

Minutes from Russell School Committee Forum
Monday, November 28, 2022, 6:30-8:00pm
Hybrid: Hadley Public Library Community Room and Zoom

Present: Courtney Meyer, Dan Regish, Alan Weinberg, Carolyn Holstein (on Zoom)

Absent: E Dragon, Amy Parsons (Select Board liaison)

Guest speaker: Laura Baker, Valley CDC

1. Minutes from the previous two meetings (8/24 & 11/14) were approved with some modifications

2. Guest Laura Baker talked about the possibility of converting the Russell School to condos or affordable housing. She said that the small scale of the building would make it difficult to convert. Also is the building near wetlands or a floodplain? If so, the site will need a wetlands evaluation. An example of reuse is an Easthampton school which has been converted to high-end condos. We need to understand the potential of our site, she said. An addition to the building may be possible, and well as mixed use – commercial first floor and housing upper floors. Another example – the Center School in Hatfield retained the front facade of the building and added new condos behind it.

Carolyn rejected the notion that the building be used for housing. It exists in a municipal district, has several uses (school, Town Hall, library) and should remain that way. Dan said that the suggestions for future use are 'putting the cart before the horse'. Stabilization of the building is the first priority. Alan said that the Valley CDC was present only for giving us options for possible future use.

An example was given of a similar situation in Southampton of an old school building which was restored for municipal uses (20+ yrs ago). The Town Hall was not big enough for all the Town activity, which apparently has been happening in Hadley Town Hall.

3. Possible funding sources

- Mass Development fund – we're not eligible for their Commonwealth Places Program, but we were advised to look into the Community One Stop for Growth application. Applicants can begin to apply in early December.

- Mass Historical Commission - are eligible for the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF), Courtney said. Up to \$800,000 is available to be granted (Courtney incorrectly said

\$80,000 at the meeting.) Application is daunting and requires us to reimburse them with funds. Carolyn will look into grant particulars. Deadline: March 17.

- CPA – application due Feb 1; Meetings to review applicants are Mondays, Feb 13 for committee questions and Feb 27 for voting. RSC should have a rep at each of these meetings. Mary Thayer is the Chair; Alan said he would talk to her about limits for borrowing. Courtney will reach out to town treasurer (in relation to Denise Barstow Manz 's question at Forum). Town meeting will be around mid-May.

4. The survey will be finished as of January 5. There are 512 online responses to date, and ~25 paper surveys collected. Alison will be asked to input the paper survey responses into the online collection of responses. Courtney to contact Alison for next steps.

5. The Forum was felt to be successful overall. Dragon's powerpoint presentation great! Dan's history of the building was outstanding. Carolyn asked that the history be added to the minutes of the evening. One person in attendance, Beth Kieras, had asked to come to our meetings in the future.

6. Courtney reported that the Historical Commission wants to make a video about the Russell building's history, along with Alex at Hadley Media. This will be separate from our committee's work, but they will present it to our committee when complete.

7. The question of the possible wetlands around the Russell School was briefly discussed. Dan said that a determination from the Conservation Commission had been done in the past, but needs to be updated. (Later Alan consulted with the Wetlands Administrator in Town Hall, and shared a map of the wetlands around the building. The land is in a 500-year flood plain district, so it is safe.)

Meeting adjourned at 7:55pm.

The next scheduled meetings will be December 19 and January 9, both at 6:30pm at the library.

Respectfully submitted, Carolyn Holstein