

Special Selectboard CDBG Hearing

June 10, 2024

Present: Doon Hinderyckx, Frank Severy, Pat Harvey, Ethan Bowen (Moderator)

Guests Present: Kristen LaPell, Julie Smith, Terry Severy, Nancy Woolley, Martha Slater, Orca Media, Chad & Mickaela Richardson, Addy Richardson, Linda & Larry Creech, Barb Dehart, Bruce Flewelling, Judy Pierce, Michael VanDusen, Jeff Gephart, Maureen Young, Jon & Karen Bindrum, Amy Wildt, Bill Edgerton, Burma Cassidy Wisner, Dean Mendell, Melinda Lary, Bill & Deb Matthews, Larry & Lesley Straus, Robert & Caroline Meagher, Mason Wade, Matthew Bakerpoole, Katherine Stringer, Mary Beth Deller

Guests Present on Zoom: Orca, Martha Slater, Troy LaPell, Robert Franks, Kevin & Paula Dougherty, Keith Spellecki, Louis & Becky Donnet,

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

Doon confirmed the open meeting law conformity.

Ethan spoke as the moderator. He opened discussion about the possible acquisition of purchasing high school building. Those on zoom were asked to wait and stay on mute until the board called on them for their questions. The audience would be able to ask questions first.

Jon Bindrum noted he had read Frank's letter to the editor in the paper, and it spoke of a lot of reality to consider. His concerns are for the taxpayers.

Burma asked about the assessment of costs and whether architects have been consulted. She asked if the architects have a better understanding of how the building will hold up over time with climate change and cooling and heating systems. Pat answered there has been an architect with the committee since the beginning that picked up where the Black River study left off. His name is Greg Gossens. He is committed to continue with the project. She said there will be further discussion about the project pertaining to climate change.

Deb Matthews asked if the current plan and the grant funding that plan is the only plan that can be done with the building or are there other options that can amend things? She referred to after the first phase and the structural stuff is done can it then be amended or is it locked in how the money is spent. Pat said when the grant was applied for there was a plan submitted and that plan came from a town wide meeting held 5-6 years ago. The congressional grant was applied for with a community center in mind. She said the grant would only support something with community center in mind. She said if one of the aspects were to change to a different category it would have to be under the umbrella of a community. Doon added it would be handled under a nonprofit management. He said if it were moved over to a for profit then the money from the Congressional grant would have to be repaid. Doon said first there would need to be a vote to buy the town building and that is not dictating what is done with the building. He said what would happen to the building going forward has no commitment. He said this is gathering of information to get an educated perspective on what could happen. He said the vote really is whether or not the town agrees it's a good risk to take the building or if we want to take the known fact that it would cost almost 2 million dollars to take the building down which would incur 30 years of debt to the town at over 90,000 a year.

Martha asked if the grant being referred to in earlier statements is the Bernie Sanders grant and Pat affirmed that question.

Pat had answers from the questions asked at the last informational meeting. She said in the last meeting it was asked what the final costs of the upgrades to the building would be. She said as of late; Greg Gossen indicated the cost to bring the building up to lease and used at 3.8 million dollars. Robert said this doesn't include the soft costs. Pat reiterated this is only for the hard cost. She said this is for the building upgrade for the hard cost and the soft costs include the architect, permits, etc. Robert Meagher indicated there were no updated figures for the soft costs yet. Bill asked if the 3.8 million is only for the envelope. He wanted to understand the figure didn't include what the cost is to suit the tenants. Pat said there is an update of 1.7 million for a demolition cost by removing the building and restoring the site to grass. She said the cost of the bond for that starts at \$94,000 per year for 30 years. She said there was a question about what the school board would predict about the future of the building. She said there are members of the school board present to ask more questions. Nancy Woolley asked if the demo included the cost of the material removed to site. Robert said there is an additional 350K allowance for possible toxic materials. Larry Creech asked if the town approve to keep the school, what happens if we get in too deep and can't afford to continue, how do we get out of the purchase. Pat said one of the points that will be discussed is if we accept the grant money, we are obligated to hold on to the school for five years, if after the five years we find the building is not serving the town there will be a town vote to sell it. Having a yes or no vote gives the town the ability to decide which way they would like to go. Burma asked with the Bernie money, do we have to do any matching of money and how much is that. Pat said we have to match with around 700K. She said the town is applying for a grant through the state for \$500K and a donation has been received of \$200K. This round of grant is due in June. There is a lot of competition for this grant and the state indicated perhaps it would be best to submit during the November round and ask for \$1million. Burma said they can't assume we will get the grant. Matthew Bakerpoole asked if the 1 million additional grants would cover energy retrofits like the HVAC. He said he knew there were monies available if they weren't covered under the million-dollar grant. Pat explained the grant they are applying for is a Community Block Grant so it would go into the pool. Burma asked if there was a project manager currently that is being paid to handle the project. Pat said the committee is interviewing for this position. She said it is difficult to hire someone without the vote of acquiring the building. Burma asked what kind of salary they are offering. Pat didn't know at this time. Mason asked if there is an opportunity to have the vote done on November 5. Pat said it would happen sooner rather than later. Mason asked if the voters could decide the date. He felt the November election date would incur a large population of the voters. Pat said that could be a deciding factor. Dean Mendell asked if there is a list of interested parties of utilizing the space. Pat said there is. Dean said it was an important factor to know prior to deciding about the building. He thought if we could fill the building with vibrant businesses and interested parties to maintain the building it becomes easier to swallow especially with the grant money. Pat said there are a few tenants that have come forward in favor. Others have not committed because we don't own the building. They are waiting for the vote to make a solid commitment. Dean asked if the list is public knowledge to share. Pat said she would check. Barb Dehart asked what the costs per square foot the rentals would be to make sure they would offset the financial payments. Pat noted the selectboard are making a stand that they do not want to be landlords so it would be up to the Valley Hub Inc., 501 (c) (3) that was formed to oversee the project. Barb thought it would be good to project the rental spaces to see where financially the project can stand. Robert Meagher said it was a complicated question dependent on how much space you need, how much build to suit took place. He said there are some rough figures of \$1 to \$1.25 per sq. ft. Barb said this could show what you will be getting back for your investment. Nancy asked if the nonprofit is in place at this time. Pat said they are a formed nonprofit with members and bylaws. Matthew Bakerpoole asked if the school district had the ability to take on the cost of the demolition or other plans with the building. Amy Wildt explained the school district doesn't have money to demo the building and would have to go to the taxpayers for a bond. The grants that have been awarded are not available to the school. 3.1 million is only available to the town. Larry Straus asked if the vote the

board is anticipating would be a vote on whether to say yes to the town buying the building for a dollar and going forward with the reno or saying no to that or is the vote to saying yes to buying the building for a dollar then deciding what to do. Pat said they haven't yet determined how they will be addressing the vote and will decide at a future selectboard meeting what the language will be on the ballots. Frank said it was addressed at the last meeting. He said it will be a two-tiered vote. You vote to buy the building, then you buy the building, and another vote is what you do with the building.

Burma asked if any studies been made to partially tear down the building and keep some of the building and what that would look like. Robert shared if we owned it and tear down the classroom side of the building it would take a substantial amount of the Bernie money and leave a building that still would need renovation to make it useful, plus you would lose the space for rental and would seem to not be a viable solution. Mason asked if the supervisory would be able to get help from the state for demolishing or whatever they will do with it. Amy Wildt indicated the state doesn't have any money in construction or demolition. She said they only have funding for consolidation and closing of smaller schools. Jamie Kinnarney shared there have been studies on school construction aid and the legislation had not put any money to support school construction. Mason asked about the liability. Jamie said the liability would be on the district. The district can sell the school to the town for \$1 under their articles of agreement and if the town voted to not acquire the building, then they could sell it out right. There are not a lot of potential clients out there to purchase. The district could moth ball the building and the district chose not to do that. Mason asked about toxic materials and Jamie assured him they have been through a Brownfield with a level 2. They are not concerned with toxic materials currently.

Pat asked the school board and Jamie if they could speak to what they think the future population of our students would be and what would the possibility of the the facility be used for classrooms again. Jamie said they did population projections, and they are showing that they will be staying about the same. One of the spaces possible uses is childcare and that is something good for communities and would be great to expand the Pre-K programs they offer.

Matthew asked if the proximity to the elementary school have restrictions other than the obvious. Pat said she didn't know if she knew of any.

Burma asked what the town can afford to take on the building. She asked how much money the town can take this on. If the board doesn't want to be landlords, but if the town buys the building, then you are landlords. Frank said there is no money, and we are lucky to do what we can do. Burma said it has to be hard on the town with all the services they provide. Doon said possibly down the line the project would be able to afford it own. In the meantime, its estimated to keep 60K-90K to keep the building running while its being renovated. On the other hand, there will be a cost of 90K to tear it down to end up with a nice grassy field. Larry Creech said if you are awarded the 3.1 million and can't find any renters has there been any thought to reach out to the federal government to put housing in the office spaces. Doon said that was one of the early questions and with proximity to the flood planes it took that idea away. Matthew asked on the flood plane issue is that an entire footprint problem or is it just a section, if that is so then can a part of the building be allow pillows in the non-flood zone. Doon said a corner of the property was taken out of the active flood zone to allow and the proximity is too close. Lesley said the structure didn't lend itself to housing. Mason said with all the upgrades to culvert size replacement during Irene, what will this do in 20 years. Will this create even more of a flood plane to this area. We also passed a Climate Emergency Declaration and that should be a part of this discussion. What are our thoughts about where we are heading along with that element. How are we looking at the carbon footprint with aspect to the project. Pat said the flood maps have all been updated since Irene.

Jeff Gephart shared that Greg Gossen has talked about using solar on the roof and putting in a heat pump to heat and cool the building and that is what needs to happen.

Robert wanted to clarify the floodway and flood plain terms. He said the floodway was what defined the outline of the property. The flood plane has taken care of some mitigation by installing a flood door.

Participants from Zoom spoke, and Robert Franks had a solution to sell the building to keep residents from taking on any more debt. He recommends that people pay attention to the tax bills and stated 85% will go towards the supervisory union and it will go up in August. He said just put the building up for sale he will find a buyer. He said it doesn't have to be demolished or put forth to the taxpayers for the next 30 years it just needs to be marketed and sold. Pat had a comment to that and said the building will need 4 million dollars in repairs. She said it will be difficult to find someone to purchase it. Bill asked to clarify or to know to phase 1 renovation there are restrictions around that. Pat said there are five years and Amy asked if that was from the start of construction.

The board indicated there would be five years from receiving the grant before transferring over to the nonprofit.

Robert asked the board what is the selectboard is envisioning for the services that young people are looking for such as daycares. If we don't do it here, how is it going to get done. Does the selectboard envision an alternative solution. Doon answered that they do not have any plans at this time. He said there are three options we spend the money and take the risk or spend the money to take it down or we spend no money to moth ball the building. Pat shared in the 1970's the town built this campus, that was a risk and in the 1980's the town developed the Park House, which is an asset to the town. In the 1990's Pierce Hall was renovated. It was a monster plan to bring up to code and is now another asset to the town. In the 2000's the town decided to start EC Fibernet and spent money to bring in broadband internet and now people from all over can live here and work from home because of the strong internet. That was a major asset to the community. She feels its just another step in how we continue to grow the community as sustainable as possible.

Bill asked if the current town offices be built out for affordable housing and if the town offices could be moved to the high school. He said we do need affordable housing. Doon said this speaks to what all the spaces could be used for. Deb said with the housing issue and all the properties that have sold she would be interested to know how the tax rolls have changed. A lot of the houses are short term rentals and how its affecting the tax roll in the past four or five years. She said a lot of the land is in National Forest Land. She said the selectboard has to work on so many different levels to keep the town running. Adding this property and the affordability with the significant increase in school taxes, the town taxes, didn't get everything into the budget this past year. Its about the affordability of what our tax bills look like. Pat said the difference between non-residential and residential is not a big difference. There hasn't been a lot of shifts between second homeowners and residents.

Burma asked if the population didn't look like it was increasing based on Jamies earlier comment she wanted to know what kind of thriving daycare there would be. She was curious about how it could sustain itself in the building. Doon said the whole building wouldn't be dedicated to daycare. She was also concerned about the Airbnb's in town. She feels like so much of our town was bought up by Airbnb's who are from out of town. She said if we are concerned about there not being any affordable housing how we can have a thriving community. She said the Airbnb owners don't get involved with the town's projects. Pat said the selectboard will not be addressing the Airbnb's she said its for the legislature.

Larry Creech asked if people have lots of good ideas, they should write them down and then the selectboard could put together all the ideas. He said in order to hook him into a positive feeling about this project, future development of this building. He doesn't feel like he has enough information with all that has been said to make him think this is a viable project. He feels like it needs all these ideas put together

to get people excited and put it all around town. He said daycare and arts doesn't cover it for him. Pat said this will be one of four informational meetings.

Chad said there is a lot of information to be read on the town website there is a Facebook link for the repurpose of the High School building.

Lesley said that as part of the engineer and architect working and doing assessments, they determined that nonprofits can not support it. They need a major tenant. The daycare is eager to sign on. She said until we own the building we can't go forward until we answer the basic question.

Matthew asked if someone could remind him of the financial risk of purchasing the building. He said in Phase 1 its about 4 million maybe higher. He said there are 3 million in grants already available with potential of another 1 million in grants. He said there are state energy retro fit money available in several thousands of dollars. He said once the project is completed, and you don't want it anymore you could sell it. He asks what the risks are there. There are some insurance costs but what other risks. Doon said aside from the construction there are ongoing maintenance costs that will incur even during the construction time at about 60k-90K. The grant money will take care of Phase 1, but the concern is what will the cost be for the ongoing maintenance. Jeff said once the solar is on the roof and a ground source heat pump the operational/maintenance costs would go down.

Doon called the meeting at 7:39 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Julie Smith