

TOWN OF HARVARD

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE



Meeting Minutes – 13 January 2011, 9:30-11:30, Town Hall Meeting Room

Attendees

Marie Sobalvarro, Pete Jackson, Lucy Wallace, Willie Wickman Doug Coots, Ron Ostberg (chair); Carlene Phillips and David Kasell (visitors); Tim Bragan

1. Reviewed and approved minutes of January 6, 2011.
2. Set schedule of January meetings (1/20, 1/27)
3. Update on meetings with various town boards and organizations, including HEAC, Unitarian Church, LWV (to request a forum), Library Trustees, CPC, FinCom and Capital Planning and Investment Committee (CPIC). Ron is still trying to set up meeting with Fire Dept.
4. Update on grants. Maggie will be meeting with Eileen Kronauer about her researching grant opportunities for us.
5. Ron reported on a meeting he and Peter had with Lorraine Leonard. If project costs exceed \$1 million, we would be required to have an owner's project manager for the design phase. Also, if renovations are estimated to cost more than 30% of the building's value, then building must meet all codes.
6. Ron reported on conversation with Bill Johnson re using Old Library as senior center. He also reported that he had told Bill we would be discussing the proposal at this meeting. We reviewed the issues previously identified making the Old Library unsuitable and more costly to renovate for senior center than Hildreth House.

Attachment: January 12 memo on Location of COA

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Memorandum Draft for review at 13 January, 2011 meeting

Subject: Location of COA
Date: January 12, 2011
Author: C. Ron Ostberg, Chair

Consistent with its charter as a Task Force in 2009 and as a Committee in 2010, the MBC has endeavored to foster and collect a wide range of ideas for the disposition of the old library, Hildreth property and Town Hall. To this end it has met regularly (typically twice/month, often more frequently) in open meeting, held five public workshops and reported to the BOS at their request. The MBC has benefited greatly from these procedures; the number of ideas generated and evaluated has been very high.

The program and location of the Council on Aging has been a subject of considerable study. At the outset of the process a number of venues were considered, including the existing Catholic Church (under the assumption that it would soon be available). In its report to the 2010 Town Meeting the Task Force recommended that COA continue in its current location. The reasoning being: first, the availability of the Catholic Church was too uncertain to serve as the basis of a viable plan; and second, the old library was unsuited – the program was not easily accommodated, there was no covered drop off, parking was inadequate, movement between car and building unsafe.

With the formation of the Municipal Buildings Committee in May of 2010, the BOS asked the committee to carefully consider the use of the old library for the Council on Aging. To that end, the committee prepared architectural plans which facilitated comparison of the old library and Hildreth for use as Council on Aging. These plans were presented at the November 13th Workshop. The consensus was clear, Council on Aging activities were poorly served at the old library.

Notwithstanding this consensus, an informal request was made of the MBC to consider revising the site plan of the old library to accommodate a drop off. This was done and the plan was reviewed with Chief Denmark who noted traffic movement and safety issues. Notwithstanding his comments the plan, prepared by the Civil Engineer was submitted to the Cost Estimator of estimating.

At the same time, as planned well in advance of the Workshop, building plans were provided to the cost estimator to determine the relative cost of ‘fitting up’ the old library for a Cultural Center and Council on Aging. The later is more expensive due to more extensive site work, the need for toilets on each floor and the need for a kitchen.

This information was discussed at the Workshop on December 18th and the cost comparison stated on page 15 of the draft report presented at that time.

Subsequently, members of the committee were approached individually by Bill Johnson. He had additional reasons for, and methods of, accommodating COA in the old library. While no formal request was made to meet with MBC and to consider this proposition, consistent with our commitment to evaluate all reasonable alternatives that would benefit the town, we are reviewing this proposition.

To that end, the Chair send a description of the proposal (attached; in the absence of a written description, the Chair characterized the proposition as thoroughly and objectively as he was able) to committee members and placed the matter on the agenda of its January 13th meeting.

In preparation for that meeting, the Chair and one committee member, Pete Jackson met with the Civil Engineer to discuss the proposed closing of Fairbank Street and extension of Littleton Road – this being

proposed as a means of creating a safe parking area in front of the old library.

This road reconfiguration has been considered at least once. When the library sought to expand in its then current location by purchasing the adjoining house on Fairbank Street, the road closing was considered. At that time, sufficient reservations about the technical, safety and regulatory viability of the adding a new intersection on the State road stopped the effort.

In conversation with the Civil Engineer yesterday the following reservations were noted:

1. The minimum separation of intersections is 200'; in this case, it is 200' from the center line of the Still River Road and the new intersection at the point they each intersect the town's most highly trafficked road.
2. The grade of the extended Littleton Road at the point it meets Mass Ave. and for 75' – 150' before, can be no more than 2.5%. (State regulations to be checked) It appears on initial inspection that this would require significant re-grading of both immediate and adjacent property.
3. Closing Fairbank in front of two private properties south of Littleton Road and one north could be resisted by owners.
4. The Common would be altered and this could be resisted by citizens and the responsible authority(ies).
5. A safer environment would be created only if this parking lot were not used as a short cut. This is very difficult to guarantee given its location and the normal flow of traffic north along Fairbank as it enters the town center.

Given the bare minimum intersection separation, the grading considerations, the alternations to the Common, the private property and traffic management considerations, it is unlikely that approval for this proposal would be granted by the State and the Town.

E-mail sent: Tue 1/11/2011 8:20 AM
(Morning following my first discussion of this proposal with Bill Johnson)
To: Willie Wickman, Lucy Wallace, Pete Jackson, Doug Coots, Peter Warren, Marie Sobalvarro, Maggie Green, Bill Johnson

To bring you up to date on Bill Johnson's proposal. Bill has spoken to Pete, Maggie, Ginger, Chief Denmark and Rich Nota.....perhaps others. He would like our committee to consider his proposal. I've added it to the agenda for our Thursday meeting.

I met with Bill last evening. Pete and Maggie had both spoken to him earlier and relayed his ideas. He proposes that COA goes into the old library for some unspecified period of time and that Town Hall is renovated and added on to. He describe the merits of this approach as follows:

1. COA gets new and better facilities;
2. Town Hall is renovated and expanded;
3. If the program for seniors in this town needs to expand in the future, COA can move to Hildreth;
4. The old library is fully upgraded so it can serve other uses (cultural center, leasing) if/when COA moves out;
5. The needs of COA for drop off and parking can be met by closing Fairbank and extending Littleton Rd to Mass Ave;

He noted that the town has two programs that must be served, the third – a cultural center – is a desired, but not essential. And, he noted that a cultural center need not have its own dedicated space, it would be itinerate/virtual (my words).

Bill acknowledged that his approach meant going to Town meeting with a request for both the Town Hall

and old library upgrades for COA. Unlike his conversations with Pete, he did not suggest to me that renovating the old library for COA would be less than we estimated. He did not say, as he had said to Pete, that it would be cheaper to accommodate COA in the old library than Hildreth. I don't believe it would be.

On the other hand, he did suggest that the proposal for renovating Town Hall and adding the Addition was probably approvable at Town Meeting.

He said he was not in agreement with selling Hildreth, although he had no specific ideas for its use in the next 6 years – when COA would move back in if its program needed to expand. He did say that he could imagine that it is sold (when the market is stronger) to a private party who would preserve the building and the grounds.

In his approach, we would be asking Town Meeting to approve the design money for two projects, with the commitment to total project budgets of \$3.9M for Town Hall and \$2.5M (N.B. this number needs to be calculated, but it is definitely his higher than the estimated \$2.2M cost for the cultural center in order to include toilets on both floors, a kitchen and the additional site work proposed by Bill - closing a section of Fairbank and extending Littleton Rd. to Mass. Ave.

I asked him to consider the merit of suspending decision on this approach for a year. I noted the following:

1. this would allow time to determine the feasibility of a non-profit cultural center (given the interest to date, they should be given the opportunity to establish feasibility);
2. it would allow time for the COA/Senior Center to better understand itself and its needs;
3. it would spread the expenditure (debt service) over a longer period of time;
4. it would significantly reduce the request/commitment of Town Meeting (and therefore increase the likelihood of passage);
5. the approach loses nothing by waiting a year.

His initial reaction was, "no".

I asked him to give it some thought.

On Thursday morning we need to list the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, decide on its merits and proceed accordingly.