



INFORMATION REGARDING THE TOWN CENTER AND LIBRARY BUILDINGS Q&A RELATED TO ESTABLISHING A TOWN CENTER RESERVE FUND

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In March 2021 the Richmond Town Meeting ballot includes two articles related to current Town Center and Library building infrastructure needs and the development of a plan for their future, Articles 4 and 5 as shown here. The purpose of this Q&A document is to provide voters with the background and details on these initiatives.

Article 4.

Shall the voters authorize the establishment of the “Town Center Reserve Fund” and transfer to it accumulated rent paid by Town Center tenants (approximately \$583,820 as of 2/28/21) to be used to pay, in whole or in part, utilities and insurance of the Town Center Building; and maintenance, planning, and capital costs of the Town Center Building, The Library Building, and the Town owned land each building occupies?

Article 5.

If Article 4 is approved, shall rent hereafter paid by Town Center tenants be deposited to the Town Center Reserve Fund?

The Richmond Free Library and Town Center Building date back to 1879 and 1907/1914 respectively. Both buildings, and the property that they sit on, are owned by the Town of Richmond and each have a long and storied history of use. The buildings are now exhibiting the toll of time and there is a pressing need to address overdue maintenance, updates, and repairs to the structures, mechanical and electrical systems.

Questions and Answers About the Town Center Campus

About our buildings

1. What is the history of these buildings?

The Richmond Free Library is housed in the Neo-Gothic church designed by Vermont architect George H. Guernsey and built in 1879 by the Universalist Society. In 1956, the building was donated to the local School District and was renovated for use as a cafeteria and gymnasium.

The current Town Center building was originally built as a school in 1907 beginning with the right half of the building which replaced the wooden school building directly behind it. In 1914, the left half of the building was added and a 4-year high school established. In 1953, the addition that is now the Post Office was added.

In 1988 the Richmond Elementary School was built on the Camel's Hump Middle School campus leaving both the Church building and old school vacant. In 1989, Richmond voters rejected a plan to demolish both buildings and voted instead to renovate the church for the Town Library and move the Town Offices into the school building. In 1991, the town won a competitive bid to house the local US Post Office in the 1953 addition. The voters approved

a bond for renovations to the Town Center and Library building with the understanding that the rent for the post office would be used to offset the cost of the bond. Further renovations to the Town Center building were done when the Chittenden East Supervisory Union offices moved into the third floor. The second floor and mezzanine levels of the library were renovated in 2003.

The State of Vermont has recognized both properties as contributing resources in the Bridge Street Historic District, which was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2016.

2. Are the buildings worth investing in?

In 2018, Bread Loaf Corporation completed an assessment of the Town Center Building and found the building is structurally sound yet required maintenance, updates for code compliance, and improvements in functionality. Of particular concern is the current HVAC system doesn't provide sufficient air ventilation and turnover important for occupant safety and comfort. Additionally, certain code requirements - including ADA 'handicapped accessibly' in entrance points and to the lower/Radiate Arts area - will need to be addressed in the near future.

Three assessments on the Library have been completed within the last 5 years. In 2015, a Preservation Trust grant funded assessments by Headwaters Construction & Jan Lewandowski, whose findings revealed the structure of the building was sound but urgent restoration/preservation projects would be needed to maintain the buildings. In 2018, Breadloaf Construction completed an analysis and again found a structurally sound building with deferred maintenance needs. Given the historical significance of the building and its structural soundness, the Committee believes that investing in the deferred maintenance projects is warranted.

In both instances, the buildings are structurally stable and fit for current use. While the Committee will explore all options for the future of the buildings, including new construction, the expected timeframe for completion of a significant renovation or build is more than two years away. Given that timeframe deferred maintenance and repairs are recommended to prevent more costly expenses occurring unexpectedly.

It is important to note, that the Town Center Building does have certain limitations due to its location within the flood plain. This limitation primarily affects the lower level and can be managed in various ways that any future renovation project will need to manage.

3. Are there plans to do a major renovation?

The Town Center & Library Building Committee will launch a community visioning and planning process for the future of our town center and library buildings. It is expected that through this process one of the options for Richmond residents to consider is a major renovation of the Town Center Building due to its age and the anticipated needs of town staff and potential tenants.

The needs of the library are largely related to the exterior of the building. Therefore there are no plans at this time for a major renovation on this building.

About the funding

4. Why is the Library included in the Town Center Reserve Fund?

While the Library Trustees are elected to provide governance to the operations of the Library, the Library Building and the land it occupies are owned by the Town of Richmond. The annual budget for the Library which is voted on as part of the annual Town Budget represents the basic operating needs of the library and include a reserve fund which is meant to cover large emergency expenditures such as elevators.

5. Why has such a large balance accumulated?

The original purpose of this fund was to defray the costs of the bond for Town Center renovations using the rents from tenants in the Town Center building (Post Office and School District). With the bond paid in full, the balance of the fund has increased over the past several years.

6. Why is Article 4 needed?

The Committee had planned to use money from this fund to do initial stabilization of both buildings and planning for the future of both buildings. Upon seeking approval from the Selectboard to pay for the Library HVAC system, Richmond's Attorney informed us that no expenditures could be made from the fund, as the only established purpose had been to pay off the bond. A vote of the residents would be needed to allow the Selectboard to use this fund for expenses related to the buildings maintenance and repairs. A successful vote will release these funds and establish the purpose for the fund to address preservation/restoration and planning for both buildings & property on the Town Center campus.

7. Why is the Committee suggesting a segregated fund for the Town Center?

It should be noted that 'segregated funds' are common at both the state and local level. For example, hunting/fishing licenses in Vermont are used to manage our wildlife and in Richmond, revenue from water resources billing fund the operations of our Water & Sewer Department. Likewise, capital assets in both the private and public sector often have segregated - or 'sinking' funds - to cover future maintenance and improvements.

8. Is there enough money to cover the work that needs to be done?

There is approximately \$500,000 in this fund. This is not enough to complete a full renovation of the Town Center building and the necessary repairs of the Library building. However, this will provide the necessary funds to address pressing maintenance and repairs that have been identified. It will also fund architectural design services as part of a comprehensive community visioning process for the entire campus to culminate in a future bond vote to realize the community's vision.

9. How will purchases from the Town Center Reserve fund be authorized?

The Town Center & Library Building Committee will be responsible for prioritizing the necessary work and defining specific projects with a detailed scope. Each scope of work will be documented and the Committee will follow the appropriate bidding or purchasing process to identify qualified vendors. Once a vendor/contractor is identified, the proposed project, scope of work, cost, and proposed vendor will be presented to the Selectboard as part of a public meeting for decision. The Selectboard would retain the authority to authorize expenditures from the fund in accordance with the permissions granted through Article 4.

10. Are you looking at other sources of funds to pay for the repairs?

The town has applied for a \$100,000 Bruhn Grant from Preservation Trust of Vermont to help defray the cost of needed repair/restoration on the Library Building. We should receive the decision on this grant in mid-February, 2021. Going forward, the Committee will seek federal, state and local grant opportunities that may be appropriate. In addition, there may be an opportunity for town businesses and individuals to contribute to this effort.

About building use, maintenance, and management

11. Will we/do we have plans for tenants to replace the MMU Unified School District?

The Town Center and Library Buildings Committee developed a prioritized list of possible tenants and uses of the 2nd floor space previously occupied by the MMUUSD based on input and feedback from town residents and interested stakeholders. The Committee has since drafted lease agreements with Mount Mansfield Community Television, Richmond Historical Society, and the Community Senior Center. These lease agreements are pending review with these organizations with expected occupation by Spring 2021.

12. Who oversees the work that will be done and who decides what work is needed?

The Town Center and Library Buildings Committee is charged with reviewing the condition and suitability of the current Town Center and Library and making recommendations for building improvements and renovations. Based on the report from Bread Loaf Corporation and additional assessments from other external contractors, the Committee has created a prioritized list of repairs and maintenance for planning purposes. The Committee will follow town policy and procedures for soliciting estimates or bids on projects and make a recommendation to the Selectboard for execution of a contract.

The Selectboard is the ultimate decision maker regarding work performed and relies on recommendations of the Committee to determine work needed, funding mechanisms, and contracts.