

MINUTES
JOINT MEETING
SELECT BOARD
AND THE
COMMITTEE FOR THE FUTURE
OF THE THOMPSON COMMUNITY CENTER
TUESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2021
WILLIAM PULLEN MUNICIPAL BUILDING MEETING ROOM
6:30 p.m.

Select Board present: Jim Justice, Adam Fuller, Martha Johnston-Nash, Josh White and Bill Lombardi

Committee for the Future of the Thompson Community Center present: Chair Rebekah Smith, Erik Amundsen, Sharon Caron, Lorain Francis, Abraham Knight, Paul Raudonat, and Martha Johnston-Nash (Select Board representative)

Others present: Jay Feyler (Town Manager), Greg Grotton, Heather Jackson, Kathleen Thornton, and others

- 1. Call Select Board Meeting to Order:** at 6:30 p.m. by Adam Fuller.
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Select Board approve and sign the Boating Facilities Grant Agreement:**

Parks and Recreation applied for this grant for an Ayer Park boat ramp before COVID. The grant would cover 75%. Jay said once this is approved, he will go to the Pullen Committee which had expressed interest in funding the remainder.

Motion by: Josh White
2nd by: Jim Justice
5-0

- 4. Call Committee for the Future of the Thompson Community Center to Order:** at 6:40 p.m. by Rebekah Smith.
- 5. Discussion of the Thompson Community Center:**

Rebekah Smith said the CFTCC submitted a report with recommendations and some photos to the Select Board. They met five times since April.

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They came up with three options in order of preference, with the understanding that each option requires significant additional due diligence. These are preliminary recommendations of what the town should explore. None is attached to any particular entity.

She clarified that the three options were generated after the committee recommended termination of the current lease. There are many indications that the current situation is not going well. They were unable to get information from TCC management.

The three options beyond termination of the lease are (by vote of CFTCC members):

- 1) The town keeps the building, undertakes repairs through a contractor who could help with financing, and rents the building out for a variety of uses. They heard from Siemens but there are other such entities. The town would retain ownership and financial responsibility, with the idea that the rehabilitated building would bring in income.
- 2) Long-term lease or sale to an elderly housing developer such as Penquis CAP, with reserved community space (primarily focused on the gym, the kitchen, and the thrift shop). Penquis, while again just one option, would be open to either a lease or a sale.
- 3) Total sale of the building to a developer with covenants to retain historical aspects, some space for community use, and whatever other covenants are deemed appropriate. Mike Mullins spoke to the committee about this option; again, he is not the only such entity.

Rebekah added the committee came up with pros and cons for each option as stated in the report.

Josh asked, regarding option 2, if it would have to be housing for elderly only. Rebekah said she believes this is a funding issue; mixed housing would require more research.

Adam thanked the committee, saying it covered all the bases.

Adam asked if they had considered demolition of the building. Rebekah said the cost of a new building (@ \$9 million) would be greater than repairing the existing building (@ \$3 million). Josh asked about replacing the TCC with a less expensive building. Martha mentioned the cost of demolishing the building (@ \$1 million). Playing devil's advocate, Adam said we could spend \$3 million and have nothing in 20 years.

Rebecca said the committee did not really get into demolition of the TCC, citing the 2019 survey which overwhelmingly indicated townspeople want the original historic building to remain.

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Bill thanked the committee for alligator wrestling a difficult situation. He said looking at Abraham's photos, emotions aside, this is a building at the end of its life. In sum his opinion would be that it's better to start from scratch.

Rebecca noted the partnership aspect of working with Siemens. She would love to see a pharmacy. The ideal would be a vibrant community center.

Erik Amundsen said the photos showed junk, a representation of what it looks like now due to bad management and not caring. If you eliminate the junk, you've got a building.

Paul Raudonat brought up potential taxpayer cost. He has not found a model of a financially sustainable community center such as TCC for a Union-size community in Maine.

Adam said it is currently a taxpayer cost. As a taxpayer and the town's highest elected official, he has no idea who is in the building, what they're paying for rent, or who will be in there tomorrow. He drives by and fumes: peeling paint, lawn not mowed, full of returnable bottles. This is not something we will pay for; we have been paying for it. Something needs to be done.

Greg Grotton spoke about the last go-round with Penquis and all the misinformation that was out there. He reiterated Penquis' previous terms as an example, and mentioned the Aging in Place in Union Committee's mandate for elderly housing.

Adam differentiated between having an emotional attachment to the building, and wanting to see some use come out of it as a taxpayer.

Jay said this is his second rodeo with the TCC. The reality is it's only financially feasible to renovate the building via historical tax credit, elderly housing, those types of federal funds. The town's credit rating can be severely affected.

Josh voiced the concerns of many new people who have moved here in the last two to three years, who in essence wonder why there is so much to-do about an outdated building in disrepair. He would like to look into demolition and a cost-effective rebuild.

Martha said going forward it might be worthwhile to separate the buildings (yellow, brick). Adam sees this as more complicated; he likes the ease of Penquis, financially and management-wise.

More discussion followed about the past Penquis option, transparency, and possible YMCA partnership. Abraham Knight mentioned the septic system is not equipped for the building at capacity.

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Motion to establish a new TCC committee tasked with presenting the Select Board with three fleshed-out options of partnering with entities such as Penquis through a lease agreement by: Adam Fuller

2nd by: Jim Justice

Bill and Josh found this too narrow. Martha thinks the board needs to have another work session. Jay said we could hire an outside person to get the numbers.

Motion withdrawn by: Adam Fuller

Greg offered to work up a chart working with Jay so everything can be explained to the citizens of the town, if the board and committee would like him to.

Josh asked if an option might be to get rid of the lease, hire someone else to maintain it whom we trust, and proceed with a partner – slowly taking it back over?

It was agreed a focus is needed so we can get some hard numbers.

Sharon Caron spoke about the urgency of having the current lease broken, adding she managed the building for 10 years and partnered with Head Start, YMCA gymnastics, etc. much of that time with Abraham.

Adam said there will be another meeting.

6. Adjourn:

Motion to adjourn and invite CFTCC members back by: Bill Lombardi

2nd by: Jim Justice

5-0

Meeting adjourned at 8:51p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Abaldo
Secretary