

Progress Report from the Envision Rochester High School Repurposing Committee
9/8/20

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to inform the Rochester Select Board (SB) on the work accomplished to date by the Envision Rochester High School (HS) Repurposing Committee, and anticipated next steps (details on pages 2-14), as well as stating our request for action from the Rochester SB and School Board.

Economic Development Context: We view the HS building as a unique and valuable community asset with the potential to become a centerpiece for area economic development and enhanced quality of life, consistent with the aims of the Envision Rochester initiative, fostering a culture of opportunity, inclusion, and diversity.

Closure of the High School in 2018 was a stark wake up call to Rochester's changing demographics. Envision Rochester began in the spring of 2019 in recognition that Rochester's aging and slowly shrinking population would over time, without intervention, adversely impact the community's economic strength and quality of life. Several community workshops were held to identify strategies to address this.

In February 2020, an Envision Rochester community-wide workshop identified a dozen focus areas reflecting the community's interest. Through a winnowing process 5 focus areas were selected. Repurposing of the empty Rochester HS building was the focus area that received the greatest sustained participation and enthusiasm. A repurposing committee was formed that in March sought and received the blessing of the Rochester SB and the School Board to explore options for repurposing the building under the Town of Rochester's ownership. Work was paused in the early spring due to the pandemic, but resumed in May and has continued since, meeting weekly through July, and now bi-weekly.

Our Request: We respectfully request that the SB formally commit to its intention of acquiring the HS building from the School Board. Additionally, we will respectfully request that the School Board come to a definitive decision about the availability of the HS building for repurposing, and that a repurposed HS building can continue to reserve space for educating public school students.

Without these actions by both boards this committee is left with a troubling uncertainty about whether the work of the repurposing planning can continue. Securing a commitment from these boards will allow our work to proceed in good faith and on firmer ground.

It is essential that all three parties work in partnership with transparency toward a clear understanding of intent, including timely information sharing and articulation of the steps needed to transfer ownership of the HS building to the town, and a proposed timeline.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,
Envision Rochester HS Repurposing Committee

**ENVISION ROCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL REPURPOSING COMMITTEE
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ER HS Repurposing Committee Members

Vic Ribaldo, Chair
Bonnie Bourne
Burma Cassidy
Robert Gardner
Jeff Gephart
Robert Meagher
Dan Ribaldo
Dick Robson
Aiden Ryan
Greg Ryan
Samantha Ryan
Kathryn Schenkman, Rochester SB liaison
Amy Wildt, School Board liaison

School Situation Background

Prompted by Act 46, the towns of Rochester and Stockbridge merged into a unified school district that combined 2 elementary schools (K – 6) into one district, and discontinued the use of the Rochester HS building for education of grades 7–12 that were given the option school choice. Stockbridge is historically a school choice town for upper grades. Once merged, students attending Rochester Elementary School continued to have access to the HS building for music and art programs, at a cost of .9% of the entire school budget or approximately \$40,000 annually.

It's important to note that these facilities are available to Stockbridge students, but to date Stockbridge has not advantaged their students of this facility. Both towns maintain a strong loyalty to their local schools. A portion of Stockbridge voters object to continued HS building use by the Rochester elementary school. This objection factored into the defeat the initial '20-'21 school budget in June. A subsequent July revote passed the budget on the strength of Rochester voters. Rochester student population is nearly double that of Stockbridge.

In a move to encourage approval of the school budget, and as a consequence the COVID-19 pandemic, the school board voted to close the HS building for the upcoming school year. The question of what to do with the HS building is actively under review by the school board, and the subject of their survey soliciting community input. Throughout this period the ER Repurposing Bldg Committee has been actively involved in exploring options for repurposing the HS building.

Overview of Committee Progress 9/5/20

Accomplishments to date (see full research activity reports on pg 6 the expanded report)

- Established a steering committee that meets bi-weekly
- Obtained endorsement from the Select Board and the School Board to explore repurposing options
- Reviewed the building's engineering study
- Reviewed initial repurposing concepts, winnowed to the following proposals, not listed in order of priority:
 1. Regional Arts and Learning Center
 2. Makerspace facility
 3. Intergenerational education
 4. Childcare Center
 5. Affordable Housing Units
 6. Worker Bee Mentorship Program, submitted by Anni MacKay
 7. Sell the HS, or a portion to the HS, should a suitable commercial interest develop that is appropriate and healthy for our community
- Established email address to facilitate community input
- Conducted multiple focus groups re the Arts and Learning Center/Makerspace concepts
- Site visit to The Mint makerspace in Rutland
- Solicited bid for a commercial real estate appraisal
- Solicited public housing info through Sen. Bernie Sander's office
- Met formally with Rochester SB for coordination
- Contacted new superintendent Jamie Kinnarny, requesting a tour the school bldg. He expressed his support of the general idea and of the visit and presented our request for the tour to the school board, who responded that the tour request must come directly from the Rochester SB. We are on the SB agenda for the 9/14 meeting

Community-wide participation

The following are essential aspects to success of this effort:

1. Working within a true partnership with the ER Repurposing Committee, the Rochester Select Board, and the School Board, with shared expectations and regular close communication.
2. Building a broad community support through transparency, inclusiveness in generating and vetting ideas, as well as recruiting volunteers willing to commit the time necessary to realizing this effort.

3. Having a regular monthly presence on the Rochester Select Board agenda for progress reports, open community discussion and SB feedback.
4. Conducting additional focus groups, e.g. HS alums, and young adults, to identify needs that the building might meet, and an online survey open to all Rochester residents inviting ideas.

Facility Condition

Although the engineer's study indicates significant capital costs to sustain the building into the future, the building is in good/functional condition and can be used in its current condition. Further assessment is needed to determine reliable cost estimates for upgrades over a specified period of time and for a specified functional use/program. Energy related improvements (solar power, modern heating options) are essential to the renovation. Once final plans for a repurposed building are confirmed, the extent of needed renovation to accommodate its purpose will be determined, in what order and over what period of time. Written cost estimates will be obtained. We require clarification of the existing movable equipment, and what of that equipment will be included in the town's acquisition and are requesting a site tour and inventory. Concerns exist about the cost of building upgrades required due to its changes use.

Financing Issues

We will explore availability of grants from public and private sources as well as memberships and user fee income. Multi-use income (non-profit as well as for-profit) will be considered in order to cover operating expenses that a project of this scope would require. We are unsure if the Town budget might provide any support.

Repurposing Committee Proposed Work Plan

Identified Tasks

Essential to success will be a functional working partnership between the ER Repurposing Committee, the Rochester Select Board, and the School Board, with shared expectations and regular close communication. Also key is the building of a broad community support through transparency, inclusiveness in generating and vetting ideas, and committing the time necessary to realizing this effort.

1. Regular monthly presence on Rochester SB agenda for progress reports, open community discussion and SB feedback, attendance by board liaisons at both meetings
2. Examine 2 local models of repurposed historic buildings in Rochester—the Park House and Pierce Hall—to learn from the collective experience of both projects by consulting with the development parties for both projects re their keys to success, lessons learned, and advice for this project
3. Identify focus group populations, (e.g. HS alums, family groups, artists/makers/ youth group) and organize focus meetings to identify needs that the HS building might potentially meet
4. Develop an online survey questionnaire, open to all Quintown residents inviting ideas for use of building
5. Contact VT Council on Rural Development to solicit their support for this project to help identify funding resources, government agency resources; schedule VCRD visit
6. Identify revenue sources for sustaining operating costs for HS bldg in its current condition under town ownership

Program Exploration and Planning

The population size of the valley suggests that an arts or community center and/or makerspace will require outreach beyond our valley to insure greater usage, support, and revenue.

1. Develop partnerships with regional organizations and businesses to expand membership and programming options
2. Explore shared programming opportunities with local organizations, including RASTA, Big Town Gallery, WRVP, RCMS, J.Jensen & Friends Fine Craft Gallery, Icarus Stained Glass, Green Mtn Suzuki Institute
3. A phased implementation over several years might be considered, using the south (auditorium) wing as the location of phase 1.

4. It is the majority opinion of initial focus groups that the development of Arts and Learning programming, in collaboration with Pierce Hall and other arts organizations, is feasible on a smaller scale in the immediate future, using existing town facilities, including Pierce Hall and the HS bldg, if permitted
5. Remain open to a multi-use building housing compatible programs
6. Reaching out to the young adult generations for inclusion in the planning and decision-making process for building use
7. Reach out to established institutions of higher learning (e.g. Castleton, CCV and VTC) to explore possibility of a satellite location in the HS
8. Sponsor a Maker Fair to ignite project interest and explore community interest that includes visual and music arts, business, culinary arts, filmmakers and recording studio artists
9. Explore establishment of a new non-profit entity to manage the program
10. Consider development of facility grounds to include a well designed skateboard facility

Articulating the Mission, Vision, Scope and Feasibility

1. Continue to conduct focus groups to identify unprompted needs as well as response to arts and learning center, makerspace, and other emerging options. Possible groups include: young adults, HS alums, current elementary school parents
2. Invite Anni Mackey to present Worker Bee program
3. Create criteria for prioritizing program opportunities
4. Arts and Learning Center— specific tasks
 - Identify potential partner organizations, development of concept with partners
 - Convene a group to draft an initial mission and vision statement
5. Makerspace—specific tasks:
 - Site visit to additional existing makerspace facilities, e.g. The Generator in Burlington
 - inventory shop equipment in HS
6. Housing—specific tasks:
 - submit grant proposal for feasibility study funding
7. Explore relocating town offices to HS bldg, which will provide weekly administrative presence

Facility Issues

Although the engineer's study indicates significant capital costs to sustain the building into the future, the building is in good/functional condition and can be used in its current condition. Further assessment is needed to determine reliable cost estimates for upgrades over a specified period of time and for a specified functional use/program. Once final plans for a repurposed building are confirmed, the extent of needed renovation to accommodate its purpose will be determined, in what order, and over what period of time.

1. Inventory the building contents and condition of the items. Will the movable equipment be included in the sale? What is there and what condition is each item in?
2. Get written cost estimates
3. Determine what movable equipment is needed and cost
4. Survey the property to determine boundary lines
5. Advise the Select Board about desirability of existing movable equipment
6. Identify energy alternatives for the HS Bldg
7. Flood mitigation systems, while necessary, are likely not as expensive as the engineer's report suggests.
8. Energy related improvements (solar power, modern heating options) are essential to the renovation.

Financing Issues

- Multi-use income (non-profit as well as for-profit) will be considered in order to cover operating expenses that a project of this scope would require
- Establishment of an entity that will effectively administrate the facility in partnership with the town, or potentially acquire the building from the town in the future

- Explore large grants (Federal, State or large foundations) to renovate the building. Explore all funding sources, including sophisticated and long-term fundraising, and a capital campaign drive

1. Confirm SB's intention for town acquisition and commitment to cover capital and/operating costs
2. Confirm a projected target date with the SB re building acquisition and what needs to be firmly in place to move forward with building acquisition
3. Work with the School Board to determine what kind of building use would not be compatible with the adjacent Elementary School.
4. Begin dialogue with State agencies, e.g., Agency of Commerce and Community Development - Green Mountain Economic Development Council, VCRD for guidance on financing the renovations.

Project Research Activity Reports

MAKERSPACE: Site visit to the Mint Makerspace Visit 7/31/2020—Report submitted by Dick, Kathryn, Robert

We met with The MINT executive director, Karen McCalla, at the Rutland Makerspace. The concept for this facility began about 5 years ago; they have had their own space for about three years. They describe themselves as, "A place for tinkerers, makers, and small businesses to have space, contacts, and equipment to thrive."

Facility

The MINT rents space in an industrial building owned by REDC (Rutland Economic Development Corporation). They have around 8000 square feet of space. REDC charged no rent for the first year, then well below normal rent (about \$1 /s.f.) for two years. Next year they will pay about \$3 /s.f. (still below normal) thereafter.

The facility is sub-divided into several areas: Wood Shop; Metal Shop; Electronics Lab; Stained-Glass Shop. All are well equipped with machinery, workspace, computers, and raw materials, including a Laser cutter and engraver and 3-D printer. Many of the machines have been donated (especially wood shop), some have been purchased, and, in the case of the metal shop, many belong to a metalworking company that uses The MINT space in exchange for letting The MINT members use its machines.

Many of the raw materials on hand have been donated (wood, art glass, electronic components) and are available for use to the members at no extra charge.

Organization

The MINT is a non-profit corporation with a Board of Directors and an Operations Team. Volunteers fill all positions for now; they are working toward having at least a paid facilities manager. Right now, because they were closed for 4 months due to Covid-19, their OT is down to three people (normally around 10). Each part of the facility has a shop manager who establishes training, safety rules, layout, etc., and who is in charge of maintaining the equipment. Members are required to be trained on equipment before being using the equipment.

The MINT is a membership organization. An individual's monthly fee (\$50) entitles facility access any time (daily, 8:00am–9:00pm, 7 days/week, and use of any equipment on which you have been trained. Basic instruction is included in the membership fee. There are also family rates for people living in the same household. Currently their membership is down to about 100 members because of the COVID-19 closing. Membership is very flexible; you only need to pay a fee for the months you wish to use the facility. Members also have access to member-only classes and events.

Additional options are available by application and subject to fees and availability:

- 24/7 Access Membership Available
- Personal Workbench
- Personal Studio Space

- Volunteer Discount
- Storage Lockers and Shelves

A significant part of their income is from class fees. These range in duration and cost depending on the activity (from \$30 \$60/class). Normally they split the income 50/50 with the instructor. Many of the members are teachers by vocation. During the pandemic, conducting in-person classes is a problem that they are trying to solve.

Partnerships

Karen stressed the importance of partnerships with other organizations. Partnerships usually involve no exchange of money—rather they are an exchange of facilities, expertise, time, etc. One of their most important partners is REDC. Many makerspaces have significant partnerships with colleges or other educational institutions. (The Generator in Burlington has partnerships with UVM and Champlain College). The Mint has no college partnership to date, but offers mentoring and educational programs such their Entrepreneurship Development Program called OnRamp.

Members of the OnRamp cohort have access to business experts from across their community, and complete an entrepreneurship curriculum from CoStarters, and go from concept to complete business in one year. Included in the program are the following: one year of The MINT membership, including special members-only pricing for classes, co-working space from Green Mountain Power in the Energy Innovation Center, access to OnRamp mentors and one-on-one support. The program is supported by a ThinkVT Innovation Grant and the following partnerships: LaunchVT, the Vermont Center for Emerging Technology's Scale Here Program, as well as local matching money and assistance of various local companies.

Operations

Any member can let themselves into the building during open hours, whether or not there is anyone else in the building. There is no full-time staff to supervise.

There are several small companies who use the facility for prototyping, for small manufacturing runs, etc. They can rent small spaces (8' x 10') for an additional monthly rental. No storage space comes with membership unless you pay extra for shelf space.

Volunteer trainers provide training/mentoring on the equipment. So far this does not seem to be a problem.

Costs

We didn't get into this in depth, but learned the following:

- There is no payroll
- Their rent is nominal
- Their liability and fire insurance is an unbelievably low \$800 - 900 per year

Startup

A small number of makers got together and decided to make this happen. Establishing the space, through REDC, was the key to getting going. For two consecutive years they produced a Maker's Fair, where a number of people who make things exhibited their products. This was not an opportunity to sell whatever they made, but rather a demonstration of, and invitation to, Making. During those years they established lists of interested people, potential equipment donators, and probable instructors.

ARTS AND LEARNING CENTER—Focus groups conducted and report submitted by Vic Ribaudó

In-person socially distanced/masked focus groups were conducted on August 2 and Aug 9 to explore community input, enthusiasm, and support for a regional Arts and Learning Center.

August 2 Focus Group with 8 participants: Vic reviewed background re how we got here and purpose of focus group: to explore what an arts and learning center would look like, and can it succeed in this valley?

Discussed the following:

- School closure & merger
- Repurposing Committee
- Studied HS bldg diagram
- Engineers Report/Building Cost and Condition
- Community size and volunteer Capacity

Imagined an arts and learning center to include the following

- Music, Visual Art, Theater, Crafts, and More
- Outdoor education re this locale
- Link to Colleges
- Could leverage and expand existing arts organizations: WRVP, RCMS, Big Town Gallery/Projects, GMSI

Brainstorming Session

- Facility would serve intergenerational demographic
- Retirement Community & Adult Learning programming
- Could serve both local and broader community
- Create a regional Artist Tree (MAJOR DONORS) to include from Pomfret to Bristol. Can they share space here?

Potential Regional Partnerships—identify groups and bring them here; suggestions included:

- Barn Opera - Brandon
- Green Mtn Suzuki (GMSI) extended to a 2nd week
- Craftsbury Chamber Place
- Middlebury Community Music Center
- Use the GMSI model for summer residency programs

Other Compatible Building Users

- After School Program
- Connect Outdoor Activity with the Arts
- Shared Space with Child Care Center, Town Offices, Studio Space, Makerspace

Financial Feasibility

- Concern re high heating cost—explore heat pumps, solar array on roof. Evaluate seasonal use from May –October; Isolating spaces to conserve heat
- What is the required capital cost to use it as is?
- Pierce Hall raised \$3 million
- Suggested talking to Sadie Danforth-Rightman - Middlebury
- Define relationship with the town/select board

Volunteer Feasibility

- We can attract people to a new idea
- More difficult to recruit volunteers these days due to increased 2-earner households
- There's more outdoor recreational opportunities now
- Cultivate Youth Volunteerism
- Cultivate Young Families, e.g., Kimball Library
- Volunteer instructors, e.g. Bethel University model/ elder hostel model

Can this project succeed?

On a scale of 1 - 5, the participants responded with a 4.25 average in favor of success

Vote: 3.5, 3.8, 4, 4, 4, 4.2, 5, 5.5

Another option—Campus model of an Arts and Learning Center

Strong group enthusiasm for a campus model that could be developed and stood up rather quickly, using existing town buildings

Keys to Success

- Volunteerism is integral
- Enlist the community to believe in the place
- Focus on participatory experience
- Right branding
- Town pride—Capitalize on the concept that "THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT ROCHESTER"
- Take art out of the box
- Make it unique and special
- Keep Rochester weird

August 9 Focus Group with 11 participants: Vic reviewed background re how we got here and purpose of focus group: to explore what an arts and learning center would look like, and can it succeed in this valley?

Discussed the following:

- School closure & merger
- Repurposing Committee
- Studied HS bldg diagram
- Engineers Report/Building Cost and Condition
- Community size and volunteer Capacity

Imagined Arts and Learning center/Makerspace, to include the following:

- Studio space
- Video production
- Recording studio
- Cooking classes
- Pottery with Kiln
- 3-D printer
- Computer lab
- Wood-working shop
- Metal shop
- Stained glass

Programming

- Local
- Regional
- National
- Classes
- Arts and Learning and Maker space are compatible
- Multi-generational
- Partnerships with area arts organizations for local programming
- Avoid competing with Pierce Hall. Different types of space. Collaborate with programming
- Adult Education
- Create broad appeal

- Leverage Valley beauty and the existing arts and cultural organizations, brand as an arts destination, just like it's becoming a recreation/biking destination

Facility Multi-Use

- Daycare Center
- Relocate Town Offices for daytime weekly presence
- Performance Center
- Makerspace
- Residencies - put out RFPs for classes/programming
- Visiting artists “discover” Rochester and how great it is
- Explore other higher education affiliations: CCV, Castleton, VTC
- Radio station
- Support of home school families
- Middlebury J-Term
- Affordable Housing Units

Financial Feasibility

- Phased use of building
- For-profit tenants/commercial office or studio space rentals
- User memberships
- Donated equipment?
- Determine a consistent revenue generating source
- Pierce Hall raised over \$2 million in 15 years; mostly private, some Fed \$, grants
- PHCC costs \$30 K / year base operating cost
- Town sell bonds to fund building at low rate
- Solar array on roof
- Enlist Alumni interest /support
- Relocate Town office and sell current town office bldg
- Attract organizations for short term facility rental (GMSI model)

Volunteer Feasibility

- Need to involve young people
- Need born & raised local people highly involved - find their interests
- Valley Idol was a huge success due to local friend/family loyalties. Avoid elitism. Foster inclusivity, diversity, and opportunity
- Leaders must have passion
- AmeriCorps
- Anni MacKay's Worker Bee Program

Can this project succeed?

On a scale from 1 - 5, the response averaged 3.8 to the success

Vote count: 4, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 5, 4, 5, 2.5, 3

Another option—Campus model of an Arts and Learning Center

Vic introduced this idea conceived in the initial focus group, which was entertained using existing town buildings, especially with collaborative programming among existing arts groups. This main focus of this group was developing a physical center especially the makerspace. One of the participants is a key developer of the Chandler Music Hall, who said that the concept of an Arts and Learning Center/Makerspace better suits the time than a large performance hall, and expressed real confidence in Rochester's capacity for developing and sustaining such a facility.

Keys to Success

- Inclusive among town members
- Emotional connection to individuals
- New energy
- Partnerships
- Frontend decision on any commercial usage
- Fundraising
- Dynamic leadership
- Building trust and enthusiasm
- Community support
- Ongoing revenue
- Clear and marketable scope / vision / mission

Affordable Housing—Report submitted by Rob Gardner

The concept is that the building be divided into north and south wings, and develop the south (auditorium) wing as an arts/learning center, and the north wing (10 classrooms and additional space) into small affordable apartments, funded by federal and state housing grants.

This proposal has merit because the town actually needs low cost housing and there is a clear (though complicated) path to develop and fund the project. And of course, it would produce income.

To date I have been in communication with Senator Bernie Sanders office, Martin Hahn, Housing Director, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, Elizabeth Bridgewater, of the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, and Ben Doyle of the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development Agency.

While Ms. Bridgewater has been on vacation, both Mr. Hahn and Mr. Doyle were both quite helpful, suggesting further action. Mr. Doyle told me USDA has no housing funds this year (though they may have funding for an arts/community center).

He said any project of this scope would require stacked or multiple funding sources—a complex endeavor. He offered to set up a zoom conference with all potential housing funders in the state, but he felt that the complex details relating an effort of this scope might just intimidate ordinary volunteers rather than encourage them.

But he said that USDA does provide feasibility or planning money for projects such as this, up to \$30,000 or so. We both agreed that efforts would best be spent developing feasibility/planning money and then using that planning to build toward the larger fundraising efforts. He is sending me an email with potential funders for feasibility with contact information.

From: "Doyle, Benjamin - RD, Montpelier, VT" <benjamin.doyle@usda.gov>

Subject: Resources for Rochester School Project

Date: September 8, 2020 at 2:23:42 PM EDT

To: Robert Gardner <rob@gardnerfilms.com>

Cc: "Muise, Jon - RD, Brattleboro, VT" <jon.muise@usda.gov>, Bob Haynes <rhaynes@gmedc.com>, "jennifer.lavoie@vermont.gov" <jennifer.lavoie@vermont.gov>

Hi Robert,

Hope you are well! Per our conversation last week, I'm providing you with some resource information as the town of Rochester considers the repurposing of its school. As we discussed, USDA Rural Development might

have some resources available when you are ready for implementation (see factsheet on our Community Facilities Program), but the first step is really a feasibility study to find out what the options are and to determine preliminary cost estimates. With that in mind, I'm directing your attention to the ACCD's Municipal Planning Grant program. This program could provide grant funds to work with a consultant to conduct a feasibility study and develop a formalized plan.

The program is currently open with an October 1st deadline. In other words, the timing is tight, but I've spoken with Jenni LaVoie from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development today and she believes that the project is typical of the kind of efforts the program funds. With some quick work, we both believe it would be possible to get an application in by the deadline. I'm attaching the program guide to this email and have CC'd Jenni. I would encourage you to reach out to her directly as soon as possible to determine if this is, in fact, something the town would like to pursue this year.

The Rural Business Development Grant from RD could also be used to support some feasibility/planning work (factsheet attached), but you would need to make the case that this project would support small and emerging businesses (either in the building itself if you have some kind of incubator/maker space, or in the surrounding village through increase economic activity). Applications are typically due in February.

I've also attached the Vermont Council on Rural Development's Community Resource Guide, which contains a chapter on developing a community center (pages 73-77). It provides a nice overview of the steps involved in a process like this and some additional resources you should consider.

Finally, I'm connecting you with Bob Haynes from Green Mt. Economic Development Corporation (the regional economic development organization for your region). Bob is a fantastic resource for pursuing grant opportunities like the ones outlined above and has experience in helping communities think about how to repurpose vacant school properties.

I'll be leaving my role at Rural Development on the 18th, but you can always call on Area Director Jon Muise (CC'd) who can help you think about how to utilize RD programs as well as continue to point you to partner resources. You can find me at the Preservation Trust of Vermont on 10/5 and I'll also be happy to continue working with you and the community. Thanks again for your leadership in Rochester—it's a great town and I look forward to seeing the reimagined school be an asset to a vibrant community.

Ben Doyle
Area Director
Rural Development VT/NH
United States Department of Agriculture
87 State Street | Suite 324 | Montpelier, VT
Phone: 802.828.6042 | Cell: 802.922.8814

Outreach to Commercial Real Estate Brokers Regarding the Market Viability of the Rochester High School—Report submitted by Jeff Gephart

This is simplification of what were much more extensive conversation, but that is the basic report.

Email text sent to 3 Commercial Realtors®:

- Ault Commercial Realty, Inc., Rutland
- Moseley Associates, White River Junction
- Donahue Associates, Burlington

I am a member of a School Repurposing Committee and I'm tasked to explore the possibility of selling Rochester High School. I have provided some information about the property below. My committee meets at 6:00 PM on

Thursday, 7/23. I know this doesn't give you much time but are there thoughts you could share with me about the building's commercial viability before then? My mobile number would be the best way to reach me (I'm having internet troubles at my office today).

Rochester High School

Route 100, Rochester, VT 05767

Due to low student population and school consolidation the Rochester High School building is longer used for Middle and High School education. The Town is exploring how to repurpose this building and is interested in a market assessment of its viability as commercial space.

- Built in 1974
- Cement block with brick veneer
- 30,700 sq. ft. with approximately 1,900 sq. ft. used by Rochester Elementary School for arts and music. Stage/Auditorium/Booth (3,837 sq. ft.) plus an entry lobby used by Town
- 8 classrooms – with both interior and exterior doors – in many cases, classroom walls are not load bearing and can be removed to make larger spaces
- 2 lab classrooms
- Central Resource Center/Library & offices
- Stage/Auditorium with seating for 320, mechanical/carpentry shop rooms, art room, and band room – these rooms the Town may wish to retain
- Facilities and Functional Analysis completed October 1, 2019 by Black River Design Architects
- Oil for High School 7/1/2019 through 6/30/2020: \$28,743.66
- Electricity at High School through April 2020: \$12,018.44

Ray Ault

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Rutland, VT 05702

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Comments from Mr. Ault:

Couldn't comment with much specificity without much more work to see building, study architects report to analyze property value. Estimates at least 10 hours of work at \$185/hour (though not real interested – at least for a couple of months). Does credit cost of analysis against broker's fee/commission. Commission is generally 10% and he has previously discounted that fee for non-profits in Rutland (though did not say he would do that for us).

Said that commercial property marketing more expensive than residential. He does list properties on NEREN; however, very few commercial properties are listed and sold through the MLS. He referenced marketing through the New England Commercial Property Exchange. Market analysis pre-2020 likely not valid. Covid-19 will change things. "Reducing the market for bricks and mortar."

Recommends a commercial appraisal be done before a Realtor® is chosen first to determine “highest and best use” by a licensed Certified General Appraiser and recommended appraisers Larry Martin in Montpelier or Sean Sargeant in Rutland. He estimated that the cost of that appraisal would likely start around \$3,000 or more.