

Ad-Hoc Academy Investigation Committee
Academy School
Special Meeting – May 25, 2012, 9:00 am
Meeting Minutes

June 6, 2012

1. Meeting was called to order at 9:00 am May 25, 2012. In attendance were David Kadamus, Joe Beerbower, Matt Callahan, Kathy Rossini and Jon Pardo.
2. David Kadamus gave a brief introduction to those in attendance about the work of the Academy School building committee. These remarks were followed by a presentation by DK that began with a brief history of building and an overview of prior committees that have looked at the issue. The balance of the presentation was devoted to outlining the various options that the committee has explored for the Academy School building, the various costs and benefits of each, and the potential impact on the surrounding ball fields and community. The presentation will be made available on the committee's website.
3. The presentation was followed by a period of public discussion and comment by the committee and those in attendance.

First Selectman Filmore McPherson thanked committee for its work. Stated his current favorite ideas for building include housing or arts.

Planning and Zoning - In 1990's, Federal Government began use of Enhanced Use Leases for surplus government property. Government leases buildings to private sector for economic benefits while retaining public ownership.

Eric Dillner from Shoreline Arts Alliance disagreed with committee assertion that an arts center would have limited economic stimulus. He asserts that it would have a high positive impact.

A comment was made favorable to the arts building concept but would be contingent upon seeing a firm proposal.

Remarks were made stressing the need for private economic development to increase grand list and reduce mill rate. Would like to see building converted to commercial/retail or private housing for seniors.

A comment was made stating that housing does not diversify town tax base. Arts proposal could be positive if town shared in revenue from sub-leases.

Discussion followed that economic development of building could help downtown lease rates which in turn would have a positive effect on property tax base.

Kathy Rossini - Decision regarding Academy building should look at long term implications for town if it is sold to private developers. Building and ball fields occupy prime space on Green and downtown.

The issue was raised on the opposition that will be raised in town if one or both ball fields need to be lost in order to accommodate private development of site.

Ted Mallory - Library board appreciates that committee has explored Academy building site as potential home for library. The Library board feels that current location and additional property that they have acquired is better suited for their needs.

Filmore McPherson asked what citizen reaction would be if the building were razed.

John Lind - Historic District Commission commented that first 1/3 of building has most significant historical character. The Academy building is an example, not necessarily the finest, of 1920's period brick schoolhouse construction. Building is more important to town from historic relationship to community and sentimental attachment. He did not think that there would be major objections if back 2/3 of building needed to be demolished.

Discussion continued further that reconfiguring building would be difficult/expensive and that best option would be to use space generally as currently configured. Also recommended that a structural analysis be performed to determine whether building has steel structural frame.

Eric Dillner - Shoreline Arts Alliance is currently looking at six potential sites in area to house their arts center. Academy is in the middle size wise. The location building to downtown and transportation makes it very well-suited to their project. Shoreline Arts envisions raising private funds to make necessary repairs to building but generally would use space as it currently exists. They anticipate using a limited amount of space in the building initially and growing into it over a 5 to 10 year horizon.

Comments were made that commercial use would not be best for building as town already has an excess available. Selling building now could be ill advised from a timing perspective. Would like to see town retain ownership of property.

4. Closing Remarks and Comments. David Kadamus asked those in attendance for any final comments and advice on how committee could proceed with project. It was suggested that a public meeting be held (perhaps taped for later broadcast), a FAQ be added to the website and that the presentation from today's meeting be posted as well.

5. Meeting was adjourned at 10:45 am.