

**South Berwick Town Council
Public Hearing
Town Hall
June 28, 2023**

Chair Mallory Cook opened the hearing at 6:00pm. Councilors present included John James, Jessica Cyr, Jeffrey Minihan, and Melissa Costella. Town Manager Tim Pellerin and Assistant Town Manager Jennifer Janelle were also in attendance.

The purpose of the hearing was to receive public input on the renovation of the existing town hall or building a new town hall.

Mrs. Cook announced that the meeting is being recorded and will be available to view on our YouTube channel.

Mrs. Cook gave an overview of the status of the staff/staff spaces and the building as it stands, and the actions taken to date to correct known issues. She stressed that we just started the process for determining whether we should renovate the existing building or build new, here or at another location. She also emphasized that there will be more opportunities for resident input as the process moves along.

Mrs. Cook also briefly reviewed the report from Port City Architecture.

Mrs. Cook explained that town staff is spending a significant amount of time 'putting out fires' regarding the amount of misinformation that is circulating. She strongly urged residents to only use official means for getting information about the project and avoid the rumor mills. Town staff will post information to the website and Facebook page when it is available.

Mrs. Cook explained the rules of order for the hearing. She also noted that emails will also be reviewed and added to the record. The initial question for tonight's hearing is 'Are you in favor of renovating the existing building or constructing a new building and why?'

-Malcolm Kenney, Agamenticus Rd, stated that he is not in favor of spending anymore money on this building. "This building has had it." He added that meetings should start later for better attendance. He also commented that if the decision is made to build new on town property, don't wait too long to inform the public.

-Richard Tiedemann, Liberty St, suggested that tours of the building be set up so that residents can actually see the spaces and issues for themselves.

-Richard 'Rob' Bernier, Mountain Rd, commented that this building is on a solid foundation and has good bones; it's worth looking at renovating. He added that the numbers provided by Port City are not accurate. He stated that the company he works for would be willing to do a complete assessment and provide more accurate numbers for a renovation.

-Floyd Beavers, Woodland Hills, asked if there were information packets. Mrs. Cook stated that information would be posted to our website and Facebook page.

-Tamre Steinhauer, Hill Dr, suggested that the council consider getting more architects involved. She added that the Port City presentation was not very good. "We should keep our cute little downtown." Consider renovating the existing building with mixed-use spaces.

-Paul Steinhauer, Hill Dr, stated that he is keeping an open mind, but leaning toward renovation. Was not impressed with the Port City presentation and suggested that we need to widen the scope and consult with more architects.

-Robert Leavens, Witchtrot Rd, made note of his construction background and believes the estimates to renovate this building are wrong. He stated that this is where town hall belongs.

-David McDermott, Bennett Lot Rd, stated that town hall should stay where it is. He added that the Port City report seemed negative toward this building; it was done too quickly.

-Mike Lassel, Paul St, stated that a community is defined by its character. This building does have good bones; and old buildings are sustainable. If we were to move, where would we go?

-John Irvine, Woodland Hills, read a letter (dated 6/12/23) signed by a number of residents urging the council to 'protect our village.' The town should look at creative ways to renovate the existing building. Concerns were expressed regarding costs and the social and environmental effects.

-Brad Christo, Oldfields Rd, stated that it would be helpful to have more information and studies. It is disconcerting that the building committee is not involved as it has been with prior municipal projects.

-Abigail Sherwood, Tamarack Dr, stated that she is in favor of renovating. She added that there should be a comprehensive study of all town owned buildings. This building would be good for mixed use. Keeping this central location may help citizens get more involved in our local government.

-Nancy Wetzal, Bennett Lot Rd, stated she was favor in renovating the existing building.

-Gary Wetzal, Bennett Lot Rd, stated he was in favor of renovating. We value our historic buildings and need to preserve them.

-James Cleary, Back Acres Ln, stated that we should renovate. He added that renovations could be done in stages by prioritizing repairs and spreading out the cost. A list of pros and cons should be developed. We don't need to go with the cheapest option. He added that he believed the problems with this building are being overblown.

-Ken Weston, Spring St, stated that he is an architect for UNH has been involved for numerous projects involving old buildings. Renovating an old building helps preserve our history. We need to be creative with our approach.

-John Rudolph, Oldfields Rd, appreciated the presentation and everyone's comments. Stated that we can all agree this is a special place. We have a complete downtown, which is rare. We should renovate the existing building. We should consider the economic, cultural and social effects of moving.

-Nicole St. Pierre, Great Works Dr, stated that once this building is gone, its gone. We can't afford to lose this treasure.

-Virginia Zavacky, Goodwin St, stated that she was in favor of renovating the existing building. "Would hate to lose the focal point of our community."

-Carrie Portrie, Norton St, stated that she loves the center of town, and we should renovate the existing building to preserve our history. She offered her services with community support workshops and dialogues.

-Stephen Portrie, Norton St, stated that we should renovate the existing building.

-Elita Galvin, Beaver Dam Rd, spoke in favor of renovating the existing building. "You can't put a dollar number on history and character."

There were approximately 55 people present for the hearing.

The hearing was closed at 7:17pm.

Attest:

Barbara Bennett, CCM

