

Minutes of Bethel Town Hall Finance Committee April 24, 2008 at the Bethel Library at 7 p.m.

Present: Amy Bergamo, Janet Burnham, Mary Floyd, Chris Masters, Winslow Ayer, Geneva Gaiko, Victoria Weber, Davis Dimock, and Joe De Freitas.

Amy called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm.

1- The **minutes** of the March 27, 2008 meeting were accepted by the committee members present.

2- **Architect's Scope of Work.** People are asking 'what is next?' on the hall. The Select Board is waiting for architect Laz Scangas to get back to them with the 'scope of work' for the Senator Leahy/Save America's Treasures grant work so that they can sign a contract for the \$301,000 that has been earmarked for the Bethel Town Hall. Dell Cloud will be the grant administrator and has been reading the paperwork involved.

Victoria reported on a conversation with Dell this afternoon in which he said Scangas has had his estimator total the cost of work to be done, and he will be sending the Select Board Scopes of Work for 4 possible aspects of the project, based on potential funding sources Dell is looking at now:

- The Save America's Treasures grant of \$301,000 which needs to be matched for a total of \$602,000.
- Handicapped accessibility modification grant Dell is hoping to get.
- Vermont Division of Historic Preservation Grant that Amy is beginning to work on.
- A possible loan and/or grant from USDA Rural Development. [*Dell had recently spoken with Jon-Michael Muise who had visited the Bethel Hall on May 17, 2006. Notes of that meeting are appended to these minutes.*]

Scangas' 'scope of work' will prioritize which specific parts of the project should be done in what order, and give cost estimates for the segments.

The estimator's projection for all the remaining parts of the hall restoration project is \$1,200,000. We believe this covers everything in Scangas' plans, including theatre lights and finishing the downstairs.

3- **Bethel Post Card & History Fair, May 24th.** Amy and Chris Masters will staff a table dedicated to the Town Hall. Amy is making arrangements to show the 7th Graders' video of the roof construction and history of the hall. Nick Nikolaidis has kindly donated three sets of nicely mounted special envelopes and postal cancellations celebrating the hall that were done in 1990, 2000 and 2002. It is hoped that three people will 'purchase' these sets by making donations of at least \$15 to the Town Hall Restoration Fund.

Amy also hopes to have handouts to distribute based on Laz Scangas' work (see above) to describe for townspeople just what is next in the project. The group discussed comments they have heard where people are frustrated that there seem to be slowdowns and troughs every time some progress is made on the restoration, such as completing the roof and being granted the \$301,000 Save America's Treasures matching grant via Senator Leahy. These troughs leave people wondering anew : "what is next?" Hopefully the handout will address this question.



**Support the Rotary
BBQ June 7th –
all proceeds go to
Hall Fund!**

4- **Fundraising – the 1892 Campaign continues with 256 donors so far.** Janet Burnham announced that Steve Day says that the Knights of Columbus raffle should increase the count by about 125.

Chris Masters continues to send out 1892 flyers to people he reads about or hears about who are connected with Bethel.

5- **Matching the \$301,000 Save America's Treasures grant.** Everyone agrees that matching this grant is top priority. How long do we have to match it? Joe De Freitas said his understanding from Dell is that there is no time limit to match the grant.

Victoria said she hopes we don't wait so long that we lose the \$301,000. She frets that the recession may cause Congress to rescind grants that have not been used, especially in the current climate that is so critical of congressional earmarks like this. If we do not match the grant and receive it in a timely manner we could lose it. As it stands now, we do not have the \$301,000 because we have not yet matched it.

6- **Vermont Division of Historic Preservation grant .** Amy is planning on applying for a Vermont Division of Historic Preservation grant, which will be due in October. They typically give about \$15,000, which needs to be matched by another \$15,000. She would like to use some of the 1892 Fund monies for this purpose, rather than using them all to help match the large Save America's Treasures grant. What work to apply for? Windows? Probably not, as they can be separated and offered for local donations. Perhaps, the front doors. Nick Nikolaidis has one of the original doors that was replaced with a garage door. It could be used as a pattern. The group decided to use Scangas' forthcoming estimates to identify some discrete thing to focus this grant application on.

7- **Whitcomb Alumni Association's** annual newsletter is coming up. Can we get some information in it about the hall restoration and the 1892 Campaign? Janet feels that older alums, and those who live away will want to know about the hall project.

8- **Fundraising with painted goats.** Janet used to live in Brandon where folk artist Warren Kimble spearheaded a 'Brandon Pigs' project to have different people paint and decorate life-sized pig sculptures, which were then auctioned, raising over \$100,000. Following the painted pallets and painted benches projects in Bethel the last couple of years, Janet would like for Bethel to paint goats, auction them and have the proceeds go to the town hall fund.



Considerable discussion followed. The goat 'blanks' are expensive, so perhaps we could get simpler ones done locally. Winslow and Mary wondered if Advanced Animations might help, and Davis recommended we broaden a conversation with them, suggesting we approach them asking for their general suggestions about the hall and how they might help.

Amy is concerned that we do not lose money and that the expense of buying the blanks would undermine any profit. She would not feel right spending money yet.

Davis feels that we need to put our energy into the existing projects. These are the on-going 1892 Fundraising Campaign, getting clear scope of work information for the next steps, and matching the Save America's Treasures grant.

Mary is concerned about rising costs of food and fuel and Victoria feels that because of higher costs for necessities, people have less money for discretionary spending.

Janet agreed that our biggest issue is matching the \$301,000 Save America's Treasures grant, and we all agreed that we should proceed slowly with a possible painted project.



9- **Bethel Rotary** needs help with their **Chicken BBQ**, which will be Saturday June 7th. It used to be held in conjunction with the Forward Festival. How to get more people to stop and buy chicken, thus benefiting the Hall? Last year there was confusion with a simultaneous coin drop event. The year with the best sales was when a giant chicken on rollerskates enticed people into the BBQ. The BBQ will be held in the parking lot next to the hall and pre-orders are welcomed. For more information, please contact Mel Washburn at 234-9731 .

10- We did receive the grant Amy wrote from the National Trust For Historic Preservation's **Charles Evans Hughes Memorial Foundation**. We received \$400 to pay architect Laz Scangas for the work he is currently doing to establish current costs and scopes of work.

11- **Veteran Rolls of Honor on the Hall**. There is currently a list of World War I veterans, but there also used to be a wooden sign in front of the hall listing World War II veterans. It would be good to recognize them, as well as soldiers from all the subsequent wars. Joe De Freitas says Senator Bernie Sanders would do this for us. Dave Aiken and Wendell Wills were also mentioned as able to obtain the names.

12- **2nd Annual Silent Auction**. Mary Floyd would like to hold another silent auction this fall. Mary has received a message from Sandra Levesque saying she would like to help with planning and coordinating.

The auction needs an event – like the Home and Garden show last spring – to kick it off, and should end by Dec. 1st. Mary is soliciting ideas of what worked well and what did not, and she has already received 1 large and 3 smaller paintings from artist Anthony Shull who was living in an apartment on Main Street this winter. The paintings are currently displayed in the Brick Store windows, and other auction items may be able to be displayed there too if the building has not sold by fall.

Mary feels that having the auction run for several months and having the items on the Internet helped last time. This brought up the issue of the **Town Hall web site** which we would like to move onto the bethelvermont.com web site. There are issues of graphics (the hall site has many and the main site has none) and software compatibility to move information to the main site and to update it. *[Victoria later checked with Peter and Heidi Nikolaidis about this and Peter responded that we can have photographs on the bethelvermont.com site and he can probably move the currently Yahoo-based information over without much trouble. We did not discuss the at-least-twice-weekly updates to donated items during the auction.]*

So, everyone who reads these minutes is encouraged to think of items and services they might want to donate to the auction! Mary Floyd can be reached at 234-9515. Thank you!

The meeting adjourned at 8pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Victoria Weber April 30, 2008

TO: Bethel Town Hall folks
FROM: Victoria Weber
DATE: May 17, 2006
RE: **USDA Rural Development visit to Hall**

Jon-Michael Muise, the current southern Vermont manager from USDA Rural Development [jon.muise@vt.usda.gov, www.rurdev.usda.gov/vt, 802-254-9766 x 105, 28 Vernon St., Brattleboro, VT 05301] visited the Bethel Town Hall today. Amy Bergamo, Del Cloud, Don Hirsch and Victoria Weber met with Jon as he outlined what Rural Development offers.

USDA Rural Development is the current name for Farmers Home Administration. Their mission is to increase economic opportunity and the quality of life. They give 3 things:

- 1- Guaranteed loans through banks
- 2- Loans through them.
- 3- Grants. Max of \$50,000. Very competitive. They prefer to give for equipment rather than construction. There are more criteria, including federal requirements for open and fair competition, etc., with construction projects.

Municipalities are eligible, and the Hall is an essential community facility, and anchor downtown building, so the project is eligible.

It is possible to be a 'serial applicant' and apply several times. It is also possible to get a loan and a grant for equipment like chairs or lighting. If we ask for help serially, we will need completely separate bids and estimates for each portion, such as the roof.

Overall Jon was offering to be a partner and work with us as we move along and, to some degree, offer advice.

Loans

[I think the difference between the 2 types they offer has to do with whether a project is public or private, but I am not entirely clear on this.]

A loan requires a bond vote in the town. It is not hard to get the loan from USDA RD. The work is in making the case to the townspeople to vote to approve the bond. This requires 'buy in' and a sense of ownership by the citizens.

Jon's loans are competitive with the bond bank and he can do a bit better for interest, and have semi-annual interests so costs go down quicker. Currently Jon can offer a 4 3/8% fixed rate loan for 30 years. No application fee, although there are bond legal fees. It can be pre-paid down in part or in full to save the interest charges if we were to get donations. Paul Juliani (sp?) is involved with these loans. If we were to go to a bank to ask for a loan, mentioning that we are talking with USDA RD might get us a lower rate.

Overall the things Jon identified that we need are:

- 1- **Up-to-date cost estimates.** The Scangas #'s from 1999-2000 are very out of date in this climate. First we need to find what it will cost to update the numbers. Using Scangas will have the efficiency of his being familiar with the project. We need an estimator to do this bid update, not an architect. This should be our first step.
- 2- **Business plan to set out maintenance/operation plans and costs.** We need to be able to show on paper how we intend to maintain the building. This is critical for 'sustainiveness'.

We have an advantage, and a beginning point, in that the town has been maintaining the building, heating it, providing electricity and heat and insurance. To date this has been an outflow of money with no benefit back. The Business plan can show how we can make some money on some of the services, and provide community benefits in exchange for the cost of maintenance. So we will be getting something for our money once the building is in use again.

People to help with a Business Plan include the local economic development group, small business development center can help non-profits, and micro-business people community action.

- 3- A **strategy** of from whom we will get all the funding for the project, along with a **timeline** for activities related to obtaining the funding. We need to know who our partners are in a more specific way than we have so far.

Everyone wants to be sure we have all the money to finish the project. USDA RD (like just about every other grantor) wants to come in at the end and finish the project. No one wants to be the first funder, everyone wants to be the last. When queried about this, Jon said that USDA RD can make a formal 'commitment' that we could use when speaking with other funders and donors.

- 4- He also suggested that we **get all the potential funders together** – possibly at a buffet – and 'get everyone on the same page'. Everyone needs a clear picture of when, and how, the project will get done. Certain requirements, such as environmental reviews, that several funders require could be identified and could be shared, thus saving costs and time. Each donor and funder is a piece of the pie and we need all the pieces clearly lined up. We need to evaluate each source of money and combine all the information so that it is clear to all.

On the topic of preparing to market the project to the citizens prior to a bond vote, Jon suggested that 'people are visual and need to see things'; little successes breed more successes. Flowers, signs, getting people into the building for tours, feeding information to people on a regular basis.

Other groups we might talk with about their experiences with USDA RD and their efforts with the requirements outlined above, include: [note that Jon only works with So. Vermont]

- White River Valley Ambulance, who got a loan
- Jamaica got a \$4,500 grant for a ceiling
- Bellows Falls has a municipally owned movie theatre/opera house. Richard Ewald (sp?) is the development director.
- Rockingham
- Putney Fire Station, Chris Ryan (?)

Jon also offered to work together with Del on other potential town projects and equipment, possibly including municipal offices modifications or equipment.

It is possible for a non-profit group to lease part of the Hall and make a joint application with the town on aspects of the Hall.

Notes by Victoria Weber. 5-21-06