

**Town of Sherman
Board of Selectman Special Meeting
Monday, April 3, 2023 at 7pm
Mallory Town Hall**

Member's Present: First Selectman Don Lowe, Selectman Bob Ostrosky, and Selectman Joel Bruzinski

Member's Absent: None

Audience & Invited: Treasurer Eric Holub, Business Manager Liz LaVia, BOE Member Tim Laughlin, and residents from the community.

Clerk: Margaret Beatty

First Selectman Don Lowe called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm followed by the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance. He began by explaining that this meeting is an opportunity to discuss and listen to the community's thoughts and concerns. He proceeded to then move promptly into the topics on the agenda.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky requested a point of order to make the meeting interactive amongst all attendees throughout the meeting. All Selectman agreed.

1) To discuss the 6,000 square feet of building space offered to the Town from the Sherman School Building Committee out of the plans for the Sherman School renovation:

First Selectman Don Lowe began by illustrating that his understanding of the offered 6,000 square feet was for a larger reimbursement from the state for the school project.

Firstly, Selectman Joel Bruzinski encouraged any/all residents to attend in person meetings, or join via ZOOM, the Sherman School Building Committee meetings to familiarize oneself of the intricacies and strategy of the committee. He acknowledged, in short, that the state would provide a larger reimbursement for smaller square footage but the project has complexities that reflect a larger issue. The committee is pursuing potential maximum funding along with maximizing the appropriate space needed for the student body.

First Selectman Don Lowe has expressed concern over the potential loss of space. Discussion of possible usage for the space was a suggested Community Center.

Selectman Joel Bruzinski reminded that the plan submitted by the SSBC is 1 or 3 potential plans and no final product has been decided upon. He added the importance of

maintaining school while seeing a project come to fruition in order to provide normalcy for the students and their families.

Gene McRoberts sought clarification in what defined a Community Center. Selectman Joel Bruzinski replied honestly a potential Senior Center. He also mentioned the possibility of office space for committees/boards in Town. The space offers potential for several ideas to be explored.

TJ Fazzone asked if the 6,000 square feet offered come as is and if the mechanical renovations for the school plan carry over into the donated space. Selectman Joel Bruzinski replied that a broader plan needs to be discussed to encompass all areas of the school and its usage.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky understood that the plan presented established the 6,000 square foot space as a separate project from the school. Selectman Joel Bruzinski acknowledged that the offered space would be a separate project but the SSBC would build a plan around the usage of that space if it is going to be occupied.

Richard Lenihan asked if the offered space by the SSBC was planned around the estimated number of students currently enrolled or does it accommodate the 10-year projection of enrollment. Tim Laughlin, BOE member, responded that the plan to donate the 6,000 square feet accommodates the higher enrollment projected. Currently the school does not comply with state regulations and is operating on a waiver. The SSBC is working to maximize the space needed as well as comply with state standards.

Rick Hudson wondered if the K-Wing will ever be functional with the reorganization of classroom space in the new design plan. Selectman Joel Bruzinski noted that subsequent plans would infuse the K-Wing into operation.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky questioned if construction on the offered space could be done simultaneously as the school renovation design. Selectman Joel Bruzinski commented that the SSBC has not engaged in discussion on potentially having two projects done at the same time. He reiterated the hardships of space within a small radius to house materials, machinery, and workers for a potential project while maintaining a school schedule.

Parking and security issues have been concerns raised by residents in the community. Senior Center committee members also expressed concern over the donated space and its location and lack of amenities.

Janet Wey, Commission on Aging member, referenced a prior meeting between the school and Senior Center members, reminding that parents were lukewarm to the idea of having their children share a space with seniors.

Carol Sperling visited local Senior Centers to get a sense of what was important for these centers to offer seniors. Patio space was an important role to provide seniors the access and

ability to congregate outside of a structure. Patio space was an important role during Covid to allow for seniors to connect. She feels the donated space is cold and felt like a basement, it does not provide a warm, welcoming atmosphere.

Joanna Wozniac commented that she was happy to have the school share a space with seniors.

Wendy Quinby commented that she and many families were receptive to mixing generations and having the school share space with seniors.

Jim Reilly wanted to inform that the school has been used as an emergency shelter in Town.

Ed Hayes noted that only one building in Town meets all state requirements as a shelter and that is the firehouse. A full working kitchen is necessary, the school does not operate under a full functioning kitchen.

Richard Lenihan wondered why the enrollment projections done by the current BOE is starkly different than the previous administrations. Tim Laughlin, BOE member, replied that enrollments are done by a mathematical equation, taking into account birthrates.

First Selectman Don Lowe shared an email submitted by Jen Freed opposing the acquisition of the 6,000 square feet by the Town. She is opposed to any acceptance of state funding to repair the school and reiterated that state funding comes with strings attached. Selectman Joel Bruzinski commented that it would not be prudent not to accept tax dollars to fund a project that consists of state requirements. The strings are with the requirements of the project.

Rick Hudson lamented the need for the right space to encourage more involvement from seniors in Town. He expressed the need for more programs to draw in crowds but reiterated that a facility fit to accommodate seniors needs would possibly draw in a younger senior crowd.

Current feedback suggests that interest for a Community Center/Senior Center in the donated space is low.

2) To discuss any other aspects or concerns regarding the Sherman School renovation project:

The SSBC is early in its process conceptually. The goal is to maximize spending in pursuit of the most functional space. The Selectman agreed that the right project is the goal for the Town. The first of three projects is valued at 55 million dollars.

Ted Hollander inquired whether the project could be priced less. Selectman Joel Bruzinski confirmed that one of the subsequent plans could come in less.

The Town's credit rating is the highest for its size. Interest rates are an unknown when possibly bonding a large expenditure. The residents are at risk of seeing a substantial increase in taxes. The goal of the Town is to equip the residents with the facts in regards to spending and taxes and let the voters decide.

Kasey Diotte reminded that reimbursements for projects are based on qualified expenses. The reimbursements reflect components of a project not the whole scope of a project. She suggested the committee look into sized waivers provided by the state for larger spaces, if left untouched, instead of moth balling an area.

First Selectman Dob Lowe referred back to an email submitted by Jen Freed asking where the budget that phases in repairs over a period of time. She expressed concern for those who are surviving on a fixed income. She encouraged the building committee to focus on repairing the most essential items and less on an extravagant building not modeled after our historically quaint rural Town.

Treasurer Eric Holub questioned why a certain aspect of a project requires an entire overhaul to an area/building space, for example a roof repair turning into the construction of a new building. The idea of repair no longer has relevance. He also asked when the other 2 options will be presented.

Selectman Bob Ostosky raised concerns on behalf of parents. He identified the spaces that might potentially be downsized, i.e. the cafeteria, plays an important role in not just school hours but for after school activities. Activities such as the art show, family reading night, and the Harvest Fair draw in a large crowd. The idea of creating a smaller space could pose obstacles when dealing with extracurricular activities.

A meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 4, 2023 at 6pm between the BOS, BOE, and SSBC. The meeting to be held in the school library and open to the public.

TJ Fazzone would like to see the school consider revamping the class structure and move towards K through 5th grade. He believes there is benefit to students having the opportunity to join another school as opposed to staying with the same group of kids through 8th grade.

Susan Zeitler asked if all 3 renovation options will rely on grant money from the state and would like to see an option presented without state aid. Selectman Joel Bruzinski commented that a process must be followed required by the state in order to meet building standards. The BOE and SSBC cannot develop their own plan.

Joanne Wozniac likes the current size of the school but is open to adjustments for the greater good of the students. She also raised concerns about the student body having to co-mingle amongst construction and possibly breathing harmful dust or unsafe environment.

Eva Defranco is concerned that the school existence is threatened. She sought clarification on the timeline for a renovation consideration. She also suggested providing residents the cost breakdown for the potential project. The Selectman concurred that the project is in its infancy and that details will be presented so residents can make their own conclusions.

Ed Hayes commented that the Senior Center has been indirectly tied to the agenda conversation and wondered if the plans to move forward with renderings for a new Senior Center will be postponed.

First Selectman Don Lowe thanked all volunteers on respective committee for all their efforts, dedication, and hard work trying to navigate a complex situation.

Barbara Hoag expressed her embarrassment that the school has spiraled in such disrepair and implored results.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:55pm.

Motioned by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky

Seconded by: Selectman Joel Bruzinski **All in Favor:** Unanimous

Notes respectfully submitted by Margaret Beatty on April 22, 2023.