

Town Hall Options Committee
Final report

November 6, 2008

RECOMMENDATION

The Town Hall Options Committee recommends the Board of Selectmen take the following actions:

- Give further consideration to the concept of constructing **new town offices at the Community Center/ Electric Plant land (the Lehner Street complex)** and adjoining lands requiring purchase. This effort also requires consideration of the Brewster Memorial Hall (BMH) re-use committee report of October 16, 2008, regarding use of BMH other than by the town.
- Give further consideration to the concept of a **reduced scope/ lower cost renovation/ restoration of BMH** based on the original design work of McGinley, Kalsow and Associates. 100
- As an interim measure, initiate actions for **immediate, essential maintenance and repairs on BMH** to be implemented in 2009 as a Warrant Article.

SYNOPSIS

This report to the Wolfeboro Board of Selectmen from the Town Hall Options Committee presents two primary options for attaining a modern, safe town hall and office space, to the selectmen for further study. These options are:

- Build a new town hall at the location of the present Town Community Center and former Electric Power station, plus some adjoining property, on Lehner St. at a cost of approximately \$3 million.
- Carry out a reconstruction of the existing Brewster Memorial Hall (BMH), but at a substantially reduced scope of work and for significantly less (\$3.0 million), than the cost of the 2008 Warrant Article proposal (\$6.7 million).

Unfortunately, without the resources or funds to develop sound conceptual designs and cost estimates to accurately evaluate these two proposals, uncertainties on both remain. A final decision must be based on better design concepts and better cost estimates than are currently available. The committee recommends that the selectmen better quantify both of these options prior to selecting one option for execution.

Retention of the National Historic Registered BMH, built in 1896, is believed to be a major factor in maintaining the Wolfeboro image as "The Oldest Summer Resort In America" and reinforces efforts to maintain Wolfeboro's wide spread reputation as an attractive tourist destination.

Prior to any final decision to permanently move town offices from BMH to any other location, a fiscally sound plan / proposal for long term use of BMH must be finalized. Failing this, the town will be faced with the burden of an inherently valuable, historic town focal point sitting abandoned in its midst. The importance of this step can not be overstated.

The Town Hall Options Committee appointed a BMH re-use subcommittee to study the issue of assessing other possible uses of the building, should the building be vacated. (See attached report)

Demolition of Brewster Hall was not considered to be an option by this committee.

BMH INTERIM MEASURE

At this time, in addition to national economic uncertainty, the voters of Wolfeboro are facing an array of potential solutions to the town hall matter. With such conflicting choices it is problematic that any one option would gather the necessary 60% support from voters. Clearly, the Board of Selectmen needs to take the necessary time to prepare the voters for a long-term solution that would best serve the "Oldest Summer Resort in America" for generations to come and not rush to judgment.

In the meanwhile, the BOS should give serious consideration to carrying out essential maintenance and repairs and ADA upgrades right now. In so doing this will mitigate the ongoing deterioration of the building and preclude a hurried final decision.

FINAL REPORT OF THE TOWN HALL OPTIONS COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION:

By Wolfeboro Board of Selectmen (BOS) vote of May 14, 2008, the Town Hall Options Committee (THOC) was appointed:

The Town Hall Options Committee is a Selectmen-appointed advisory Committee. Its mission is to conduct a thorough examination and evaluation of all the options available to the Town to achieve the goal of attaining modern, safe, cost-effective, energy-efficient, ADA-compliant Town Offices to accommodate the needs of the Town Departments and the public. In the event Brewster Memorial Hall is not selected as an option, a reallocation plan for the property (land & building) will be developed.

The following Wolfeboro residents were appointed to that committee:

- Peter Alden
- Judy Breuninger
- Joyce Davis, Vice-chairman
- Richard Hamilton
- Alan Harding
- Allan Kasiewicz
- Linda Murray, Chairman and Board of Selectmen Representative
Suzanne Ryan
Dave Senecal, Board of Selectmen Representative
- Robert Smart
Richard Jason Smith
- Fred Stephens

During the period of May 22, 2008 through November 6, 2008, the committee met and discussed a wide range of options to meet the needs of the town.

The Town Hall Options Committee appointed five subcommittees:

- The Brewster Memorial Hall Subcommittee provided the Town Hall Options Committee with six options for possible repair/renovation and other uses of the building. (See report attached)
- The Land Subcommittee found nineteen parcels of land, which might be used, as a possible new location for the Town Offices. (See two attached reports of 8/17/2008 and 10/1/2008)
- The Lehner Street Complex Subcommittee investigated possible parcels of land and buildings surrounding the Town's Electric Building and Community Center. (See attached report)
- The Building Subcommittee evaluated and reviewed town owned buildings as to possible use for the Town Offices. (See attached report)
- The Re-use Subcommittee identified community members to help with the inquiry into possible re-uses for BMH. (See attached report)

Principal options included:

- **Resubmit the March 2008 BMH reconstruction proposal** to the voters for approval, but with more and better justification.
- **Purchase another, existing in-town building**, such as the Wicker's Building (off Rte 109A), or the Community Bank and Trust Administration Office building (on Varney Road).
- **Build a new Town Hall building** either on property that is already owned by the town or on land that might be purchased for this purpose.
- Consider a **significantly reduced scope/lower cost version of the March 2008 BMH proposal**.

In addition, as an interim measure, the committee recommends that the selectmen carry out:

A minimal maintenance / repair of BMH (costing up to \$750,000) to prevent further deterioration of the building, while renovation and / or relocation options are further studied and until the outlook for voter approval of a sound final proposal improves. The Board of Selectmen must establish priorities of repairs needed.

OPTION DETAILS

The advantages and disadvantages of each town hall option were examined. The principal, but not necessarily only, factors behind each can be summarized as follows:

Option I. Resubmit March 2008 proposal:

This would ask the voters to reconsider the 2008 proposal to carry out major reconstruction of BMH for continued use by the town. Estimated cost \$6.7 million (2008 dollars).

Advantages:

- Over the long term, this is most likely the lowest cost option to fully restore BMH and provide for the long-term needs of the Town.
- This option does retain Historic BMH as the center of Town operations in best accord with the Wolfeboro Master Plan. This advantage is discussed more fully in later options.
- By total restoration of the BMH, the Town does gain ample space for the long-term needs of the town, as well as restoration of the historic auditorium.

Disadvantages:

- The town voters soundly rejected the (895 yes 1,120 no) 2008 Warrant Article.
- Even without the costs of a new town hall proposal, property tax and utility bills are expected to increase significantly in the near term as the result of a number of other high priority and very expensive infrastructure repairs already authorized (sewer system, water system, roads, etc.)
- The uncertain national economic outlook at the current time makes it very doubtful that the taxpayers would opt for such an expensive proposal, even with better justification.

THOC Recommendation:

The outlook for voter approval of this high up-front cost option is considered too remote for further consideration at this time.

Option II Purchase another, existing in-town building, for conversion into a Town Hall. Estimated cost \$2.5 million.

While a number of other buildings were considered (see App. ___), the most promising were:

- The Wickers Building- off Rte 109A
- The Community Bank and Trust Administration Building on Varney Road.

Advantages:

Existing buildings could be converted and adapted to town hall use faster than new construction. Existing buildings could be more energy efficient than BMH, although perhaps not as efficient as a new building.

Disadvantages:

As defined by the Bridge in the Town's center, none have close proximity to the town center. In time, such a move, made for short-term reasons, could be seriously questioned by future generations of town planners.

- Both buildings lack the long-term permanency of the existing brick and concrete BMH.
- The Wicker's building in particular is situated well off traveled roads in an industrial park and would offer none of the visual impact and source of pride that communities expect of a Town Hall.
- The industrial nature and layout of the 23,000 square foot Wicker's Building are not conducive to use as a town hall and could easily lead to extraneous and non-essential use of excess space by non-essential functions at substantial operating cost to taxpayers.
- As cautioned in the opening synopsis, prior to vacating BMH, the Town must find another suitable long-term use for the building. Before any use of BMH other than by the town takes place, professional guidance must be obtained for an appraisal of the building, to identify clear deed restrictions (especially on the facade), and to identify qualified buyer(s). A Town Meeting vote for re-use is mandatory.

THOC Recommendation:

- Without significant advantages over other options, action on these proposals was deferred until other more desirable options were ruled out.

Option III Build a new Town Hall at a new site at the Lehner Street Complex site, either on land already owned by the town or on land that could be purchased. Estimated costs: \$2.5 million range.

While a number of sites were considered (see app. A) the most promising sites were:

- Community Center / Power House-Lehner St. complex
- Electric Dept. land-Middleton Rd
- Town Forest land- Rte 28
- South Main Street-near library, police and fire depts.

The Lehner Street Complex site, which includes the Electric Powerhouse building, Community Center and adjoining property, is considered a viable option.

Advantages:

- New building would meet all current building and ADA codes, and have latest energy saving measures, i.e. a "green building".
- New construction would not be disruptive to ongoing town hall operations during construction.
- Moving the Town Hall to Lehner St. could provide additional stimulus to the neighborhood.
- Land purchase would provide additional parking.

Disadvantages:

While reasonably close to the town center, for the foreseeable future, a Lehner Street location will remain out of sight and any Town Hall would not have the positive visual impact for the town that the current BMH commands.

- Buildings presently proposed and costed for this proposal would not have the virtually unlimited life of BMH.
- The location would add to Lehner Street traffic problems, especially at the already very hazardous intersection at Center Street.
- The Historic Electric Plant (WPA architecture) and/or Community Center may need to be demolished.
- Private property will need to be purchased.
- Some of the existing substation property will need to be retained by the Electric Department (0.44 acres).
- As cautioned in the opening synopsis and option II, prior to vacating BMH, the Town must find another suitable long-term use for the building. Such efforts could be very time consuming by the town, with no assurance that they would be successful.

Before any use of BMH other than by the town takes place, professional guidance must be obtained for an appraisal of the building, to identify clear deed restrictions (especially on the facade), and to identify qualified buyer(s). A Town Meeting vote for re-use is mandatory.

Execution of this proposal would require voter approval for five or more Warrant Articles for demotion of town buildings, land purchases, and appropriation of construction funding.

The **Middleton Road Electric Dept. land** and **Town Forest** were considered too far from downtown for serious consideration at this time. With building construction costs being significantly higher than land, a new building could be built in close proximity to downtown for only a small amount more than the cost of building some distance from downtown. Not recommended.

The **South Main Street location** adjoining the Library and Police / Fire Complex does offer much promise as a desirable location for a Municipal Complex of buildings. The owners of the three parcels south of the library were contacted and asked if they would be willing to sell their land and buildings to the Town. This location was dropped, since there were not three willing sellers.

THOC Recommendation:

If the town is reasonably assured that it could in fact effect another suitable use for BMH, then, and only then, the BOS should consider carrying out a conceptual design / cost estimate for the Community Center / Electric Power Plant (plus adjoining land) for realistic comparison to a proposal for the retention of Brewster Hall.

Option IV Reduced scope/lower cost renovation of BMH

Carry out renovations/restorations to approximately 12,000 SF of BMH (previous plan was 21,673) bringing the building into compliance with today's codes and ADA requirements. This will more than meet the needs of the town's Town Hall space requirements. Estimated cost \$ 3 million.

Work would include repair and renewal of the deteriorating building exterior, completion of interior finishes, provide an elevator, and updating of the building's utility systems to include sprinklers, safety issues, electrical, plumbing and HVAC.

Areas to be renovated include the 1st floor of the main building and annex and portions of the main building 2nd floor. A large (approximately 100 person) conference room will be provided on the 1st floor of the annex. The 2nd floor of the annex and the basement of the main building are not to be renovated. At this time a portion of the old auditorium will be used for office space, which could easily be removed. If in the future there is a need or desire to restore the auditorium, it will be possible.

Advantages:

- For significantly less than the cost of the original proposed renovations, the town offices would remain in town owned Historic BMH, at its present convenient down-town Main Street location in accordance with the Town Master Plan, and carry out all essential functions with some room for expansion. Historic BMH with its unique architecture would remain the Town Hall.
- With approximately 71% of voters supporting the purchase of the BMH for \$1.00 in March 2004 (yes 1037 to 299 no) and 67% voting to support the design efforts to rebuild BMH in March 2007 (1500 yes to 762 no), there appears to be strong voter support for retaining Town operations at their present location, within BMH.
- With modifications to bring it into compliance with today's building codes, the existing BMH, with its heavy brick and concrete construction, has been found by engineers to be structurally sound and, with reasonable maintenance, could continue in service for another hundred or more years, virtually indefinitely.
- Cost of reconstructing the present BMH, but on a reduced scale, would be approximately the same total cost of constructing a new town hall at another location.
- Work could be phased over a number of years to minimize near term costs and spread cost over a longer time frame.
- Most of the effort that went into the recent reconstruction design will be salvaged.
- When, and if, the Town feels that it is desired, and funds (public or private) are available, the option remains for later relocation of some town operations, possibly Public Works or Planning to other sites within the town, and restoration of the BMH Auditorium.
- Retaining the legendary Historic BMH, could make the Town eligible for historic grant funds from the state, federal government, or private benefactors, such as The Friends of Wolfeboro Town Hall, reducing the net

cost to taxpayers.

- As noted in the Synopsis, continued use as a Town Hall removes the concerns that would be inherent in selling or leasing the building to another public or private entity. The town would be assured that BMH and Main Street would retain its historic appearance.

Disadvantages:

- Present conceptual ideas for reconstruction need to be refined to assure that BMH would be brought into compliance with today's building codes, make it ADA compliant, and make it reasonably energy efficient. Energy efficiencies, while doable, would be more difficult than new construction.
- A number of secondary issues need resolution regarding details of a reduced scope reconstruction and phasing of town operations, including employee relocation, during reconstruction.
- Almost all existing basement / cellar spaces, other than utilities, would remain in their current unusable state. Renovation of these spaces at a later time, while doable, would be expensive.
- Reconstructing the existing building will be disruptive to occupants and users during reconstruction, whether they remain in the building or relocate temporarily.
- Phasing over a period of time will be costly.

THOC Recommendation:

This option should be considered by the BOS and refined through a conceptual design / cost estimate for due consideration against the Community Center / Lehner Street complex proposal.

INTERIM MEASURE:

Carry out essential minimal maintenance and repair to the existing Brewster Memorial Hall.

In 2009 the Board of Selectmen should carry out a program to complete critical items of deferred maintenance and repair, as well as most urgent ADA necessities to BMH so as to prevent further deterioration of the building and minimize potential for legal action against the town. Work to include:

- Repairing present rain leaks and remove temporary drains
- Provide ADA access to key public areas
- Provide ADA toilet facility on main floor
- Repair any hazardous situations

Estimated cost of \$500,000 to \$750,000.

Advantages:

The short term cost impact of this proposal would have less impact on near term tax bills than other options. It would help "buy time" while plans for long term use of BMH are finalized.

- This effort would be directly supportive of any future use of BMH by the Town or others, and put a prompt stop to ongoing leaks and deterioration while efforts continue to finalize long term plans for the building.
- All work to be performed would be consistent with proposals for longer-term use of BMH, either by the town or other entities. If the BMH is not used by the town, this work would make the building much more

- attractive to prospective users and/or buyers; costs would likely be recouped.
- With proper explanation of longer term savings, this interim measure could stand a higher chance of present day support by voters than more expensive options involving high costs the near term.

Disadvantages:

None

THOC Recommendation:

This option should be considered for inclusion in the very near term (2009 Warrant Article) while long term solutions to the town hall issue continue to be developed and until the outlook for voter approval of a sound final proposal can be assured. It could be a first step to the long-term resolution for the town hall issue and may reduce the later cost of any proposed renovations.

ADDENDA:

The following notes, memos, and letters, were prepared during the course of this study or were submitted by individual committee members in support of this report and are appended.

Appendix __: Richard Hamilton e-mail-Town Hall Advantage and Disadvantage List 10/02/08

Appendix __: Judy Breuninger notes-Town Hall 10/08

Appendix __: Joyce Davis memo of October 7, 2008

Appendix __: Linda Murray e-mail-RE: Town Hall rough October 7,2008

Appendix __: Alan Harding e-mail-Preliminary Rough Draft-10/28/2008

-See text and Linda 07 pages 2 and 3-