

Walker Building Repurposing Committee

Wednesday, April 1st 2026.

Attendance: Pete Beckford, Elise Brown, Dean Bartlett, Harry Schadei, Hannah Hatfield, Barbara Edmond, Jim Caldwell, Richard King, Mica Whitney, Bob Kohl, Jane Liebler, Cheryl Ball

WHOLE COMMITTEE:

Called to order at 6:08pm

HOUSEKEEPING

- Approval minutes - 3/11 and 3/25
 - **TABLED** until next week (due to emergency absence)

CELEBRATIONS (Elise)

- First fundraiser!
 - \$155 — whoohoo! With great cookies.
- A smooth town meeting!
 - U-shaped set-up worked really well.
 - Shout-out to Tammy Reynolds in particular
 - Discussion went great and the money got approved
 - Proposed Fire station sign got a lot of comments
 - Some confusion around the warrant language re what the money is going to. Clarified it's going to operations.
 - **ACTION: Elise** upload PDF version of PPT for accessibility

BUILDING LAYOUT DISCUSSION (Richard)

- Review 3 possible plans
 - Q about sq footage being roughly the same for all three. town office will fit into any of them.
 - There is a fireproof vault needed (mandated by law) that would go in either the second or basement level of the remodel. Use for birth, death, marriage records, etc.
 - Q: Which is least expensive? Which is quickest?
 - A: Doesn't make any difference. Both will cost money. Building separate offices or interaction with the public will cost the same in both places. The cost difference shouldn't be substantially different.

- Fire protection is the biggest cost regardless of the design choice. The older section is easier to sprinkle due to open attic. Newer section has cluttered trussed roof.
- Heard from town employees that they favor offices in the groundfloor wing. Elderly would have to come in and go around. There's going to be steps regardless. Security through doorways is also a question (two vs. one set of doors). → There is a misunderstanding about where the elevator shaft will be located.
 - We can close spaces but not corridors. Doors to rooms/offices can be locked.
- Q: Will there be two entrances open simultaneously?
 - Yes. If it's going to be run as a community center, someone has to be responsible for the center, not the town office employees.
 - We are uncovering some issues that lots of people might have. These concerns will help us prep for a public meeting. We don't have to figure it out tonight, but we can use that to organize and then address.
 - We can't actually decide where offices, etc., will go until we get more community input.
 - Money is not the only thing making us decide what offices should go where.
 - Square footage will determine, but any of the rooms are big enough for a town office, combined.
- Proximity to the vault matters when there's only one person working. They can't leave the office unattended. Lindsey accesses the vault 10-12 times a day. Could pull stuff out temporarily, but she still needs to get in there 2-3 times a day at least.
 - State regs recommend a safe on the floor in the office for petty cash on property instead of using a vault.
 - Vault meant for long-term protection/archiving, not for money, license plates, etc.
 - Record storage — how is it handled? File storage can be stored in the vault.
- Q: Which rooms can we rent? Thinking about this will help with the business model. Town use might be limited to 3-4 rooms, and rent the rest.
 - Need to think about renting in terms of square footage. The town will pay annually roughly what they pay now — which is around \$10,000 all inclusive (rent, lights, heat, etc.)
 - For federal grants, we can't rent to for-profit places. But we could rent to a non-profit that rents to artists, teachers, etc, as a workaround.
 - Which side (old or new bldg) is more valuable?

- MCOG has a market study, but not sure if they looked at that data.
- Re Childcare center usage, we need to know about the licensing issues with also renting to non-childcare usages (i.e., sign-in and sign-out spot and ensuring kids' safety en route to bathroom, etc.)
- Q: Can we have any renters before there's an elevator?
 - NO. Basically we can't use anything in the building until the elevator is in place. We'd have to talk to the state fire marshall to see what the timeline has to be. Plus, it's hard to renovate a building when there are occupants.
 - If everything goes right AND we got the money, it'll be at LEAST a year before we can start work. And we still have to come up with another \$500,000. So assume another two years before anyone can really occupy the building.
- Naming conventions, locations, and potential plans on the plan
 - **1935 upper level - Four classrooms (scheme A)**
 - could be town office space for back office, public office, selectboard room, planning board and other mtg room
 - More "historic" - is that nice for the town office?
 - Could be for auxiliary community use (and can use elevator)
 - No vault space.
 - Elevator as "extra step" could be an obstacle to town office access
 - Front rooms could be performance spaces, to enjoy the historic floors, etc.
 - Rental rooms in the smaller rooms
 - No bathrooms on this level (yet?)
 - More visible in terms of town office prominence
 - Less flexible in terms of architectural change, so why not make the town office there since it'll stay that way for a LONG time.
 - Elevator precludes any steps at all to access A, unless you want to use the main entrance with the grand staircase.
 - Possibility for skylights with atrium all the way to the basement at the back of Scheme A.
 - Potential for moving the elevator somewhere with less steps to this level. (*Elise suggested this, but secretary missed where.*)
 - **1986 main level (scheme B and scheme C - same mirror images in 4 classrooms)**
 - Town office could also be there, just different configuration
 - More accessible — a lot of the elderly can't do their transactions online so they want to come in. Accessibility is a high value.

- More space.
- Childcare could be better in C, but would town office want to be next to it?
- Has vault space in both B and C (as well as in basement)
- Friendlier access for folks who want to get in/get out and who don't know how to get around Walker already. (for town office in Scheme B)
- Town office employees had a positive response to childcare (C) being next to town office (B)
- Easier access to playground out the back (if childcare in scheme C)
- Rooms could host historical society docs, etc.
- Easier for parents dropping off kids
- In case of fire, easier to get kids out of B or C
- Much friendlier to rent and coherent with the rest of the potential community space.
- **Old Library (across from entrance)**
 - Community space
 - Cafe?
 - Welcoming and alive as a space
 - Meeting room in the evenings
 - Near bathrooms
 - Seeing kids around is lively
 - Concern about meeting space being part of the town offices but it needs to be available to anyone.
 - But only the chairs would belong to the town office.
 - Could be a comfy waiting space for folks going into other parts of Walker
- **Basement space**
 - Maker spaces
 - Shop (workshop)
 - Art stuff
 - Can make the windows larger
 - Also has a vault
- Discussion ensued regarding where things might be, accessibility of those spaces, transparency of these decisions internally and externally, and how we can go about getting feedback on these (or other) ideas from the town office and community.
 - Richard motioned to move on. Barbara seconded.

COMMUNITY INFO MEETING

- Pick a date for a community info mtg - we said early June, but should it be sooner?
 - Community feedback on building use & layout

- Announce matching fund plan
- Announce any local events we have planned
- Q&A session
- Q: Does it need to be so soon? Do we really have a childcare option that's interested in using the space already? Can we use a few months to talk to people?
 - Mica has \$ to start a Montessori school already, as soon as the space is ready.
 - If we do it sooner, it's to get input on plans, to educate them as to where we are in terms of transparency.
 - Even if the meeting turns raucous, it gives the public a chance to say their piece.
 - The previous meeting whetted people's appetite to hear more, so June would help us further explain what's going on, and we will have more accomplished before then. It would be great to have more meat on the bones re fundraising and potential renters.
 - Who else might be interested in the building besides the town office? Can we show that?
 - Probably still preliminary
 - We could ask them then
 - Likely to have our fundraising plan ready to share.
 - Is it more like an open house where we walk people through the visible options in the school? Full-size dioramas, lol. Signs on the door explaining what the space might be.
 - Qs to ask folks: what would you like to see, what would you go to in the building, what can't you get in Belfast, etc. that you'd like to see here?
 - Do the same as we did in the last June meeting with post-its, etc.
 - But we are farther along now.
 - Community Engagement group considered doing an open house as a fundraising option.
 - Need to make sure there's enough substance to share with people to encourage them to attend.
 - Should we flesh out a town meeting agenda and bring it back to the next meeting? Since we promised we wouldn't take questions at the last meeting, but promised them we'd do it soon. People are nervous about the half million, so how can we explain the plan to them?
 - Challenge: the biggest chunk of the 500,000 is selling the town office. If it takes 6 months to sell the building, we could take a loan that's paid back once the building sells.
 - Q: Does the town office sale include the parking lot? (Can we get Pottle's to buy the parking lot?)
 - Potential meeting ideas:
 - Feedback on design plan options

- More community input in terms of renters or services we can pursue
- General updates on financing and finance plan
- Q&A
- Maybe a suggestion box instead of envisioning the space out loud again.
 - → Although maybe different people will come and envision now since we've narrowed focus and know the codes now...(i.e., like housing is off the table now). **ACTION: Elise** find old envisioning doc to send to Mica
- Q: Zoom meetings to cast a wider net?
 - Hard to hear
- Two meetings: Saturday and Wednesday night — the meeting agenda would be identical for both.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK PROCESS

- Need a fair and consistent process for feedback, whether someone stops us on the street or through more formal channels.
- This is primarily for off-meeting times
- Form similar to RSU3 survey, easy survey that was well put together
- Q: How to distinguish between brainstorm and more “official” suggestions?
- What we need is to be able to show a trail of how requests inform the committee's work, without overcomplicating it.
- The staff had specific requests, for instance, but what is the process we use to *process* those requests?
 - E.g., does each request come to the full committee and then the secretary can respond?
- Does MCOG have suggestions? Or Northport since they just went through something similar? **ACTION: Elise** will ask them.
- Can we do a weekly open mic (that Pete would run) and then log all those suggestions?
- Some questions/suggestions would be straightforward that don't require whole-committee input. It's the contentious things that would require multiple cmte members or whole cmte.
- Q: Are there parameters: low, med, high in terms of importance?
- Q: What's a “broad range” of community members - 20, 50, 100?
- Big question: some are hearing is how much is it going to cost taxpayers? People were concerned about \$500,000. This is a repeated question.
- FAQ: we need it going sooner rather than later. The newsletter can include one question, for instance.

- Timelines/Milestones: make these public too.
- Is there a companion form that will help crystallize this and make it easier for folks but also distinguish questions or suggestions from brainstorming that doesn't need a response.
- The people who are really interested will come, and those who aren't, won't. Once we publish something, folks who aren't interested may come/participate. They can email or call Richard if they don't want to attend, and he can bring it to the group.
- Also could drop off questions/suggestions at the town office.
- With a survey, we could say we at least reached out.

General Committee Concerns and Questions

- Big fear: we build it and no one will come. If no one uses it, it will fail. What can we do to help people envision how they will engage in seeing themselves using the building.
 - At least Walker school is a manageable size. It's easier to imagine what might go in these rooms.
 - Elise played with numbers. We might be able to generate \$120,000 (incl. Town office), to cover our operational cost (maintenance, insurance, staffing).
- Q: What's the biggest maintenance item that will arise?
 - We can't anticipate, but we know the boiler is in the autumn of its life. There is a replacement part available in the immediate future. But part of the HVAC renos is changing out the boiler.
 - Need several engineers to review everything (and the grant money covers that).
- Next time: Fundraising team needs a big chunk of time to meet. If you have agenda items, send them to Elise or Richard.

Dean adjourned, Richard seconded. 7:29pm