

1835 Town Hall Committee



Report to the Board of Selectmen
May 4, 2016

Overview

To the detriment of the 1835 Town Hall Committee, I have been very slow in learning the intricacies of Town Government here in Sterling. Unlike Mr. Szlosek and the Board, I am unable to tap the resources of Town Counsel to help make my case.

So, it has taken me a year to realize that somehow, some time, someone removed the line item that allowed the 1835 Town Hall Committee to direct the expenditure of funds the Town Hall generates. This item was summarily removed from the Town Warrant last year.

Mr. Szlosek advised me that the Committee was not empowered to expend any money nor procure any services. He was very clear in stating the Revolving Account was not reauthorized last year. Two weeks ago, he was also clear in stating that he had sought out Town Counsel on the interpretation of our directives and that Counsel agreed with him.

The Committee has been deluded by the fact that the Town Accountant continues to account for income generated by rental fees applying them to the 1835 Revolving Account and has reported available funds to the Committee.

We now learn that we have no say in how those funds are used to the benefit of the 1835 Town Hall. As an example, we lack the authority to purchase bottled water to offer passersby's during the Memorial Day parade, in spite of the fact that the Town Hall has historically opened its doors providing refreshment and convenience to the community.

Our new charter states that we shall *advise* the Board and comply with the directives of the Town Administrator or the Board of Selectmen. This charter can be interpreted narrowly or liberally as the Selectmen deem appropriate.

The Selectmen have the capability to empower or constrain the 1835 Town Hall Committee. Our question for the Board is what would you have us do. In lieu of specific directives, we are dissuaded from taking any further initiative on our own for fear of being told we haven't the authority.

That said, it is appropriate that we review our journey over the last year to better determine an appropriate path moving forward. It was on May 19, 2015 that we paid tribute to the successful work Vern Gaw experienced in Chairing the Town Hall Committee for more than 15 years. As new Chair under the constraints of the article under which we now operate, we have become frustrated.

Here is the good, the bad (bad news first) and what we need to move forward in a positive direction.

The Bad

Maintenance

In May 2015, the 1835 Town Hall Committee was relieved of the Maintenance Account of \$5,000 as it was determined that maintenance should be administered by the Facilities department. This has prevented the Committee from handling small tasks within the Town Hall such as repairing a broken door knob, painting stained areas of walls in the rest rooms or stripping and sealing the floor in the great hall. Nor are we able to save funds to, for example, add handicap access to the front of the building. The Town Administrator has been very clear in saying that the Committee “has no authority to expend funds”. This remains a concern for the Committee as our priorities are not shared by the facilities department. We will create a work-order system to begin documenting maintenance issues requiring attention.

Painting and Column Repair

As of March, 2016, the Committee still had \$15,448.11 in the 1835 Painting Account per Town Accountant and confirmed by Town Administrator. Although these funds may be used for the repair of the Columns and painting of the Portico, the 1835 Town Hall Committee is unauthorized and unable to procure the services of vendors and must surrender this task to the Town Administrator and the Facilities Department. The 1835 Town Hall Committee cares deeply about the historic accuracy as the columns are repaired, restored, scraped, vented, sealed, and painted. The Committee should be involved in the process.

Procuring Services

The Town Administrator has made it all too clear that the 1835 Town Hall Committee has no authority to procure services. The Committee will defer to the Facilities Department and work with Tom Rutherford to secure vendors that are able and willing to address the historic challenges the Town Hall presents.

Revolving Account

All year, we were operating under the knowledge that we had control over the 1835 Revolving Account even though the account is not a funded account. This account is totally funded by rentals of the Town Hall and is reported to the Committee by the Town Accountant. As of March 2016, there was a balance over \$700. Revenue from the private rentals of the Town Hall have historically been deposited into the 1835 Town Hall – Revenue account and the 1835 Town Hall Committee has been able to pay expenses from this account by warrant and vote of the Committee. Reporting to the Committee is provided by the Town Accountant and appears to us as:

1835 Committee

<u>Acct Num</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>FY15 End Bal</u>	<u>FY16 Revenue</u>	<u>FY16 Expenditures</u>	<u>Closeouts/Transfers</u>	<u>Balance</u>
0100 194 7 00 5701 0000	1835 Old Town Hall Bldg Maint.	0.00				0.00
0100 194 9 01 5801 0000	1835 Town Hall Painting	5,060.11	10,388.00			15,448.11
0100 194 9 02 5802 0000	Fy'13 1835 Window Restoration	10,388.00			(10,388.00)	0.00
2080-194 0-5701-0000-00	1835 Revolving	532.11		(73.88)		458.23

In April, we were advised by Town Administrator that this account has not existed since July 1, 2015, yet we have documentation from the Town Accountant that the account indeed existed and it continues to be funded. The Committee feels it should be able to prescribe how these funds are expended to benefit the Town Hall.

Donations

It appears that the 1835 Town Hall Committee will be unable to accept donations earmarked for the Town Hall nor can it decide the appropriate disbursement of those funds for the benefit of the Town Hall. The Committee feels it should not be dissuaded from the opportunities of accepting donations and that it be allowed to account for those donations and prescribe how funds are expended to benefit the Town Hall.

Friends Organization

We have been advised that a Friends organization would be a good move and these types of organizations have worked well for the Library and the Council on Aging. We contend that the Town Hall is different than other Friends organizations in Town.

The primary purpose in establishing a Friends of the Sterling Town Hall not-for-profit 501C(3) organization would be to initiate a capital campaign to raise funds for major restoration and ADA Compliance such as

- Restoration of the Great Hall and gallery
- Revert staircase to original and incorporate a lift system to access the 2nd floor
- ADA Compliance in accessing all areas of the Town Hall

During the April 20, 2016 Board of Selectmen meeting it was stated that donated funds collected on behalf of the 1835 Town Hall would flow into the general fund.

Not only do we believe it unlawful to funnel donations into the general fund instead of a trust account, but this single intention would prevent establishing a Friends of the Sterling Town Hall organization, as it would defeat the purpose.

The Good

Despite some frustration, there has been much accomplished. We all have been doing some very positive work building a cohesive Committee, working towards maintaining and restoring the 1835 Town Hall while remaining prudent and fiduciarily responsible. We all have shown a commitment and caring for this wonderful building, the Sterling Town Hall. I very much appreciate the cooperation and collaboration of this group. Learning and growing with the Committee has been a great honor. Some of our achievements are:

- Cooperation with other Town Departments, Boards, Committees and Commissions have been cooperative and informative. The Board of Health, The Sterling Historical Commission, The Finance Committee and the Town Clerk have all been quite helpful.
- The Recreation Department and specifically, Kristin Dietel has been awesome in watching over the 1835 Town Hall day to day. She regularly meets with the custodians and communicates with Tom Rutherford and is informative and helpful to the 1835 Town Hall Committee. Kristin schedules all activities and meetings at the Town Hall and she also collects rental fees and accounts for those funds while getting them over to the Municipal Building for deposit and credit to the 1835 Town Hall Revolving Account.
- In June, the Committee along with the approval and funding from the Sterling Historical Commission, obtained an accurate forged plaque for the front of the Town Hall. Ron Pichierri was kind enough to mount it and we held an informal joint meeting to install the plaque.
- In September 2015, we took a close look at the insurance coverage for the Town Hall. It was apparent that the Town policies required any user of the Town Hall for private functions to provide a certificate of Insurance and The Town of Sterling will be named as an additional named Insured.
- In November 2015, we revised rental agreements and increased fees which had been extremely low.
- This year, we began to make progress on the dozen year project connecting the septic at Town Hall to the Fire House leaching area, as was originally intended.
- Our working document **The Sterling Town Hall Long-Term Plan**, has been a work in progress for a few months. It contains not only plans but also historical facts pertaining to the 1835 Town Hall Committee and should be available in June 2016.
- Our web site www.sterling1835townhall.org has been improved and documents added including rental agreements, fee schedule, 1835 Town Hall Committee Reports to the Board of Selectmen and the Long Term Plan document.
- Our Facebook Page is <https://www.facebook.com/Sterling1835TownHall>
- To reach our Committee, use email address info@sterling1835townhall.org
- We will be working to add a kitchenette to the Town Hall using some of the space in what is now the Veterans Office. We believe the proximity to water, drainage and electricity make it a perfect place to add a small sink, counter and cabinets. A kitchenette will provide space for

coffee and snacks for visiting groups improving the viability of the space for private meetings.

- In this same space, we intend to add an additional meeting space at the Town Hall by reclaiming the unused Veterans Office which has been relocated for more than a year. This will add a much needed smaller meeting space to the Town Hall. We look to make this room the permanent home for both the 1835 Town Hall Committee and the Sterling Historic Commission. We will also be able to rent the room for one on one lessons or small meetings.
- We have named all rooms on the first floor in honor of those past and present that have contributed to the Town of Sterling and the Town Hall. Look for plaques commemorating the various rooms in the very near future.
- We will soon have developed **Use Policies** for the 1835 Town Hall to boost utilization and support exhibits of art, crafts, paintings and photography insuring schedule compatibility with current events and protection of public space. This involves the creation of an Exhibit Coordinator to act as liaison between artist and Committee.

Moving Forward

We continue to make some progress. However we are frustrated by the fact that we get mired in controversy at every initiative. It makes it difficult to make significant change. Since we seem to be misguided, the 1835 Town Hall Committee requests clarification from the Board of Selectmen as to our mission.

Respectfully submitted May 4, 2016

1835 Town Hall Committee

Robert McKay Jones

David Gibbs

Ron Pichierri

Joann Drown

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