

TOWN OF BRISTOL

Old Town Hall – Old Fire Department Study

Minutes

September 4, 2012

Committee members present: Hilda Bruno (Historical Society), Dave Carr (Budget Committee), Michael Capone (Town Administrator), Susan Duncan (Chair), Lucille Keegan (Energy Committee), Peter Vannah (public) and Steven Yannuzzi (Fire Chief)

The meeting was opened at 7:05 with introductions of those present. Lucille Keegan presented histories of both properties and provided handouts (attached).

The Old Fire station was built in 1889 (a 28 x 42 foot structure). The historic bell in the tower came from the old Bristol Power Company. When the new fire station was constructed in 1974, the basement of the old station began being used for storage. At one point EMS was located in the basement but moved upstairs in the old station in 1991. (At this point the Historical Society moved from upstairs to the Old Town Hall.) Between 2000 and 2001, the EMTs moved out of the old station and into the new fire station and the Historical Society moved back into the upstairs. At some point after 2001 new vinyl windows were installed. The Historical Society has invested a significant amount of “sweat equity” and resources into renovations and upkeep to the upstairs area. At one point in the 2000’s the services of the Grafton County jail population painted the Old Fire Station. Lucille Keegan’s observation is that the bell tower is leaking with the shingles/clapboard of the tower in pretty bad shape and that the entire roof needs attention (perhaps sealed and painted?). Mark Bucklin has looked into the drainage off of High Street which affects water from the street and into the building. Michael Capone will check with Mr. Bucklin as to the current status. At the current time the downstairs area is an important storage area for the Town and holds the Emergency Management trailer, the forestry truck, two safes, the old “gaming” materials from past days when the Fire Department did fundraisers as well as a weight machine and assorted other “stuff.” The pipes are drained in the winter and no one uses the building. At one point there was a pin hole leak in the pipe which was repaired by Jeff Chartier (Water and Sewer Dept.) At this point it would

appear that the building “suffers” from a basic lack of maintenance. While it has become a “catch-all” for various equipment and items, this does serve an important function for the Town. A thought was shared that we should consider water sealing the floor in the storage area.

In 1848 the Town voted to form a committee to formulate plans to build a **Town Hall** (at a cost not to exceed \$1,200). The first Town Meeting was held in the hall in March 1850. It was originally a 45 x 54 foot building (with a second floor which was later removed). In the 1870’s a west wing (facing downtown) was added. The “west wing” was used for Selectmen’s meetings and also held a kitchen. We were told that there is a huge old stove still in the building. In the 1890’s a brick walk-in safe was built to hold town valuables. The last major structural change happened in 1914 when the cloak room was added. At this time the second story was done away with and the ceiling was raised along with the addition of the two bathrooms. Various building uses through the years have included a Chautauqua show, traveling minstrels, theater plays (The Peter Sleeper Players), elocutionists, magicians, singers, bands or orchestras, dances, agricultural fairs and poultry shows. In the 1920’s and ‘30’s there were motion pictures prior to Bristol having our own theater. Bristol High School used the facility for basketball games, senior plays, graduations and proms. It housed a “lockup” and facility for vagrants and later leased as a meat market.

Various town warrants appropriated moneys for improvements and maintenance: 1993 -- \$25,000 to make necessary renovations; 1994 – allowing the Bristol Historical Society to use the west wing; 1995 – appropriating \$8,700 for necessary renovations; 2004 – work on the basement was successfully completed (though no appropriation was allocated).

The building has been used more recently for voting, various programs, public hearings when the meeting room is not large enough and some town meetings such as Summer Town Meeting and budget hearings. A large town seal is housed in the building. This was donated years ago by Dave Williams of IPC who was very generous to Bristol and a benefactor to many local needs.

In response to life safety issues, Chief Yannuzzi had installed smoke detectors and emergency lights. The old back ramp was removed as it was rotting and posed a safety risk. The back door is sticking and needs to be checked. At the place where the old ramp attached to the building, the sill is rotting and needs to also be inspected. There is a spot around the chimney where there is a depression that should be checked out. The leaks that were occurring in the roof have been addressed and at this time we do not believe

that it is leaking – however, the roof looks bad. At one point in the past years money was budgeted to paint the roof but the work was never done. The past leaks have done some damage to the antique tin ceiling inside. There is some extra tin upstairs in the building and we will check to see if it is extra left from when the ceiling was originally done; how much there is and whether it could be used to repair the “bad places.” There is also a section in the back corner of the building (the east side) where there is no siding. We will need to check that out. Some Tyvek was placed over it just to protect it from the elements. The patching that was done to the chimney was just the bare minimum to stop the leaks but it is holding at this time. At one point there were some issues with the furnace which were addressed, but it is an old one and fortunately continues to work.

Currently the MetroCast cable equipment is kept in the building (in the area toward town). The temperature is kept about 50 to 55 degrees during the winter to protect the equipment. The Select Board members considered moving the equipment up to the new Town Hall but MetroCast wanted \$3,000 just to move it – so it was decided to wait until this Committee completed their work before making a decision.

Basically both of these buildings have been “limping” along with no one group, department or staff in charge of their upkeep and care. The Joint Loss Committee moves their meetings regularly from one town-owned facility to another so that they can follow carefully any hazards, liabilities or risks to the Town. Following their meeting at the Old Town Hall is when the Fire Chief made the necessary improvements noted above (smoke detectors and emergency lights along with removal of the rotting ramp). Aside from the Joint Loss Committee’s attention, items get addressed when absolutely necessary. The Historical Society has taken charge of improvements to the upstairs of the Old Fire Station, though there has been no official requirement for them to take on this responsibility.

Mr. Capone indicated that the Historic District Commission is supportive of our efforts and is available to us as a resource if needed. He shared that through their efforts, Bristol is now a Certified Local Government (CLG) – a designation shared by only about 18 towns in the State. By having this designation, we are able to apply for possible resources.

Mrs. Keegan shared that the Division of Historic Resources is a possible source of funding for studies. Another possible resource is the Preservation Alliance.

While parking is an “issue” with the Old Town Hall, it was noted for the record that folks today seem to have the mindset that they must park their vehicle and be right at the front door. The doctor’s office has been very generous through the years in sharing their ample parking lot with the Town (and Baptist Church congregation) and we are fortunate to have such a friendly neighbor.

The CIP has established a building fund for general town repairs and should we recommend or request specific items in the future, a line item is already in the budget.

In discussing the charge of the Committee, it was agreed that we will start with an assessment of the history and current condition of both buildings (especially any life safety or liability issues). The next meeting will be a tour of both facilities (8:00 a.m. on **Thursday, September 13th** starting at the Old Town Hall). We were in agreement that we should keep in mind current facility needs of the Town as we go through the process of evaluating these buildings. A Final Report will be issued in time for the March 2013 Town Meeting. We asked that all meetings please be posted on the Town web site and that minutes be easily available.

Someone asked what the Charrette had indicated regarding these buildings. Mr. Capone will look for their report to see what it included.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

ATTACHMENTS: Handouts from Lucille Keegan

NEXT MEETING DATE: 8:00 a.m. Thursday, September 13, 2012
Old Town Hall followed by the Old Fire Station
for a tour and inspection

REPORT DUE: Prior to 2013 Town Meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Duncan
for the Committee