

**Town of Wheelock
Town Hall Accessibility Project Committee
January 10, 2022 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 grants, property tax implications, Town Meeting Day plans/articles.

Present: <u>Selectboard</u>	Ann Lawless, committee chair (at Town Hall)
Committee Members/Others at Town Hall:	None
Committee Members on Zoom:	Steve Amos, Enid Ellis, Eileen Boland, scribe
Not in attendance:	Liz Muckerman, Marc Brown (Committee members)

Meeting called to order 6:05 pm with a welcome and review of the agenda by Ann Lawless.

Adopt Minutes: Steve moved, Enid seconded, adoption of the 12/13/21 meeting minutes; passed unanimously.

Discussion of topics included in “Notes for Project Committee”: Ann provided some additional updates since drafting the notes. The Vermont Legislature has taken action on and is still considering legislation which will affect the 2022 Town Meeting in all Vermont municipalities. S.172 (passed) essentially carries over most of the pandemic-era practices of 2021: **it allows towns to hold votes via Australian ballot or to postpone in-person meetings until warmer weather allows for outdoor gatherings.** Still under consideration are two proposals that **waive the signature requirement** (S.223) for candidate petitions and suspending some **open meeting law requirements** through 2022 (S. 222).

It is unclear how many of these issues will be decided before 1/18/21, when the Selectboard will take up completing the warning and how (or where) to hold Town Meeting. There do not seem to be any proposals authorizing holding a Town Meeting in a location outside a municipality (such as Miller’s Run School). Committee members recognized that the Selectboard decides Town Meeting logistics and has received a positive legal opinion for this option, but were not in favor of it. If our Town Meeting is by Australian ballot, a public meeting to review the warning is required before February 19. Ann noted the new OWL technology has been a huge improvement for hybrid meetings. She has contacted KATV for their availability to provide the same technical services as they did for the 2021 Town Meeting.

Discussion centered on the best way to solicit Wheelock voters’ preferences for the two conceptual designs. Given that an **Australian ballot** is a yes/no binding vote and these two options have only preliminary budget estimates and no construction documents, no contractor bids, or bond amounts for voters to consider, it was generally agreed Australian Ballot is not suitable for the task. In an email (1/7/21) from Carol Rossi, she proposed language for a possible **“preference ballot”**. Ann agreed to further refine this language and share it with the Committee before including it for consideration at the 1/18/22 Selectboard meeting. Eileen noted Option 1 is a 2-story 20’x 30’ addition, 1200 square feet total (20 x 30 x 2 = 1200) and Option 2 is a one story 37’ x 43’ addition, which is 1591 square feet. The next step in the planning process is too consequential (selecting one option to develop into construction documents) to put under “other non-binding business” at the end of a town meeting (if it were in-person). Committee members continue to favor **mailing ballots** (preference) to Wheelock voters to ensure a large, definitive response that can direct the next phase of planning.

Potential Grants: Ann provided some additional details to her meeting notes regarding potential grant opportunities for the next stages of planning. She will inquire whether our 2021 NCIC grant (\$1700 remaining balance) can be used for mailing cited above. **The VCDP (Vermont Community Development Program) Access Modification** grant option seems to offer some reasonable chance of success given the detailed work products of the first grant (proposals due April, awarded June, which Enid noted would not be timely to meet the DOJ August deadline for completed construction documents). A successful grant proposal also puts Wheelock in a good position to be eligible for large constructions grants. The administrators for this grant (and NCIC) “want to help us”, which is a big plus as the proposal process requires multiple steps and numerous documents (the Selectboard is expected to authorize submitting a proposal). Wheelock’s **ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act)** appropriation is another potential source of funding for portions of the project. The Selectboard is expected to take some action on 1/18/22 towards establishing a citizen advisory committee charged with assessing and recommending proposals that are suitable for ARPA funding. Several people have expressed interest in participating. Eileen noted that the ARPA information session for citizen committees (VLCT/NVDA) has been postponed until Feb. 2, but she would help promote it to encourage broader participation. Ann observed that **energy efficiency/alternate heating/cooling** has not been a big focus of the accessibility project, but it is a really important consideration that would lower municipal operating costs and could be addressed with ARPA funds. (UVM Center for Research on Vermont has agreed to provide Wheelock with a “**Local Democracy Intern**” who may be able to provide research and other support to this citizen ARPA advisory committee.)

Information Mailer: Eileen provided an updated draft of page one (same info, different presentation) that was favorably received. It was agreed that it should be a one-page, portrait orientation to be folded into a business envelop. (Cost of such a mailing needs to be determined.) Steve recommended adding a \$350K property value to the tax chart and Eileen noted that some additional explanation for “Amounts decrease...” is needed. (Some research on Wheelock property values may be helpful; Ann to suggest sources of data.) Eileen will include information about the history of the issue (timeline) and emphasize that Wheelock can ill afford ignoring the DOJ agreement or the risk of a personal injury suit. Ann will draft a committee report for the town annual report with help from other committee members.

Articles on Town Meeting Warning: Ann shared some of the thinking and discussion that led the Selectboard to draft Town Meeting articles for a \$30,000 appropriation for the reserve fund to support Town Hall renovation costs; no new funds for the town garage reserve fund; and \$16,500 for a new reserve fund to help pay for construction documents. It was noted that construction documents would require significantly more resources, but the \$16,500 could be put towards a planning grant match (such as the Accessibility Modification Grant).

Other Business: Steve will research the process to engage Lyndon Institute students in a “J-Term” project that could support the Town Hall accessibility work.

Tabled: Discussion of Carol Rossi’s memo (Jan.1, 2022) regarding bond vote preparation (premature).

Adjourn: Steve moved to adjourn, seconded by Enid, and the meeting ended at 7:50 PM.

Next Meeting
Monday, February 14, 2022
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
