

memo

FROM: Brandy Saxton, AICP
RE: Wheelock Community Survey
DATE: 2 June 2021

Enclosed is a compilation of the community survey results. 80 responses were received by the deadline and tabulated (there have been a few late arrivals). Of those who responded, nearly all were familiar with the current town facilities situation. A large majority indicated that they were likely to vote next March and two-thirds indicated they voted on the Town Hall proposal in 2018. These results indicate that we heard from a well-informed and engaged sector of town residents.

Questions 2 through 12 are sorted by respondents' level of agreement with Statement 2 having the strongest level of agreement and Statement 12 having the weakest level of agreement. What is striking in the responses is how few statements have a clear majority on either side (agree or disagree). There was majority agreement that Wheelock needs an accessible public meeting space than can accommodate 200 people and a bare majority that the total cost to taxpayers is the most important consideration when deciding what to do about the Town Hall. There was also a clear majority saying that Wheelock can afford to spend more money on town facilities and that the town cannot "continue to make do with what we have." The level of agreement with the other seven statements was split.

One interesting result from that set of statements was the close split (40% agree - 37% disagree) on the statement that the historic Town Hall is essential to the community's sense of identity. Prior appeals and messaging for renovation proposals have emphasized the historic character and importance of the building in the community. The survey response suggests that approach may not be effective in convincing a majority of residents to support a renovation proposal. One of the survey comments speaks to the position evidently shared by many residents, "It just doesn't make sense to spend the amount needed to continue to renovate this old building for historic value."

The results of the rank choice voting in Question 13 was also very close with the Combined Facilities - New Buildings approach slightly ahead of the Town Hall - Make It Better approach. This question had a lower number of complete responses because many of the respondents returning paper surveys did not rank all four options as instructed and therefore their responses could not be entered into the survey response tabulation software.

Question 14 indicates significant majority support for making the repairs and upgrades to the Town Hall needed to meet accessibility requirements and a slight majority for building a new highway garage near the Town Hall. The other six options presented did not achieve majority support, although the Town Hall addition nearly did. It is clear that respondents want a solution based on the town's existing assets (Town Hall and the town land) and do not support looking for other sites for municipal facilities.

Another theme evident in the response to Question 14 and others is that respondents were supportive of doing what is needed but were not supportive of "extras" that are not strictly necessary. One of the written comments included the phrase "Nothing extravagant, but functional and sound" which nicely summarizes this position.

Question 15 indicates that most of those residents who responded to the survey recognize that solving the town facilities problem is going to require the town to raise taxes. Only 20% of respondents were not willing to support any increase in the tax rate. The caveat here is that those residents strongly opposed to prior Town Hall proposals or who feel strongly that no additional town funds should be spent on the Town Hall or other municipal facilities may have been less likely to respond to the survey than those in support.

TOWN HALL ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

80 Wheelock residents responded to a community survey conducted from April 26 through May 21, 2021. The purpose of the survey was to better understand the values, motivations and concerns of town residents on the issue of town facilities. 308 surveys were mailed to Wheelock households using the current grandlist and voter checklist. The survey was also available online and notices with a link to the survey were distributed through multiple email lists and websites encouraging town residents to participate. Of the 80 responses, 36 were returns of the paper survey and 44 were to the online survey.

1. How familiar are you with the current situation with the Wheelock Town Hall and prior proposals to improve or replace town government facilities (clerk's office, meeting space, highway garage)? 79 responses

49% Very familiar 41% Somewhat familiar 8% Not so familiar 3% Not at all familiar

2. "Wheelock needs an accessible public meeting space that can accommodate 200 people."

76 responses (63% agree and 25% disagree)

15 Strongly agree 33 Agree 9 Neither agree or disagree 11 Disagree 8 Strongly disagree

3. "The total cost to taxpayers is the most important consideration when deciding what to do about the Wheelock Town Hall."

76 responses (53% agree and 36% disagree)

18 Strongly agree 22 Agree 9 Neither agree or disagree 22 Disagree 5 Strongly disagree

4. "We just put a lot of money into the Town Hall. We need to finish fixing the building so it works as office and meeting space."

75 responses (50% agree and 32% disagree)

17 Strongly agree 20 Agree 14 Neither agree or disagree 14 Disagree 10 Strongly disagree

5. "The Town Hall needs to be rehabilitated and expanded to meet current and future needs for office and meeting space."

76 responses (50% agree and 38% disagree)

19 Strongly agree 19 Agree 9 Neither agree or disagree 14 Disagree 15 Strongly disagree

6. "Wheelock needs an accessible public meeting space with kitchen facilities."

76 responses (47% agree and 32% disagree)

13 Strongly agree 23 Agree 16 Neither agree or disagree 12 Disagree 12 Strongly disagree

7. "New construction would result in nicer, more efficient office and meeting space than rehabilitating the Town Hall."

76 responses (41% agree and 33% disagree)

8 Strongly agree 23 Agree 20 Neither agree or disagree 18 Disagree 7 Strongly disagree

8. "The historic Town Hall is essential to our sense of identity as a community in Wheelock and needs to be fully rehabilitated."

75 responses (40% agree and 37% disagree)

14 Strongly agree 16 Agree 17 Neither agree or disagree 13 Disagree 15 Strongly disagree

9. "Wheelock needs a new Highway Garage more than it needs improvements to the Town Hall building."

76 responses (26% agree and 27% disagree)

6 Strongly agree 14 Agree 35 Neither agree or disagree 17 Disagree 4 Strongly disagree

10. "It would be more expensive to rehabilitate the Wheelock Town Hall than to build new facilities (office and meeting space)."

75 responses (30% agree and 36% disagree)

10 Strongly agree 13 Agree 25 Neither agree or disagree 18 Disagree 9 Strongly disagree

11. "Wheelock cannot afford to spend any more money on town facilities (office, meeting space, garage)."

76 responses (24% agree and 63% disagree)

8 Strongly agree 10 Agree 10 Neither agree or disagree 26 Disagree 22 Strongly disagree

12. "Wheelock does not need any new facilities (office, meeting space, garage). We can continue to make do with what we have."

76 responses (17% agree and 75% disagree)

7 Strongly agree 6 Agree 6 Neither agree or disagree 28 Disagree 29 Strongly disagree

**WHEELOCK TOWN HALL
A. MAKE IT WORK**

Make only the code & accessibility improvements to the Wheelock Town Hall necessary to meet the terms of the DOJ agreement with minimal other upgrades.

**WHEELOCK TOWN HALL
B. MAKE IT BETTER**

Make accessibility improvements to the Wheelock Town Hall, expand office & vault space, and upgrade facilities so the building can be used for more activities.

**COMBINED FACILITIES
C. NEW BUILDINGS**

Make accessibility and other improvements to the Town Hall so it can serve as meeting space. Build new town facilities (office, garage) adjoining the Town Hall.

**COMBINED FACILITIES
D. NEW LOCATION**

Build new town facilities (office, meeting space, garage) on a site elsewhere in town and leave the Town Hall as a vacant building for now.

13. How would you rank the four general approaches in order of preference? (select only one approach in each column)

61 complete responses (ranked voting result: 52% C. New Buildings and 48% B. Make It Better)

| | First | Second | Third | Fourth |
|--|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| A. Wheelock Town Hall - Make It Work | 15 | 11 | 17 | 18 |
| B. Wheelock Town Hall - Make It Better | 15 | 28 | 11 | 7 |
| C. Combined Facilities - New Buildings | 25 | 13 | 21 | 2 |
| D. Combined Facilities - New Location | 6 | 9 | 12 | 34 |

14. Which of the following options should the Project Committee continue to consider as it works with the consultant team to develop the two alternatives? (select all that apply)

76 responses

- 71% Make the repairs and upgrades to the Wheelock Town Hall necessary to meet the terms of the DOJ agreement.
- 51% Build a new Highway Garage on town land near the Wheelock Town Hall.
- 47% Build an accessible, code-compliant addition or adjoining structure to the Wheelock Town Hall to house the Clerk's Office.
- 38% Improve the existing meeting space in the Wheelock Town Hall.
- 33% Build an accessible, code-compliant addition or adjoining structure to the Wheelock Town Hall with a larger meeting space.
- 32% Use other town-owned land in Wheelock for one or more new facilities (office, meeting space, garage).
- 30% Enhance the Town Common with landscaping, accessible walkways and related improvements.
- 18% Find a site elsewhere in Wheelock for one or more town facilities (office, meeting space, garage).

15. How much would you be willing to increase the municipal tax rate to meet the town's facility needs?

75 responses (No choice received a majority response. Assuming that the respondents who selected 8 or 10 cents would remain supportive of a 6 cent proposal, 6 cents achieves a combined majority of 60%)

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 12% 2 cents | 12% 8 cents |
| 8% 4 cents | 36% 10 cents |
| 12% 6 cents | 20% Would not support any increase in the tax rate |

16. How likely are you to vote on that proposal (town is obligated to have a proposal before the voters next March)?

74 responses

| | | | | |
|-----------------|------------|-------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| 62% Very likely | 20% Likely | 8% Neither likely or unlikely | 7% Unlikely | 3% Very unlikely |
|-----------------|------------|-------------------------------|-------------|------------------|

17. Would you be more likely to support a proposal next March if you knew the town had obtained some outside funding (from grants or other sources) to support the project?

74 responses

| | |
|---------|--------|
| 85% Yes | 15% No |
|---------|--------|

18. Did you vote on the 2018 proposal to renovate and expand the Town Hall?

73 responses

| | |
|---------|--------|
| 67% Yes | 33% No |
|---------|--------|

Other Responses to Question #14

1. It seems there is not enough land for parking to make the current town hall the spot for expansion and or offices and road crew building. I also thought there were water run off issues so the current location is not the best choice.
2. It would be good to have the garage and clerk's office together to only heat one building. But is the present location good for truck access on 122? Is near sand pile.
3. Please do something about the unsightly junkyards in town.
4. If the town contracts out the roadwork there would be no need for a new large garage.
5. Save some of the historic components of the town hall and combine them in a new structure. I don't go to town meetings anymore, because I questions the safety of the building. Is the town garage repairable? Is there any federal money available for this project?
6. Make repairs to existing town garage to improve office area and insulate and roof repairs
7. Since our tax dollars support Miller's Run School we should be able to meet there just fine.
8. For now we should rent a space that suits our needs for both. Abandon facility or continue using if possible, then we save \$ until we can appropriately build a new facility to accommodate all towns needs..
9. Secure contractors and materials from community. Get village designation status and funding.
10. I believe we need a new and it will continue to be more expense as time goes on.
11. Continue use of existing town garage. Repair and upkeep instead of continued neglect of garage.
12. Buy the log yard down the road.
13. Do the minimal and if a group of people want more they should fund the project.
14. Build an addition for Town Clerk, kitchen, vault, bath with a sheltered ramp to hall and basement.
15. Do nothing!
16. We can use the Miller's Run School building for meetings.
17. Make the Town Hall Code Compliant and that's all. It serves its purpose otherwise. More focus on a new town garage.
18. Purchase the Deos property as directed and funded by townspeople in 2020 and plan to develop it along with the current site of the garage to create a park beside the falls.

Comments (Question #19)

1. I am out of the area in March. Can I get a mail in ballot?
2. We are outgrowing the town hall for meetings. A new garage is needed.
3. Make do with what we have. Stop taking more money from us especially during a pandemic.
4. Your questions are not specific. You should have asked did the person vote for or against a project - not did they vote. I for one vote on every question but not necessarily for it.
5. Thank you for your work on this!
6. I think that building a new meeting space would change the character and the charm of Wheelock's historic and beautiful Town Hall. Finding ways to make it more accessible while being as thrifty as possible seem in line with Wheelock's values. I think a leakproof Town garage is important as is accessibility to the Town clerks office/ bathroom. What would happen to the basement should an addition be built? If this did happen I would imagine a small addition the size of the office now plus an accessible bathroom. In my experience elevators are not a great addition as they take yearly maintenance and use electricity which all cost money. A more landscaped town green and welcoming space for outdoor gathering would be lovely, I bet a work force could come up with a simple start without raising taxes for it. Not sure if any of these thoughts help. Thank you for working so tirelessly on this. I am interested to hear the results of this survey.
7. I've looked at this questionnaire over and over again. This questionnaire makes me feel like I am wading in a large jar of peanut butter, it is very difficult to answer the questions. So I decided to express myself with this letter to the committee. Our family has lived in Wheelock for 34 years. I am now retired from the State of Vermont and so is my wife. I am a disabled Viet Nam Veteran. In my opinion, the town hall and garage should be removed and a new one put up in its place. The outside grounds are horrible looking. The area is an eyesore. Please get it done already the correct way. I would like to say thank you for all your hard work.
8. Town hall needs to be bulldozed down. Make new building for town clerk.
9. Too much money has been spent on architects that simply make a few changes on already existing plans and resubmit. The townspeople have already voted against these plans time and time again. Come up with new ideas and stop wasting time and money. Ryan Hanrahan had some great cost effective ideas to improve the town hall and the garage but those ideas were pushed aside to try again to get the more grandiose ideas of others approved.
10. Enough time wasted. Let's get it done and give our community something to be proud of. The status quo is embarrassing.

11. I firmly believe in examining and streamlining current expenditures.
12. It just doesn't make sense to spend the amount needed to continue to renovate this old building for historic value. Move forward to progress for the future. Its well known that restoring old always will be more costly. Its a shame all this money has already been spent but it would be great to progress toward a high tech option and set us up for an option of technology improvements as needed.
13. It's not a great time to build because of inflation but it's a good time to borrow money. Delay building. The Town of Wheelock is never going to be big enough that it needs the facilities aforementioned so working with what we have is probably the best bet. Perhaps purchasing a loading dock lift (which could be cheaper than a handicap lift) or moving the town offices out of the basement could solve these problems. It is not a good time to consider building anything new. The town should do a reappraisal before it decides to raise the tax rate, otherwise you might just increase any inequity that already exists.
14. I am not a resident but a taxpayer. I would like to see a historically sensitive expansion, addition with a realistic budget. Nothing extravagant, but functional and sound.
15. I believe the town should build a facility to take us into the future. Also something should be done to the mess across from the Town Hall. It is a disgrace to the town. Used to be a nice, well-kept trailer, but now is detrimental to the town and a public eyesore.
16. The town has already spent more than we should have on an undersized decrepit building.
17. If the books in the vault are online and the original are stored like in Montpelier and the town clerk does most of her work from home. A private person can build a 200 person hall w/ kitchen if they think that it will make money and there is a need. Why can't both towns use the school to vote in? It is one day/night every 2 years - not a good return of our tax \$. If we do anything it should only base as long as a as large car payment of 5-7 years . Interest is going up. The town is getting older with limited income. STOP leaving bills to the next gen! What is the breakdown of ages of our town. Do the children stay here and work? People 60 yrs old will not be around to pay a 30 yr bill! If you have to raise taxes on 40-50 to pay for older residents (limited income or died) you would have to double them. Will they move out of town /state because of the burden? Look at 2020 Census. What did Wheelock do? You need to be forward thinking - if there is a group of wealthy townspeople that want this project let them personally pay for it in extra taxes.
18. Build addition to house clerks office, vault, unisex bath and (kitchen??) - kitchen could stay in basement with accessible ramp from new addition (ground level) to lower and upper floors of town hall. Elevators are too expensive and cost thousands to maintain. Ramps are best, cheapest.
19. Please help us raise the bar here in Wheelock. Our poor town center is looking very sad and dilapidated. If we want to participate in the future and be appealing to potential residents we need to show that we care about ALL of our residents and that we are putting our best foot forward. Also, can we bull doze the disgusting trailer and garbage just across from the current town hall location? Does someone actually live in there? We are new full time residents in Wheelock and very invested in this community so long as there are others who are interested to continue to raise the bar. We know its hard work, and requires funding, but anything worth doing is worth fighting for! You have our support. Thanks for your efforts!
20. I think the community needs to be aware of the consequences if we continue not to move forward with this issue. Are there fines involved, removal of our charter as a town? Knowing the consequences may stimulate a quicker response to a solution. I for one would rather my tax dollars be put into improvements than continue to pay ongoing penalties, if that would be the case. Since we have already made some improvements to the current building, it makes sense to continue to do so. It would also make sense to either expand with either an adjoining building or adjacent one to correct whatever deficiencies repairs of the current building won't resolve. We need to resolve this issue by not merely bandaiding it. Doing so will just prolong our dealings with it. It is encouraging that Wheelock will be seeking grants to help reduce the cost to property owners. No one likes to see taxes raised , so it would be helpful to keep that part to a minimum!
21. SO many in Wheelock struggle to pay taxes as it is; if this project increases taxes, it forces people out of town - and then what will be the point of a meeting place anyway? If you want my support, your plan must be fiscally responsible for the poorest of us AND fundraising efforts must be aggressive - and you will need to prove your fundraising is aggressive BEFORE my vote because town officials have also lost my trust. And I'd like to see the wealthiest Wheelockians making private donations to this effort, not just voting for the poorest of us to pay the same share...this is also about accessibility of the poor, not just accessibility of the physically differently-abled, and I don't think that is being understood appropriately.
22. You are wasting your time and the taxpayers money with your project ideas. None of this is needed.
23. My road taxes are wasted. Why should I think this will be any different?
24. Thank you for volunteering to serve on the committee. With Covid monies available, this is the time to make a significant investment in our town's infrastructure and create something we can be proud of.

25. Strongly suggest saving tax payer dollars and doing “what is needed” to bring the Town Hall into compliance with the DOJ and then focus turn the focus onto the Town Garage. We simply cannot afford to do both.
26. Thanks for putting together the survey to make sure the wishes of Wheelock property owners and voters are heard.