

**TOWN OF WHEELLOCK
SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING
LISTENING SESSION - TOWN HALL ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT
At Wheelock Town Hall and via Zoom
Sunday, March 27, 2022, 2:00 pm**

Minutes, draft for distribution

Present in person

Ann Lawless, Selectboard chair
Jim Blackbird, Selectboard
Marilyn Lincolnhurst
Enid Ellis
Eileen Boland
Peter Miller, moderator
Nancy Young
Tanya Brewer
Bradley Brewer
Bobbi Jo Norcross
Richard Norcross
Barb Miller
Carol Rossi
Galen Smith
Liz Muckerman (arrived late)
Kathy Buck (at 3:50pm)

Present via Zoom

Mike Richardson, Selectboard
Erin
Steve Amos
Norma Twombly (left at 3:30pm)
Susan Dangel

Guests present in person

Karen Geraghty, NCIC
Meaghan Feeney, UVM Democracy Intern

(Total from Wheelock 21 persons)

2pm Ann welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. She explained the meeting purpose: (1) To hear all ideas, comments, suggestions and and feedback on the town's goals towards a fully accessible Town Hall; (2) For the Selectboard members to review a draft report to the U.S. Department of Justice. She asked for any changes to the agenda and none were proposed. She welcomed and introduced Meaghan Feeney, student Democracy Intern from the Center for Research on Vermont, University of Vermont, who is helping the town as a Wheelock ARPA Committee member. She also welcomed and introduced Karen Geraghty, planner from Northern Community Investment Corporation who is assisting the town with writing a planning grant to the VT Community Development Program. She then turned the meeting over to Wheelock's elected moderator, Peter Miller.

Comments and suggestions on a wide range of issues and from different viewpoints were offered and have been grouped as follows:

New technologies

- Up flush toilets; do not need to elevate; uses only a 2" waste pipe
- Energy efficiency, weatherization, repairs to windows, new heating technologies would help reduce operating costs and allow us to heat only the spaces as they are being used

Lift or elevator

- To avoid an addition, suggested positioning in current basement utility closet. Need 7 x 7 space
- How can a wheelchair user get out of building in case of fire
- Contact other places to find out their rules, Colonial Apts. in St. J, NVRH
- Folding lift attached to stairs that can take wheelchairs. That type of stair lift may not be permitted in a public building
- Our stairways are too narrow for stair lift. Does not solve the issue of access to the stage
- Does not solve the issue of getting into the building (other than via ramp)

Washrooms

- Need a 5' diameter circle for wheelchair turning
- Who decides how many we need? Likely there is a public occupancy limit
- Do we need more than one? Hopefully we do not need both a mens and womens

Stage

- Ramp will be required
- Removing stage could provide space for kitchen
- Is removing it permissible?

Existing ramp

- Fire Marshall who visited with some citizens said not worth the cost to replace (\$20 - \$30K) considering it is out of compliance by only a matter of inches
- Install a "boat ramp" so pitch can be easily adjusted

Stairs

- Local volunteers could fix outdoor front steps at no charge (one offered)
- Front steps issues are the surface, railings, railing height
- Interior stairs are an issue for others besides non-wheelchair users. Need to be aware of all citizens' needs (parents/small children)

- Recent work adding handrails and shortening treads (inside) was an immediate fix required by DOJ but does not address the main issue regarding access into building and between the two floors
- Handicap parking areas and walkways need appropriate slopes and ground surfaces at all times of the year

Kitchen

- Very important to have it for community activities

Layout

- Post Covid office - additional space needed. Create a more open plan with flexibility, and space for researchers, listers, clerk.
- Vault would benefit from appropriate shelving to maximize space use

Cost and impact on taxes

- Broad agreement this is a major concern
- Living expenses have risen since 2018 when 190 people voted for a town hall project
- Homeowners try to stay within what they can afford; town should do the same

Financing

- A \$1M project is affordable and reasonable, a good investment, given expenditures of \$1M every 8 yrs on town equipment and every 20 yrs. on transfer station
- Must balance between keeping costs down and a wise long-term investment
- Voters are habituated to \$30K annually on Town Hall since 2017, initially for roof repairs, now going into reserve account. For a \$1M project, if borrowing \$900,000, that \$30K would not change, and total would very likely be reduced with grants
- People have already said NO to a \$1M proposal
- Having costs mapped out in the planning grant project and identifying potential funders will give people perspective on how to pay for project – likely a mix of grants, loans and voters (already contributing \$30K/yr)
- Need to plan for ongoing maintenance as well as project costs, as we have a tendency not to take care of what we have (gazebo, cemeteries, pavilion <since repaired>)

- Do we have an idea of how much grant funding we are likely to get? Fire Marshall has told some don't depend on grants.
- Karen would never advocate for a project without knowing which grants are in place. There are significant grant opportunities for projects just like this one. Financing will likely be a mix of grants, loans and voters, and pretty detailed plans and cost estimates will be necessary. It is also necessary to determine ongoing costs. The VCDP CDBG planning grant will allow the town to create a process to hear the community's wishes, and find where to get the construction plans and produce the materials needed to do the project. A community member could do this work or it could be hired it out. The DOJ will want the requirements addressed in our plans and they will want to be sure the resulting work conforms to the plans.

Process issues

- Who do we answer to? Must address deficiencies spelled out in U.S. Dept. of Justice Settlement Agreement
- Would like to see written comments from current Fire Marshall on what they will approve. Both past officials have said they would not approve a small lift
- Fire Safety will sign off on the building permit, which must specify the plans
- DOJ will likely want to see that we have complied
- In 2016 VCDP project, 5 different architects recommended rear addition. Itemized cost estimates approximately \$800K
- In most recent effort, the idea was to offer 2 concepts for voter approval prior to undertaking construction documents as it would be too expensive to develop documents for two concepts
- Construction documents and bids are needed to accurately predict costs
- Is historic integrity an issue with making changes? There are variances. Funders want historic buildings to be used
- Come to meetings and help. Don't just sit out there and fight and argue
- Taxes are already too high
- Past suggestions were not listened to (voiced by several)
- Past 2 concepts are dead; a new plan is needed
- VCDP planning grant will have a large focus on working with community members

- Selectboard must come up with a new plan to propose to community. Selectboard members each expressed willingness to proceed
- Jim said the 2 options are done. His concern is we satisfy the DOJ the cheapest way we can do it.
- Mike said we need to get the main DOJ issues done, and look to solving other challenges later. He is concerned there is not enough room for the new ideas suggested, so therefore how about a small addition on West side near doorway to house lift, redo the stairs, and fix the basement leak problem. Also willing to look at drawings of the other plans discussed tonight.
- Ann stated we need to continue to move forward.
- Where can people find the list of deficiencies? Town website, <https://townofwheelockvt.org/>, Town Hall ADA tab

3:50pm There being no more comments forthcoming, Peter turned the meeting back to the selectboard. Jim made a motion to adjourn the listening session, seconded by Mike, so voted.

The selectboard members reviewed the draft letter to the U.S. Department of Justice and authorized Ann to finalize it by including number of attendees and brief notes about this meeting and prepare it for signatures.

4:06pm Jim made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mike, so voted.

(see posters and sketch, appended)

Notes by Ann Lawless

Posters by Carol Rossi

Annual Expenditures

\$148,197	Road Crew
63,835	New Road Equipment
57,800	Equipment Repair, Maintenance Diesel, Tires
50,387	Transfer Station
33,293	Lyndon Rescue
31,376	Fire Department
30,000	Town Hall Project

Municipal Facility and
Community Gathering Place

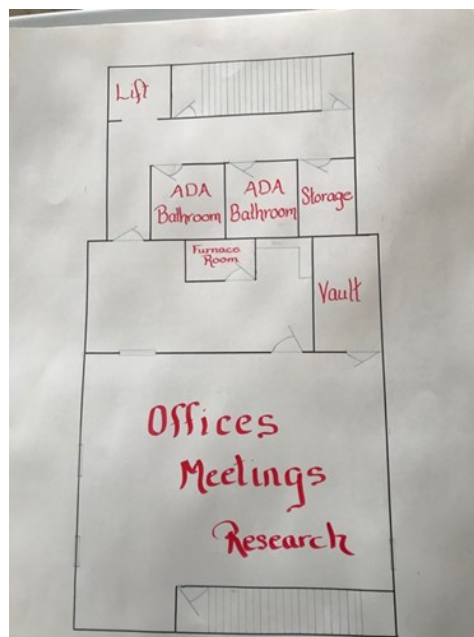
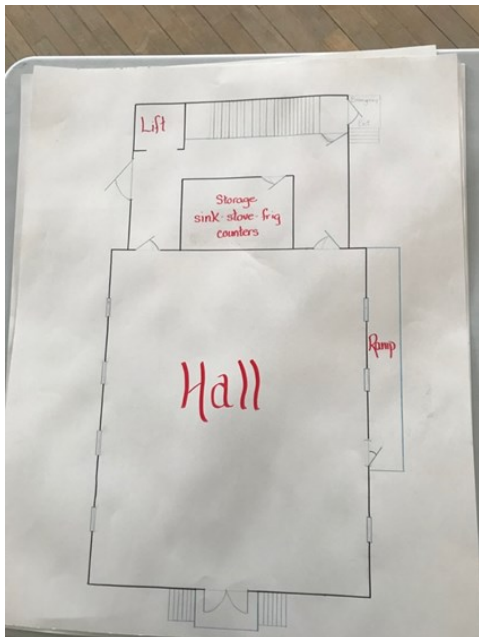
POLLING PLACE

OFFICE SPACE
more spacious
less basement like

MEETING SPACE
Town Meeting
Board and Committee meetings

GATHERING PLACE
Family Gatherings
Community Groups

SAFE ACCESSIBLE FUNCTIONAL
Provides a connection to our past and will
continue to meet needs long into the future.



Address Needs
while

Keeping Costs Making a Wise
DOWN INVESTMENT

Sketch by Mike Richardson

