

Minutes of Bethel Town Hall Finance Committee May 29, 2008 at the Bethel Library at 7 p.m.

Present: Committee members Amy Bergamo, Janet Burnham, Mary Floyd, Chris Masters, Winslow Ayer, Eric Benson, plus Geneva Gaiko, Steve Day, Phil Mollitor, Victoria Weber, Davis Dimock, and Joe De Freitas.

Amy called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

1- **Knights of Columbus** Bethel/Rochester Council Grand Knight Phillip Mollitor and Deputy Grand Knight Steve Day presented Amy with a check for \$525 for the 1892 Fund, which is the local council's half of the annual statewide Knights of Columbus charity raffle. This represents about 125 donors, and that figure will be added to the number of donors to the 1892 Fund.

2- **More donations received:** Amy announced that she and Chris Masters had an information table at the Second Annual Bethel **Postcard & History Fair** on May 24th and received private donations of \$250.

[The day following this meeting Amy received an email from **Bond Auto** donating \$5,000 over 3 years to the 1892 Fund, and **Bethel Rotary's Chicken BBQ** is June 7th, with all proceeds going to the 1892 Fund.]

3- The **minutes** of the April 24, 2008 meeting were accepted by the committee members.

4- Amy described information received at a meeting with architect Laz Scangas, Dell Cloud and Joe De Freitas May 28th where Laz responded to the Select Board's request for **updated cost estimates and scope of work** that could be accomplished for \$600,000. That amount of money would do all "demolition, site work (= outside work), concrete, masonry, metal fabrications, woods and plastics and doors and windows" work, but would not include plumbing, mechanical, fire protection, electrical, thermal and moisture protection, finishes, specialties, equipment, furnishings, and conveying systems (lifts). This means all structural work would be done and the building would be stable and safe BUT people could still not utilize it.

5- **Windows.** Scangas recommends having new 'composite material' windows built which would not require maintenance every few years (at a cost of several thousand dollars according to Winslow) or semi-annual putting up and taking down of storm windows. There is some concern that this would make the windows inapplicable for historic preservation grants. Davis said other buildings are working out whether windows for historic buildings that are not made of wood fit within historic preservation guidelines. The newer windows might well be more energy efficient, and they would definitely save regular maintenance. However, wooden windows can last indefinitely if they are well maintained.

Rick Benson asked whether Laz had broken out an amount per window as the Askers would like to ask for donations of individual windows. Apparently this figure is not yet available.

6- The committee was frustrated to realize that for \$648,268 we still would not have insulation, plaster, a sprinkler system, plumbing fixtures or exit signs. As Davis said, the building would be **structurally sound, but in no way would it be up to code** nor would anyone be able to hold a public event in it.

The group discussed the long time the town has been working on the project, the fact that this is a good time to have construction work done and the advantages of a single construction project to get most of the work done. They also discussed the fact that grants need matching funds and a bond

could be used to pay these matching amounts, certainly the \$301,000 for the Leahy grant, but also smaller grants Amy or Dell may obtain.

Winslow made a motion that we come from a position of strength and bond for half the cost of the whole project, which, along with the \$301,000 grant, would allow us to do most of the work and actually begin to use the building.

In the discussion that followed Davis had the Estimated Debt Service Schedule tables Dell had obtained in February from the Vermont Municipal Bond Bank. They showed that, given Bethel's current tax rate where 1¢ on the tax rate currently raises \$19,579, a bond for \$500,000 would add 2 ¼ ¢ to the tax rate the first of 20 years, and it would go down each year thereafter. Davis also pointed out that despite a flat rate of increase by the Bethel school board in 2008, the change in the state common level of appraisal caused the school tax rate to go up over 10 ¢ this year and no one protested or voted against it. He also pointed out that we are now paying \$4,000 to \$6,000 per year in maintenance on the hall and we cannot use it.

Joe De Freitas encouraged the group to move ahead, saying that this project has been in the pipeline in Bethel for years and we need to get it done and to move on. Joe felt the key is to put a package of information together that the community will understand and accept. He felt that Jamal Kheiry would be an ideal person to do this and to help present the information.

Rick liked Winslow's idea and felt it was good logic to get half the money needed in hand, and that we can use bond money (but apparently not loan money) to match any grant. Also that in supporting a bond, a town demonstrates its support for a project with money, and that makes the project significantly more attractive to other grantors and to private donors as well. Both are more likely to give when it is clear a project will be completed. The \$600,000 bond would likely leverage the final quarter of the money we need to actually finish the project.

Winslow made the motion, and Mary Floyd seconded it. **The committee members voted unanimously "To ask the Select board to pursue bonding for the amount of \$600,000, which is half the amount needed to finish the town hall restoration project".**

The committee asks that the select board consider this motion at their June 9th meeting.

7- Educating people. Some concern was expressed that we have learned that people do not know that the numbers in the hall window represent the number of donations to the 1892 Campaign (now at 394 with the Knights' donations), and that they will need to be educated about tax implications for a bond vote. Janet will create a thermometer type sign showing amount of money raised to post on the hall featuring the tower, and we will also begin to post more information on the door and with the numbers in the window. We will ask Sandy Levesque and Jamal Kheiry if they will help us reach out to citizens, many of whom we are beginning to realize do not read the *Herald* newspaper.

The meeting adjourned at 8:07.