

Special Selectboard Informational Meeting Minutes

April 29, 2024

Present: Doon Hinderyckx, Frank Severy, Pat Harvey

Guests Present: Kristen LaPell, Julie Smith, Terry Severy, Nancy Woolley, Orca Media, Kevin and Paula Dougherty, Walt Gaulb, Burma & Ed Wissner, Bill and Deb Matthews, Asia Kennett, Jolanta Labejsza, Dean Mendell, Sandy Pierce, Jon & Karen Bindrum, Larry & Leslie Straus, Frank Russell, Larry Plesent, Judy Jensen, Rob Gardner, Anni Mackay, Jim Whitley, Midge Scanlan, Kelly Kelly, Diane White, Sarah Martire, Donna Ostro, Caden & Gabrielle Ostro, Derek Dzhugashvili, Michael & Huibertha Sorgi, Hannah Rice, Mickaela Richardson, Amy Wildt, Dane Cooley, Jerry Lablond, Mary Beth Deller, Freya & Mitch, Cindy Sutherland, Walt Wells, Wendy Stedner, Deb Scherrer, Andrew Hudson, Lois Bond, Jeff Mather, Vic Ribauda, Kathryn Schenkman, Megan Payne, Bill Edgerton, Tony and Brenda Goupee. (If I have missed anyone, I apologize.)

Guests Present on Zoom: Orca, Martha Slater, Troy LaPell, Anjanette, Lemak, Harv & Brenda Downs, Bonnie Chadwick, Jusin, Michael Rockefeller, Graham & Blythe Bates, Irene Smead, Diane Teetsel, Janice iPad, Kirk White, Jeannette Bair, Tim McDonald, Jeff Gephart, Doreen Joens, Robert Franks, Tegan Murray, Char Gardner, Mary Beth, Andrew Fersch, Chelsea Steinauer-Scudder, Connie Mendell, Andy, Amir, Barb Shenton, Lois & Becky Donnet, Matthew Bakerpool & Hallie Mendell.

Doon called the meeting at 6:00p.m.

Doon confirmed the open meeting law conformity.

Discussion and questions about the possible vote to acquire the High School Building: Doon opened the meeting with what to do with the former high school building and gave a brief description starting at the beginning, four years ago and what led to now. Many questions were asked by the residents. There were many who voiced their positive support for the purchase. Many agreed with taking a space within the building once finished. The school has been through phase 1 with the environmental assessment. The certificate of completion will be coming soon. Larry Plesent asked what the final costs if its 3 million to stabilize it, what's all in. Vic answered they don't have the final number. The committee members, Kathryn Schenkman and Vic Ribauda have applied for the Bernie Sanders Congressional Spending Grant and was awarded this past winter in the amount of 3.1 million. This money would upgrade all the systems, the building envelope, the heating system, fire alarm, windows, and doors, etc. He said there is more to come. The number comes from a 2022 number figure. Frank Russell wanted to express a word of thanks for who had put the package together for the Sanders grant. Doon made an interesting point that the money that has been accessed has been applied for through the municipality and not the school district. If there were a non-profit organization formed to run this entity, it also would not have been able to access these funds. The town, in his thoughts would be a transitory vehicle that can access money so the project could move forward. Doon shared he talked with folks in Wilmington, who had gone through the process with their high school and ended up being taken over by a 501 (C) 3 that was formed and consequently its been long lingering to access money to update their building. This hasn't been decided yet. It will have to go to vote with the town voters. Kathryn shared we have been awarded the Bernie funds and we have 5 years to spend the money. The committee is also raising additional money as they go along. There was a Community Development Block grant they applied for to go towards the town's match for \$500,000 and a local anonymous donor has given nearly \$300,000. They have established a nonprofit as well know as the Valley Hub, Inc. Walter Gaulb asked about the flip side. He said we never hear about how much it will cost if we do nothing. Doon said the estimate to tear down the building is 1 million that we do not have grant money for and will have to bond that money. Walter asked then it would go on our taxes for the next 20 years. Doon agreed. Jeff Mathers asked if we have just the three choices then. He said if we repurposed the building its 3.1 million, if we don't repurpose and decide to tear it down its 1million on our taxes for 20 years and the third choice if we don't do anything what happens then. Does the unified school district continue to support the building financially? Doon said it's a school building until they decided to sell it to the town or someone else. They tried to put it on the market but wasn't successful in finding a realtor to sell a 35,000 square foot building. Amy Wildt reiterated all that was said was correct. She said it would come back to the school board to analyze what to do with it at that time. She said they don't have a lot of options; they are in the business of educating kids and not an abandoned building. Frank shared that same argument goes along with the town as well. He said we are not in the business to be landlords either. Vic spoke about the nonprofit. He shared there are some board members and will be looking for additional members. They have established bylaws. The board

needs to be established the building is showing money flow and hiring a project manager. They don't want to see the town staff and selectboard all tied up. The nonprofit would be managing. Money would be set aside for management and planning from the grant. Freya asked about the money that has been secured, if it is not all spent on the high school then it would be spent by the town. Is it earmarked in some way, or certain regulations on how it is spent. If the town voted to not spend it on this project, can that money be used on some other economic development for the town? Kathryn said this earmark was written to cover the costs provided though the feasibility study that was present to the town in July 2022 through Fairweather Consultants and Greg Gossin, the architect. The cost is what was given to us then, as presented for what we needed the money for. That is what the money was proposed for spending based on proposal and cost. That would be Phase 1 of the repurposing project. This would bring the building to the 21-century energy efficiency and tenant ready. This money is through facilities type grant. USDA has multiple different grants, but this one is specific to community's facilities CDS. It was reported to Kathryn if we were to not spend all the money, the town would then keep what is left. Doon explained if we didn't do the project what then would happen to the money. Kathryn has not asked that question. She said she will ask in her next interaction. She said congress passed it based on what they said they were going to do and what that is going to cost. Deb Matthews asked if the selectboard put any money in the upcoming budget to cover any maintenance costs for taking over the building should they acquire the building in the fall. Doon said the new budget starting in July didn't have any costs incorporated should they acquire the building this fall. Pat said the contract wouldn't take place until July 2025. Frank said that we will have time to budget in our next budget season for July 2025 to include those costs. Asia Kennett spoke fondly of how our project could be a major turning point in Vermont's future for repurposing these unused schools. Lois Bond asked if the grants require a sharing from the community. Who will pay for the cost sharing. Kathryn shared the CDBG grant that was just submitted does include as the matching funds for the Sanders money. She said the Northern Borders will be included in the matching funds. She said it's a tricky thing when creating the funding stack. She said some have caps others do not. She said all the grants have their own idiosyncrasies. We have learned they have NEPA reviews. She praised Sarah Wraight from Two Rivers, who has been an angel in supporting the town. She said the support of the agencies and those who want to see this succeed have been valuable. Rob Gardner is hearing all the best-case scenario, he wanted to know what the worst-case scenario is. Vic answered by saying the risks would be not to get the money to finish the building, which would delay the rental spaces being finished and the operating costs of the building would fall back on the town if purchased. Nancy Woolley asked with all the work going on we don't hear too much about what it cost to just maintain the building. Vic said that Jamie Kinnarney estimates to maintain the building is \$60,000/yr. She asked what that covers. Vic said it covers all the routine costs such as heat, electric, insurance to help maintain the building. Doon asked if we go through this is there a timeline, we could sell it to a non-profit or another organization. Doon thought it would be a more attractive building once improved. Vic didn't have the answer to that question but has it in for request to answer with USDA. Anni said if they had put some thought towards a project manager with a commercial purpose. They have thought of this. She asked if any of the outreach has started yet. They have been looking for professionals for this project. Anni also wondered if a contractor has been identified and if they have quoted the cost. Rob Gardner asked if the figures had all derived from the Black River Study. Rob asked if they would have the new costs before people vote on it. Kathryn said Greg has been working on this. Vic said to go back to Rob's question, the school board hired the architectural firm Black River Design from Montpelier to take assessment of all three of the school buildings from the combined school district and to come up with costs estimates to renovate them to put into education or other purpose. They did a visitation to the building, came up with estimates based on the site visit and cost per square footing and other projects and came up with numbers including cost of demolition. He said in 2022, Greg Gossin, another architectural firm reviewed the study, visited the building, and agreed to the study and upgraded to the inflation based on their own shop. That is where the additional 35% came into play. Going forward to a construction period of 2025 we would need to inflate the costs again. He feels it is good advice to find out what the current costs would be. Rob felt before the town were to buy the building, they would have a clear sense of what the costs would be to fix it. Kathryn shared that we should all be impressed that the town passed the environmental assessment piece. It took a couple of years, but it was done and passed. Midge spoke about Rob asking about the worst-case scenario and one is not doing anything and watching the building deteriorate. She said the other is to pay 1 million to demolish that we will all pay through our taxes for many years. She said it becomes a danger zone next to the kids at school. She said the committee has worked hard for the past 4 years to move forward to what this building could become. She said any questions that have come up have been thought of by the group on the repurpose committee. She said they are very talented people, so you know what you are voting on when it comes time. Megan Payne thanked the committee for their hard work and dedication. She wanted to make aware that the building shouldn't be a cost for Stockbridge to take on. She hopes the vote goes through so that it can come off the budget for the school. She said it's our problem. Vic shared we have 5 years to spend the money, so the vote doesn't have to be done tomorrow. There is time to get cost estimates. He said there is no rush, but the school would like to get out of this. The draft purchase and sales indicate it can take up to July 2025. He said the selectboard wants the input before making the call for the date to vote. He wants us to get enough time for reliable cost

estimates can be gotten. Anni shared in her mind the worst-case scenario would be to get the project going and it sits with no progress or half finished. Bill Matthews asked with Phase 2 if the contractors could estimate the build outs. He saw around 5,000ft for one with 1000 foot her and there. He said it would be helpful to have those costs for 5,000 square feet would be. Kathryn said the letters of intent really help with a hypothetical lease to guide them. The cost of the build out for the childcare has been done. Kathryn said they are looking for partnerships. Bill wanted the costs for Phase 2 building. He said you have the 3.1 for the envelope. Kathryn said they are working on those costs. Burma spoke and asked what is the latest they would consider the town to vote. Doon said the vote would happen this summer. He said that is what we are working towards. Burma asked with all the knowledgeable people here in the room, what do they foresee in the next 5-10 years that the town will have to spend money on that would impact our takes. Terry thought that the sewer system is something to consider because they are on their own system and the town can not go on the town's system. Terry said they wanted the school to bring those tanks up so they could be checked along with the towns. The school will need to check into this. Kathryn said to Bill that she understands he wanted to know what the build out would cost in comparison to the rentals for that space. Great question. Jeff asked if the spaces would be drafted so people could see what they will look like. Anni had a concern about the design and having it transcend into the future. Franks said we need to address a couple things. One vote should be if the community wants to move forward with the school building project and the second is to buy it if the vote goes through. He said if you vote yes/no to buy the school are you voting for the plan going forward or not. Anni asked if there will be additional meetings and to separate what the meeting will address in the future. Andrew asked what we are going to vote because if you want to find a contractor or tenants it will be important for them to know who does own the building. He said at some point you will have to vote on Shall the town own the building and then ask what it becomes. Doon said it has made it more difficult in navigating these grants because it must be the town. Walter Gaulb shared he has been paying taxes since 1967, he said there's half of you here that hope its going to go away and the other half hope it's going to happen. He chooses to be optimistic. He said that he watched a 2-person company succeed on to become Oatmeal Studio. He said Conceptions Unlimited started with 3-4 people in a little schoolhouse grew to employ 80 people. He said the same for Advanced Illumination. He said if we can raise 1.5 million to restore Pierce Hall, we can raise a million from the government. Martha said for the Players it would be beneficial to keep for theater, as well as town meetings. Andrew Fersch spoke as a new resident. He is very excited to sign the dotted line for rental space for education for middle to high school students. He will be an educator teaching elementary school. He moved from the Portland area and is familiar with conservation commissions and open space acquisitions. His wife, Chelsea spoke and is very excited about the project and is looking for space for writing workshops. Anjennette asked about the flooding issue. She said she wanted to know more about that. Vic shared they worked with DuBois and King to go through that issue. The location of the 100-year flood is right in front of the auditorium. He said the solution calculated by installing flood resistant doors that create a watertight seal. There was another installed by the band room as well. Midge said the flood gates are used in Florida. Doon said because of the flooding, housing is off the table to be a use of the building.

Meeting adjourned at 7:23 pm
Respectfully submitted,
Julie Smith