

OCTOBER 2025



Lowe Lecture Hall Information Meeting

Agenda

- Background and History
- Recent Developments
- Potential Uses
- Financial Breakdown
- Decision and Next Steps





Opening

- Tonight's meeting is about the future of Lowe Lecture Hall, a building central to Johnson for nearly 200 years.
- Our goal is to provide background, share the process that has brought us here, and outline the decision before the town.
- The decision is whether or not to acquire Lowe Lecture Hall from the Vermont Studio Center.

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Background and History



History of Lowe, the Town, & VSC

- 1832 – Built as a Congregational Church
- 1854 – Gifted to the Town of Johnson
- 1899 – Renovated with stage; hosted school plays, graduations, grange meetings, shows, and movies
- 1984 – Leased by Vermont Studio Center
- 1998 – Purchased by Vermont Studio Center from the town, with deed restrictions (including right of first refusal)
- Present – Tower weathervane remains town property



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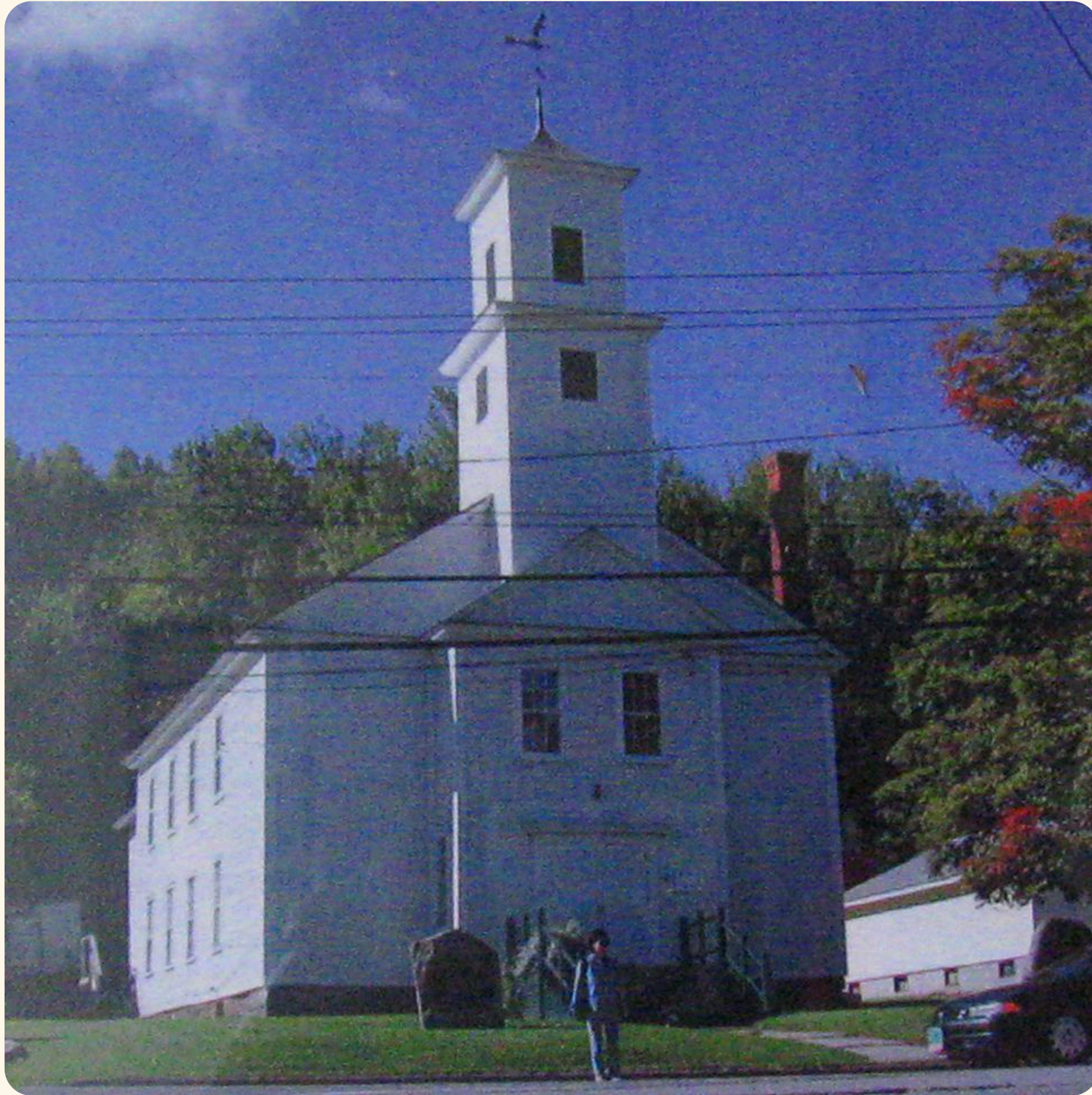
Recent Developments



How VSC Got Here

- Public meeting February 2025
- VSC held the first of several meetings with municipal, business, and nonprofit leaders
- VSC shared its campus master plan, noting Lowe has no future programmatic role for them
- Experts, community members, and preservation groups discussed the building's condition, needs, and reuse options
- Lowe identified as a potential community asset for the Town of Johnson





Lowe Lecture Hall: Recent Discussions

February, 2025 - Selectboard Meeting

- VSC briefly mentioned that Lowe Lecture Hall may not be needed in their future plans.

July 21, 2025 – Selectboard Meeting

- VSC shared with Selectboard that the Lowe building no longer has a role in their future plans
- Selectboard expressed strong interest in acquiring Lowe
- Purchase price: \$1.00, plus \$7,090.78 (2025 Village & Town taxes) and \$3,000 closing costs.
- VSC goes back to VSC for board approval of offer

August 18, 2025 – Selectboard Meeting

- VSC Board agrees to sale price \$1.00, plus \$7,090.78 (2025 Village & Town taxes) and \$3,000 closing costs.
- VSC continues paying Town/Village taxes until transfer
- Town agreed to warn a special vote for purchase of Lowe Lecture Hall

Broad List of Potential Uses

***THESE POTENTIAL USES ARE EXAMPLES ONLY; THE BUILDING'S FUTURE PURPOSE WILL ULTIMATELY BE DETERMINED THROUGH A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS LED BY A TOWN-APPOINTED COMMITTEE, TASK FORCE, OR GROUP.**

- Community events space – meetings, lectures, celebrations, workshops
- Cultural programming – theater, music, film screenings, art shows
- Education – after-school programs, tutoring, adult learning classes
- Health & wellness – fitness classes, yoga, health clinics, support groups
- Childcare – preschool, daycare, or drop-in childcare programs
- Senior programs – social gatherings, meals, activities, resource center
- Nonprofit hub – office or meeting space for local organizations
- Business incubator – shared workspace for entrepreneurs or makers
- Tourism & heritage – small museum, history exhibits, visitor center
- Emergency use – relief distribution site during disasters

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Financial Breakdown



Initial Costs

ITEM	ESTIMATED COST	NOTES
ACQUISITION COST	\$1 + \$7,090.78 TAXES + ~\$3,000 CLOSING = ~\$10,092 TOTAL	VSC PROPOSAL TO SELL FOR \$1; REQUEST TAX REIMBURSEMENT
STRUCTURAL EVALUATION & ARCHITECT (EGRESS/ACCESSIBILITY)	\$500	TO BE DONE BY SILVER RIDGE DESIGN (CONTRACTED FIRM)
HAZARDOUS MATERIALS ASSESSMENT	EST (LIKELY \$3K-\$10K)	IN PROCESS OF BEING PERFORMED BY THE TOWN
FOUNDATION REPLACEMENT REQUIRED + SITE WORK	\$150,000	FULL STABILIZATION IS NEEDED
ELECTRIC	\$4,000	RELOCATION OF ELECTRICAL PANEL
ANNUAL MAINTENANCE & UTILITIES	~\$5,000-\$10,000	ROUGH RANGE; WOULD BE REFINED AFTER OWNERSHIP TRANSFER

Yearly Costs Estimates

CURRENT CONDITIONS (UNUSED)	
LOSS IN REVENUE	\$ 2,297.55
WATER/SEWER BILL	\$ 539.12
ELECTRICAL BILL	\$ 1,028.21
HEAT BILL	\$ -
TELEPHONE/INTERNET BILL	\$ -
MOWING	\$ -
PLOWING	\$ -
BUILDING MAINTENANCE	\$ -
MISC.	\$ -
TOTAL YEARLY COST IMPACT CURRENT	\$ 3,864.88

25-26 GRAND LIST	\$ 2,446,545.00
1 CENT ON 25-26 GL RAISES:	\$ 24,465.45

POTENTIAL CONDITIONS (*COMPARED TO HOLCOMB HOUSE 2024)	
LOSS IN REVENUE	\$ 2,297.55
WATER/SEWER BILL*	\$ 776.65
ELECTRICAL BILL*	\$1,298.98
HEAT BILL*	\$4,609.56
TELEPHONE/INTERNET BILL*	\$1,433.02
MOWING (ESTIMATED)	\$ 1,000.00
PLOWING (ESTIMATED)	\$ 1,000.00
BUILDING MAINTENANCE (ESTIMATED)	\$ 2,500.00
MISC. (ESTIMATED)	\$ 2,000.00
TOTAL YEARLY COST IMPACT POTENTIAL USE	\$ 16,915.76

Grant Opportunities for the Town

Grant Name	Administering Body	Typical Award	Match Requirement	Notes
Historic Preservation Grants	VT Division of Historic Preservation	Up to \$20,000	50/50 match	Competitive; quarterly deadlines; reimbursement basis. In 2025 five grants were awarded. In 2024 five grants were awarded.
Historic Preservation (VHCB)	Vermont Housing & Conservation Board	\$75,000–\$115,000	Perpetual preservation easement	For acquisition/rehab of historic community buildings. In 2024, fourteen grants were awarded; in both 2023 and 2022, four grants were awarded each year.

Grant Name	Administering Body	Typical Award	Match Requirement	Notes
Vermont Community Development Program – Implementation Grant (IG)	VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development	\$50,000–\$500,000 (up to \$1M)	Yes (varies)	Must serve public purpose (economic development, housing, community facility)
Vermont Community Development Program – Accessibility Modification Grant	VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development	\$5,000–\$150,000	10% match	For ADA compliance upgrades to municipal/community buildings

Grant Name	Administering Body	Typical Award	Match Requirement	Notes
Vermont Arts Council	Vermont Arts Council	~\$30,000	Varies	Depends on cultural/arts programming use of building. In 2026 and 2025, sixteen grants were awarded each year, and in 2024, nineteen grants were awarded.
Preservation Trust of Vermont (technical/bridge support)	PTV	Varies	Varies	Can assist with grant writing, partnerships, and preservation practices

* In addition to public funding opportunities, the Town can pursue grants from private foundations and corporate giving programs, as well as launch community fundraising efforts to support the restoration and future use of the Lowe Lecture Hall.

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Decision and Next Steps



Why This Matters

- Historic value – Built in 1832, one of Johnson's most significant historic buildings.
- Community space – Longtime venue for events, plays, and gatherings
- Future uses – Could support culture, art, or whatever the Town residents would like.
- Local control – Town decides its use, not outside groups
- Grant funding – Town ownership opens access to major preservation and community grants.





Decision Point

The upcoming special town meeting and vote will determine:

Will the voters authorize the Selectboard to purchase on terms and conditions agreeable to it, a +/-0.32-acre property located at 58 Lower Main East Street, currently owned by the Vermont Studio Center, Inc. and referred to as the Joe & Emily Lowe Lecture Hall for a price of \$1.00 plus Village and Town taxes in the amount of \$7,090.78 for tax year 2025, plus estimated closing cost of \$3,000.00?

(NOTE: THE VOTE ON ARTICLE I IS ADVISORY AND NON-BINDING. THE SELECTBOARD'S INTENT IS TO FOLLOW THE WILL OF THE VOTERS BUT BELIEVES IT PRUDENT TO RESERVE THE RIGHT TO MAKE THE FINAL DETERMINATION TO PROTECT THE TOWN'S INTERESTS IN THE EVENT OF UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES AND/OR NEW INFORMATION BECOMES AVAILABLE.)

Next Steps

- Tonight: Informational session.
- Special Town Meeting Tuesday, October 28th, 2025 at 6:00pm Johnson Elementary School, 57 College Hill Road: Community vote on whether the Town will acquire Lowe Lecture Hall.
- If approved, the legal transfer process will begin.
- A community planning process can then follow, supported by LCPC and preservation partners.



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Questions?

