

TOWN OF MADISON
CONNECTICUT 06443-2563

MEETING DATE: Thursday, October 25, 2018

MEETING PLACE: Town Campus, Room A, 8 Campus Drive, Madison, CT

SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Ad Hoc Academy Building Guidance Committee

Members Present: Sarah Barrett, Henry Griggs, Bob Hale, Kathryn Hunter, Jerry Davis
and Tom Scarpati

Members Absent: Rob Card

Others Present: Al Goldberg, Board of Selectmen

I. Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m.

II. Public Comment:

Dick Passero advised that he had contacted the Senior Center and was told that demand is very high for meeting space there, with every room taken on days the Center is open. Dick advised that he and Catherine Ferrante had presented the community center model, floor plans and description to the BOS and received permission to display at the Town Campus. He also noted that the group presenting and advocating for the community center has named itself "Citizens for Community Center" or "CCC".

Catherine Ferrante reported that the Town website links for Academy and the Committee are confusing and out of date. She requested that the website be organized so that current Academy information and resources and materials relative to the Committee's work and upcoming poll/survey be collected and made available to the public in a common location on the website and that out-of-date materials be clearly separated to avoid confusion. Bob Hale said he would work with the Town's webmaster to get the pages and links properly organized and updated.

III. October 18 Minutes:

Bob Hale moved that the October 18 minutes be approved. Sarah Barrett seconded the motion, which was approved by all members present.

IV. MOTION TO RECONSIDER:

Tom Scarpati moved to reconsider the Motion passed at the Committee's October 18th meeting, namely, to send a draft poll questionnaire to GreatBlue Research that includes three options for public/community uses for Academy: a park, relocation of Town Hall and a community center. Ms. Barrett seconded the Motion. Chair, Henry Griggs, instructed members that the motion up for reconsideration had passed unanimously (6-0). He advised the Committee that a motion to reconsider is a privileged motion that may only be made by a member who supported the motion under reconsideration. Mr. Hale advised that such a motion requires a super majority to reopen/reconsider.

Ms. Barrett urged the Committee to isolate the marketplace as a stand-alone question on the poll/survey in order to accurately assess the level of Town interest in the use. Kathryn Hunter restated her continuing opposition for the reasons stated at prior meetings, namely that inclusion of a marketplace as a stand-alone option was not responsible because it is a commercial retail use unsupported by a private proposal and that the Town is not capable of operating such a commercial enterprise. Ms. Hunter noted that such a retail use would compete with Madison's downtown commercial center and would spread the commercial district west of Route 79 into Madison's protected historic district.

Mr. Scarpati explained that he was not asking to add the marketplace as a separate option on the poll/survey, rather he believes in the concept of the marketplace and its revenue-generating potential and expressed his concern that the concept needs to be better explained in the community center option. Ms. Hunter noted that the Committee had discussed this very point at several meetings and repeated her concern that to alter the community center option, which is an option for a municipally-owned facility operated with taxpayer dollars for community purposes, makes the option confusing and perhaps less attractive to those who doubt the feasibility and value of a commercial use in the historic district. Ms. Hunter reminded that the Committee had determined, after much discussion, that inclusion of "marketplace" as a descriptor in the community center option reserves on the point. Mr. Hale agreed and reminded members that the exact uses, programming and activities within the community center will be fleshed out in the future if the community center proposal receives significant support in the poll/survey. Ms. Barrett urged the Committee to reconsider and to tease out the marketplace idea in the poll/survey to avoid a lost opportunity.

MOTION TO PROCEED TO A VOTE: Mr. Hale moved the previous question, and Jerry Davis seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

VOTE ON MOTION TO RECONSIDER: The Committee voted on the Motion to Reconsider. Ms. Barrett voted "AYE". Mr. Griggs, Ms. Hunter, Mr. Hale, Mr. Davis and Mr. Scarpati voted "NO", and the Motion failed.

V. Report on Discussion with Colliers International:

Mr. Hale and Ms. Hunter held a conference call with Marc Sklenka of Colliers International regarding cost estimates for renovating and converting the existing Town Campus offices into a community center as part of the proposal to relocate Town offices to the Academy building. Among the assumptions Mr. Sklenka worked from were 1) moderate conversion of the existing space, and 2) keeping the arts barn and gymnasium along with modular classrooms, the ballfields and the tennis courts where-is and as-is, and 3) updating building mechanicals, and 4) performing certain limited site work (sidewalks and rear parking lot). The overall effect would be to create a community center campus. Based on said concept and assumptions, Colliers estimated that the cost of converting the existing Town Hall into a community center would be approximately \$5 million.

Mr. Scarpati noted that all of the existing Town offices would fit into the Academy building with considerable room to spare. He suggested there could be about 30,000 square feet for the Town offices with 20,000 square feet for other community uses, plus an additional 20,000 square feet for community use at the converted Town Campus. He said another approach would be to demolish the 1936 addition to the Academy building, which could save money in operating expenses. Mr. Griggs reminded that any demolition of the Academy building involves potential legal opposition and would likely result in the loss of historic tax credits. Members discussed the value of retaining the Academy gymnasium for community use. Ms. Hunter queried whether partial demolition and reconstruction might be more costly than retention and minimal restoration as anticipated by the estimate for the Town Hall option.

The Colliers Subcommittee reported that Mr. Sklenka accepted the Committee's offer of compensation for the additional estimating services Colliers has provided to the Committee over the past several weeks (which compensation for additional services has already been authorized by motion of the BOS).

VI. Discussion of Poll/Survey Questionnaire:

Mr. Scarpati asked how long the online survey would be available after the telephone interviews begin. Ms. Hunter said her recollection is that it will run two weeks.

Mr. Griggs reported that he had reached agreement with GreatBlue Research regarding adding more capacity for respondents to the online survey. The firm will charge an extra \$3,500 if there are 1,001 or more respondents, but will not charge above the original contract cost if the number of respondents is 1,000 or less. Ms. Hunter reminded that the additional expenditure has already been authorized by prior motion of the BOS.

Mr. Griggs advised that he will be submitting the latest draft of the poll questionnaire to GreatBlue this week. Ms. Hunter asked Mr. Griggs to confirm with GreatBlue that the online survey questionnaire will be identical to the phone poll questionnaire (as previously discussed), with the "honor" question added to the online survey. Mr. Griggs said he would follow-up with GreatBlue.

VII. Discussion of Public Education Materials and Information Session:

The discussion turned to the “script” the Committee will use for the public information sessions on November 14th. Mr. Hunter suggested that the PowerPoint presentation include a separate slide for each of the seven proposals.

Mr. Griggs offered an outline of the components of the script, working closely from Ms. Hunter’s draft (previously submitted to the Committee).

- 1) How did we get here? including a brief history of the building and the different task forces and committees that came before the current Committee;
- 2) How was the Committee formed and what is its charge?
- 3) What has the Committee accomplished?
- 4) What are the elements of the survey questionnaire, and how will it be administered?
- 5) What are the logistical elements of the survey, including the telephone poll and the online survey?
- 6) What will be done with the findings of the survey?

Committee members then expressed points that they would like to see raised in the public information materials and sessions. Ms. Barrett pointed to the revenue potential of some proposals; Selectman Goldberg wanted the Committee to keep a focus on value, as opposed to costs alone; Ms. Hunter noted that while estimates of hard costs for renovations have been supplied by Colliers and assumed reliable, projections of operating costs and revenues are difficult to make as the proposals for community use remain speculative; Mr. Davis urged the Committee to be prepared to answer tough questions about the validity of the survey methodologies; Mr. Hale cited issues related to approvals needed from the Planning and Zoning Commission and restrictions brought on by the building’s historic status. Ms. Hunter urged the Committee to give a well-crafted, detailed and comprehensive presentation. She suggested that such an effort is integral to public support for the process and success of the upcoming poll/survey. She reminded that Academy has been in the public domain and discourse for many years and that residents have a level of anticipation and expectation about the Committee’s work.

Ms. Hunter then raised the question about possible impact statements regarding the developers’ private proposals (for example, the risk of financing contingencies in the two affordable housing proposals). Mr. Davis cautioned that the Committee must avoid any actions or statements that could suggest a preference. Mr. Scarpati suggested that the program open with a disclaimer stating that the Committee has no preference. He added that he thinks the public decision likely will be made on emotional grounds more so than on a practical analysis of financial and other similar factors.

Ms. Hunter then asked if the Committee intended to request resources to create concept drawings or other detail for the community-based options on the poll/survey in an attempt to “level the playing field” with the developer proposals (which all include drawings/renderings and plan detail). Members agreed that the detail and supporting materials for the developer options provide a “visual” advantage, but reminded that without an actual concept plan for the community-based options, renderings will be highly speculative at best.

Mr. Hale reiterated the value of PowerPoint and suggested (again) that the Committee utilize resources at the Town Campus to assist.

VIII. Public Comment:

Dick Passero said that a PowerPoint presentation will be impactful, provide structure and prevent chaos at the public information sessions; and show that the Committee has professional standards. He suggested that the matrix of proposals that the Committee has prepared and a print-out of the slide show be made available as hand-outs.

Catherine Ferrante cautioned that the Committee not avoid including information relating to options not on the poll/survey and reasons for excluding, as the public will surely raise these at the information sessions. She suggested that the Committee be prepared to provide a thorough presentation with supporting materials, as those who make the effort to attend a public session are interested and often well informed and will have certain expectations and questions.

IX. Adjournment:

Mr. Scarpati moved to adjourn, and Mr. Davis seconded the motion, which was approved by all members present. The Committee adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

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