

## **Minutes from Russell School Committee Forum**

**Monday, November 14, 2022, 6:30-8:00pm**

Hybrid: Hadley Public Library Community Room and Zoom

Present: Courtney Meyer (Chair), E Dragon, Carolyn Holstein, Daniel Regish, Alan Weinberg

Absent: Amy Parsons (liaison)

In attendance: about 8 members in person, 6 on Zoom

Dragon had made a PowerPoint presentation for the forum, including historical and current photos, and the committee largely followed its pages.

Courtney opened the meeting with welcoming words and stated that the goal of the committee is to figure out the future of the building.

Dan gave an outstanding history of the building, including the fire of the original school and the town authorizing \$17,790.17 to rebuild the school. (The building committee consisted of all men, the custom of the day.) He said that the rebuilt structure, which stands today, was made of the finest material and still is extremely solid. Still no creaks in the floorboards, after nearly 130 years.

Alan spoke next and gave an overview of the survey options. He also said that to convert the school to a Town Hall annex would cost about \$16 million. To stabilize the building, addressing the 4 current deficiencies, might cost \$1.5 - 2 Million. Demolition will cost \$700K+.

Dragon said that if the building were to be used, parking would be an issue. (There were no cars in the 19th century when the building was constructed.) Also many ADA requirements must be met - an elevator, a ramp into the building, handicapped bathrooms, etc.

Carolyn addressed the last PowerPoint slide. She stated that about 500+ surveys have been completed to date. The deadline for the surveys to be submitted is Jan 5th. The committee is hoping to apply for CPA funding, even if in parts. Other sources of funding could be Valley CDC funds, Mass Historical Commission, and Mass Development.

Following the committee's presentation of the PowerPoint slides, questions from the audience were entertained.

The first speaker (we failed to ask for identification) asked what makes a building historic? Have any famous men stopped there - George Washington, etc, and even Calvin Coolidge. The

committee responded that the building's age, its use, and its location within an Historic District all qualify it to be called "historical". He remained not convinced.

Other speakers present in the room defended the "historic" classification and questioned the estimates of the exterior repairs. Dan read the exact figures from the 2018 report for each repair, then suggested doubling that figure.

\*\*Note - I didn't write down the Zoom speakers. Will do the best I can here, but not good enough

Folks at the meeting on Zoom had questions/comments.

Molly Keegan, Select Bd, praised the Forum and the Committee's work, and apologized for not giving the committee a charge (do we have one yet?) She later said that a lot of CPA money was given to the school for improvements to the playing field. The CPA also borrowed for this project. So she was concerned about the amount of CPA money available for the school exterior improvements. (Keegan failed to note that 'education' and 'historical renovation' are two separate categories/pots of funds for the CPA.)

Denise Barstow Manz also spoke twice. She suggested that the Town Treasurer may be able to change the tax rate for the building ( I didn't get this - isn't the building already exempt from taxes, as a Town building, off the tax base?) She also made some other comment that I didn't record.

There was another Zoom speaker which I didn't record.

The next meeting will be November 28, 6:30pm at the Town Library.

The meeting adjourned at 7:57pm.

Respectfully submitted

Carolyn Holstein, Clerk