

Select Board Sidelines

February 9, 2022

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in the Sidelines are the individual thoughts of the Select Board member.

Submitted by Bill Lombardi

The Select Board meeting held on Tuesday, February 1 was long with varied topics. I could say that much fun was had by all but that would be stretching the truth. I can truthfully say that it was long and varied. What follows is a short summary of each topic that follows the posted agenda.

The Nuts and Bolts: Your Select Board voted to accept the low bids for the construction of the Ayer Park boat ramp and the Clarry Hill culvert. Hopefully the boat ramp adds to citizen enjoyment and the culvert eliminates flooding.

We voted to bring mileage expense reimbursement to the IRS rate.

Thompson Memorial Association (TMA), request to release funds: Upon review of a report submitted by the TMA that included what the expenditures entailed, a financial projection and a review of issues to be addressed, the Select Board voted to release \$13,500 from the up to \$30,000 approved at our recent Special Town Meeting. Of special note, the financial projection does not anticipate utilizing all of the approved \$30,000. The Select Board requested that access to the TMA report be available on the Town's website. The initial report can be found under the Government tab, plus other reports regarding the TCC are available under the Government tab.

Members added to the Future of the Thompson Community Center Committee: The Select Board welcomes Gail Hawes and Stephen Migliorini to the committee. Thank you for your willingness to serve your community.

Referendum Voting: The trend is to change from Town Meeting voting to Referendum voting. We get three to five times as many voters at a referendum vote as at a town Meeting. We usually get 100 or less at a Town meeting, referendum meeting is 300-800.

Positives of Referendum: More participation and say by the voters. We tend to get younger people with kids and seniors to vote, neither of which always have the ability to come out to a town meeting. It also prevents a vocal minority from moving an issue which may not resonate with the entire community.

Positives of Town Meeting: Town Meetings and nostalgia, sometimes it is hard for people to change. Some like face-to-face contact with other folks in town. Others like the spectacle that it sometimes creates.

Budget Committee members and Pullen Trustees will need to take out nomination papers and be elected similarly to the Select Board and School Committee with referendum voting.

Public hearings on Warrant articles would still take place. Plus, now we have the added advantage of meetings being recorded and available on Town Hall Streams.

Costs: Probably no difference, what we would pay to print ballots would be offset by the staffing costs of an in-person meeting.

A lively debate ensued with impassioned arguments on both sides. As stated previously, it can be viewed on Town Hall Streams.

The Select Board voted 3 to 2 not to advance this article for a June vote.

Town Meeting & Election Dates/Times: The election is set for Tuesday June 14, 2022 from 8 AM to 8 PM. The Town Meeting is set for Tuesday June 21, 2022 at 7 PM. If you care to run for Select Board or School Committee the nomination papers filing deadline is Thursday April 14, 2022 by 4 PM.

Town Manager's Report: The Pullen property purchase is moving forward. More information is expected at our February 15 Select Board meeting. Ambulance Budget concerns have been expressed by Appleton & Washington. Expect this topic to be addressed at the February 15 meeting.

Future of the Thompson Community Center: This was a long conversation. What follows is an attempt to simplify the multiple moving parts. This is not a complete synopsis. More will be heard and discussed as we get closer to the town vote. This is a HUGE task for the committee in a limited time schedule. Best wishes!

The "Futures" committee has narrowed the possibilities into four categories:

- 1.) Keep it
- 2.) Lease it
- 3.) Sell it
- 4.) Tear it down

There may be multiple permutations within each category. The committee's task is to present the Select Board with the best options within these four categories with the associated costs & benefits as best that time allows.

"Keep it": Does that mean that the TMA continues? How is the building brought up to code/ the 2018 property evaluation addressed? Is an Engineering firm engaged? A General Contractor? What does the business plan encompass?

Select Board Sidelines – February 9, 2022

"Lease it": To whom, Senior Housing, MRC, Continuing Ed, a hybrid with the TMA? How is the building brought up to code?

"Sell it": A market evaluation is needed. What is being sold, parking lot, courts? How do we control or evaluate how the new owner would utilize the property, if at all possible?

"Tear it Down": Full tear down or partial? If partial, what is the use/cost/business structure? What happens after tear down, land sale, or?

All of these four options have multiple avenues that could be pursued. In the short time that the committee has available, it is a "best efforts" venture. It would be a monumental task if all of the details were in place by the time frame needed for the Town Meeting warrant. It is to the town's benefit that the folks on this committee are generously donating their time to develop the possibilities.