

Minutes of Bethel Town Hall Finance Committee August 31, 2008 at the Bethel Library at 7 p.m.

Present: Committee members Amy Bergamo, Janet Burnham, Mary Floyd, Chris Masters, Eric Benson and Paul Feeney, plus Geneva Gaiko, Victoria Weber, Davis Dimock, and Joe De Freitas.

[NOTE: Reports from Historic Preservationist and architect delayed. The day after this meeting Amy spoke with Lyssa Papazinan and was told she does not believe her report to be due until mid-October (not 2 weeks after the site visit), and she is waiting for information from Laz Scangas. If Laz is seriously delayed, we may not be able to hold the bond vote on November 4th as this meeting decided. As of Sept. 5rd, Dell had still not been able to reach Laz. -- VW]

Janet Burnham is researching **architect George Guernsey** and brought photographs of 48 of his buildings. They include churches, business blocks, halls, libraries, homes, and each is interesting and different from the others. We think of the look of Vermont as being mostly in the landscape of woods and hills and fields, but our unique built landscape is a major part of the state and Guernsey is as important as any other individual for making Vermont look the way it does.

Amy called the meeting to order at 7:00. The committee members present approved the July 31, 2008 minutes as written.

1- **'Other Venues' chart and information.** Victoria reported on the chart of procedural and management information that she had gathered from interviewing people connected with 13 other halls similar to ours. Joe had asked that the group use this information to create a draft set of management suggestions for the selectboard to react to. Since the chart was disseminated on August 16th, Victoria had also talked with Vermont Technical College and the White Church in Bethel. The most important parts of their information are attached as "part 2" of the *Other Venues* chart. Also attached is a pdf if VTC Conference Facilities fees.

2- **Bond issue.** Davis reported that Dell Cloud has confirmed that the hall and roads issues will be separate questions. Dell also said that if a large hall bond vote fails, the selectboard could re-warn for a \$301,000 vote to at least match the Save America's Treasures grant.

Following the request at the last meeting, Amy had contacted **Jamal Kheiry** and he had met with Amy, Davis and Victoria to gather information about the hall restoration issues. He has just emailed a draft Communications Plan for Amy to react to.

Amy reported on several of Jamal's impressions and suggestions:

- We should research how community centers affect towns economically and bring in people to live in the town. Good data on this topic would help convince some voters.
- Jamal is interested in bringing more people not only to visit Bethel, but also to live here. More children would help lower our school taxes.
- Jamal is concerned that a bond vote of \$1 million or more would not pass.
- In his dealings in town the hall restoration is just not an issue, it is not on people's radar. We need to change that and make it an inevitability in their minds.

In order to hold the bond vote, we first **need to know from Laz the cost of all the work** that is necessary in order to get people into the building and using it. That is our goal. The people who were on the walk-through site visit with Laz and engineers on July 24th (approximately) understood that Laz and Lyssa would have information back to the town in about 2 weeks. Since 5 weeks have

passed, and expecting the information to be forthcoming, **the group decided to go for holding the bond vote on federal Election Day on November 4th**. This will require warning it very soon. Much of the rest of the meeting consisted on deciding what information to gather to inform voters, and how to reach them.

There was some discussion on how much we want to accomplish now. Joe wants the hall to be complete. Amy is interested in making it usable to the citizens. Davis quoted Michael Mills who said that once people can get inside it will be easier for them to buy in. We very much want to get to the point where people can safely be inside and use the hall. The basement would be usable for some purposes as it will be finished off, but not yet divided. Just how to divide it has not been agreed upon. The Federal Historic Preservation Standards for Rehabilitation state that new construction is not governed by historic preservation standards, as long as it can be removed in the future, leaving the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment unimpaired.

3- Getting Information to the voters.

- **Paul agreed to create a powerpoint** show to present to town groups. **Victoria will supply him with photographs**. We listed Bethel groups who Paul might be able to present to: Rotary, Masons, Knights of Columbus, the school – CAKE, the Boosters and - if we supplied a flyer, it could be sent home with the kids as once a week they bring home various papers. Also the BBA, Republican and Democratic groups, the Historical Society, Unity Circle, and the Catholic Daughters.
- **Davis will help write an article for the Herald**, which Chris Costanzo has offered to write. It will be a review and history of the building and the project. This master article will then be reprinted as a flyer and distributed via mail, left in businesses and sent home with school children. *[NOTE: the town hall funds, which are town funds, cannot be used to persuade people of one side or another of a bond vote, although an informational packet would probably be alright.]*
- **Davis will calculate the tax rate** of the different potential bond amounts (pending info from Laz so we know how much to ask for), and the **extra dollars that the bond would cost owners of properties** valued at \$100,000, \$200,000 and \$300,000.
- Another way to get information out will be through the **web site**, which has recently been taken down. **Davis will talk with Heidi** about getting town hall information up as part of the Bethelvermont.com web site.
- One of Jamal Kheiry's points was that we need answers to negative, or 'tough' questions available to us as a group, although not openly disseminated. Jamal had listed 7 such questions. **Davis agreed to write these up** and the group brainstormed answers.
- There will be an official informational meeting as part of the statute-driven procedure for having a bond vote. We would like to run an additional, more **informal, meeting as well**. Perhaps with food like ice cream.

4- Amy reported that her investigation of the **1772 Foundation** found that they only grant funds to 401(3) (c) non-profit organizations, and not municipalities like us. However, if in the future a non-profit rented space inside the hall, it might be eligible for a 1772 Foundation grant.

5- **Staffing the hall**. We did not draft an entire management plan, but Dell Cloud had conveyed some information on key issues of fees and staffing. Dell suggested that municipality affairs, like board meetings, be free, that Bethel citizens get reduced rates and that there be a set rate for others.

Dell believes town office employees can schedule the hall, as they now do the Peavine Park and other town properties. The main tasks beyond that will be: walking renters through the building before their events, checking on the condition afterwards to see whether they will get their deposit back, cleaning what renters do not clean, general oversight of mechanical systems.

Management / Oversight Board. Mary Floyd suggested that Bethel use the model that Royalton used until recently, and that Selectwoman Peg Tromley suggested we try to use. That would be a board made up of people from different groups who used the hall. Each group would send a representative and the selectboard and town administrative staff would also be included. A few unaffiliated interested persons could also be included, especially if they were willing to do some of the walk-through work at the hall.

This Oversight/Management Board would report to the Selectboard for important issues, but would save them from having to make every little decision.

If these two staffing modes were used, the Town would not incur staffing costs, thus saving a considerable amount of money for citizens.

6- Victoria reported on her communications with Sylvia Burroughs of the **Whitcomb class of 1956**. The class had challenged themselves to make donations to the **1892 Fund** at the annual Whitcomb Alumni Banquet in May. So far 50% have made donations, and their deadline is early September. Victoria had made note cards for Sylvia to use which feature the restored tower against a blue sky on one side and the restored curtain on the other.

7- The group agreed that as soon as we have figures from Laz relating to the actual amount of the bond vote, and/or we need to finish up our promotional materials, we will meet again – hopefully before September 25th.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25pm.

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