 Present: Wheelock Town Hall Accessibility Project Committee members Ann Lawless (chair), Steve Amos, Eileen Boland, Enid Ellis, Liz Muckerman. Absent: Marc Brown. No other members of the Selectboard were present besides Ann. Approximately 20 Wheelock residents also attended.

At 6:01 pm Ann opened the meeting, welcoming community members and explaining the purpose of the meeting – for information sharing only, with no actions to be voted or taken during the meeting. She introduced the consultant team Brandy Saxton, PlaceSense (outreach); Paul Simon, VISCC (team manager); Christopher Kennedy (MAKE Architects). She also welcomed Jenna Koloski and Nick Kramer, VT Council on Rural Development, facilitating the discussion, and Mike Deterling, KATV, recording the meeting to create a video with a link to be posted later in the week. She thanked the Sheffield Field Days group for lending their tent and the Sheffield-Wheelock Fire Department for setting it up and taking it down. She noted that Wheelock was chartered as a Town in 1780, and 2021 marks the current Town Hall’s 150 years as our center of government & community life. She stated the Town is at a critical turning point because of the threat of a lawsuit from the US Department of Justice because the Town Hall building is out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. She also thanked the funders for making this community engagement and architectural planning project possible: State of VT Municipal Planning grant, VT Community Foundation Northeast Kingdom Fund, Smart Growth Fund and Northern Communities Investment Fund.

At approximately 6:05 Jenna Koloski went over the meeting agenda: first an introduction and slide presentation by project consultants providing drawings for two concepts, followed by a brief break for people to post written comments on the large format printouts, then a general discussion and community comments on the two concepts, ending with a straw poll on the favored option.

At approximately 6:10 Brandy Saxton reviewed the meeting framework. The Town needs to get to a proposal for a code-compliant facility to meet the Dept. of Justice requirements. She reviewed results of the survey conducted in May 2021, noting that the 80 respondents agreed on three things: need for an accessible meeting space for 200 people; cost to taxpayers is the most important factor; and we ought to finish fixing the building so it works as office/meeting space. She noted many were supportive
of doing what is needed but not supportive of “extras” that are not strictly necessary, and that most were amenable to an increase of .05 to .06 cents on the tax rate.

Paul Simon and Chris Kennedy presented slides explaining the two concepts, Make it Better and New Facility. They highlighted access including parking from the outside into the building, and showed views of the floor plans, birds eye views from above, and angled views showing the building in the landscape.

**Option 1:**
- New, 2-level addition at rear
- Remove existing east side door; new entry in addition
- Raising the grade means no ramp or railing
- Some elements shown are beyond the basics required, could be done later, such as street trees
- Lift to basement, rest rooms
- Lower area contains clerks’ area, vault, rest rooms
- Retain the “porch” ramp on west side to access main hall

**Option 2:**
- Addition at side
- Everything is accessible on one level
- No lift to avoid troublesome maintenance and cost
- Raise grade 1’ at front enables a short ramp/railing
- Alignment of buildings (including garage placement that could be used for either option) creates a sense of a village center
- Potential 2nd phase could add an addition at rear to move the stage back, enlarging meeting hall
- Basement can be used for storage of items the staff does not access frequently

**Budget summary:**
- Option 1: To meet DOJ requirements ONLY - $869,000 to $1.4M
- Option 2: $1.3M to $1.7M
- Elements not required, but included for master planning purposes:
  - Septic, trees, window repairs, existing heating & other systems, renovate office / expand vault

Specific questions on the presentation:
- Lift or Lula? Lift. A Lift is less costly that an elevator ($30K vs$75K) An elevator is larger, lift is for a single wheelchair user who drives in, backs out. Basically functional although need regular maintenance. Typical issues with a lift involve overloading.
- Dept of Justice timeframe was provided

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/31/2021</td>
<td>Selectboard create Town Hall Accessibility Proposal &amp; share with DOJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/31/2022</td>
<td>(or Twn Mtng Day), vote on approval of Town Hall Accessibility Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>If approved:</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/31/2022</td>
<td>Create construction bid documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/5/2022</td>
<td>Propose bond vote for project funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>If approved:</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/31/2023</td>
<td>Begin construction</td>
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- Ceiling height of Opt. 2 addition could be lowered.
Division for Historic Preservation has been consulted and OK’s both options.

**Brandy spoke more about funding.** She noted that a .05 to .06 cent increase on the tax rate could provide $1.3M to $1.5M bonding ability. The totals are not likely to be what the town bonds for as we are likely to seek additional grants, as much as $250,000. The largest fund available is USDA Rural Development, offering combination grant / loan packages. The proportion of grant to loan is based on the income level in the community. According to current figures, the Wheelock ratio is a 15% grant / 85% loan. Brandy stated it might be worthwhile to do a detailed income study because it does not seem that this ratio accurately reflects Wheelock. If we can show that Wheelock’s income level is <80% of the state median income figure, the ratio would be a 35% grant / 65% loan.

At 6:45 Jenna invited participants to take a short break, and come to the tables at the front of the tent to look closely at and add written comments on the large printed drawings spread out there for compilation afterwards.

At approximately 6:55 Jenna resumed the group conversation inviting verbal comments on the two options, asking first what people responded to or liked, and then inviting suggestions for improvement. Thoughtful suggestions were offered:

- The Town needs infrastructure to support community building
- Both options provide solutions for the Dept. of Justice
- Garage consideration is helpful
- Need to expand clerk/office area in Option 2.
- Suggest taking out interior walls in basement area in option 1
- Voting could take place there in option 1. 150 to 200 people throughout the day
- Question for Fire Dept. members present: fire code concerns? A public building has to meet state code; if lead paint burns, can only spray with water -cannot enter building
- Is the current roof sound enough to attach the addition in Option 2? YES, and engineering would be done
- Accessibility in winter – shoveling walkways costs money
- Snow load on valley in option 2: Typically the thermal envelope is addressed so snow does not slide off or create ice dams that leak
- Meeting current building performance standards may cost more than basic DOJ requirements, but will save on operations costs over time

Jenna then asked for people’s choices, and why:

- #2 all on one level, no lift, full access for community functions
- #2 bigger meeting space, but is capacity for 200 enough?
- #1 b/c #2 has too little office space. And a long walkway for mobility-limited persons
- #1 b/c we can use our school as a large meeting space. 58 -62 people usually attend town meeting. #1 is suitable for Australian Ballot
- Have we spoken with Sheffield, who have a new building? How did they do it?
- Sheffield building is now outdated, and their funding structure is colossally different from ours b/c of wind tower revenue.
- Their functions are split; new municipal building is only the office for their clerk and assistant clerk.
• We need to care for neighbors. People don’t volunteer.
• Let’s not waste taxes. Roads and bridges have needs too.
• A shelter for disasters? At least one person hoped to provide this; another thought it would be too costly to have a generator, septic. Must be 24/7. Millers Run and Lyndon Town School are shelters and fairly nearby. Suggestion to further discuss with Marc Brown, Emergency Officer.
• Building is now structurally sound. Cupola could be straightened if so desired.

At 7:25 Jenna invited participants to a non-binding “straw poll” by placing a sticky dot on one of the two options. “If you had to vote now, which proposal would you choose?” Four chose option 1, eight chose option 2.

At 7:30 Ann thanked everyone for attending and contributing to the discussion, noting opportunities for comment are available through October 17 via comment boxes inside at Town Hall and at the Wheelock Village Store. Comments may also be submitted online at http://placesense.com/wheelock/.

At 7:40 Ann motioned to adjourn, seconded by Enid, and acclaimed by the Committee members.

Scribe: Ann Lawless