

Town Hall Blue Ribbon Committee
Minutes

Tuesday, July 14, 2015
Flynn Building, Silva Room, 278 Old Sudbury Road

Vice Chairman Howard Gold called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

In attendance were Vice Chairman, Howard Gold; Susan Asbedian-Ciaffi; Bill Johnson; Sally Hild; Christine Hogan; Frank Riepe; and Joe Sziabowski. Absent was Mike Melnick. Staff in attendance were: Combined Facilities Director Jim Kelly and Assistant Planner Jim Kupfer. Also in attendance were Peggy Fredrickson, Stewart Hoover, and Lee Swanson of the Sudbury Historical Society.

Mr. Gold asked if there were any changes to the minutes from the last meeting on June 29, 2015. With the exception of one minor correction the minutes were approved as amended.

Lee Swanson, Town Historian and Historian for the Sudbury Historical Society then spoke about his recollections and understanding of the Town Hall's history. He explained that his father was responsible for hiring architect Charles Way to build the Town Hall in the 1930s. Mr. Swanson said that Charles Way had a lot of pressure put on him to build the town hall as Sudbury had more famous, or prominent, architects residing here such as Ralph Adams Cram and Joseph Everett Chandler who were also his peers. Mr. Swanson said that he could not, however, find any records in Sudbury Town Reports about Way's other work in Sudbury. He said that Mr. Way was not overly inventive. For example, he noted that there is a lot of wasted space in the attic and two wings. Mr. Swanson felt that it was a successful building but noted that Mr. Way had to make a lot of cutbacks in its making due to cost.

Mr. Swanson said that there is a memorial box located in the Town Hall's portico steps under the bronze town seal. He said that the Bradshaw sisters, past Sudbury residents, confirmed that the capsule is comprised of a lead box with paper artifacts enclosed. Mr. Swanson then described the interesting wrought iron lantern that hangs in the portico and was given to the town in 1914 by the Goodman Society. "G.S." appears in the ironwork on one side. The lantern was made by a prominent blacksmith, Samuel Yellen*, who created a lot of work for Cram at Cram's chapel on Concord Road. He said that the lantern needs restoration. He explained that there appear to be no pictures of the interior of the original town hall that burned, but suggested that the portico lantern may have been in the back of the original town hall. He said that the brass lighting, (hanging lights and sconces) in the current Town Hall was designed by Charles Way. He described interior faux painting that looks like pine wood. Mr. Swanson suggested that the first floor meeting room should be named the "supper room" as it was called in the 1930's.

Mr. Gold asked Mr. Swanson to explain what separates an older building worth keeping from one that should be replaced. Mr. Swanson answered that a building worth keeping is one that creates an emotional connection. He said that the building is perhaps not remarkable but it was built to look like the original wooden Town Hall building and it has an aesthetic that is not easily reproduced today due to cost. He added that some of the most important action that happens at Town Hall happens on the Town Hall steps. The Committee thanked Mr. Swanson for his comments and thoughts.

Frank Riepe passed out sketches he had worked on for a renovated Town Hall. He advocated for restoring the existing functions but creating necessary town department spaces by moving the Flynn staff into an enlarged town hall. His sketches included an addition at the back of the existing Town Hall and below in the south parking lot. Parking would not be lost and the tree to the south of town hall would be saved. The main roof ridge of the original building would be extended and a new façade on the east side would be built with a gable that echoes the west side. He envisioned six elevator stops which would solve access problems. There would be the same brick work, entablature, and design to create a seamless addition for cohesiveness. Windows would all be replaced and could match. The primary entrance would be from the back of Town Hall from the parking lot and would include a handicapped access. He mentioned Sudbury architect Kaffee Kang who has done renovations of older town halls. In talking with her she said that Westford's town hall uses signage for the non-accessible entrances that are "staff-only". And in Tewksbury she was able to obtain a variance from the architectural review board to preserve non-accessible entrances. As long as the building provides full access somewhere with a new entrance then the original could be maintained.

The Committee agreed to add Mr. Riepe's plan as an additional option for discussion on the option list.

Ms. Ciaffi asked about meeting space. A small conference room like the Flynn's Silva Room may need to be included. She wondered whether the Clerk's Office had to be in the front of the building where it is now. Mr. Riepe said that his renderings preserve the meeting space because the lower meeting room is currently the largest meeting space available in town used for voting. With meeting space upstairs there may duplication, however. Mr. Riepe discussed the fact that the front entrance is not useful for casual use but would be for ceremonial use. The Town Clerk needs to stay near the vault. Mr. Sziabowski said that based on where the parking is and the fact that most people would be driving to the building, visitors would be coming from the parking area to enter.

Ms. Hogan questioned the number of bathrooms required on each floor and commented on the roof angles due to upkeep. Mr. Kelly suggested that a flat roof may be out of place for the structure and perhaps the section should not have a third floor. Mr. Riepe said that a third floor was proposed in one of the studies but having it would depend upon departmental needs. He wanted to build up not out. Mr. Kelly asked if Mr. Riepe programmed square footage into the plans. Mr. Riepe said that he used the dimensions of previous study and his sense of volume. The sketches are preliminary, however.

Mr. Gold was troubled that the building plans appear to be designed around a vault and questioned if that was too limiting.

Mr. Sziabowski liked the idea of preserving the upstairs meeting hall and concentrating the offices in the back of the site, but he wondered if people would gravitate toward upstairs. He understood the symbolic uses of the building but questioned whether the symbolism was enough to justify the amount of work that would be needed. He also wondered if the plans would get the support of the town.

Mr. Riepe noted that any plans that involved demolition would require approval from the Historic Districts Commission.

Mr. Johnson brought in a window model to show what could be done for first-floor windows so that all would not need replacing outright. He talked about what sort of window bracing was necessary to accommodate seismic issues. Mr. Johnson said that his goal is to preserve the exterior character and have the town staff fit in based on desired square footage.

Option number three on the Committee's matrix simply renovates existing space. There was a discussion about how that does not necessarily meet the committee's goals. Another site would be required for office space. Mr. Kelly said that if the town wants to preserve town hall as is with a meeting room, renovate the Town Clerk's offices, create an auditorium, and bring the building up to code it would cost \$5.7 million but could be largely CPA funded. He reminded the group that space needs are determined by the Fairbank Center and the need to find space for the school department. There was a discussion about whether an addition at Nixon would be possible.

Discussion ensued about support for renovation for an auditorium and adequate staff needs met by the Flynn Building, and parking and septic issues in the town center. Questions arose about whether an addition at Nixon plus a renovation at Town Hall may be more expensive in the long run than other options.

It was brought up that Town Hall was never considered to be an office building and nowadays would be expensive to make it so.

Mr. Gold said that ideally any renovation would provide the utility of new building but with the character of the old building. The committee then discussed keeping the portico and rebuilding the back of Town Hall.

Mr. Kelly said that the columns themselves are not in the best condition since they are made of wood planks. Mr. Gold said that he would like to propose to the town a product that is forward thinking and solves all space problems.

The committee then discussed which of the buildings in town has the more urgent need. Mr. Kelly opined that perhaps the Fairbanks building is the most urgent. Town Hall's heating system is problematic and the pipes and slabs are deteriorating but would not be significantly more different in a year. A year difference at Fairbanks would perhaps be more critical due to the daily use Fairbanks has. He said that Nixon could serve a purpose in housing SPS staff.

It was decided that the Town Hall Committee would learn more about what is happening with the Fairbanks project as its own discussion moves forward. The Fairbanks project as proposed is around \$30 million.

The next meeting of the Town Hall Blue Ribbon Committee was scheduled for Thursday, July 30, 2015 at the DPW Conference Room. Upon a motion made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

(Secretary's note: visit www.samuelyellin.com to learn more about Samuel Yellin. The Forge is still in existence today.)