

**Town of Wheelock
Town Hall Accessibility Project Committee
November 8, 2021 6:00 pm at Town Hall and via Zoom
Minutes: Unapproved**

Meeting Purpose: The Project Committee was appointed by the Selectboard on Jan. 4, 2021. Its purpose is to assist the Selectboard in managing a grants-funded project providing funds for community outreach and architectural concepts to help solve the Town Hall accessibility issues.

◆ This meeting was called to discuss two grant applications, the DoJ 12/30 report, and Town Meeting plans.

Present: <u>Selectboard</u>	Ann Lawless, committee chair (at Town Hall)
Project Committee Members at Town Hall:	Liz Muckerman
Project Committee Members on Zoom:	Enid Ellis and Eileen Boland, scribe
Not in attendance:	Steve Amos, Marc Brown, Project Committee members Christopher Kennedy: MAKE Architects, architect Brandy Saxton: Place Sense, planner
Project consultants on Zoom:	Paul Simon: VISCC LLC, project manager

Meeting called to order 6:02 pm with a welcome and review of the agenda by Ann Lawless.

Adopt Minutes: Enid moved, and Liz seconded, adoption of the committee meeting minutes from 10/26/21 (minutes from the 10/11/21 meeting were adopted at the 10/26/meeting). Passed unanimously.

Update from the Consultant Team: Paul explained the consultants' last invoice (#5) on the completion of services. The invoice for all services came in exactly on budget \$26,500 (equaling the grants of \$23,500 and \$3000 for the additional architectural work) by excluding some additional overhead expenses that the consultants were absorbing. Ann expressed the committee's appreciation for the team's excellent work products and overlooking the additional overhead in excess of our grant resources. The working relationship with the committee was smooth and positive throughout this phase of the project. Enid moved, and Liz seconded, approving the invoice for payment. Passed unanimously.

Paul stayed in the meeting to reply to Enid's questions about Option 1 design modifications that could address an event where the lift stops operating (power failure, fire, etc.) and a person with mobility challenges is in the basement and unable to get out (there is no egress in the current design). She also expressed concern with the length of the walkway from the parking area to the rear entry and the challenge of keeping it clear in winter months.

Paul was considering these questions without having exact calculations at hand, but generally he expressed concern that creating such an egress option could create "a bowl effect" by cutting a lower grade where moisture from the building, parking lot, and the rear hillside is likely to congregate. He observed that the additional fill to raise the grade in the Option 1 to the back entrance side will be less costly than removing ground to create a lower grade. It would also create a much taller looking building. Discussion moved to consider creating a possible emergency egress point on the opposite side (right side of the plan drawing), which seems more doable. Paul suggested that since the current covered ramp on that side does not meet ADA requirements, and it is not in good shape, it could be made level to create a porch.

He did some ‘back of the envelope’ calculations with the Option 1 grading which would create a way to shorten the length of the walkway to the rear entrance, suggesting that an ADA parking space might be placed to reduce the walkway by some 20 feet. (Note: Option 1 includes two ADA parking spaces, but only one is needed to meet ADA requirements.) Paul left the meeting at 6:32 pm.

MPG Grant Proposal Update: Ann shared that the proposal was submitted on time, but creating it was a lengthy process because of the effort it took to strike a balance between keeping the costs down and recognizing that Wheelock already received a grant last year. This funding source is “over-subscribed” so it is unclear whether the project’s second proposal will be approved. Ann expressed appreciation for the assistance she received writing the grant from Brandy, Paul, and Enid. Eileen asked about the possibility of using ARPA funds for supporting some of the needed planning and communication, including sending a paper ballot to residents for the required Town Meeting vote. She also observed that many towns are forming citizen advisory committees to vet ideas and assist their selectboards on use of these funds. Ann indicated that the Wheelock Selectboard is taking a measured approach in studying the town’s options and have yet to consider forming an advisory committee. Vanessa is attending trainings offered by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) on the rules related to the use of these funds. Ann noted that some small towns are considering sharing an administrator or “guide” to help them navigate the fund requirements.

VCF Grant Proposal Feedback and Town Meeting Planning: Since the VCF response in turning down the grant proposal was clear, there was little discussion about it. It did, however, generate discussion on how to secure the resources necessary to update the designs based on resident feedback, pay for consultants to create bid documents, and how the ballot initiative should be worded for the March 2022 vote.

It was noted that the town has not committed any financial resources into the accessibility project. The committee considered the option of putting an appropriation request in the town budget or using ARPA funds to assist with drawing up bid documents, especially since other grant options seem slim. In 2021, voters approved a \$30,000 special appropriation line item and another \$3,500 for Town Hall maintenance. The committee would need more information about the intent for these funds and whether any may be used for the accessibility work.

The logistics of Town Meeting with the continued and elevated presence of Covid are still uncertain. The October Selectboard meeting minutes noted that Vanessa shared that she spoke with the Vermont Secretary of State’s office which advised that floor votes are required to be held within the township of Wheelock; thus, town meeting cannot be held at the Miller’s Run School in Sheffield. Should the town wish to challenge this rule, consulting first with the town’s attorney was advised.

Discussion centered on whether to present voters with one or both design options, (with estimated project costs and the effect on property taxes) and whether to include a “do nothing” option on the ballot with clear wording of the consequences. Eileen shared that she has reconsidered the committee’s earlier leaning to presenting a single proposal to voters in favor of including both options and not offering a “none of the above” option. The committee is charged with advising the Selectboard and the community on what is the best course of action for the town, and it has been amply established that just saying “no” is not an option. No formal motion was made on whether to vote on one or both options, but it was generally agreed that after either option is selected, the task for the committee is to figure out the financing, including grant opportunities.

Research on Bond Bank Loans and Tax Impact: Enid provided a summary of her research and contact with Ashley Lucht, Director of Capital Planning, Vermont Bond Bank. Ashley can provide amortization schedules

for any amount borrowed. For the sake of comparison she focused on scenarios of \$800,000 and \$1.7 million (2.86% interest rate). Loan payback is always “front loaded” meaning higher in the first five years, however, there is an option of paying only the interest during that timeframe. Enid provided a breakout of the potential tax impact (increases) on properties assessed at \$100,000 and \$250,000. She noted that taxpayers’ *education* tax is income sensitive, and ~27% of Wheelock taxpayers qualify for some reduction of their education tax bills. “How to apply” webinars are available from the bank. Wheelock would need to conduct an independent external audit before applying, which Enid said the town ought to be doing as a matter of good governance.

800,000							
Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	
250000	-15,572	62.25	61.36	60.51	59.55	58.46	
100000	-15,572	24.9	24.54	24.20	23.82	23.38	
1,700,000		2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
250000	2.59	264.60	262.89	261.09	259.04	256.73	
100000	1.04	105.84	105.16	104.44	103.62	102.69	

Additional/Potential Grant Writing and Other Project Assistance: Ann noted that Jenna Koloski has capacity to assist our project efforts as she did for the community meeting (Wheelock is a VCRD “Future” town). NCIC provided a great support letter for the grant proposal, as did Mariah Noth of the REDI program. (The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), a program of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, helps rural communities access the funding they need for community and business development.) Ann observed that it may be time to approach REDI for support. It would be helpful to have assistance establishing a “fundraising map” for whatever option voters support.

Other Business: None

Adjourn: Liz moved to adjourn, seconded by Enid, and the meeting ended at 7:30 PM.

Next Meeting
Monday, December 13, 2021
6:00 PM Hybrid format in person at Town Hall and via Zoom
 Meetings are scheduled for the second Monday of the month

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Selectboard adoption
