

Town Hall Blue Ribbon Committee
Minutes

Monday, June 1, 2015
Flynn Building, Silva Room, 278 Old Sudbury Road

Prior to opening the meeting at the Flynn Building members of the Town Hall Blue Ribbon Committee met at 7:00 p.m. for an informal tour of the Town Hall, which was led by Combined Facilities Director Jim Kelly. The group reconvened at the Flynn Building and the meeting was opened at 7:50 p.m.

In attendance were Chairman, Mike Melnick; Susan Asbedian-Ciaffi; Howard Gold; Christine Hogan; Bill Johnson; Chris Morely; Sally Purrington-Hild; Frank Riepe; and Joe Sziabowski. Staff in attendance were: Director of Planning and Community Development Jody Kablack; Assistant Planner Jim Kupfer; and Combined Facilities Director Jim Kelly. Also in attendance were Stewart Hoover of the Sudbury Historical Society and Diana Cebra of the Sudbury Historical Commission.

Mr. Melnick asked for comments on the conditions at Town Hall. Ms. Kablack noted that the building appeared to be in worse condition than she had initially thought. Mr. Melnick agreed that the building was in tough shape, with the stairs and bathrooms in particularly awful condition. Mr. Riepe said that what he saw was as he had expected. He was not surprised and felt that the building would need a massive renovation. Mr. Gold said that aside from the systems conditions he also saw nothing particularly charming about the building that would need preserving. He felt that charm was important because it would be hard to form an emotional attachment to the building the way it is now. Mr. Morely noted that the building was a simple building and was not intended to be fancy. It was built for a small agricultural town. Ms. Asbedian-Ciaffi said that she was surprised by the inefficiencies in the building and by all of the nooks and crannies and the maze-like conditions. She felt that there would be a lot of opportunity for offices and to maximize capabilities. But she added that currently nothing in the layout made sense. Mr. Kupfer said he had similar thoughts. He felt that the condition of floors in the second floor was in better condition than he had imagined but the spaces were not laid out practically.

Mr. Johnson suggested that perhaps a mezzanine floor level could be put in at the auditorium level. He said that from his reading of the report the engineers described the systems such as HVAC which could be made efficient with the installation of a large electric generator. He thought that the building could serve as an emergency shelter. He said that in terms of the building being a jewel, the Historical Commission would prefer to keep the exterior. Ms. Hild referred to the building as a "make-do" space. She said that her perspective comes from working amid the constraints and her organization feels the inefficiencies with all of the ups and downs. Ms. Hogan noted the obstacles in the layout with multiple levels.

Mr. Melnick asked whether anyone from the audience wanted to comment. Ms. Cebra said that it was unfortunate that the space was not better utilized. She noted inappropriate use with a lot of stored things that were taking up valuable space.

Mr. Riepe felt that the discussion needed to start with the building's program and function. He felt that the broader discussion of moving offices should be the committee's starting point.

Before moving on, Mr. Melnick asked for the committee for approval of the previous meeting minutes. Minor corrections were pointed out. Mr. Morely made a motion to accept the minutes as amended and Ms. Hogan seconded the motion. All were in favor and the minutes were approved.

Mr. Morely clarified for the group the differences between the various historical groups in town stating that the Sudbury Historical Commission and the Historic District Commission (HDC) are Town boards and each had their own purview. The Sudbury Historical Society is a nonprofit organization which leases space on the second floor of Town Hall.

Ms. Kablack noted that the HDC, through the Acts of 1963, was given jurisdiction over the demolition of buildings in all Historic Districts in Sudbury. The Town is not except from needing a certificate to demolish its own buildings. The Historical Commission has jurisdiction over the care of all historic structures in town. It guides policies on the care of historic town buildings. The Town Hall is a historic resource residing in both a local historic district and a National Register historic district. As such the town would need to work with the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Sudbury Historical Commission in order to do anything with it. The Sudbury Historical Commission can issue a demolition delay permit, which buys time for more research and planning before a building is demolished. However the HDC can absolutely stop a demolition. Mr. Riepe added that the HDC is also the reviewing authority of sites within historic districts so that any changes sought would require a Certificate of Appropriateness as well. Ms. Kablack added that, for example, the changes currently being made to town center all required a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Mr. Melnick noted that Mr. Johnson had submitted a memo of recommendations dated May 19, 2015, however he suggested that the committee may not have enough information to discuss it at this meeting. All agreed to read it for the next meeting and discuss it then. At this point Ms. Kablack reminded the Committee about the open meeting law policies to clarify how the committee should communicate ideas. All memos from board members should be sent to the committee's staff. Board member to board member communication is discouraged.

Mr. Gold proposed the idea that committee members should draft vision statements of what each wants the Town Hall to be and say about Sudbury? He encouraged everyone to be aspirational in addition to stating what are the desired goals of the building. Mr. Kupfer suggested that vision statements be delivered to town staff by June 11 so that they can be compiled and distributed to the committee before the next meeting.

Next the committee discussed at length the drivers for the project. The space needs at the Fairbank Center started the project coupled with the dire building conditions at the Town Hall. As scenarios were discussed Ms. Kablack reminded the committee that costs are going to be the big issue with any plan.

It was suggested that page 119 of the Town Hall Report had the most comprehensive breakdown of proposed options with their pros and cons. Although, Mr. Kelly advised that the study should be used as a source of information only.

At one point the idea of creating an addition at the Nixon School to house the school administration was voiced. There is not an actual study for this scenario, however.

The committee then discussed square footage needs in the various buildings. The existing space used for the School Administration in the Fairbank Center is 6,000 square feet but their current need is about 10,000 square feet. The square footage at the Flynn Building is approximately 17,000 square feet. The Flynn IT department needs at least 1,000 sf. The Town Hall today measures approximately 14,000 square feet.

The Committee discussed the fact that the Senior Center and the Park & Rec Department need more space. The School Department is occupying prime space and the whole building needs a new roof and renovation. The structure is substandard. If the School Administration moves to the Flynn Building, as suggested in one of the BH&A options, Town Staff would be displaced.

Ms. Hogan asked about whether or not all town staff should be in same building in the same area. The study looked at that option but there is not enough room in the town hall because the Town Clerk and vaults would need space there too. It was determined that proximity of Town Offices may not be a driver in the discussion as offices are spread out now and if the costs do not allow the most ideal situation then other options need to be sought. Also, large additions could destroy the character of the town center.

Mr. Riepe said that the fact that the town hall is under-utilized is a great opportunity. He suggested preserving the Selectmen's meeting space and the original upstairs space as a meeting hall and then building a new addition to the south to add on the offices. He said that 80% of building would be restored in the front. He said that floor levels would not become an issue because there can be an elevator.

There was some discussion about how much land would be available. Some didn't think that there would be enough land. Others questioned whether or not two meeting rooms would be needed and noted that the Fairbank Center would have a cultural space and performance area with a meeting room and stage. Mr. Morely said that the Town Hall plan should consider all spaces in the Town Center, including the Loring Parsonage and the Grange.

Mr. Sziabowski said that perhaps the town center needed a Master Plan that would take into consideration the whole infrastructure, including parking.

Ms. Kablack reminded the Committee that it would be imperative to figure out costs because if they are too high it won't work. Town Hall has been waiting for years and the conditions are worsening. It may not be able to wait for a master plan. There were also concerns that the project may not have a constituency.

Mr. Melnick suggested that the Committee split up into groups and do site visits to other towns with comparable town halls. It was suggested that consideration be given to how CPA monies were used. Ms. Kablack would generate a list of Town Halls and the group would divide up. Mr. Kelly reminded the committee that Sudbury's town hall differs from other town halls in that it is a meeting hall and not an office building.

The next meeting of the Town Hall Blue Ribbon Committee was scheduled for Tuesday, June 16, 2015 at the Flynn Building, Silva Room. Upon a motion made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.