

April 11, 2017 7:00PM

Select Board Meeting

Present: Ernest Cardillo, Steve Shatz, Don Chabon, Danielle Fillio

Chuck welcomed everyone.

First on the agenda was Arthur Schwartz, 22 Main Street, presenting an Interim report for the Old Town Hall use Committee.

This Committee was appointed in the spring of 2016 by the Selectmen, following an open meeting at the Town Offices, to explore creative reuses for the OTH in the absence of any known development activity. There were eight original appointees. Arthur W. Schwartz, Richard S. Jackson, Tom LaBelle, Terry Flynn, Fred Rutberg, Tom Stokes, Theresa O' Brient, and Shelby Marshall. The Selectmen wished the Committee to use its best creative instincts and to think "out-of-the-box" to come up with recommendations intended to aid them in their deliberations as to the disposition of the building. The building has been under lease from its owner, the Congregational Church, since 1902 and it is not altogether clear who actually has control if the Town no longer uses the building for Town Offices. The Town and Church had been discussing reuse of the building for some time but had vacated deliberations pending further investigations for a mutually acceptable direction. Several reuse studies have been done to date but without success in attracting any real development efforts. Our committee was instructed to not enter into any direct discussions with the Church concerning reuse.

The committee held its first meeting on March 10, 2016. There had not been a secretary elected so minutes were not kept. At the next meeting held on March 28, it was noted that Theresa O' Brient had made the decision to resign leaving seven members, six in attendance. A subcommittee consisting of Richard Jackson, Tom Stokes and Tom LaBelle was formed to research historic preservation issues and funding. Committeeman Terry Flynn suggested he form a subcommittee to identify any possible needs for using the building from current Town employees and staffers. Fred Rutberg offered to assist with legal issues that might arise. A. W. Schwartz was elected Chairman and Tom LaBelle secretary. The need for a "Mission Statement" to clarify the direction established by the Selectmen was discussed. Members were asked to begin submitting ideas.

At the next meeting on April 4, Chairman Schwartz introduced a series of protocols to organize, define our mission and set review procedures. Discussion also included subcommittee reports on historic preservation funding services, available funds for OTH being held in Town accounts, future meetings with outside groups.

At the following meeting, April 18, the committee began to consider the format for review procedures. Our final mission statement was distributed.

"The purpose of this committee is to offer guidance to the Selectmen as to what should be done with the Old Town Hall. Beginning with a thorough understanding of the physical, legal, economic and cultural realities that define this task, we will go on to a consideration of uses that fulfill real needs within the limits of the possible. Our ideas for use should be developed with imagination and creativity, and then evaluated with practicality and common sense. The committee will issue a final report offering informed and well-considered recommendations to assist the Selectmen in reaching a decision that serves the best interests of the Town of Stockbridge."

Chairman Schwartz asked the committee to consider dividing our work into three phases; *What have we got here? What do we want it to be? How do we get there?* Members were dispatched to begin work on the first phase collecting background information to include records, history, existing conditions, zoning issues, site conditions, previous development

reports, feasibility studies, and other relevant information. Secretary LaBelle did the lion's share of this herculean task and is listed in the Appendix.

The committee also set out to meet with Town Committees, local businesses, educational organizations and cultural organizations. Our purpose was to acquaint the local community with our existence; to clarify the current status of the facility, including its ownership; and to solicit any interest from local community groups in using all or a part of the facility, including purchase for their own use. Meetings were sometimes formal board agenda items and sometimes informal with key personnel only. We also wanted to encourage the community to suggest possible solutions for reuse no matter how fanciful.

Some ideas coming out of these sessions included "warehousing" the building in its present vacant, unheated condition; partial demolition leaving foundation walls and columns and developing a park setting with historical plaques, meeting areas within the remaining foundation; relocating Town Offices back to the OTH; restoration of the 1902 performance/meeting hall; relocating and restoring the original 1839 building to its historic location; Some agencies and town committees had been using parts of the building for events, meetings, and file storage to some extent. Secretary LaBelle arranged for keys to the building to conduct tours of the facility for interested groups. Tours typically lasted about 45 min to an hour. This procedure proved to be problematic when interested organizations requested multiple time-consuming visits for intensive inspections. This effort to meet with local organizations has been fruitful but remains incomplete.

In late May, however, it became clear that there were two, possibly more, reuse proposals in the works. Committeeman Stokes was known to be working with the Waldorf High School on possibly relocating from their Pine Street facility. Secretary LaBelle and Chairman Schwartz had met previously with Waldorf School officials and toured the building. Their interest was clear and architects and engineers had been retained to prepare feasibility studies. Chairman Schwartz was also contacted personally by the Rockwell Museum which revealed that it was studying the building as well. Chairman Schwartz suspended regular committee meetings on July 5th in order to give both organizations time to complete preliminary work necessary to firmly establish intent. Secretary LaBelle continued to arrange meetings with Town Committees and others over several months to touch as many bases as possible. The committee was notified in late September that the Rockwell Museum would be issuing a press release covering its plans for the OTH. The press release appeared on October 10.

A formal presentation for the Waldorf School plans was scheduled for Tuesday, October 25. Waldorf School Board Chairperson Theresa O'Brient, CEO David Sagarin, consultants Stephan Green, Steve McCallister and Brian Bordanaro of Clark & Green, Architects, Great Barrington, gave a complete and in-depth presentation in the form of drawings, reports and analyses. The committee also heard informal comments from Rockwell Museum Director, Laurie Norton Moffett, present as an interested party. Also, commenting from the audience was Carl Bradford, Congregational Church officer and member of its Reuse Committee. Terry Flynn also introduced an effort by local townspeople looking to develop the OTH as a Town-owned venue for community activities.

The Waldorf presentation meeting marked the last official activity of the OTH Reuse Committee. As long as current informal proposals for reuse of the OTH remain in progress, there is no useful purpose to be served looking for creative "out-of-the-box" solutions to recommend to the Selectmen. The building, and underlying land, are owned by the Congregational Church. Any acceptable reuse proposal would have to meet with its approval. It is entirely possible that the building could be sold outright to a third party. In any case a potential buyer/user faces extensive development hurdles with no guarantee of success. The outcome will likely require a collaborative public/private effort.

"In considering the future of this building we should bear in mind that the problem is *not* the large investment required to make it usable again. The problem is finding a use that will support it so that in twenty years or less another Town Hall

Committee isn't convened to answer the recurring question, what is to be done with the Old Town Hall?" Excerpted from *An Economic History of the Stockbridge Town Hall 1904-1999*. Thomas LaBelle 2016

The OTH Reuse committee stands ready to begin its work where it left off at such time as it may be necessary to the Selectmen if current development proposals fail to materialize. All six current members wish to continue pending other extenuating circumstances preventing their participation. The committee feels also that the work to develop creative reuse potential might be better served with more than six members of the community involved. I would like to express my sincere thanks to my fellow committee members for their help and assistance and in particular to Secretary Tom LaBelle who drafted most of our documents and papers and kept us scheduled and focused. Attached to the report are three appendices and records.

Steve commended people to read *An Economic History of the Stockbridge Town Hall 1904-1999*, written by Thomas LaBelle. Steve commented that it is clear that the lease says that the landlord has the right to terminate the lease if no longer used as Town offices. The Town may also terminate the lease but thus far neither have terminated the lease.

Don also thanked Arthur and asked how many interest groups are there currently. Arthur said that both the Waldorf School and the Norman Rockwell Museum remain interested. Arthur said that their job is just to report their findings.

Dennis Regan of the Housatonic Valley Association came before the Board to request permission for an Open House Event on May 12, 2017 to celebrate their recent move to the Merwin House. They have received permission from the church to use the parking area at the Old Town Hall. They are expecting it to be very low key event with the possibility of an acoustic guitar player on the patio out back.

The Board inquired if anyone was living in the Merwin House at the time. Mr. Regan explained that the caretakers live there and have been even before the Housatonic Valley Association moved in.

The Board asked Mr. Regan to notify his neighbors and double check with Chief Fennelly about the pedestrian traffic. The Board continues the matter to their next meeting of Wednesday, April 19th.

Attorney Jeff Cook came before the Board to represent the Boston Symphony Orchestra and their curb cut application for widening of Ozawa Hall entrance and street cut opening for utilities.

The driveway would be widened 1 ½ feet on either side to make for two-way traffic and acknowledged that no vegetation along the roadway would be removed.

Steve feels that this is a very reasonable request and made a motion to approve the curb cut application. Chuck seconded the motion.

Upon discussion, Don feels that a site visit should be done by the Board to see the project as this is such a large project. He said that there had been concerns by neighbors and wanted them addressed.

Patrick White, Hawthorne Street, expressed his concerns for the pedestrian traffic on such dark roads.

The applicants thanked him for his concerns and explained the proposed work would be on Hawthorne Road.

Don again suggested a site visit. Steve said he had already visited the site on his own time and noted that Chuck is very familiar with the site. Steve did not feel the site visit was necessary and did not want to delay the efforts.

Don said he did not feel this to be a postponement but instead as the Town doing its due diligence with such a large project that is moving forward.

Kim Noltemy of BSO said she would be happy to do a site visit and walk them through where the project would be.

Chuck withdrew his second for the motion and the Board continued the request until April 19th. Attorney Cook will be in contact with Danielle to schedule the site visit.

Marie Raftery of the Laurel Hill Association let everyone know that they will be out cleaning the roadways for Earth Day on the 22nd and encouraged everyone to participate.

Chuck asked Marie to let Darrell know they will be out there since it is Mercy Sunday weekend.

Steve announced that the Town received a \$500,000 Small Bridge Program grant for the Larrywaug Bridge.

He thanked Lenny for his efforts and thanked Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito, Francesca Hemming at Mass DOT and noted that it would not have been received without the influence of Norman Rockwell, the BSO, and Smitty Pignatelli.

A question was raised regarding the Park Street foot bridge and the possibility of grants for repairs.

Tom LaBelle asked the Board if they had looked into the possibility of an inter-municipal grant writer.
Don said that he is looking forward to getting a Town Administrator and that could be a possible skill set to look for.

With no further business Chuck motioned to adjourn. Steve seconded the motion.