

- Draft only, not yet approved by the Selectboard -

Greensboro Selectboard

August 19, 2024 Special Meeting – Minutes

[This was a hybrid meeting held at Fellowship Hall at the Greensboro UCC]

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Ellen Celnik, MacNeil, Eric Hanson, Bobbie Nisbet, David Kelley(joined remotely)

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT in person: Sara Slater, Marty McDonald, Nancy Lammert, Naomi Ranz-Schleifer, Vince Cabbage, Cathy Donnelly, Mary Parker, Missy Cook, John Mackin, Michelle Mackin, Warren Hill, Jr., Coleman Parker, Jody Parker, Janet Showers, Day Patterson, Zola Kehler, Mary Jane McKenzie, Patti Sunday-Winters, Ed Sunday-Winters, Brian Kelly, Betsy Donlon, Charlie Peck, Mavis MacNeil, Andrew Koehler, Nancy Keyes, Lucy Mitchell, Chris Cogswell, Jay Barrett, Lynette Courtney, Nancy Riege, Stuart LaPoint, Emma Sheedy, Rachel Sheedy, Terry Sheedy, Lisa Sartorius, David Baldwin, Isa Oehry, William Marlier, Peter Watkinson, Fan Watkinson, Anne Altman, Cilla Bonney Smith, Robin Hardy, Sam Friend, Paul Fixx, Dan Predpall, Mary Young, Wayne Young, Eleanor Guare, Elissa Mackin, Judy Carpenter, Gail Sieg, Galen Fisher, Liz Baum, Bill Berman, Harry Miller, Jill Bennett, Cynthia West, Elsa Schultz, Sarah Lammert, Miriam Rogers, Bill Rogers, Brett Stanciu, Kim Greaves, Josh Karp, Mark Snyder, Tim Nisbet, Penny Bretschneider, Liz Steel, Chris Steel, Beth Meachem, Meaghan Meachem, Mateo Kehler, Jig Gresser, Chris Roy, Erika Karp, Gary Circosta, Renee Circosta, Kent Hansen, Brent McCoy, Maya McCoy, Karl Stein, Davis Barnett, Mary Carpenter, Mary White, Jennifer Ranz, DeDe Stabler, Jed Feffer, Alice Perron

OTHERS PRESENT remote: Aileen Gebbie, Anna Weisenfeld, Anne Stevens, Brenden Beer, Cathy Irwin, Chris Leary, Diane Irish, Elaine Cole-Kerr, Rod Kerr, Ellen Burchenal, Eva Carpenter, Glenn Olds, Heather Lumsden, Janet Hill, Janet Long, JoAnn Hanowski, Kristen Leahy, Rob Brigham, Chad Sims, Mary Metcalf, Rachel Hellman, Lise Armstrong, Neal Burnham, Sheila Dillon, Victoria Von Hessert, Adrian Ivakiv, Stuart O’Sullivan, Carol Pierce, Bethany Warner, Courtney Hobson, Peter Cook

CALLED TO ORDER: 6:30 PM

SPECIAL MEETING ON TOWN HALL REDEVELOPMENT / RURAL EDGE HOUSING PROPOSAL

Town moderator Tim Nisbet welcomed those present and set ground rules: those who are aren’t residents or property owners, as well as the press, please refrain from speaking, you can ask the selectboard questions at the end. Those who want to speak, get in line for the mic, you get two minutes of time. Please, everyone respect all opinions and refrain from personal attacks, this can be a positive and constructive experience.

Tim introduced the board and town staff who were present. He thanked Liz Steel and Beth Meachem for organizing the dessert pot luck, Ted Donlon for lending his sound system, and the library for use of technology that allowed remote participation.

Eric Hanson (selectboard chair). Thanks everyone for coming, this is the selectboard’s second special meeting on this topic.

Kent Hansen (planning commission chair). A town housing committee was formed in 2019, looking back we should have publicized ourselves better. We've been glad to champion the extended village district with its two-acre zoning, we helped a Habitat for Humanity project get started, and we introduced RuralEdge to the selectboard. Several of our members left the housing committee and took on other roles in town, we need to re-energize the committee, please consider joining.

Vince Cabbage. 15 years in town. Affordable housing is needed but this proposal deserves public scrutiny. The best path forward for all involved is complete transparency from the selectboard, will they fulfill all public information requests, ensure transparency of negotiations, truly listen to opposing viewpoints, minimize discussions in executive session, seek and respond to public input? I suggest the town's governing bodies and committees disclose any conflicts of interest that have to do with this town hall project.

Mary Carpenter. We've owned a house in town since 1985. Housing is not appropriate at the town hall, this is a treasured town asset, a focal point for town business and gatherings. This building could be revitalized and made usable year-round. It's not in the town's best interest to sell the building to RE or anyone else, we'll lose it forever. While the size and scale of this project is not appropriate, I believe all are in favor of affordable housing and are willing to put our collective heads together to make this happen.

Davis Barnett. The Save Town Hall coalition submitted a petition to the board with 180 signatures, residents and taxpayers. It appears the selectboard hasn't considered or discussed this. The board also received a letter from an attorney retained by the coalition with 11 questions about the project, we believe you have the duty to respond to these questions, and soon.

Ellen Celnik answered the following questions:

Q: Will sale of the building to RE be put to a town vote? A: Yes

Q: When will the vote occur? A: Once the purchase and sales agreement (P&S) has been negotiated.

Q: Will the town require a project impact analysis prior to signing a P&S? A: Various project analyses have been done, but to my knowledge a 'project impact analysis' will not be done.

Q: Will town offices remain in the town hall? A: Yes.

Q: What are anticipated tax implications? A: There are none.

Q: Will the Village Green still be accessible for events after a large septic system is installed? A: The P&S will be contingent on the green being accessible for uses such as Funky Fourth, farmers market and community garden, but no vehicles will be allowed.

Q: How does proposal meet objectives in the town plan? A: Housing is an important part of our town plan.

Gary Circosta read part of a letter that was sent to the selectboard by a concerned resident: I would suggest the process slow down, the selectboard needs to commit to working with the community. Are you planning to have a community impact report? Many haven't signed the petition for fear of retribution, this is very unfortunate. If the project continues, who is managing the ongoing relationship between RE and the town during construction? What is the remedy if the contingencies and any other agreements are not met? Why isn't the property being subdivided? Has a long-term lease been considered?

Renee Circosta continued reading the letter and added her thoughts: the selectboard should consider and answer if there is any other town in the state that would give up its town green. Why not a do a long-term lease, this would provide more control of the development. Is it true that RE has not submitted a site plan with a detailed set of architectural drawings and all features of the project? If this has been received by the town, please post to the town website. If not, when do you expect to get this, will you impose deadlines on RE to submit this information?

Ellen Celnik. RE has said detailed architectural plans will cost \$400k. Until the town votes to proceed with this project, a non-profit developer like RE is not going to spend this kind of money on plans.

Anne Altman. I've been in the village since 1997 and have long-time family connections. Yes, affordable housing is an issue in Greensboro and everywhere else, but when I saw the plan for town hall I was shocked, four apartments would be fine but 20? Absolutely not. But it's not just the building, it's the ecology, this project is a bad idea environmentally. Have you been to New Hampshire recently, it's bad, many areas paved over, trees cut, once this is done it can't be put back. I hope we can work together to save town hall and the ecology and environment around it, it's OK for the community to say this is a bad idea.

Mary White. We're seasonal homeowners since 1960. Us seasonal home owners are collectively taking up many housing units and land. I feel neutral on this project, what I don't know about are challenges you've had to address for this project such as town zoning, topography, stormwater, wastewater, easements. Can you talk about why you focused on this project given the challenges of the site? In a project I heard about in Ohio, those who needed affordable housing did not want to be grouped together like this.

Ellen Celnik. First challenge is an average home's sale price here has gone up from \$285k a few years ago to \$500k now. Second challenge: if the wastewater committee can't find a suitable site for a community system, it will be very challenging to build a different housing project elsewhere. I ask people to honestly think about if the town hall was in the Bend, was underutilized, had mitigation issues, and a conversion to housing was suggested, would this be controversial? This is not subsidized housing, this is modest income housing.

Judy Carpenter. I have lived in town just outside the Bend for a long time, I remember when town meeting was held upstairs in the town hall. I participated in many events on the third floor. The Save Town Hall group seems to be well funded and organized, but what are we saving the building for? We have ample other meeting spaces in town. If we put housing there, it will become like it used to be here - when the town was vibrant.

Jennifer Ranz. I want to save this building, even in its current dilapidated condition we're using it for a lot of things, the town offices, farmers market, Funky 4th, giving closet, voting, town records, meeting space. My kids went to school there, the upstairs was used for gym classes, if you haven't been in there go take a look, it is a beautiful space. The building has been neglected by the selectboard and not maintained as it ought to be. We can find funding to improve and maintain the building, add an elevator. Don't hand it over to a private developer, we'd be giving up a historic town property.

DeDe Stabler. Our family has been coming here since the early 1900s and I've become legal resident recently. The town hall is currently a community resource. A few questions: the water district is seeking information about the anticipated water use, is this known? Please post these documents to the town website if they exist. And, can RE sell the building later to a private investor?

Ellen Celnik. RE has given the Fire District information about the project and asked for a response, they haven't gotten an answer to date. RE cannot sell the town hall to a private investor, it must be kept as affordable housing in perpetuity. The building can't be a community resource because it has asbestos, lead, PCBs. If any work is done it will automatically trigger an enormous amount of remediation taxpayers can't afford.

Jed Feffer. I've been coming to Greensboro since 1967 as a summer resident, here year-round since 2019. I've heard the Save Town Hall folks state that area services would be woefully inadequate for the influx of people if this project is built. But what about the much larger summer population that comes every year? Most of the people who will live in the building will have cars and can drive to services nearby as needed.

Karl Stein. Our kids went to Lakeview School. I came into this project being skeptical. I did research, read all the RE materials, visited three RE projects in the area, asked questions, got answers. I agree that everything needs to be on the website. But this project is strongly needed, it will be successful, I don't think this will change the town. We were poor when we came here. Just because people can't afford housing doesn't mean they aren't good people. I object to the thought that 'they' are going to destroy the town.

Penny Bretschneider. I give props to the selectboard for still being here. I'm on the fence about the project. I do think it's too large, if every person had a car that would be over 40 cars. Having such a huge parking lot so near to the school? The most important project for the lake is to have a town sewage system. Tax incentives for tiny houses and home shares? We need to quit fighting with each other and work together to come up with a scaled down plan.

Elissa Mackin. Full time resident. Not in favor, transparency has been the biggest issue to me. It's been stated that Ellen and MacNeil are in charge of negotiating the contingencies in the P&S, can we get a written list of these so we can stop repeating the same questions? What conditions are considered deal breakers.

Ellen Celnik. Contingencies include adequate septic system and water capacity, hosting the giving closet at no cost, housing the town offices with a minimal rental fee, meeting all local, state, federal permit requirements, village green available for public use, historic preservation, environmental remediation, sale of building for at least \$390k.

Charlie Peck. Summer resident since 1950, we pay property taxes. There are changes you make yourself and changes that befall you, I've seen a lot of changes in 74 years and don't like them all, but no one likes change. I'm very impressed with the process, I will disagree with Jennifer Ranz - the town hall is not currently well utilized, when I was a kid I went to square dances there, we can't do that anymore. Town properties should be 'used and be useful', this this building is not really either. The town and taxpayers don't have the funds to hold on to the building just for sentimentality. The RE scheme may be too big or impractical but here it is. I would encourage everyone to move on, make the building used and useful.

Kathy Donnelly. We own Lakeview Inn, we know all about buildings with possibilities. Will the P&S vote be for just residents or will taxpayers be included? And will an Act 250 review be required?

MacNeil replied that the vote will be only for legal residents of Greensboro. Act 250 is currently an unknown.

Lisa Sartorius. We've been here for many years. What is the legal, financial responsibility the town has to RE if the project does not go through? MacNeil said if the P&S is not signed by the end of the year, we have no obligation to continue.

Bill Berman. We've been in town for 11 years, we're supportive of the project, it's good stewardship, it's the right thing to do, maybe not perfect but a concrete attempt to help with an intractable problem that we have. We should step forward and do it. It could be place to live for someone who grew up here, a local teacher, for a family with kids. Short term rentals in Greensboro have gone from 5-10 units in 2017 to 25-30 now. This takes properties off the market, there are things going on here that are having an impact. I don't begrudge people who have to rent their properties, but let's provide housing to those who don't have generational wealth.

Mateo Kehler. I operate a business in town. It's way easier to be against things than for things. No one shows up now, there's a huge vacuum of volunteerism in this town, you have to put in the time. This project has been five years of civic-minded people volunteering and showing up. Those against this project, where were they the

past 5-10 years when all these meetings were going on? Thanks to all who volunteer at the library, for the water district, for the selectboard. There's no future in this town without young people.

John Mackin. Retired. When RE first came on the scene they were talking about a 10-unit project, now it's up to 20 units. The fire district has not received any inquiry from RE about water, they need to follow up with us.

Sarah Lammert. I serve on the board of the Greensboro Nursing Home, skilled nursing care is a piece of all this. GNH has about 60 staff members who need housing relatively close by. Many of them are commuting as long as two hours. Some are camping with their families; we are considering putting a trailer in our parking lot for traveling nurses. Since so many staff live far away, those who live nearby have to be ready to show up in case of an emergency if residents need to be moved out in a safe manner. We're trying to keep these institutions alive in our community, someday we all may need this kind of care.

Emma Sheedy. Grew up in a small town in California. I'm not against building housing but I was ineligible for a few different affordable housing units because I made too much money. I'm 28 and have had to live with my parents. Look at the salaries of the people you're trying to house and make the project more approachable for the average person, many professionals make too much to be eligible for affordable housing.

Ellen Celnik. In NYC, I worked on subsidized housing, people must have very low incomes to qualify. But this would be modest income housing. Locals will have a six month lead on applying for these apartments, RE can assist people with the application process.

Mavis MacNeil. Lifelong resident, now a teacher at Hazen. As a teacher I could not afford to buy a home here, one of the reasons our schools are struggling is because it's so hard to keep them staffed. Hazen has hired teachers who have had to walk because they couldn't find housing in the area. Nursing home workers, educators need housing.

Meaghen Meachem. We've been here for 12 years, I teach journalism at VT State University. I don't know how I'm going to vote on this project - but I do need to know what I'm voting on, I need a complete package. There's no site plan, how will water and wastewater work? But beyond that, it's important to state that we've missed creative, collaborative conversations to see what the town wants. Unfortunately, this has divided the town, it's really painful. I wish there was an acknowledgement of that, I wish we could go back in time and start the process over from scratch.

Eric Hanson. This has been a painful year for the selectboard, and for me as Selectboard chair. Thank you for being civil tonight. I'm in favor of the project but how do we do the vote? I would prefer this project to be like a commercial real estate project where you have all the answers up front. But the only way RE can move forward with a site plan is with a signed P&S agreement. There are many contingencies in the P&S, we could involve townspeople in these negotiations. Or instead we could ask the townspeople if they want the selectboard to continue negotiations with RE, or not?

Terry Sheedy. Second homeowner. We have a rental property close to the town hall, we've offered this to Jasper Hill Farm and nursing home employees but haven't had much response from this workforce, perhaps because we don't allow pets. |Everyone in Vermont seems to have pets, does this project allow pets?

Ellen Celnik said pets would be allowed.

Alice Perron. Third generation local resident. As a kid, I could count ten kids in the village. We're a geriatric community now, no kids. I'm for this project because, as Mateo said at the last meeting, towns can die. Who

will be on the rescue squad, who will work at Willey's? If our school closes it will have a trickle-down effect. When our wonderful summer community is here you see kids biking around but when they're gone, what's left is a small, aging community. Who's going to take care of me in 15 years?

Naomi Ranz-Schleifer. I was born and raised here. I would like to keep the town hall as a community asset. I haven't heard anyone say they don't want affordable housing in our community, it's just where it should be built. I suggest attending the affordable housing forum in Craftsbury monthly. Why aren't we looking at Greensboro's property in Glover, this could be perfect for housing. What attracts young people to this town and what keeps them here? Look at this from a zoning perspective.

Ellen Celnik. The reality is that there is very limited land around here that perks. If we could have found alternative areas for a community septic system we would have. People have suggested using the 19 acres that Allen's have, but it doesn't perk. Can we just be realistic: for the town hall, if it's found that a septic cannot be put there, neither can one be installed for these alternative ideas that people have for the building. I'm glad people have other ideas but it's state funding that makes the difference for a large project.

Brent McCoy. I'm from Hardwick and now live on Taylor Rd. I'm in support of this project, thanks to those who worked on it behind the scenes. It's great to say 'let's build community' but who's doing the work? I hear the arguments against this but I think the future is brighter with this project in place. Ask yourself, why are you against this project? If this is about class, fear of others, let that go, you'll look at this in the future and realize it was a good thing to do. I don't see a future here, what I see is less and less, I would like to see a ten-year plan for Greensboro that has more people here.

Davis Barnett. I just started going to selectboard meetings, until recently the culture at these meetings has been harsh. About a month ago, the selectboard asked for volunteers to form a communications group. The group came back to present a communications plan and rather than patiently listening to the presentation, some members of the selectboard harassed them. I was at another selectboard meeting where the old board chair tongue-lashed one of the town employees in public. Later that meeting people from the library were presenting, these two ladies were shaking in their boots. Recently the board has tried to engage in a more civil discourse. I thought that would have been here from the start but I was wrong.

Missy Cook. Long time seasonal resident. I don't know anyone opposed to this project who is against affordable housing. Friends of mine say the scale is the problem - build eight or ten units, 20 units feels too dense, too many cars. Can RE consider a smaller development? If we can't see an actual plan before the vote, how can we have an educated vote?

Ellen Celnik. There is a cost analysis, in order for the project to work you need a minimum number of units. RE estimates a full site plan will cost \$400k, how can you expect a non-profit like them to spend this amount of money if the project could just be voted down?

Renee Circosta. Thank you, Davis, for bringing up the lack of transparency. Brent talked about all the work behind the scenes, I want to call out those people doing the work behind the scenes. We've been told repeatedly that the housing committee has been doing all this work, but there are no minutes. How can the public attend meetings of this committee if they aren't warned and no one knows about them? I'm furious about this behind-the-scenes work. Also, the wastewater committee is an official town committee, there are no agendas, no minutes, no documents - no transparency.

Penny Bretschneider. Maybe some of that is true, but I'm not going to say they've been withholding information. But I am going to admit my guilt about not reading all the information that's been put out, I'm catching up in my seat tonight. I would add that I'm not in favor of that many apartments.

Ellen Celnik. The whole point of people electing selectboard members is to trust them to do the work. We have no personal agendas, my priority is to focus on fiscal responsibility. We can't expect people who work 2-3 jobs to come to all the meetings, we had special meetings and presented information at the 2023 town meeting. I do acknowledge there was information we received from RE last September that we should have made public sooner, although this information didn't change anything. We're five volunteers who are trying to do the best we can with just two full-time town employees.

Vince Cabbage. My background is in finance. My concern is about the process itself. I hear numbers being thrown around but has the selectboard seen a financial model of the apartment? (Eric Hanson said no.) I've looked some of RE's other projects, the organization doesn't have any money, they are relying on other people's money for it all to work. What drives the economics, how can the town be expected to vote if we don't have all the information showing the project will actually work? If there are cost overruns, will RE have to raise rents? If you do the math, it doesn't work out to be a facility with affordable rents.

Ellen Celnik. They can't just raise rents whenever they want. I would note Hardwick voted to have RE manage some housing properties in that town.

Karl Stein. I did the research, visited three other RE projects, two out of three had great reviews. The third, which is 'subsidized' housing, had multiple problems. I asked Patrick Shattuck about this, apparently people are being accepted but they bring along others who are causing trouble. I expected him to explain the problems away but he didn't, he admitted there are problems at some of his facilities. From all that I saw, I respect RE's abilities to do what they say they'll do. I encourage you to read all of their communications and visit these other projects, don't just be angry.

Mary White. Thanks to Tim and everyone for such a diversity of perspectives. My questions are, RE ran out the clock earlier with the first option agreement expiring, how interested are they really in seeing this project through, why haven't they moved faster? 50 cars, no wonder there's public pushback, there is a massive loss of confidence. We have to have young people, but we need a better solution. Craftsbury is looking at a number of alternatives, are you in touch with them?

Ellen Celnik. I did attend a Craftsbury housing meeting. They also have real challenges, despite the fact that they have no zoning, they still haven't been able to get a project together.

Eric Hanson. RE came to us, did a year of research, came back with preliminary drawings. They looked at funding and told us they can raise \$10 million for the project, they are very much on board. They are a non-profit and have put in \$40-\$100k of their own cash. The town is not on the hook to pay this back if the project fails to happen. As was said earlier, they can't sink \$400k into a site plan without assurance they'll be able to move forward. They are now finishing up studies, if the P&S is signed the next step for them is a year to raise the funds and then a year of construction.

Jennifer Ranz. I believe much of the literature provided by RE is misleading and inaccurate. I'm surprised so many people believe it. I'm not against RE but I think they've misrepresented many things, everyone needs to look deeper. In a few documents, RE indicated they've provided frequent updates to the selectboard during this entire process, this is not true. They said they had overwhelming support at the 2023 town meeting, did they? In the interest of openness and transparency, I ask the selectboard to please post all memos, emails, and documents

from RE to the selectboard since 2019. Same for the wastewater and housing committees. We should have been asked from the very beginning if we even wanted this project to begin with, many of us don't want this.

Renee Circosta. RE says in late 2022 they were approached by a member of the selectboard. Who was this, and under what authority was this done?

Ellen Celnik. On the website there is a history of the entire project. After WonderArts investigated renovating the town hall and it turned out to be unaffordable for them, Kent Hansen and Peter Romans gave RE a tour of the building.

Alice Perron. In 1994 there was a group that wanted to tear down the town hall. I think the idea is: what are we doing with this building? If this project moves forward it will be put to good use and be a real asset to our community. Regardless of how you feel about the apartments, this is a building that needs a lot of help, it's only going to age and cost more to keep up. I agree the project is too big and there are unanswered questions, but what's the alternative? The Lauredon Apartments, Circus Smirkus, Highland Center were all big deals at the time, now no one notices. Housing in Vermont is a really big deal, I'm really worried about losing our school.

Ed Sunday-Winters. Thank you to the selectboard for listening, for leadership, for trying to communicate about this project. We're grateful and fortunate to have you. Also thank you to those who organized the desserts.

Naomi Ranz-Schleifer. I'm confused about this process. I do come to meetings and serve on committees, when I asked the selectboard to consider more community participation in the process I was shot down - selectboard members, please consider this. We now have the extended village district, let's go further. To Alice Perron: would you consider putting housing on any of your family properties, such as modular housing or accessory dwelling units? What has been explored? I would like to see us look at these smaller options that could happen immediately. Yes, wastewater restrictions are a problem.

Mavis MacNeil. For years my family has thought about how to put housing on our farmland, but we're not the only ones with property. We're accepting offers for funding housing. Maybe the 180 people who signed the Save Town Hall petition can put up the \$400k for the site plan, so we could have that before the town vote.

Tim thanked everyone for a respectful conversation.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted, Josh Karp, Selectboard Clerk