

Greensboro Selectboard

April 16, 2025 – Minutes

[This was a hybrid meeting held at Lakeview School]

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Ellen Celnik, MacNeil, Mike Metcalf, Tim Brennan

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Judy Carpenter

OTHERS PRESENT in person: Karl Stein, Naomi Ranz-Schleifer, Jennifer Ranz, Kent Hansen, Ryan Hall, Davis Barnett, Janet Hill, Alice Fleer, Jan Terwiesch, Jody Parker, Coleman Parker, Liz Steel, Victoria Von Hessert, Fan Watkinson, Jed Feffer, Rick Morrill, Dawn Morgan, Bill Rogers, Miriam Rogers, Mark Snyder, Mike Cloutier, Mike Lammert, Erika Karp, Sarah Lammert, Sherral Lumsden, Larry Lumsden, Raymonda Parchment, Kathy Newbrough, Steve Kirby, Hugh Knox, Cilla Bonney-Smith, Mateo Kehler, Jeff Bennett, Maria Amador, Peter Gebbie, Sandy Gebbie, George Young, Lorelei Wheeler, Kim Greaves, Josh Karp, Dede Stabler

OTHERS PRESENT remote: Aileen Gebbie, Alison Gardner, Bobbie Nisbet, Catherine Donnelly, Christine Armstrong, Diane Irish, Isa Oehry, Ila Hunt, Elaine Cole-Kerr, Mary Metcalf, Michael Porrazzo, Rick Lovett, Stefanie Cravedi, Valerie Carter, Kathy Watson, Sheila Dillon, Janet Long, Janet Patterson, Vince Cubbage, William Scollon, Nancy Hill, Bobbie Nisbet, Clive Gray, Amelia Circosta, Megan Wright, Erik Synnestvedt, Andrea Macleod, Mackin Family, Lisa Sartorius, Jess Nichols, Amy Nichols

CALLED TO ORDER: 6.30 PM

INFORMATIONAL MEETING ON UPCOMING RURALEDGE/TOWN HALL AUSTRALIAN BALLOT VOTE

Selectboard chair MacNeil called the meeting to order and welcomed those present. He explained that those who want to speak may do so for up to two minutes, and you can get in line to speak again.

Patrick Shattuck, RuralEdge Executive Director. We are here because we were asked by the community. In January 2019 the planning commission reached out to RuralEdge (RE) for help with Greensboro's housing issues. RE met with the planning commission and housing committee. Covid happened, but we continued to meet and get feedback. We looked at different properties, including some in Greensboro Bend, but didn't find anything suitable. In November 2022 we were asked to investigate whether the Town Hall could be repurposed for housing. We told the town that we think it could be, and showed preliminary plans. We were asked to put forth a proposal and make a presentation at the 2023 Town Meeting.

We can all agree that in the past six years the need for housing hasn't decreased, there simply isn't enough housing stock. We've got a challenge across VT and the country, housing is desperately needed and we're here to be part of the solution. We support this project going to a town vote, it will let us all move on. You can decide the future of your community. The vote asks, should this proposal be investigated further. If, after a thorough investigation the project doesn't prove feasible, it doesn't go forward, the sale doesn't happen.

Ellen Celnik. It's not a secret that I'm in support of this project. I empathize with many of you, I know how hard it is to think about change. The property across from me was sold and I was concerned who would move there, it turned out to be a great neighbor. I went from a fear mentality to appreciating the benefits that something new presented.

Karl Stein. I'm in support. I would like to know what it would cost to get the Town Hall renovated and usable from top to bottom. In 1987 I was on the school board and we got an estimate of around \$1 million. I've

been all through that building, there are major structural issues. Taxpayers would be paying the bill for a major renovation.

Tim Brennan. In 2018 I was serving on the WonderArts Board, we got a \$70k grant to do preliminary architectural and engineering estimates. The cost was over \$600k for a basic renovation and elevator to the third floor. Considering construction inflation is 58% since then, figure \$1 million for a basic renovation.

Davis Barnett. The proposed rent the town would pay to RE would be more than \$250k over ten years. Also what is the plan for a septic system?

Patrick. Before moving further with septic investigations we first need to know if the building is available. We have lots of experience with alternative septic systems.

Ellen. It costs us over \$20k yearly to operate the building with considerable deferred maintenance. So, what we'd pay in annual rent to RE is about the same as what we're currently spending.

Tim. According to the Purchase and Sales Agreement (PSA), solving wastewater is RE's problem. The property doesn't change hands until all permits are in place. There may be a solution utilizing more advanced technologies. Regarding the Town Hall's deferred maintenance, the selectboard has held off developing a plan for the building because there was historically interest from WonderArts or maybe another operator. Maintaining this building is a burden which at some point will cost us.

Renee Circosta. We have many questions that haven't been answered. We're now being told to trust the process. The third version of the informational sheet that was posted online today is still inaccurate. Why not start over somewhere else? This is not a NIMBY reaction, the proposed annex is giant. Say no to this project.

Jed Feffer. Patrick, how long will it take to get answers to the many unknowns?

Patrick. We'd start right away. Additional funding would need to be secured. Certainly lining up funding has gotten more difficult.

Dahria Messina. I work as a social worker at local homeless shelter. I'm deeply in favor of this project. About 18% of our year-round housing is rentals. About 81% of our housing stock is seasonal, this is a wildly high number, especially for a town that is seeking to grow. We want more families in town and the Town Hall is underused and seeking a new purpose. Change is going to happen one way or the other. This project won't go forward if it is shown to be unfeasible, but we've spent time stonewalling those who are trying to help solve our housing problem. Everyone deserves a warm place to sleep.

Dede Stabler. The Perron farm was talked about for wastewater at one point. MacNeil, what is the current status of this?

MacNeil. That was for a village wastewater system, not for RE.

Mike Lammert. Can the town water system handle the needs of the building? Can our fire dept. handle this size of building? What other ancillary costs might be coming down to taxpayers? Who would maintain the property?

Patrick. All maintenance would be RE's responsibility. We look at what the life cycle costs are for our buildings, we look at every component and project outwards, we plan proactively for maintenance and keep funds in escrow for repairs.

Ellen. I sent an email to the water district asking the about this project and got no response.

John Mackin. I operate Fire District #1, we need to see a permit with specifics before responding. In 2019 we redid the water system, the new lines are adequate for a sprinkler system for some of the larger buildings in town, but not sure if the current line is big enough for sprinklers for the RE project. I'd add that the town might have to buy a ladder truck due to the scale of the proposed project.

Patrick. We'd have a storage tank in the building for the sprinkler system.

Ellen. The village water system supported the school when it was full, isn't that capacity built into the system?

John. The water supply was increased in 2019 but it's not an endless source, especially in drought years.

Christine Armstrong. Would Greensboro residents take priority on the RE waiting list?

Patrick. Each property has its own waiting list but Greensboro can add names first. Historically folks who move in to our buildings tend to be local and have connections to the community. There are seniors in the area who are overhoused and are looking for an opportunity to downsize.

Hugh Knox. I've lived in Greensboro for 20 years. I've been involved professionally with housing programs for many years, and while I'm an advocate of housing people who need it, this project is just plain dumb. We need to focus on housing our populations but this project doesn't do it.

Sarah Lammert. I don't think it's fair to call this a dumb project. This is a project that could begin to move us forward, create diversity in town, there's a lot of privilege here in Greensboro. In my many years as a minister, I've seen that when people are afraid of change they swamp the change makers with process questions. Fair housing is always in the wrong place, the scope is always wrong. Yes, these are hard conversations.

Meteo Kehler. We started our company 23 years ago with the intention of building a livable community, but I feel like we're failing. This is not the perfect project and it's not in the perfect place but we're in the middle of a crisis, there is nowhere to live in this town. There are many examples around the country of prime real estate being converted to housing because it's so terribly needed. We're looking at an aging population.

Sheila Dillon. Many say this project is awfully big for this town. I haven't heard why it can't be smaller. How many parking spaces are planned?

Patrick. We're proposing 20 units. The current hardscape area would allow 50 parking spaces, yet we don't need that many. Many of our residents don't have cars. Six spaces would be set aside for town offices parking. Regarding the scale of the project, The VT Division of Historic Preservation has to sign off on projects like this. They were very involved with the massing of the project and we've listened to feedback from these folks. We believe that what we are proposing works for the site. Density is something that has previously existed in our communities.

Warren Hill, Jr. We'd be much better off putting groups of 4-5 housing units around town. 20 people in one building will lead to problems. We've tried to develop housing but found that we cannot complete as a private investor with subsidized housing such as this.

Ryan Hall. I'm 31 and grew up here. I came from not much, grew up in a trailer. I worked hard and had no problem finding a piece of property with a house to fix up. Property values being too high is not a problem in this community. If you look at RE developments, the quality of the people is fairly low. Do we want to bring that into our community?

Jane Hoffman. People talk about losing meeting space at the Town Hall. Many alternatives for meeting spaces currently exist.

Larry Lumsden. I've lived here forever. This is a very important issue and I wanted to thank the selectboard. If you don't know how challenging it can be to serve on the board you could give it a try.

Karl. Tim, I'd like to clarify that the WonderArts Town Hall report you referenced only dealt with accessibility-related improvements, not structural improvements, correct? That could be why it was less than the \$1 million I quoted from 1987.

Tim. I don't know for sure, but yes, I believe that project focused on the minimum ADA requirements to make the 3rd floor usable.

Karl. I want to thank everyone for putting such hard work and thought into this, keeping this discussion civil is so important locally.

Vince Cubbage. 'If we don't do this project there will be no affordable housing and the town will die' is a cynical perspective. We can support other types of affordable housing projects. We are not being given the information we need to make this decision. We may be stuck with the ramifications of this poorly drafted PSA for years. The PSA doesn't give the town the right to get out of this contract without RE's approval. Has anyone at RE seen any info about wastewater site evaluation from Hoyle Tanner or anyone? Our volunteer selectboard

is spending a ton of time on this. MacNeil, why are you recusing yourself, it would be good for the town and for the project's chance of passing for this to see the light of day.

Patrick. Our projects have to prove to the funders that they're financially viable.

Tim. The PSA states that if the project can't move forward as contemplated, the contract is null and void.

Patrick. We have some funding committed for this specific project. I would note that there is incredible pressure across the state for limited resources.

Davis. MacNeil, about the Perron property, could you answer Vince's question?

MacNeil. RE's wastewater needs are totally separate from a Village Wastewater Project.

Davis. I see 16 units often noted, but tonight you've said it could be 20 units.

Patrick. The PSA says we have to produce a minimum of 16 units. We'd like up to 20, but we have to be flexible as we go through the design process and deal with the many unknowns.

Davis. Would a statewide waitlist from VHCB result in many people seeking housing here?

Patrick. No, we would have our own waiting list.

Renee. These are vague answers. The PSA doesn't mention potable water. Why does this project have to be so big? Regarding the waiting list, it's not in the contract that Greensboro residents will get first dibs. And why would RE want a building that's in such terrible shape?

Patrick. We've talked about the scale we need to operate sustainably, and that is a range of 16 – 20 units. Each of our properties have their own waitlist.

Hugh. I'm an economist, the housing crisis is an income crisis. I have no problem with the board and the town doing what they can to encourage housing. I like the direction the Headwaters Community Trust is going. I don't support the RE project, it's in the wrong place, it's doing the wrong things. I encourage the board and RE to look for other possible locations.

Ellen. Going back to 2019, the selectboard and planning commission did major searches, spent years looking at other properties and we couldn't find anything suitable.

Vince. Patrick, what is your tenant selection process, and how is that related to people from Greensboro getting first choice of the apartments?

Patrick. Would-be tenants have to submit a full application, we look at income, assets, criminal record, credit report. Three units may be for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This could be people who are rent-burdened, people living with relatives, people living in substandard housing. But ultimately, you're looking at someone's ability to pay the rent. Rents will range from \$833 to \$1387, based on operating pro-formas from a few years ago.

Ellen. All this is complicated. An example, for the lowest rent of \$833, someone has to earn at least \$33k to be eligible, rent can't be more than 30% of monthly income. We've had families lose their housing to fire in Greensboro Bend, should these people not be considered for housing? I'm embarrassed the town would bring this up as an inclusive community.

Mark Snyder. Whatever we decide about this project, we're still going to be neighbors. If we could pull together as Greensboro Village and Greensboro Bend, one community, we could have a direction and all these divisive issues would be resolved and we could work together on a grant-funded master plan, looking at wastewater, water systems, schools, housing. In the meantime, this is democracy. It's not a right most people have.

Elissa Mackin. I was born and raised here. This whole process with RE has asked us to put the cart before the horse 100 times. We are told over and over we don't have the answers. But people want answers before the vote. It's ridiculous to turn over the building to RE before we have those answers.

Warren. I'm not against housing but I'm concerned about the size of this project. Patrick, will there be different ages of residents in these units? We've tried this and found different ages have different sleeping schedules. Can this work?

Patrick. All different age groups live in our projects, and yes, it works. We have experience with this and design our buildings so people can co-habitate successfully.

Ellen. In my experience, mixing age groups and families is the best possibly way to build a community. Why not look at it that way, rather than all the 'what if's'?

Renee. Where is the parking going to be, exactly?

Patrick. As you look at the building from the front, there would be some on each side. Your zoning has parking requirements which we have to meet in order for the building to move forward.

Stefanie Cravedi. This is an incredibly important meeting. It bothers me that a number of people are so concerned with the details, when it's clear that if RE cannot get all the permits the project won't move ahead. Also, are we really not going to welcome lower income or homeless people into our community, given the current situation?

Davis. If the project starts but runs into funding challenges, could it be half-built and then stop?

Tim. The PSA says that the buyer's obligations are subject to conditions imposed by public funding agencies. If you look at those conditions, RE has to have all funding lined up and a construction contract lined up before we close and construction can begin. They have a relationship with funders such as VHCB, who has the ability to monitor these projects. There's a perpetual affordability covenant. There are incredible reporting requirements. True, all of this isn't in the PSA but it's included in the conditions.

Dede. For residents who don't have cars, how can they get around?

Patrick. As a landlord, that is not our responsibility. Across our portfolio, about 40% of our residents have cars, so many are choosing not to have them. This is a reason why the state believes projects should be located in town centers.

Renee. It's inappropriate that these special conditions attached to the PSA come to light now, after half the town voted. Tim, you mentioned standard conditions, and you've posted some special conditions. But as RE gets other grants, will other conditions be tacked on? At what point will we know all the conditions?

Tim. Who's going to live there is addressed in the special conditions. VHCB is the key funder, HUD funding and other funding flows through them. The conditions are very similar to each other, it's a coordinated funding effort.

Naomi. There should have been more community involvement years ago. The fact that the community doesn't have any say after the vote is a huge concern for me. We talk about building equity through homeownership, this is the exact opposite situation. We may differ in how we want to build housing, but wastewater is a big problem in many situations and we haven't made progress developing the basic infrastructure we need.

Stefanie. I really appreciate all these opinions, it's been respectful. Also, what about the 14 people who own houses on Breezy and Lauredon Aves., they could agree to build accessory dwelling units, this might solve part of the housing problem. Also, I love *Brigadoon* but I wouldn't want to live there.

Naomi. Wastewater is a big part of the ADU issue. I hear how 'empty' the Town Hall is, but currently every space that is allowed to be used, is being used. I would love to see us able to use the third floor.

Ellen. Naomi, I appreciate all of your volunteer work.

Jennifer Ranz. I've been in Greensboro most of my life, I would hate to see our Town Hall sold, this would change our town forever, there are other solutions. I would like to think about creating homes. We live here for a reason, a project of this size is an ill-planned project from the beginning. I don't feel anyone in town was asked for feedback about whether we wanted to sell the Town Hall. Patrick mentioned in a pamphlet there was 'overwhelming support' for this project, I don't see that. This has been divisive and has torn apart our community for over 2 years. We are now forced to vote on something without answers.

Vince. Selectboard members, have you seen pro forma financials? I'm concerned that this project is not financially viable based on the rents charged, will the town have to step in to keep this project viable?

Jackie Tolman. I have the same question, have you seen financial projections?

Tim. I've looked at RE's financials overall and also several audit reports. These are very positive reports that show that RE, with all their projects and properties, are cash positive. The picture is of an organization that is strong financially.

Patrick. The underwriters require that we present a pro forma showing positive operating budgets 20 years out.

Sheila. I'm curious whether RE has looked at a smaller version of this project. Also, the Village Green easement is a good thing, but what are the terms?

Tim. There is no easement drafted yet. Patrick and his team have to come up with a wastewater plan, this may or may not ultimately involve the Green. If they need to use the Green for some or all of their septic system, we'll need to sign the easement.

Ellen. Part of the PSA says if the Green is used by RE for septic, they have to allocate capacity for the Grange building.

Lise. I thought Hoyle Tanner's report said the Green is not suitable for the RE septic.

Patrick. We have a study that came to a different conclusion. They looked at a traditional system, but our study looked at an alternative system. The Green would be still have public access if RE ends up using it.

Lise. I've heard that the \$800k CRRP grant, leftover from the community wastewater project, could be used by RE for this project.

Patrick. We have not taken part in those conversations. All I know is that there may be some wastewater funding available but it must be used within a short-term timeframe.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:31 PM.

Respectfully Submitted: Josh Karp, Selectboard Clerk