

**Town Of Needham Board of Selectman
Special Meeting Minutes for June 23, 2008
Broadmeadow School**

6:10 p.m. Call To Order

A special meeting of the Board of Selectmen was convened by Chairman James Healy at 6:10 p.m. Those present were: John Bulian, Daniel P. Matthews, Gerald Wasserman, James Healy, Denise Garlick (6:40 p.m.), Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick and Recording Secretary Greg Cooper.

6:10 p.m. Introduction and Background Information on Town Hall Project:

Mr. Healy welcomed those Boards, Committees and residents in attendance for the summit on the planned reconstruction of the Town Hall. He stated that, although the Board has held two public hearings on the issue, the Board felt that a broad-based forum would provide the Board with more input prior to it voting on how to proceed. He stated that the Board will be getting additional input from the Town Hall Study Committee and expects to vote on a course in mid-September. Mr. Healy explained that a decision needs to be made by mid-September in order get an application to the Community Preservation Committee and have the final project approved at the 2009 Annual Town Meeting. He asked that everyone be respectful and hoped for an open dialog on the issue.

6:15 p.m. Selectmen's comments:

Mr. Healy asked each of the Selectmen to provide some initial comments prior to seeking input from others. Mr. Wasserman hoped for a reasonable discussion and reminded people that any proposed project will need a thirds vote of approval by Town Meeting. Mr. Bulian expressed his openness to listen to options, but that restoring the auditorium has many impacts such as the need for increased parking and relocation of certain Town services. Mr. Matthews expressed his support for restoring the Town Hall for basic services. He feels it is hard to have a mixed use building and that the increased cost

of an option that restores the auditorium will cause other Town projects to be delayed.

6:35 p.m. Board and Committee Input:

Mr. Healy stated that one member of each Board and Committee will be asked to make a 1-2 minute statement about his/her personal opinion or their Board's/Committee's opinion, and raise questions and areas for further study.

Permanent Public Building Committee:

John Connelly stated that the PPBC does not take positions on projects but rather, works for the Town Meeting to execute capital projects. He stated that the PPBC selected a designer to provide three options but has not endorsed any particular proposal. Mr. Connelly then stated that he personally favors Option #1 for Town Hall to act as the core location for Town business. He did not feel that combining an auditorium and town services in Town Hall would be appropriate. He stated that the Town needs to prioritize its capital projects and he feels a Senior Center should be high on the list.

Community Preservation Committee:

Paul Siegenthaler, Chairman, stated that a majority of committee members approved Option #1. He stated that the Committee also sees Option #1 as allowing for future changes, if desired. He stated that the CPC needs to have a proposal that the Committee can understand to determine whether it meets the CPF requirements.

Finance Committee:

David Escalante read a statement prepared by the Finance Committee. The statement identified that relocation of departments are not covered by CPC funding and that renovating the auditorium will require permanent relocation of some town services, which will be at a cost.

Historical Commission:

Carol Boulris stated that the Commission supports the restoration of the auditorium and that having cubicles and false ceilings is not true historical preservation. She stated that

the Town needs to follow the Department of Interior standards for renovating a historical building.

Commission on Disabilities:

The Commission stated that several entrances to Town Hall are currently inaccessible to certain populations and that these entrances must be made accessible including the front entrance to the building.

School Committee:

Michael Greis, Chair, stated that the School Committee has not discussed the issue. He stated that the Town has a number of capital projects including the Emery Grover building that should be factored into the Town's capital decisions.

Mr. Healy stated that the Town Hall project does have impacts on other capital needs and that these needs must be recognized.

Planning Board:

Jeanne McKnight stated that the Planning Board has voted twice in support of Town Hall as an assembly location not just as an office building. The Board sees functions at the auditorium being an economic benefit to the downtown. She stated that historic preservation includes the preservation of the original use of the building. She stated that the Planning Board is aware of the complexities of the project and impacts on parking and some town departments. Ms. McKnight stated that Weston has successfully restored its Town Hall auditorium.

Cultural Council:

Louise Miller stated that the Council does not see the restoration of the auditorium as a replacement of a needed Cultural Center in Town. She stated that the Council would be concerned about fees and the cost to use the auditorium, parking and availability. She stated that the Town Manager should take input and decide what is best for delivering services to residents.

Tercentennial Committee:

Bill Paulson stated that personally he feels it would be ideal to get both the auditorium and space for town services. He stated that an auditorium would have benefit to the Town but you can't ignore the issue of cost. He suggested some private fund raising might be necessary.

Park and Recreation Commission:

Chris Dollase, Chair, stated that the Park & Recreation Department will need to be moved regardless of which option is chosen. The auditorium would not be used by the Park and Recreation Commission. Personally, Chris Dollase did not feel restoration of the auditorium would be a good use of limited town resources.

Citizens for the Preservation of Town Hall:

Michael Niden stated that restoration of the auditorium would bring a new dimension into downtown and stimulate economic activity. He stated that a renovation with an auditorium would revitalize the downtown, build community and be a catalyst for change. He read a letter from the owner of Fava's Restaurant which supported the restoration of the auditorium. Mr. Healy wondered what the economic impact of moving Town departments out of downtown would have.

Needham Business Association:

Paul Good stated that the NBA has not taken a position on the project. He said that personally he needs more information on the impacts both economically and to the coordination of Town services.

Mr. Healy recognized Selectman Denise Garlick, who arrived late. Ms. Garlick stated that ideally several issues would be addressed through the renovation of Town Hall including timely completion, a need for good working space, a functioning auditorium and the building needs to be under the control of the Town Manager during normal business hours. She stated that the Natick auditorium has had a positive impact on the downtown area. She hopes that at

least two designs might be prepared for Town Meeting consideration.

Historical Society:

Mark Gluesing stated that the Historical Society supports the restoration of Town Hall but has not taken a position on whether this would or would not include restoration of the auditorium.

Board of Library Trustees:

Lois Sockol stated that the Trustees have not taken a position on the issue. She stated that she, personally, needs more information on the impacts on downtown, the ability of the town to deliver services and on other town capital needs.

Mr. Healy stated that the size of the project will have an impact on financing other town projects.

Memorial Park Trustees:

Ron Sockol stated that the Trustees have not discussed the project.

Town Manager:

Kate Fitzpatrick stated that some of the services currently in Town Hall have been there for over 40 years. She stated that a big question is where do some of these Departments go if the auditorium is restored. She stated that she is concerned how the auditorium upstairs will impact the first floor offices. Ms. Fitzpatrick also stated that there would be some inefficiency if departments are relocated.

7:40 p.m. Break

7:50 p.m. Mr. Healy asked for some initial reaction from Board members. Ms. Garlick stated that she is pleased with the input and that information needs to be gathered to make the various options clear. Mr. Wasserman stated that no options are off the table but there are significant challenges. Mr. Bulian thanked all present for their input. Mr. Matthews doubted that a restored auditorium would be an economic driver.

He stated that Natick's center is a private enterprise open seven days a week. He stated that in addition to normal operating hours, Town business is conducted at a minimum Monday thru Thursday nights. Mr. Healy stated that he does not support using tax payer dollars to support private entities.

8:00 p.m. Other Input from Boards and Committees:

Moe Handel stated that as a member of the Planning Board and the Downtown Study Committee it has become apparent to him that the community desires some night activity in the downtown. He stated that private contribution might be able to supplement the Town's investment.

Richard Zimbone, Finance Committee Member and Town Meeting Member, stated that neighbors in his precinct were overwhelmingly supportive of restoring the auditorium, but that financial impacts might preempt this support.

Sheila Pransky CPC and Town Meeting Member, is pleased that the issue of restoring the auditorium is still up for debate. She feels a third floor might be added to the proposed DPW building. Mr. Healy stated that he feels the DPW site is too small.

John Commando, CPC and Town Meeting Member, stated that the Town Hall project needs to be completed by the Tercentennial and that raising private funding in time is not likely. He stated that under Option #1 the Town may look to restore the auditorium in the future.

Ed Cosgrove, Board of Health, stated that he does not approve of having the BOH in the basement of Town Hall because of access and aesthetic issues. He advocated for the BOH moving to the DPW building.

Claire Messing, Town Meeting Member, stated her support for restoring the auditorium. She also feels that Emery Grover should be part of the discussion.

Irwin Silverstein, PPBC and Town Meeting Member, feels that two critical issues are how town government services would function with an active auditorium and the financial impact of the restoration of the auditorium. He worries about the financial impact on the ability of the Town to meet the needs of seniors with a senior center.

Gloria Greis, Town Meeting Member and Town Hall Study Committee Member, stated that real solutions with convincing arguments need to be developed.

8:30 p.m. Citizen Input:

John Fountain, Gayland Road, feels the exterior of the building is a treasure and the proposed elevator extension at the rear of the building will impact the aesthetics of the building. He recommended putting the elevator extension in the center of the rear of the building rather than to one side.

Paul Robey, Trustee of Memorial Park, recommended the Board of Selectmen consider the future needs of town residents in making its decision, particularly given internet and other methods of delivering services.

William Powers stated that restoring the auditorium is not a new issue but many residents do not understand the issue fully. The focus should be in the efficient and economic solution that benefits the town. He stated that the purpose of the Town Hall Study Committee is unclear and that the Board of Selectmen may be too accommodating. He stated that residents need to become educated on the issue.

Bob Smart supports the full restoration of the Town Hall. He hopes that the Town Hall Study Committee is given adequate time to develop its recommendations. He does not feel there is agreement on the facts and recommended the Town's architectural firm be charged with

providing the facts. Mr. Healy suggested that answers to these questions would be obtained over summer and that the PPBC has been clear on when a decision needs to be made in order to meet the desired timeframe.

Ed Cosgrove stated that the way that the Town will do business in 5-10 years has a great impact on what should be restored and how.

Jeff Kristellar, Town Meeting Member, stated that he does not know what the historical value of the auditorium is and therefore how much it is worth in financial terms.

Ron Ruth, Planning Board, stated that the Town can not encourage private parties to invest in the downtown if it is unwilling to do so itself. He stated that the Town needs to lead and invest in its downtown.

David Escalante, Finance Committee, stated that he is unsure of the goals of the proponents of preserving the auditorium. Are they interested in preserving the auditorium or restoring and using it?

John Comando recommended that the members of the Town Hall Study Committee read the Town Hall Study Committee charter. The committee has some specific goals and a short timeframe to deliver on these items.

Sandy Tobin, CPC member, echoed Ron Ruth's comments and stated that she frequently helps try to relocate people to Town. She said the business community needs a shot in the arm.

Lois Sockol stated that the renovation should meet the needs of departments for the next 50 years.

James Powers, Town Meeting Member, expressed his feelings that the Town has a dysfunctional approach to capital needs. He questioned whether the Town is making decisions based on a master plan. Mr. Healy stated that the Town has

conducted several studies relative to town operational needs and the development of the downtown.

Michael Niden stated that there have been several studies but there has not been an overlay of Town Hall needs with downtown needs.

9:20 p.m. Final Comments from Board:

Ms. Garlick thanked everyone for coming. She stated that the Town needs to develop and execute a plan. She favors a multi-use building that maximizes use and functionality. She recommended the Town's Economic Development Officer be asked to investigate the economic impacts of a restored auditorium. She wants to be sure the financials of the project are very clear. Ms. Garlick does not feel that any department should be in the basement. She stated that she believes cultural and civic issues are important to residents.

Mr. Wasserman stated that hard economic data is needed. He feels the town needs to stick to its current financial commitment and possibly look to restore the auditorium in the future or through private funding. This could include privately funding the construction of the annex in the future in order to restore the auditorium.

Mr. Bulian stated that it is obvious that everyone cares. He stated that the interests of all residents need to be look after. He agreed with Mr. Wasserman's comments on the need for private financing.

Mr. Matthews stated that the community typically gets together to discuss the issues facing the town and that the Town Hall should serve as a central place for this discussion. He does not agree with restoring the auditorium.

Mr. Healy thanked everyone for their participation. He plans on keeping an open mind

over the next few months. He said the process needs to be transparent.

9:50 p.m. Meeting Adjourned.