

Belmont Town Facility Strategy Committee Meeting – August 22, 2017

Attendees: Tom Garfield, Donna Hepp, Carmen Lorentz, Pret Tuthill, Woody Fogg and Bob Ferguson

Next proposed meeting: Tuesday, September 19th at 6pm Corner Mtg House 1st Flr

Meeting Notes:

Committee approved Charter for Belmont Town Facility Strategy Committee.

There was a brief discussion of the August 4th building tour and discussion about the value of sharing insights gained by taking photos of some facility challenges we found such as cramped police dispatch center and office space, marginal office space in Town Hall basement and safety and accessibility challenges. Pret Tuthill offered to take photos that could be shared as slides during Public Open House.

Donna Hepp shared update on public comments during Old Home Day at our Information Table. We now have some additional contacts for our public outreach updates. Everyone we talked with thought it was a good idea to take a big picture look at all the town building needs and form a strategy for future investment and use. Most were interested in learning more about specific buildings and taking a building tour. Several expressed concern about retaining the historic character of the Village and praised recent work on Main Street and the Band Stand. Three expressed interest in the Bank Building or another facility for the Recreation Department. One offered a full alternative including fixing up the second floor of Town Hall, moving the Police Department to the Bank Building and keeping costs down.

Bob Ferguson, a contractor and member of the Town's 2013 Appraisal Committee provided insights and answered questions about structural conditions and considerations for future use of Town buildings. We also discussed the Gale School status and condition. Woody Fogg asked that we also include the Gale School in our considerations. Committee members indicated that our focus is on Town-owned buildings but we would discuss this issue with the Selectmen.

The Committee agreed that a good next step was to host a public Open House on Town Buildings at Belmont High School on October 11th from 4-7:30pm to share information about all major Town buildings, their challenges and opportunities. The general idea was to have an Open House with an information table for each of the major Town buildings and someone available to answer questions. There would also be a table for the Facility Strategy Committee. Then during the evening, there would be a short update with slides about Town buildings, their challenges and opportunities and some initial alternative ideas for future use and improvements to Town buildings. These alternative concepts would be very general. The idea is to show a simple range of concepts to get the public discussion started. Prior to the Open House, the Committee would share the format and alternative concepts with the BOS for their feedback. We agreed that the key is keep the concepts preliminary so there's no perception that the decisions have already been made. The Committee wants to build a range of options with the assistance of the BOS and community. Donna offered to develop some "straw" concepts for the Committee to discuss at the next meeting, and reserve the High School Cafeteria for October 11th. Donna also offered to update Sonny Patten, our BOS representative on this and ask about whether to include the Gale School in the Open House and our work.

The Committee discussed next steps after the Open House. One idea was that we could use the Open House feedback to further refine options and get them back to the BOS and public for feedback. We also agreed that once refined, the Facility Strategy options would need cost estimates so these could be used to further inform the discussion. We talked about needing assistance from a commercial realtor to get a estimated value of some of the major buildings like the Belmont Mill, Town Hall and the Bank Building. Pret Tuthill offered to make some contacts to see if we could get a firm in the area to assist us. A question also arose after the meeting about whether the Town would help us advertise the Open House in local papers.

We agreed upon Sept. 19th for our next meeting.