

## Notes of Bethel Town Hall Finance Committee February 26, 2009 at the Bethel Library at 7 p.m.

**Present:** Committee members Amy Bergamo, Chris Masters, Winslow Ayre and Paul Feeney, plus Geneva Gaiko, Victoria Weber, Davis Dimock, and Joe De Freitas.

- Amy called the meeting to order at 7:03.
- The committee members accepted the minutes of the January 29, 2009 meeting as written.
- **Operations/ Management/ Maintenance Suggestions**

Background: In order to answer townspeople's questions about how the Hall will be managed and how revenues will offset expenses the Committee had gathered information from 14 other halls similar to ours last summer. This information was presented to the Selectboard and to the Committee on August 16, 2008 in the form of a chart covering about 13 topics. Subsequently Selectman Joe De Freitas and also Dell Cloud had asked us to digest that information and present a set of suggestions on Hall Operations that the Selectboard could respond to. Preparing for the bond vote last fall put this activity on hold and tonight the Committee returned to it.

A preliminary draft had been prepared and the group went over it. The resulting chart is attached. **The group hereby passes this chart of suggested operations policies along to the Selectboard** with the hope that it is useful to the board as they set up their Bethel operations and management policies for the Bethel Town Hall.

In the process of discussing the Operations Chart a number of questions needing answers or clarifications came up, especially the following:

- **Seating:** Dell had told Victoria that the fire marshal will allow 50 seats in the balcony plus 200 on the floor of the auditorium, for a total of 250. However it is unclear what type of seating this is – fixed to the floor /permanent? semi-permanent or semi-fixed into rows? or individual/ loose chairs?
  - Also, are chairs included in the upcoming work that will begin this spring?? Should it be???
  - We have some old wooden sets of 3 & 4 connected seats that could be used in the auditorium for a time, but permanently fixed seats are definitely needed for the balcony.
- **Dedicated Space for particular groups or organizations ?**

For the sake of consistent language, we will refer to the roof work that was done in 2007 as Phase I, the work about to commence as Phase II and any subsequent work, such as dividing up the first floor, as Phase III.

- Our understanding is that the **first floor / basement** will not be divided up in this, Phase II, of work on the hall. The plan is for the meeting room on the left and the mechanical room to have a stud walls and wallboards. Beyond that the first floor will be usable but not divided, pending use by the townspeople and a later decision on how to divide it and use it for the benefit of the most people. The feeling is that the town as a whole will be queried and will be involved in these decisions and fundraising to accomplish this.

Indeed the two things that most of us had understood to be excluded from Phase II were dividing and finishing the first floor, and theatrical/stage equipment.

- Since this process has not taken place it would be unfair for one group to try, especially at this early date, to get some or all of the first floor dedicated to their own use only.
  - Victoria explained that Rochester's Pierce Hall has a clear policy about this, saying that Pierce Hall is a public facility for the use of the public. They want there to be a feeling that people can use the spaces and the building but that it is not exclusively theirs – it is for everyone.
  - **Dedicated Storage Space.** Pierce Hall does have lockable storage cabinets that particular groups can use in conjunction with their regular meetings. Storage cupboards are going to be built into the back (south) wall of the auditorium, as well as storage under the stage (possibly for chairs) in this phase of work, 'Phase II'. The 2002 plans for the first floor featured lockable storage cabinets under counters. The group felt that renting such storage cabinets to individual groups who regularly use the hall would be fine.
- **A Constant Presence in the form of a rental office**  
Should there be a regular rental of a portion of the first floor to provide regular income and to have someone in the building on a regular basis to take some responsibility for things like mechanical systems (has the heat gone off?) and to provide some security? If so, should this be located in the front right corner which is the sunniest area, or some other place? The 2002 plans include such a rental space.
  - **Front Foyer with display shelves?**  
Phase II does include walling off the area just inside the main front doors on the first floor and connecting with the stairway to upstairs, which is to the left. It is not clear until we see the plans how much of those walls will be glass, but if it is possible to build in a means to display historic Bethel artifacts, such as the eagle from the Hall tower, this would be nice to have. Having current displays in the building would be nice too, perhaps new books available at the library and tourist information.
  - **Kitchen**
    - This is an important item and took more time than any other.
    - The plans call for a kitchen at the east end of the mezzanine level, the space to be shared with use as a dressing room (aka 'green room') for stage productions just upstairs.
    - Apparently no appliances are planned for this phase of work. Is this an oversight because all cost estimates have been based solely on architect's information?
    - Amy, Davis and most of us feel that appliances should be purchased and installed in this Phase II because the kitchen is a very important element of the hall, not a frill. It will be a determining factor in which rentals we can secure. People need to know from the beginning that a kitchen is available, otherwise many potential users will cease considering us for their events. The other halls Victoria talked to emphasized the importance of a kitchen. Royalton says that 95% of their users use their kitchen.
  - The main question is **do we need a 'commercial' kitchen** which involves expensive vents and other fire reduction equipment and even wall material.
    - We agreed we need to know just **what triggers a kitchen being 'commercial'**. Apparently the things that are necessary for a 'commercial' kitchen can cost tens of thousands of dollars.
    - Will most users just warm food there or actually cook it? Do we want to exclude folks from cooking?

- How much of necessary equipment may be purchased **second hand**? Paul knows of a place with used restaurant equipment in White River Junction, and Winslow knows of one in Rutland.
- Joe suggested we establish a ‘shopping list’ of things the hall needs.
- We agreed to try to **get input from Bethel caterers** as to their needs and suggestions. These include Willy Walker, Nick and Heidi Nikolaidis, Maybelle Dumont and Rhonda Ketner. We hope we have not excluded anyone. These professionals should look at the plans as soon as they arrive from architect Laz Scangas and also look at the mezzanine space in the building and make recommendations. Joe would like them to come up with a cost estimate for both a ‘commercial’ and a non-commercial kitchen.
- Joe suggested that we **have wiring, amount of voltage, ducts/vents, spaces, etc., all built in this phase** so that when we can obtain appliances, etc., they can easily be installed with no need for opening walls, etc. In fact the Selectboard had discussed this at their meeting last Monday (Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup>) and the minutes of their meeting read:

*The Board then reviewed the minutes of the January 29, 2009 meeting of the Town Hall Committee, and discussed questions which have been raised about the design of the kitchen area within the subject building. Several people have suggested that provision for commercial rating should be made as it would provide more flexibility for future usage of the building. The architect has advised that there is enough space for the required installations, to meet Health Department requirements. The Board members agreed that the design should be done to accommodate placement of all necessary appliances and fixtures as far as locations and space requirements, even if not fully equipped at this time.*

- Other things to include at this time are:
  - A panel with a **meter to register the amount of power** used so that – if we choose – we can charge parties for the exact amount of power they used.
  - Enough space should be allocated for good-sized scaled refrigerator, 3-part and hand washing sinks, ranges, ovens, dishwasher.
  - Should the stove be electrical or gas? What does each require?
  - Counter space is important, especially if caterers bring in trays of food.
- **Extra money now available?**  
 Victoria wondered if we might **use money that has become available** since the \$944,000 that the Town voters passed on November 4<sup>th</sup>. Since November Amy has obtained a front door and windows matching grant for \$15,000, and Dell Cloud has spoken for some time about getting a matching handicapped access grant, perhaps for \$20,000. So if we have \$35,000 more than we did in November, could we not use the money that replaces toward kitchen appliances and also chairs? This would mean that indeed the selectboard’s declaration when the board decided to go for the whole amount in the bond vote “to do it all so we don’t have to go back to the voters” would hold true.  
 Thus we would have the necessary chairs and kitchen to really use the building at the end of this, Phase II of work, and we would 1) not have to wait to fully use the building, and 2) not have to immediately return to taxpayers asking for more money.
- *[Note: there is a possibility of even more money coming via federal stimulus funds through Rural Development, and this could be used for the same purpose of kitchen and seating.]*

- **Staffing & Committees**

- What needs to be done and who should do it to run and maintain the Hall? Joe said that the Selectboard is not near deciding on a board or committee.
- Joe also related that Neal Fox wanted to make it plain that there is more to go to raise money and the Town Hall Finance Committee should continue financing. It was not immediately clear what the committee should raise money for, from whom and how.

- **Alcohol usage**

- Amy reported that the Selectboard has told her they will change the town ordinance which currently prohibits alcohol in all town-owned buildings.
- Insurance questions. What sort of liability insurance will be needed – by the town and perhaps also by parties using alcohol? What is the difference when alcohol is sold, and when it is BYO or simply given away?
- Should there be additional deposit fees and/or insurance disclaimers if alcohol is available?
- Paul said that the state police say that generally 4 drinks in an hour will put a person over the legal limit.

- **Insurance**

- As we discussed issues we realized that many are based on insurance coverage.
- Pierce Hall arranged for presentations on different types of insurance to cover the building, the board of directors, volunteers and visitors, and then purchased appropriate coverage. For instance, a volunteer driving to pick up a donation for Pierce Hall is covered.

- **Disturbing the Peace**

- With the ability to have dances, concerts and parties, how should excessive noise be addressed?
- Chelsea requires that events end by midnight.
- Who is responsible for 'policing'? Paul said that that should be the Bethel Constable, unless he is out of town.
- Paul explained that the rule of thumb in this area is that there should be no loud or unreasonable noise after 10pm. It is 'reasonable' to be fairly loud up until 10 pm.
- The downtown area is zoned commercial at this time, not residential.

- **Newsletter #6**

- Davis distributed paper copies of the annual **Town Hall Newsletter #6** for February 2009. It has already been distributed electronically to the committee and other people interested in the hall, it is posted (in color) on the [www.bethelvermont.com](http://www.bethelvermont.com) website and paper copies are at a number of town businesses. Some copies will be available at Town Meeting March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25.

→ See attached Bethel Town Hall **Operations Chart** of Operations and Maintenance Issues.

❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ Minutes respectfully submitted by Victoria Weber ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ March 1, 2009. ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖