

Memorandum

To: The Greensboro Selectboard

From: Patrick Shattuck

Subject: Status of Feasibility Investigations – Greensboro Town Hall and Grange

Date: 29 September 2023

I am writing to update you on our progress to date in investigating the current town hall and grange structures in Greensboro for potential reuse and the addition of housing units. Our initial investigation focused on two specific components that would dictate any reuse of the structures: wastewater and historic preservation.

Our wastewater analysis has been completed. We developed a potential load based on 24 units, 10 one-bedroom, 10 two-bedroom and 4 three-bedroom as well as a municipal office. Based on the site, it does appear that there is sufficient space and conditions to meet the load. As part of the assessment, we have been advised to complete a wetland analysis to ensure that none of the space in the triangle in front of the school is considered wetland which could reduce the potential load. That assessment has been engaged. The grange site, which has been confirmed as all being a wetland, has no leachfield capacity so that site requires multiple holding tanks, grinder, and pump to then get across the street to the potential leachfield in the triangle.

Historic Preservation consultant Polly Allen of Craftsbury was engaged to complete the required site assessment as part of the Section 106 Historic Preservation review process. Ultimately, it was determined that both buildings are considered historic, are listed on the Vermont Register of Historic Places, and retain their historic integrity. They too would be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as contributing structures within a district but are not likely individually eligible for listing. That means that to use historic tax credits, there would need to be an extensive formal historic resource survey and nomination for the National Register of the entire Greensboro Historic District (which would encompass most of the town center). That is an expensive and time-consuming process that would likely cause substantial delay to any redevelopment efforts. At this point, we would not use the historic tax credit but would still be required to comply with the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation.

As should come as no surprise, the buildings retain great historic integrity on the interiors. How these spaces and finishes are treated and retained is a very tricky balancing act, especially as we look to create a sustainable, energy-efficient building. In the case of the town hall, the significant tin interiors need to be preserved which limits how the building can be insulated, especially if the exterior is also considered untouchable. While the primary level of

the town hall allows for easy conversion into four apartments – basically one in each classroom space, the gym presents some daunting challenges as Historic Preservation typically dictates that the “feeling” of public spaces is retained. Because we would not be using the historic tax credits, we likely have a little more flexibility in what the Historic Preservation Office will accept but ultimately, they dictate the final use.

Knowing that, we did complete a site visit in late September with two field staff from the Division for Historic Preservation: a building specialist and an archeologist as the State identified the site, and its location close to the lake as prime for archeological resources. We also included our own archeological consultant as we have the responsibility for generating the written reports and research as required by the Division for Historic Preservation. They confirmed that the interior of the town hall is most significant and agreed (conceptually) that we could remove the exterior siding and trim and insulate from the exterior and then replace all siding and trim in kind, maintaining the existing reveal for any trims. As we would likely be padding out the exterior, we would also need to move the window plane out so that the shadows cast on the windows would not change. This sounds laborious and expensive, but we have done this before and were hoping that they would approve this method here – so, good news. They also like the idea of an “accessory” residential building behind the town house that would be linked by a small connector porch that would align with the two rear doors of the town hall. This would allow for a shared exterior stair to serve both the town hall and the new structure.

Our proposal for the gymnasium space is six townhouse units that would also utilize the attic space. This is going to take a little more design nuancing for Historic Preservation sign-off but given our success with both wastewater and historic preservation, we have issued an RFP for architectural design analysis. We sent it to seven firms we have worked with who have experience with all our typical funding sources as well as historic structures. The RFP was also published in the Caledonian Record. We have already had interest and questions from an architect I think would be well suited for this development but will hopefully have several proposals to consider.

As for the grange hall, feedback has been more limiting. The designs that were done through the Preservation Trust grant were reviewed and there was some concern from Historic Preservation about both the ground level side entrance and the lift location. They feel that the front entrance and the rooms to either side – and the two sets of double doors should all be preserved as they exist as well as the large open space. The plans at the grange call for the lift to be placed in one of the front rooms. There is also concern that the proposed new covered entrance on the northern elevation of the lower level in the wetland area would not be permitted. Couple this with limited parking for an office use and required handicapped spaces and you have some real challenges for reuse as a town hall.

This doesn't mean that the grange building couldn't be adapted into the town offices; just that it is likely going to be expensive, and your usable square footage limited. Right now, Barnet is rehabilitating a grange building with a larger footprint that Barnet owned. They are only using one level so have no elevator requirements and accessibility can be addressed through sitework. Their project, which totals about 2400 square feet, is about \$1.3 million. We anticipate that yours would be more likely not yield the space configurations that you would want.

We do think that the current town hall space could be reconfigured to better serve the community. We think that windows on the lower level could be enlarged (since they have already been altered, we do have flexibility from Historic Preservation), and a second entrance developed so that the offices could be separate from any other use in the building.

The feasibility analysis that we complete is a thorough undertaking. We look at every aspect of the buildings and put the pieces together. These projects are huge investments of public funds, and we want to make sure that we



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investigate thoroughly and plan for the long-term sustainability and ease of operation of any property. We expect that, closer to the end of the year we have a much better idea of where things stand and have options of what a potential project could look like and would look to set up a meeting with you then. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out directly.