

Town of Northumberland Building Committee
Draft Meeting Minutes
February 4, 2021

Present: Bill Caron, Alan Rossetto, Gail Rossetto, Sam Oakes, Jim Gibson, Allan Clark, , Nicole Canavan, Ryan Shannon, Jodi Paradis, Peter Pelletier, Jim Weagle, Andre Brasseur, Robin Irving, Jack Bernard, Brian Connors, Christina Ross

(As per a conversation with Allan Clark, Allan will be referred to as “Clark” in the minutes to differentiate Allan Clark from Alan Rossetto)

Alan Rossetto opened the meeting at 6:00PM.

Alan asked for a motion to accept the January 18, 2021 meeting minutes. Bill Caron motioned to accept the minutes, Sam Oakes seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

Clark advised that the text for the brochure was in process and would be done soon. A “Frequently Asked Question” sheet was passed out to be discussed by the committee during this meeting.

Clark was happy to see that we had more members of the public at this meeting and he gave them a synopsis of what we had discussed up to this point.

He discussed the needs of the two departments, how the building will be utilized, and that the building will be around for at least 50 to 60 years. We are trying to project it’s functionality for the next 25 to 50 years in the future. Clark went over the floor plan for EMS and Police. These plans are not final. They will give us some good numbers to develop the total project budget so that the warrant article will ask for sufficient funds to finish this project. After Town meeting, if we get the okay, we will go into design and development phase and start working with the architect.

Our goal is to have the building as simple to build as possible, to be energy efficient, and to use the most durable materials that we could so that it will require very little maintenance.

A cost sheet was handed out and it shows the actual construction costs are \$1,875,000.00. The total project cost is approximately \$2.3 million. There is a contingency amount in the budget. Clark advised that there is always a percentage of the construction cost put in as a contingency. It hopefully will not be used. If not needed, it just does not get spent.

Three contractors that Clark has done a lot of work with have given us prices. These are not bids. When our warrant passes at town meeting, we will put the project out to bid and Clark thinks their proposals would beat the prices we have received so far.

Prices for materials are skyrocketing and increasing all the time. Some materials are difficult to purchase at all. Subs are busy right now and some have openings just because of the uncertainty of Covid. We have a window of opportunity. Timing is critical.

At this point, Clark's job is done, but he had promised to move forward and help get facts to the voters. We will continue to get as much information as possible out to the residents. We need to present the facts to the public so that they can make an informed decision. There will be a three fold brochure that is self contained with bullet points that can be looked at quickly.

All we can do now is present facts and market this project to the voters so they can make an informed decision when it is time to vote.

In the Town of Carroll, which is an SB2 town, the first vote for a new building was no and the warrant failed by two votes. When they voted again the next year, the warrant passed, however, the years delay cost them an additional half a million dollars in increased costs.

The public needs to understand that many liabilities exist within the old building. It is not unusual for the ambulance crew or the police officers to get bodily fluids on their persons and in their vehicles. The building they are in now has no decontamination facilities for people or vehicles. They bring home contaminated clothing and there is liability with that. These issues can lead to dangerous situations for both the ambulance and the police.

If there is a power failure, there is no emergency generator. If the police have someone in custody and they lose power, it could become a dangerous situation.

What we are trying to do is present facts to the voters. The cost to the taxpayers for the new building will be approximately \$89 per \$100,000 of valuation.

Committee members need to talk to as many people as possible and make sure that the public gets their questions answered. We need to let them know that it is in best interest of the town to approve this project. There is nothing that cannot be changed.

The two Chiefs need to demonstrate to the public why this new building is important not just to them but to the town itself.

We have the two informational meetings set for Monday, February 8, 2021 from 2:30 to 4:00 and from 6:00 to 9:00.

We need to have answers to any and all questions put to us by the town residents. One of the questions concerned available grants and that in Clark's analysis, he only shows \$100,000.00 in grants. Clark can answer those kinds of questions. However, the questions concerning the needs of the departments, why this building is important to the Town, and the tax impact will fall pretty heavily on the two Chiefs.

One question is why is the building cost so high? One of the reasons is that it is a municipal building and by code it needs to have a full fire, sprinkler, and alarm system.. There needs to be fire barriers between the ambulance bay and both office wings. The building has radiant heat and uses durable materials which will make it more efficient and will need less maintenance. The rest of the cost is architects, interest, furniture, equipment, and other necessities. The building will have a 60 kw generator for stand by power for both departments.

The ambulance bay is not just a garage. It is a very large room with heat and air conditioning. It can be used for Town meetings, voting, and any other large gatherings necessary.

The building will be designated as the Emergency Operations Center. Robin advised that the Town office is designated as the Emergency Operations Center and it is not the most “friendly” setup. The new building would be a training and operation center for that purpose.

Another question was about any available grants. There is a grant available for the generator. If the building is designated an emergency operations center, we should be eligible to pick up the cost of the generator. We may even be able to get a grant for some furniture that would be related to the Emergency Operations center. Clark is assuming around \$50,000 to \$60,000 could be available.

Robin advised that there could be a FEMA grant available. However, we would have to close out the existing FEMA grant for the update on the emergency operations plan that has not been started so that we could open up a new grant.

Clark advised us that Eversource has a program that will fund about \$15,000.00 of rebates.

Robin is pursuing a grant from Northern Borders Regional Commission. Clark said that in Carroll, they were able to get \$250,000.00 and the commission is anxious to give money to Coos County. Clark also advised that we need to appropriate the \$2.3 million. Where these grants come about will be the impact on your taxes. So obviously, the more grant money we get, the more we can reduce the amount of taxes. Clark is not willing to bet on the amount of grants we will be able to get. We have to demonstrate to the public what we think is a realistic tax impact.

Robin gave an update on Northern Borders. We had talked about a \$100,000 grant. Robin then followed up with them and discussed the eligibility limit. In 2020 the eligibility limit was \$350,000 for economic development projects. In our case, the best case scenario would be that we would create 5 jobs. We will have to boost the budget aspect to show how these 5 jobs contribute to our town’s economic development. There will be new rules in March for the NBRC grants and Robin is hoping that economic development grants limit will be changed to \$500,000.

Clark advised that with Northern Borders grants, you have to spend the money and then they reimburse you. So we would still have to appropriate the \$2.3 million and then if we spend less than that amount, the savings goes to reduce the amount of the tax impact.

The warrant article has been written in a way that says we will appropriate the \$2.3 million, less any grants that we earn. The warrant article has been sent to DRA and we will see if they accept the wording.

The committee discussed some of the other frequently asked questions.

The town hall has a “meeting” room but it is more like a conference room and only has space for about 20 people (pre-covid).

The building we are in now was renovated by the landlord over 10 years ago when we moved in.

Sam advised that moving the ambulance offices to the fire station would not work because of space

limitations. It was tried before and there isn't enough space to house patient files and other equipment.

Jim Weagle said that if the ambulances are housed in the new building we would not be paying rent to the precinct.

Andre advised that there would then be more room for the fire trucks and it would be better for the fire department and make it more functional.

Jim Gibson advised that the ambulance bay at the new building will be safer and save time in an emergency. Also, with the ambulances at the fire station, if school is getting out and there are school buses and children in the area, it is almost impossible to get the ambulances out quickly.

Chief Pelletier discussed some of the issues the police department has now with security for vehicles, personnel, and the public.

They have had "soft" audits by the State and have regularly failed them because they do not have the necessary facilities to correct any inadequacies. The State understands that they are doing the best they can and are very happy that we are working on getting a new building. The police will then have a building that was designed to be a police station and they will be able to be in compliance.

Another question is why do the police need a two car garage? Chief Pelletier said that we are not a 24 hour police station, yet, but when the cruisers are left in the parking lot they are under a camera so that we can see any damage that may occur and have a reasonably ability to find out what happened. But that doesn't stop the damage that could occur. Another reason is if we have to do a search warrant on a vehicle it has to be done outside, rain or shine. No matter the weather, no matter the time of day. Also, if they have not gotten the search warrant, they need a locked and secure place to safely store the vehicle while they wait to get in touch with a judge. There have been occasions, such as after a fire, when the police have been asked by the family to look at something that was in that fire and see if there were any personal documents that survived. Again, it had to be done outside in the parking lot of the police station. The items could not have been brought inside the police station because they were contaminated with fire debris and toxic substances. Another issue is when bringing a prisoner into the station, having a secure garage limits the ability of the prisoner to run off. The garage would have a decontamination facility so that no contaminants would be brought into the police station itself. The officers would also be able to decontaminate themselves when necessary. Robin added that the cameras in the garage would record the chain of custody.

Chief Gibson advised us of the problems the ambulance department have in the present facility. Again, a major problem is no decontamination facilities for people or vehicles.

The ambulances cannot be restocked, cleaned, or decontaminated while inside the fire station. No matter the weather, they have to be brought outside. Even in the winter, when it is snowing, below zero, and the wind is blowing, the cleaning has to be done in the parking lot.

Alan asked just how do you decontaminate an ambulance? Sam replied that ambulances are always cleaned. But, if there has been a covid patient in the ambulance, it has to go through a deep cleaning. This includes tools that have been provided by the State at no charge to them. To do a deep cleaning, all four doors have to be open and the stretcher, defibrillator, and other equipment have to be removed and cleaned. It takes about three hours to do a thorough decontamination for the vehicle. The employees have also been contaminated and there is no decontamination facilities available for them at

all. The ambulance is now decontaminated, but the employees still have on their contaminated clothes and they end up driving themselves in their personal vehicle to their homes to shower and wash their clothing. Now your personal washing machine and every room in your house that you walked through is contaminated. It is not just Covid contamination. There are several other viruses and bacteria that would bring on the need for decontamination. Antibiotic resistant bacteria is one, meningitis, and viruses that are in health care facilities are another.

Clark advised that this is a liability not only to the employees, but to the next person the ambulance transports. It is a liability to the town and other citizens as well.

Brian Connors asked about personal protection equipment and decontamination training for the town employees. Does the town provide anything? Sam advised that the town does not supply the ambulance department with uniforms. They wear clothes that they have purchased personally while on duty. During Covid, the state has provided disposable surgical gowns, masks, and shields. However, they do not always replenish these items quickly. There are some decontamination courses given by the state. The ambulance personnel don't always know when they are going to a site with a covid exposure. They may not know until they are called many hours later that a person they have had in the ambulance tested positive for Covid. On every call right now, the minimum PPE is a surgical mask, some kind of eye protection, and gloves.

Question about the utility cost of new building. Clark advised that even though the new building is more than twice the size of the building they are in now, there will be no significant increase in the utility costs because of the energy efficiency.

Another question is why do we need a full time police department. Why can't we rely on the state police?

Chief Pelletier advised that sometimes there is only one trooper from Franconia to Pittsburgh. Obviously, the trooper cannot be in two places at once. The troopers will respond to a major call but not to minor issues. They will not respond to a call that your neighbor is threatening you or my neighbors dog is barking.

Jim Weagle said that if we have coverage only by the state police, they give you twenty hours per week and those twenty hours are at their discretion. They will only respond to major issues. They will not respond to any minor issues. Right now, because they know our situation, they have agreed to help us but they pick their hours. We would not be able to depend on the state police.

The reason there is a state cruiser at the police station is because they use Groveton as a substation. Groveton is a central location between Franconia and Pittsburg and the troopers can do their paperwork and be in a central area.

Another question is that one of the local newspapers reported that the Lancaster ambulance was expanding. The question was why can't we just contract with them.

Jim explained that Lancaster is expanding their transfers. Transfers are a money making call. 911 calls are not. Lancaster will be positioning ambulances at Dartmouth and other hospitals so they can just take transfers. Their expansion is to have more paramedics just for transfers. There is no cost savings to contracting out the ambulance service and it would just add more time for the ambulance to get to a scene.

There is a huge liability exposure for the Police and Ambulance because of the inadequate or non-existent decontamination facilities. Also, if the police continue to fail the soft audits, the state could pull some of their equipment and they would be unable to use the states databases.

Jack asked how do we justify to the residents the increase of 89 cents per thousand. Alan said that we need to ask the residents if they value having a local ambulance and police department and the dedicated employees that work for these departments. If they do, then the 89 cents per thousand is money well spent. Peter stated that the 89 cents per thousand will provide services for all the people in town and will limit the town's liability exposure. Jim Weagle added that with this new building, the town would not be renting anything. We would own all our town buildings.

Nicole said that this new building will show prospective residents and businesses that the town is investing in it's own future and make a statement that the community is investing in itself. Nicole works in commercial real estate and one of the questions she gets from prospective businesses is where is the police department in relation to this building. If we can attract more businesses to town that would mean more jobs, the towns tax base would increase, and the town would start to regenerate itself. Interest rates are low right now and the longer we wait, the more this project will cost. We can pay for a new building now or pay liability claims later and still need a new building.

Robin said that the questions we have heard here have been answered by logic. The residents questions may be based more on emotion. She had spoken to Troy Merner, Joe Kenney, Erin Hennessey, and Beno Lamontagne and they would possibly be coming to the informational meeting.

There have been notices put in the Colebrook Chronicle and The Caledonian advertising the informational meeting on February 8.

Committee members will be at St Francis hall to start decontaminating at 1:00. The building will be decontaminated between the two sessions and when the meeting is over as well.

Jim Weagle said there will be a video on the presentation and he will put it onto the Groveton Neighborhood site.

Our next meeting is to be determined.

Alan asked for a motion to adjourn. Jim Weagle made a motion to adjourn. Bill seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:50

Respectfully submitted,

Gail Rossetto, Secretary

