

Select Board Sidelines

January 12, 2022

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

Submitted by Bill Lombardi

At the Select Board meeting of January 4th, the Board met with the Town Attorney to go over details of the TCCA vacating the lease for the Thompson Community Center with the Town. It isn't a simple matter of the Board accepting the move by the TCCA, as you will find in the following report. Replacing it with another lease isn't an option short-term, as the Townspeople would need to approve it as well. The Board took Attorney Theriault's advice and approved a contract with the new nonprofit Thompson Memorial Association which allows them to manage the facility until a town vote in June. Additionally, the SB voted on a special town meeting on January 25th.

Special Town Meeting: Tuesday, January 25th we will hold a Special Town Meeting at 6:30 PM in the Meeting Room of the William Pullen Municipal Building. There are two critical Articles.

Article 2 asks that the existing lease granted to the Thompson Community Center Association (TCCA) be rescinded. Even though the TCCA has vacated the premises, our Town Attorney informed us that because the original lease was voted on at a Town Meeting, it can only be rescinded at a Town Meeting.

Article 3 asks, in essence, that the Town spends up to \$30,000 to fund operations at the facility through June. This is complicated and not an easy decision. The alternative is to shutter the building, cost was estimated to be 7 to 8 thousand dollars. It is debatable, given mix of original and retrofitted plumbing, if shuttering the systems could be feasibly accomplished. Given the leaks in the roof, leaving this building unheated could lead to a catastrophic failure, limiting the price of selling the building if the town decides on that route. Some estimate the buildings value to be somewhere around a million dollars.

Many town folks have expressed a desire to have this town asset function as a true Community Center. There is a belief, that with proper management and a business plan, that the facility can become self-sustaining. Maybe this is true, maybe not. The decision was made to preserve the value of the buildings by keeping the heat and utilities functioning. This benefits existing tenants while giving the town time to address the complexity of a permanent decision. Additionally, closing the building could potentially expose the town to significant legal costs as we would be breaking the lease held by an existing business tenant. Our intention is to provide full disclosure of developmental alternatives for a vote at the June Town Meeting. The Committee for the Future of the Thompson Community Center is working on developing cost/benefit analyses on multiple scenarios. The plan is to bring these possibilities to the taxpayers for direct input and a decision at the June Town Meeting. The Town Committee has two openings, if anyone is

interested in helping, please submit a “Statement of Interest Form” found on the Town’s website under the “Government” tab then “Boards & Committees”.

We feel that this is the best solution for this challenge. To underscore the Select Board decision to pursue this alternative, we know that if Article 3 does not pass on January 25th that we may be personally liable for money spent for the continued functioning of the building. At the Special Select Board meeting held January 6th we authorized \$5,000 for the new Thompson Memorial Association to keep the heat & utilities functioning until the January 25th Special Town Meeting. If Article 3 does not pass, we will expend no additional dollars and the building will be at risk of further damage as it will be shut down.

Since this is a communication from the Select Board, we feel that it is not the place to discuss the plans of the new Thompson Memorial Association (TMA). The folks of the TMA have been working diligently to establish an organization and business plan to bring this facility to a new level of functioning. What they have accomplished in very short order is commendable. You may find more information on their Facebook page.

Pullen Committee: This past Thursday by a 5 to 2 vote the Pullen Committee voted to purchase the Clark’s Field property on Rt 17. They authorized the expenditure of \$155,000 from the Pullen Fund account balance. If the citizens vote to accept the property from the Pullen Committee, it may be multiple years before this property will function as a recreational space. It was discussed that development plans and grant applications will be part of the future.