

M.D. Drysdale's Editorial in *Herald* , October 30, 2008

An Opportunity for Bethel

Perhaps the editor of a newspaper published in Randolph should forego offering advice to the good citizens of a neighboring town, but it seems from here that Bethel has a great opportunity Tuesday to take a very positive step towards the future.

That opportunity is the bonding proposal which would allow for full restoration of the old Town Hall building, which is already the town's architectural icon and could become a vital center for the community.

Passage of the bond issue in Tuesday's election is a necessary step toward securing an opportunity that probably won't come Bethel's way again—a \$301,000 grant in federal money secured by U. S. Sen. Patrick Leahy from the Save America's Treasures historic preservation program.

The Town Hall project has already received gifts of cash and countless hours of labor from many citizens who recognize what an asset the building can become. It has a new roof, thanks in large measure to a private citizen. It has a new drainage system around the building, thanks to volunteers. It has \$30,000 in a Town Hall Fund of donated money, as well as \$25,000 set aside in town-approved funds voted at last year's town meeting.

In order for all those efforts and gifts to bear fruit, and for the \$301,000 Leahy grant to be secured, Bethel has now to bite the bullet and do the work that will create a community center in the Town Hall. To that end, the selectboard has proposed a bond issue of \$1.3 million, to be voted on Nov. 4. Now, \$1.3 million is a lot of money, especially in unstable times. But the gifts already promised or in hand will reduce that amount to an estimated \$944,000 which would result in an increase in the tax rate of just under three cents per \$100 of value—or \$45 a year for a \$150,000 home. Once the project is a "go," it is possible that other grants could be captured that would reduce the bill to the taxpayers.

Because of the Leahy grant, this is an opportunity that likely will only knock once on Bethel's door—the chance to save one more of "America's Treasures."