

Minutes of Bethel Town Hall Finance Committee November 29, 2007 ■ At Bethel Library at 7 p.m.

Present: Amy Bergamo, Janet Burnham, Mary Floyd, Rick Benson, Winslow Ayer, Chris Masters, Paul Feeney, Geneva Gaiko, Victoria Weber, Davis Dimock.

Amy called the meeting to order at 7 pm.

1- Janet announced she has been studying **George Guernsey**, the architect of our hall and (apparently) 180 other Vermont and New Hampshire buildings. He changed Vermont townscapes and was viewed as very practical. She would like the Bethel Historical Society to write a booklet about him. This would help us get grants.

Davis read from a December 15, **1892 Bethel Courier article** by E.W. Rolfe about the building of our hall: H.O Maxham of Pomfret was the master builder. The building measured 44 by 80 feet on the outside, "the extreme height of which is 80 feet to the top of the large eagle that forms the weather vane." The interior measurements of the "main or public" hall were 42' x 48' x 20' high. The wainscoting and window casings were made of brown ash. "The main hall is to be furnished with portable folding chairs and with the gallery at the west end, will seat comfortably 500 people."

2- Amy asked **what steps are needed to stabilize the foundations and the brick work?** Rick Benson said that engineer Tim Schaal's plans should be used for this.

Paul Feeney asked whether getting a second opinion from another company would make sure the work was done correctly, and would last. Rick explained that Tim had been brought in to give the Town a second opinion compared with architect Laz Scangas' plans. And Tim said we should do what Laz had set out.

Paul pointed out that Schaal's plans only covered the brick work to just above grade, and not the brick façade or the walls higher up. Davis said that Don Hirsch's grant application contained 4 pages of descriptions of the façade work needed. Although this is descriptive language, and not specifications, apparently Hirsch got it from Scangas, and/or Schaal, and we can re-use it for grants.

Rick reminded us that the Town did get a couple of bids on the foundations work, but the Selex felt the bids were higher than they wanted. Perhaps it was partly because at the time people could not see behind the interior walls in the lower level, as they can now. Davis said that since the swale work identified that the water problem is largely surface, not ground water, hence the foundations work may be cheaper than the first bids expected it would be. It is agreed that the grade was changed when the parking lot was built so that water now runs toward the building.

3- The committee members present approved the October 25, 2007 minutes as written.

4- **Wall-to-the-Hall Project, a.k.a. Bethel Downtown Plan.** This project began in 1993, and the restoration of the Town Hall is one of the things that was planned at the time. The timeline is:

- late 1980's – Bethel Business Association formed.
- 1993 – the process started and charrettes were held in neighborhoods to have townspeople offer their vision and ideas of what was needed. [The word *charrette* may refer to any collaborative session in which a group of people drafts a solution to a design or urban planning problem solution. Typically they are series of meetings which integrate the aptitudes and interests of a diverse group of people.]
- 1996 – a VT Community and Development Program (VCDP) grant improved sidewalks, light posts and electricity, and built the parking lot.
- 1998 – the first town hall committee formed to study financing and feasibility
- 1999 – a new town hall committee was formed

- 2000 – a \$29K VCDP planning grant to create biddable specs for the hall was joined by \$7K from the town.
- 2002 - Bethel received **Village Center Designation** from the State which makes it eligible for benefits including tax credits and priority consideration from other state programs and agencies.

So, we are in the middle of a large project to revitalize and bring economic vitality to downtown Bethel. Lots of work has already been done, and now Fort Fortitude is being addressed. While we are at the beginning of the Hall restoration, we are at least half way through the overall downtown work.

5- **Newsletter for February 2008.** Victoria listed some topics she would like the annual newsletter to include and solicited writers and articles. The group agreed with the topics suggested, and Janet agreed to write an article on George Guernsey.

6- **Alcohol ordinance.** According to the current town ordinance, alcohol is not allowed in any town building. It is agreed that some functions in the hall – such as weddings - should be allowed to serve alcohol. Rick said it would be an amendment process by the Select board, once we know what we want. We will contact the school superintendent to see what policy they use and see if we can use it.

7- **Maximizing capacity of the Hall.** Rick recalls that Laz Scangas' estimates allow 200 – 250 people in the hall. It is not an issue of physical space or structural integrity. It all comes down to exits and how much to alter the exterior of the building to allow for exits. We need to verify that Laz' plans indeed allow for an occupancy of 250, as we want at least that capacity. We need to find out from state fire marshal and other officials just what is needed to allow for at least 250 people in the hall. It was noted that originally the hall held 500 people. Perhaps later we might build a Vergennes-like deck and extra exits off the Credit Union side of the hall. [At the Vergennes Opera House this deck is accessed by 2 sets of double French doors along the left side of the hall and allows for breathers during intermissions and wraps around the back of the building and serves as the handicapped access to the hall which is on the second floor, just as ours is.]

8- It was readily agreed to **not meet December 27th**, so the next meeting is January 31, 2008.

9- Mary Floyd announced she has a goal of holding a **second silent auction** sometime during 2008, and ideally it will be held in the hall.

10- **Users.** Mary Floyd said that Sheila Jacobs is definitely not following up on the users. Mary now has the time and asked specifically what she needed to do to contact them for more information on their needs and desires and their ideas about the Bethel Town Hall. Amy asked for ideas of more potential user groups.

11- **Fundraising.** The 1892 Fund campaign now has 166 donors, plus we have been awarded a Randolph Lamson-Howell Fund grant for \$5,000. The 1892 Fund letter has been mailed to Bethel residents and landowners, as well as included in the Bethel Schools newsletter and the Historical Society Newsletter. Chris Masters has addressed and paid and mailed out 544 copies of the 1892 Fund letter to Bethelites. We all thanked him for his generosity and time. Davis suggested Chris should be the first recipient of "The Bill Green Award for Heart and Good Work."

Amy said the 'silent phase' of fundraising is never over and she and Janet continue to ask businesses for donations. She reported that people do not say 'no'. They all say the Hall is on their list. Amy plans to call a meeting of the Askers in the new year.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Victoria Weber ■ January 14, 2008