

To: Richmond Selectboard
Date: 3/20/24
From: Laurie Dana, Chair Library Trustees & member of the Town Center & Library Building Committee
Re: Moving forward on the Town Center Renovation & Maintenance Plan

As a member of the Town Center & Library Buildings Committee since 2018 – I have some personal thoughts about potential next steps for this work.

First, I think that we need to move forward with some plan. There is momentum and more voters understand that the Town Center building issues need to be addressed. They will only get worse and costs will not go down.

Second, I believe that the Committee needs to be expanded with new members (hopefully some current members will continue). The Selectboard could advertise for new members. but I can think of several people who came to tours and/or meetings that have expertise. Sometimes people need to be **asked** to volunteer. Suggestions: Matt Moultrou (works in construction, his company does building maintenance contracts for buildings they build. Gary Rabideau (architect, designed 2nd floor library renovation, was part of committee that got insulation in TC attic. Mike Storrs (he is very thoughtful and clearly cares). Mark Aridges (had a lot of critical things to say about the financing of the building and cost). I think we need to look for an experienced grant researcher & writer and perhaps a capital campaign person – June Heston comes to mind or she might know others. Other committee members may have other suggestions.

Third, the Selectboard needs to provide guidance on issues we are NOT revisiting, otherwise this will take another 2-3 years. The Selectboard seemed to agree with the Committee about these items:

- We are NOT building a new building but are working on how to restore/renovate existing Town Center to serve our needs for the next fifty years.
- We **do need** space for the Police Department in Richmond—do we really want to reopen the Public Safety building debacle of a few years ago?
- We want to keep the U.S. Post Office as a tenant in this building (I've heard a rumor that they will move to the market building when Dan builds a new market)
- Town employee needs are primary, particularly a safe, comfortable and pleasant work space.

Fourth, it may need to be a larger committee with 3 subcommittees with specific expertise in the area.

- 1) **Building Renovations**. Charge would be to review and build on the work that has already been done (not starting over again). Explore the many questions around immediate and long-term prioritization of needs, phasing work, identifying areas where more information is needed. This includes HVAC systems questions around cost-benefit of going for energy efficiency vs. maintaining existing and just move

mechanicals. I would recommend reengaging Black River Design in some of this work and paying them. Also an in-depth review with them and former committee members about steps and information we have gathered.

2) **Funding. I want to correct the impression at the Selectboard meeting that we did not explore grants.** The committee (particularly Jeff, myself and Diane) did a pretty in-depth exploration of grants. We held a funders conference in July 2023 and had 20+ attendees from our congressional offices and most of the significant State & Federal agencies who do grants as well as the Vermont Bond Bank. They had some suggestions but acknowledged that, because Richmond is regarded as a “wealthy” community, some of our Federal and State grant opportunities are limited. We also ran up against several issues:

- Some grants require that you have the project funds in hand before you can apply.
- Some grants are so small and requirements are so restrictive that they are not worth the cost to the Town/project – i.e. Bruhn Historic Preservation Grant is a maximum of \$100,000 and would require historic restoration of windows and exterior, a 5-year easement requiring their approval of any change to building (like solar on roof), registration with the National Register of Historic Sites which would restrict changes to building in perpetuity.
- Some of the grants require an up-front outlay of cash by the Town for things like ADA consultant reports, Environmental Reviews, and Historic Consultant reviews –
- Some grants have a short time-window—Better Places and AARP Living Communities Grants must be spent within the calendar year.
- There are many, many grants that we don’t qualify for because we are regarded as a wealthy town. For example, USDA grants (Richmond is too wealthy to qualify). We might qualify for a USDA loan. Suzanne runs into the same issue with grants for OCCC. The Library runs into this problem too.
- We applied for Congressionally Directed Spending grants 3 times and were not successful.
- Two big grants I think it is worth applying for the State of Vermont MERV which is not yet open to applications and FEMA Flood Mitigation Grants which are very complex. This was one area that we simply ran out of time and bandwidth.

That said, I think there are areas to explore including:

- **Town Funds**, for example Conservation Fund charter includes buildings
- **Rent** – I think Connie applied some of the rent to the project in the capital plan presented at the recent Selectboard meeting. This idea was never presented to the public because the committee didn’t know there were numbers already run.
- **Grants** – Pursue the FEMA Flood Mitigation Grant
- **Foundations** (local corporate and national) – I think South Burlington new Town Hall leveraged a lot of local & national Corporate donation funding—

most of the Library spaces have names attached (Comcast, Ben & Jerrys, Verizon, Pizzigalli & O'Brien are there I think).

- **TIF funding** – A community member asked me if the Town had considered becoming a TIF District (I don't know what that is!)
- **Private fundraising** – Should we run a capital campaign and offer an opportunity to town residents with the ability to contribute more to the project to reduce the tax cost on all? This would need a separate effort. Martha Nye mentioned this to me late in the process.
- **Creative borrowing ideas**, explore further the difference between loans vs. grants, USDA loan rates, etc.
- **Hiring a grant writer** as it is tough to do this well as it is a particular skill and it is a log to ask a volunteer to do.

3) **Town of Richmond needs a Facilities Maintenance Plan** for ALL town-owned buildings -- Library, Town Center, Fire Station, Town Garage --and could include grounds like parks & cemeteries.

- Look at combining maintenance contracts for things like elevators and HVAC.
 - Review purchasing process to achieve economies of scale--see attached memo from Library Trustees from 2016—no action was ever taken on this!
 - Identifying who is responsible for routine & emergency building maintenance so we aren't paying the librarian spend her time making phone calls
 - Options include hiring a buildings/grounds maintenance company. Hiring a part-time facility manager or combining responsibilities with other duties. There are several Richmond residents who do this for a living and could be advisors (Matt Moultrou, Chris Siple)
- **Fifth, revoting a new Bond** - I don't necessarily think we cannot go back to the town for a new Bond vote if we were able to trim the \$9.8 million number down, if we had \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 of grants in hand (or combined private donors, foundations and grants) and we revised the communications on the project. One of the biggest criticisms I heard was that we didn't "communicate the tax implications" but every one of the packets stated that the tax implication was around \$96/\$100,000 of value. A lot of people thought we should have actual construction bids before a bond vote—I don't think this is usual path. We would have had to pay for the construction drawings in order to do an RFP and go through the sealed bid process. I guess it could be done if the Selectboard felt that they wanted to spend the money up front.

Thanks for letting me get all of this out and for your support.
Laurie Dana

Appendix A – Library Trustees Proposal from 2016

Proposal to the Town of Richmond Selectboard from the Trustees of Richmond Free Library

We would like to propose that the Town explore and adopt a coordinated facilities management program.

Problem Statement:

Inefficient use of staff resources:

The Library Trustees continue to be concerned about the amount of time that is being required for the Library Director to manage large-scale capital projects. This is time that she is not able to devote to her primary responsibilities as the director of the Richmond Free Library--a vibrant and important community resource. Responsibilities such as researching contractors, contacting and obtaining bids and meeting with multiple contractors is beyond the scope of the Library Director's responsibilities and expertise. The time spent is often greater because it is often difficult to get call-backs from contractors or to find someone willing to do a project that is rather "small." ** Please understand that this recommendation in no way reflects any dissatisfaction with the results Rebecca has achieved on various projects.

We believe that the same issue is faced by other town employees, for example the Police Chief, Fire Chief, etc. who are also housed in Town buildings.

Cost Inefficiencies

We believe that a centralized Facilities Management system could also recognize cost savings through getting better pricing and responsiveness from contractors and services by bundling needs and combining projects. For example, the same provider delivers protective floor mats in the winter to the library, town center and schools—on different days—it seems like one contract would be more efficient and would save paying fuel surcharges for three separate deliveries. Previously, when natural gas became available in the Village, each department head and Town Manager obtained bids to convert LP fixtures to natural gas in their respective facilities.

Recommendations: Here are a few ideas on how to proceed

- 1.** The town could conduct a survey of all of the buildings/building managers to assess services they subcontract for and who they use as well as larger building maintenance issues.
- 2.** Research how other towns handle this issue, either through paid staff or other methods, such as a "coordinator" that might be on retainer.
- 3.** Develop a list of "town approved" contractors (plumbing, electrical, etc.) who would be the "go to" list when there is a repair or emergency need and made available to all department heads. This would save employees time as they could simply contact a pre-approved contractor who knows they are going to get Richmond's business on an ongoing basis. It could save money if contractors were willing to negotiate on price to either get all of the town business, or to be one of three on the list.
- 4.** Consolidate services that are paid for at multiple sites into one contract and negotiate a better price. E.g., inspections
- 5.** Consolidate contractor projects so that the project being bid on doesn't seem so "small."

- 6.** Additional employee time savings could be gained by waiving the need to get 3 bids if the work is done by one of the pre-approved contractors (or just raise amount which requires 3 bids). Sometimes it takes a really long time to find 3 people willing to bid on some of our smaller projects.

Respectfully submitted,
Sept. 19, 2016
Trustees, Richmond Free Library