

Town Hall Study Committee:

The chairman stated the Board wanted an opportunity create a Town Hall Advisory Committee and meet with and appoint people interested in serving on the committee prior to the project start. The Board wished to discuss the purpose of the committee and make sure that it included input from the Board as well as a cross section of interest/skills including construction background and knowledge on the space/other needs of the staff/services at the town hall. It was important to include the conclusions of the previous study. She was concerned about the committee's first act being to investigate the possibility of relocating/using the Gale School because she did not feel it would be appropriate to meet the needs of the community as a town hall. She referred to the difficulty/burden/expense the Town assumes with the reconstruction for everyday use of historic properties such as the Mill property. She stated the Board of Selectmen had looked at a new building, which was withdrawn from the warrant, but she cautioned that the town couldn't always be put on hold for the needs of the schools.

Mr. Knowlton explained that as a member of the budget committee he had voted against the new town hall on this year's budget. He subsequently regretted his vote to deny because he felt it was a knee-jerk reaction to having been surprised by the proposal. He felt that it was too much money on too short notice. He had been unaware that the process of using a building needs committee to evaluate and recommend on all other town buildings was not going to be used on this project. But something does need to be done. After the vote to deny, he contacted D. McLelland and asked to be placed on the building committee if there was going to be one. D. McLelland stated there would be a committee formed and Mr. Knowlton could chair it. At that meeting Norma Patten and Ken Ellis who also voted against a new town hall asked to participate. Mr. Knowlton also spoke to Mr. Morse, Jeff Marden who has been instrumental in many projects and Ms. Frawley based on her knowledge of grant opportunities and interest in revitalizing the village. It was not his intention that others not be included. It is an open committee and others are welcome. He referred to correspondence between himself and Mr. McLelland and stated he had not understood that the Board wanted to meet with and appoint the committee members prior to proceeding.

Mr. Morse noted that he had only casually asked the school district about their willingness to let the Town have the Gale School. He said they were extremely willing to offer it to the Town. He followed that up with a call to the SAU to obtain information from them on a recent building study they had completed. He stated he wanted the study to be by a public committee and that he would offer to produce and distribute minutes of all of the meetings and activities of the group. They want to take a real CIP attitude towards the project with a square footage analysis and needs assessment. New town halls can be very vanilla; Belmont's should have some character.

The chairman noted that the space needs had been identified in the previous study. Mr. Knowlton noted that the conclusions of the previous study as to space needs would be used. He had already referred to that in his letter to the Board. They simply want to fully explore all alternatives and available options and give the staff something because \$2.3 million wasn't supported. Is there anything better and cheaper available?

R. Caldwell noted that the possibility of using the Gale School as a community center was researched 10 years ago and found not to be feasible. This isn't a new issue. The need for/study of a new town hall began in the 1970s. The presentation of a new town hall was not

11th hour or unexpected. There was even previous consideration of a commercial building on Rte 106, but no one wanted the town hall to leave the village area. Mr. Morse noted it should be studied again.

Ms. Cilley noted that she does not feel that the Budget Committee, Planning Board or the Board of Selectmen have grasped the magnitude of where the town is headed. The Gale School could be used to support something historical, but it's not suitable to meet the current or future service needs of the community. The feasibility of grants is overrated. It takes a lot for a community to apply for, obtain, administer, and match grants. This is not a large amount of money. She urged everyone to look at the form and size of the government. She referred to a recent flowchart that she had presented - the Board of Selectmen acts as the executive board to the large and varied organization. She feels that many of the people involved in the processes of the organization are in denial - Belmont is not a small stagnant town. It costs money to run the town. There's a huge influx of people who are used to, and demand a high level of services. The bottom line is that it is the cost of doing business. Officials are not being realistic. The Planning Board is concerned about extending a sidewalk out to Rte 106 when there isn't one to the high school.

Ms. Cilley noted that many people express the concern that "we can't afford it". There are always people who are going to be financially strapped, regardless of what the community does. She works with them on a daily basis and knows better than anyone the impact they experience. But Belmont is a huge housing market. People are selling their half-million dollar homes out of state and moving here with a small mortgage - and they're demanding services and infrastructure. The Town is going backwards. It can still take positive measures on preservation, conservation and protecting rural and historical character, but the bottom line is that the community is growing. People need to take that vision and move forward.

Ms. Frawley described her experience and background in private and public sector funding packages. She stated there are many opportunities for grants and financing partnerships many directly linked to community vision and potential. If you have an engaged community there are many opportunities. Any alternatives and creative kinds of investigation will do nothing but receive positive reactions from citizens that are concerned about cost. Mr. Morse noted that Boscawen developed an old school into a police department and town hall. The other thing about the Gale School is that the school district has been mandated to use it as an SAU at a cost of \$1 million when they don't even want it because it won't work. Now you want to spend another \$2.3 million for a town hall at a total cost of \$3.3 million. Using it as a town hall would save a lot of money.

Mr. Knowlton stated it's important to consider growth - and how to slow it down. R. Caldwell noted he supports the committee's study, but Ms. Cilley is right when she says we need something and we can't hide from it. Ms. Frawley noted the master plan has only a passing reference about some town hall study committee. It was never an emphasis - the most recurring message is about growth management. Ms. Cilley stated that this board of selectmen stepped up to the responsibility they were elected to assume. They were not successful because it is a large number, but it was time financially to act, with the available finance rates - the money that would have been saved - it was the right decision. R. Caldwell stated his decision to vote to withdraw it from the warrant was based on the vote of the budget committee. The community has worked too hard over the last few years to bring consensus to difficult decisions. Ms. Cilley stated that the Gale School just isn't big enough unless you start adding wings and additions. Use it for some use that, itself, has historical significance. If you

don't like the design of the proposed new building, then change it, but you need to prepare for the future. We need to work with what we have. Preserve what we can, but adapt to what is here and coming. The people who come to this town hall are unbelievable in their demands. That's the world we live in today – that's what's coming - change. Mr. Knowlton stated that there has been a lot of progress in the last few years and the community has supported all the building needs. The buildings were all developed by a building committee who made recommendations to the budget committee and that's how this should be so that it isn't a shock. We want to look at options. W. Peterson stated if the committee only wanted to look at alternatives to a new building, then the Selectmen would still pursue information on a new building so that all alternatives could be evaluated equally. Mr. Morse said no, the committee wanted to explore all alternatives including another new building. Mr. Knowlton agreed, saying they could look into another form of new building. He stated they would use the square footage requirements from the first study results, that would not change, but they could look at other building types. Ms. Frawley said a local taxpayer just designed another community's municipal building and could be asked for help. Textbooks can be used to determine space needs. R. Caldwell noted the internal building needs are best known by the people who work within the building and have been determined. The Town of Hollis was another example given for research purposes.

R. Caldwell stated he was ready to act to create the committee and consider its membership. He supported Mr. Knowlton as chairman. He stressed the membership is not closed and others could be appointed. He expressed interest in serving on it himself. W. Peterson noted the Board would likely add other members to the committee. He stated that the committee was to advise the board of Selectmen and the Board expects to be kept up to date and to have information presented to them prior to any conclusion by the committee. The Board will call public hearings as necessary. Mr. Morse stressed they will produce a written record. Ms. Frawley stated those present had written at least 50% of the recent master plan document so that would not be a problem. Mr. Knowlton will inform the Board of proposed meeting dates. He stated he did not want to further burden busy staff but was going to ask C. Daigle to participate in the process. They would also be looking for input from any contractors and others. The chairman thanked those present for their interest in assisting the town on this project. Ms. Frawley asked if the Board saw any conflict of interest in her serving on the committee and asked to be sent a copy of the Town's Code of Ethics. The chairman noted she was not aware of any conflict of interest with this project for any of the members wishing to serve.

MOTION: On a motion by R. Caldwell, seconded by D. Harper, it was voted unanimously to create a Town Hall Study Committee and to appoint Kenneth Knowlton to serve as chairman and Kenneth Ellis, Norma Patten, Jeffrey Marden, Linda Frawley and David Morse as members. (3-0)