I still like the building.

Carol Stansell: Just one more comment, personally I feel that the existing building has out grown its use. The Eaton Road building offers expansion, the existing building renovating plans do not.

Anne Cunningham: It could, but it would have to be Option 3; to have a full addition on the back of the existing office building.

(Q) Doris Sirois: Could a second floor be put in the new building?

(A) Anne Cunningham: Yes, but the staff at the Town Office building wanted a single story. .

(Q) Sam Porter: Would there be possibility to do a re-interview of the Town Offices employees?

(A) Anne Cunningham: At this point that would not be an option. I believe interviews were done by people who made themselves available. However, there were multiple requests for interviews for those who choose not to be interviewed. If either of these options move forward, this can be addressed at that time.

With no further question, Anne thanked Kate Richardson, Shawn Bergeron, Robert Turpin, and the public for attending. The meeting was adjourned at 7:49pm.