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By Karen Wilber at 1:54 pm, May 16, 2022

**WHITE CLIFFS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES – October 14, 2020**

10:30 a.m. – Chairman’s Introduction to Remote Meeting

Chairman Helwig stated that pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor’s March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the White Cliff Committee will be conducted via remote participation. No in-person attendance by members of the public will be permitted.

Chairman Helwig confirmed that the following members and persons were remotely present and could be heard:

Committee Members

Todd Helwig, Committee Chairman - CPC Representative
Norm Corbin, Committee Vice Chair - Historical District Commission Liaison
Julianne Hirsh, Board of Selectmen Liaison
Diana Nicklaus, At-Large Member

Member Absent:

Tom Reardon, At-Large Member

Town Staff

John Coderre, Town Administrator
Kathy Joubert, Town Planner
Scott Charpentier, DPW Director

APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 3, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

Ms. Hirsh requested that the following be added to the minutes: *At the meeting, Ms. Hirsh requested coordinating a visit into the building at a time when contractors or architects were on sight. Town Administrator, John Coderre, stated that only municipal employees or contractors are allowed into the unoccupied building due to liability coverage.*

Ms. Nicklaus moved to approve the meeting minutes from September 3, 2020 as amended. Ms. Hirsh seconded the motion. The roll call vote was taken as follows:

Corbin	“aye”	Hirsh	“aye”
Nicklaus	“aye”	Helwig	“aye”

APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 22, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

Postponed to next meeting.

MR. CORBIN – PROJECT OVERVIEW

For the benefit of the public, Mr. Corbin reviewed several key management decisions regarding the purchase and subsequent evaluations of the White Cliffs property as follows:

It was first decided that in addition to requesting funding for the purchase of the property, the request should also include funding to secure the building, have it thoroughly evaluated and allow for monthly expenses, such as insurance. The funding request was authorized at the April 2016 Town Meeting.

In July of 2016, an Environmental Site Assessment of the property was conducted. This evaluation identified the presence of an old oil tank beneath the parking lot that started to leak. The Town made the decision that the property would not be purchased until the tank and any contaminated soil was removed. Once it was confirmed that the site was cleaned, the property was purchased in September of 2017.

The first order of business was to reroof the mansion. The current roof was reaching its service life and several leaks were observed. The Town applied for an Emergency Waiver from the Massachusetts “Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance - DCAMM”, which allowed the Town to seek out local vendors. A Northborough based roofer was found who roofed the building at a fraction of the cost of earlier quotes.

The architectural firm DBVW was hired and was tasked with the following:

1. **How Best to Secure the building:** from weather, rodents and intruders
2. **Thoroughly Evaluate the Building:** including items such as; structural stability, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, preparing digitized drawings of the buildings floor plan, document the building modifications over time and identify its “Character Defining Architectural Features”
3. **Initial Re-use Considerations:** Their evaluation is a very useful cursory overview to look at general financial considerations for several reuse options.

Ms. Hirsh stated that she thought this was a great summary and asked if it could be added to the minutes. A copy of Mr. Corbin’s summary is attached.

Committee members and Mr. Coderre thanked Mr. Corbin. Mr. Coderre added that this history is helpful to those that tune into a project such as this at different stages of the process; and therefore don’t always appreciate the amount of work that has been put forth as they did not see it from the start.

DISCUSSION OF OPTIONS AND NEXT STEPS REGARDING DRAFT WHITE CLIFFS ASSESSMENT AND REUSE STUDY

Mr. Coderre noted that at their September 22, 2020, DBVW proposed the following three options:

1. Hospitality/Event Use
2. Municipal Use
3. Residential Use

At that time, Mr. Busch provided the Committee with basic information in terms of budget and cost per sq. ft. for renovation of the historic portion of the building and any potential new construction. Following Mr. Busch's proposal, the Committee found significant gaps ranging from approximately \$10M to \$14M in terms of the economic viability and private sector potential reuse. It was determined that it would not be possible to simply finance the project with additional subsidy from the Town. The Committee recognized that in order to move this project forward, an economically viable reuse needs to be identified.

Mr. Coderre indicated that since the Town purchased the facility, basic renovations have been done to the building envelope, including repairs to the roof and back dormer, and preservation of the stored historic artifacts that were removed by the previous owner.

At the prior meeting, the Committee heard proposals for three very expensive reuses and discussed with the architect an additional fourth option that would, at a minimum, preserve the existing building. Mr. Coderre reviewed the architect's proposal for a fourth option as follows:

Description of Option 4

1. Preserve exterior envelope without fully restoring the original configuration
2. Repair and limited preservation of interior
3. Consider retention and repair of some additions
4. Include full mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection systems to upgrade the building
5. Evaluate inclusion of accessibility improvements
6. No specific use will be identified
7. No sight improvements beyond utility connections will be included

Project Scope

1. Add Option 4 to the draft final report
2. Provide written description (no drawings) of what Option 4 would include with respect to the building
3. Provide additional market feasibility analysis for Option 4
4. Attend one additional meeting with White Cliffs Committee
5. Deliver the revised final report, including Option 4

Fee Proposal

DBVW Architects and the Peregrine Group will provide the services described above for a fixed fee of \$5,800 plus a \$400 allowance for reimbursable expenses. DBVW's hourly rates have increased since the submission of their original proposal, however, they proposed to utilize their old hourly rates for this effort.

Mr. Coderre asked the Committee to consider this additional scope of services, adding that DBVW will produce a revised draft final report sometime in November.

Mr. Coderre answered several questions asked by Mr. Helwig relating to system upgrades in the building, ADA Compliance and additional market feasibility analysis for Option 4. Mr. Coderre also confirmed that DBVW will still provide a full presentation to the Committee at a future meeting. Mr. Helwig stated that he supports the additional cost of \$5,800.

Ms. Nicklaus stated that DBVW has done an exceptional job and agrees that the additional \$5,800 is reasonable. Regarding the market feasibility analysis, she doesn't think that DBVW will just throw out the cost without contextualizing it within the market as they have done previously. Mr. Coderre indicated that following a review of the costs for Option 4, the Committee will need to determine the most viable option, which may end up being the hospitality/event space reuse only with a lower level of historic restoration, which was how the facility was being used before it closed.

Ms. Hirsh was worried that the Town might have to consider selling the building; and if so, would it have to go before Town Meeting? Mr. Coderre responded that Option 4 will hopefully offer a viable option that may allow for partnership with potential private sector entities who may be interested in rehabbing the building. With that being said, the option to sell is not a decision to be made at this time.

Ms. Nicklaus moved to approve the Proposal for Option 4 as submitted by DBVW Architects; Ms. Hirsh seconded the motion. The roll call vote was taken as follows:

Corbin	"aye"	Hirsh	"aye"
Nicklaus	"aye"	Helwig	"aye"

Mr. Coderre confirmed with Mr. Helwig that he will work with DBVW to frame the next steps the Committee must take to move this project forward. In the meantime, he asked Committee members to forward any thoughts or information to him. He added that he has done several successful building projects, but this one is unique. If the Committee chooses to seek help in marketing the facility, it won't be through a traditional procurement process. With that being said, he will need to speak with the architect and the financial analyst to find a logical approach to the procurement laws and conduct some research and on how best to move forward. This will be a scheduled discussion at a future meeting. Ms. Nicklaus added that she can help with this process and suggested that Mr. Coderre look to the State for some guidance.

Ms. Hirsh asked if the statutes could be removed from the end of the driveway in an attempt to maintain the visual appearance of a stately old home. Mr. Coderre responded that the Town needs to prioritize what needs the most attention at this time considering the limited available funds. The DPW Director is in the process of obtaining quotes from the same local contractor who repaired the roof, including the repair of localized areas of significant rot, specifically the windowsills where the windows are no longer secured in the sashes. This would be a higher priority over removing statutes in order to keep the building from deteriorating. Ms. Nicklaus agreed with Mr. Coderre, adding that this process will continue for some time and other problems will arise with the architectural aspects of the building.

Mr. Charpentier reviewed the current issues that will require attention in order to keep the building from further deteriorating. Ms. Hirsh indicated that she understands and agrees that building repairs should be top priority. She explained that her request to remove the statutes stemmed from a preservation lecture that she attended in the past, where it was discussed that a fresh coat of paint on an old building generated more interest in the project. Similarly, the removal of the statutes would improve the whole appearance of the property. She asked how much it would cost to remove the statues? Mr. Coderre cautioned that the expenditure of funds should be prioritized to preserve the actual historic building, adding that if the Committee feels that removal of the driveway statues is a priority he can look into it.

To Ms. Hirsh's point about demonstrating to the public that there continues to be forward progress with this project, Mr. Helwig suggested signage indicating that this is a Town project funded by Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funds. He asked if CPC administration funds would be able to pay for the signage?

Mr. Corbin agreed with Ms. Hirsh's request to remove the statutes, adding that they are not appropriate to the building. He suggested that the Committee consider placing them up for auction at some point.

Ms. Nicklaus agreed that the signs suggested by Mr. Helwig may be helpful. As for the statutes, if they do not have any historic value to the building and there is no value from a preservation standpoint, the Committee should consider demolishing them.

Mr. Helwig recapped the discussion regarding the statutes and the consensus was that to spend limited funds and staff time on removing them is just not a high priority at this time.

All Committee members agreed that the signage is a good idea. Mr. Helwig will ask the CPC if the signs can be funded through the CPC Administration budget.

At the request of Mr. Corbin, Mr. Coderre will distribute via email pictures of the new dormer.

NEXT MEETING

Mr. Coderre will reach out to the architect and will get back to the Committee with some options for the next meeting date.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Corbin moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:30 a.m.; Ms. Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Corbin "aye"
Nicklaus "aye"

Hirsh "aye"
Helwig "aye"

Respectfully Submitted,

Lynda LePoer
Executive Assistant

Documents used during meeting:

1. October 14, 2020 Meeting Agenda
2. Meeting Minutes from September 3, 2020
3. DBVW Proposal for Evaluation of Reuse Option 4 dated October 5, 2020
4. Project Overview from Normand Corbin dated 10/14/2020