

**Committee for the Future of the Thompson Community Center
Report to Select Board
August 31, 2021**

The Committee was comprised of the following voting members: Erik Amundsen, Sharon Caron, Lorain Francis, Martha Johnston-Nash, Abraham Knight, Paul Raudonat, and Chair Rebekah Smith. The Committee also included the following non-voting members: Greg Grotton and Tim Schau.

The Committee held five meetings between April and August 2021, toured the TCC building, generated options for the TCC buildings, developed a list of pros and cons as to each option, invited several guests to speak, and heard public comments. In addition, the Committee Chair met with the Director of the TCC and the Town Manager. Photos taken during the committee tour of the TCC are attached to this report.

At the start of the process, the Committee sought general information from the TCC Director regarding Board membership, use of the buildings, status of certain systems, etc. Because responses were not received, with the approval of the Select Board, the Town Attorney drafted a letter to the TCC Director in June formally requested information. The TCC Director has not replied. In July, the Committee voted as an initial matter to recommend that the Select Board terminate the lease with the TCC.

The Committee determined that the following three options were the most promising in the order listed. The Committee notes that all of the options require significant additional due diligence and evaluation to determine their feasibility and desirability.

- #1. Town retains ownership and engages with a general contractor to rehabilitate the buildings for business, housing, and/or community space and hires building administrator.
- #2. Long-term lease or sale to elder housing developer with some community space reserved.
- #3. Sale to developer with covenants to retain historical aspects, retain some space for community use, and whatever other restrictions the Town deems appropriate.

The Committee as a group developed the following pros and cons lists with regard to each option.

- 1. Town maintains ownership and operations. Engages with engineering company/contractor (such as Siemens, Developer Collaborative, or New Heights) to determine how to rehabilitate the buildings, obtain financing, and locate tenants**

Pros

- Accountability from Town in regards to how building will be maintained, business strategy, etc.

- Potentially “best of both worlds”... ability for town to maintain voice in future of building, while partnering with experts
- Lot of possibilities
- Would allow for mixed use and variety of constituents using the property
- Town maintains full ownership and control and determines who tenants are (doesn't exclude any type of tenant)
- Rehab projects can be chosen in a manner that gives the most bang for the buck (such as a good face lift would go long ways to filling empty spaces)
- Aggressive marketing by a Board could be tied to rental increases as building is improved
- Siemens has knowledge, expertise, and willingness to follow through and make it a very real possibility
- Siemens could act as general contractor. They have far reach and sound track record. Can bring in best subcontractors at the best price and guarantee the work. They also have contacts with financial institutions that the town does not.
- Should result in income to Town once up and running

Cons

- Strong oversight from Town required
- Could require a board of directors with no voting rights to oversee the process
- Would require a building director hired by the Town who had knowledge of the complexity of a multi-use facility
- Requires termination of current lease with total Town oversight throughout the rehab process and beyond
- Town retains financial responsibility; requires financing

Note: Siemens provided a Preliminary Evaluation which is attached to this report.

2. Long term lease or sale to entity that would create elder housing (such as Penquis CAP or Stewart Property Management)

Pros

- Possible that a community center could remain in the building in such a situation
- If lease, Town retains ownership of the building and will get it back at some point
- All maintenance and upkeep will be done by lessee or buyer
- Although no property taxes paid, could require annual donation to the town
- Retention of the gym as community center could be negotiated
- Museum and thrift store maintenance of space could be negotiated
- Creation of positive community living experience for elders
- Integration of elder housing and community use space in brick building

Cons

- This failed a town vote in the past
- If sale, little or no control from town
- May not benefit elderly of Union (although due to way the housing application process is done without advertising, it is likely Union residents would be first to know of openings)

Note: Penquis CAP provided answers to questions posed by the Committee, which are attached.

3. Town sells buildings to rehab specialist/renovation group to create community and mixed use spaces

Pros

- A “quick fix” solution
- Final space could be very beneficial to town citizens for use
- Creates income stream for town in sale of property
- Town could keep a long-term lease for use of some community spaces possibly
- Town could include covenants related to desired uses for community space, business, and/or housing

Cons

- The developer will face many challenges that come with securing grants for historic buildings
- Loss of Town ownership/accountability over the building and potentially its future
- Loss of a valued Town asset
- Developer may rely on donors to fund the purchase and the rehab of the building; this could be long haul and may result in further disrepair