

Town of



Sterling

MASSACHUSETTS

**TOWN BUILDING NEEDS COMMITTEE**

**STATUS REPORT**

April 30, 1997

FORMATION OF BUILDING NEEDS COMMITTEE

The Building Needs Committee was established in January, 1994. According to the Select Board, the Committee was charged with "deciding what to do with the Butterick School building." In addition, the Committee was also instructed to "look at the current space crunch at Houghton School, and the space needs for the fire, police and other town groups."

The Select Board appointed members from several town boards. The original committee members were Bruce Baker, Public Safety, Norman Clemence, Building Inspector, Robert Cutler, DPW, Phyllis Fitch, Senior Citizen representative, Ruth Hopfmann, Historical Society, Maryanne Macleod, Historical Commission, Sean McDonough, School Committee, and Ronald Pichierri, Planning Board. Robert Cutler was appointed Chair, with Phyllis Fitch as secretary.

UTILIZATION OF BUTTERICK BUILDING

As their first priority, the Committee explored possible options for the utilization of the Butterick School. Among the uses proposed were: a new police station to alleviate the overcrowding of the present station, a senior center to meet the needs of Sterling's senior citizens, re-opening the building as a school, converting the old school into expanded town office space, and selling the building for use as professional office space or apartments. With all these possible options, the Committee went to work.

Under Robert Cutler's direction, letters were sent to every town board requesting their needs for space. From the responses, it became very evident that one of the greatest needs in town was for expanded office space in which to conduct town business. Also, the School Committee announced that it had no further interest in re-opening the building as a school. Indeed, a School Building Committee was appointed, and from that point on, the Building Needs Committee concentrated on non-school space needs, with a prime focus on the Butterick Building.

At the special town meeting in the fall of 1994, voters approved \$15,000 for a feasibility study to determine the cost of converting the Butterick building for town office space. The Committee then began looking for an architectural firm that could complete the study. After an intensive search Preservation Partnership was chosen to do the preliminary design work and architectural plans to convert the Butterick School into the new town offices. The Committee briefly studied the suitability of using the Town Hall for other purposes.

At the annual town meeting of May, 1995, the voters approved the expenditure of \$940,000 to convert the Butterick School into town government offices, a senior center and meeting space for town boards. Preservation Partnership was officially hired to design architectural plans and a nine member committee was formed to oversee the reconstruction.

With the task of finding a new use for the Butterick building accomplished, the Building Needs Committee turned its attention to the needs of other town departments, including the Public Safety Departments and the Recreation Committee, with particular attention to the Town Hall. A new use needed to be found for this venerable old building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and is the oldest public building in Sterling.

## TOWN HALL

### Historic use

The present Town Hall was built in 1835 by architect-builder, John Springer on the site of the first town hall. For over a century, the town hall was used as a community center. The first floor was used by various town groups for social dinners, display halls, cultural events and occasionally for town business. The second floor was used for town meetings, religious services, social gatherings, dances, exhibition hall and school rooms and other school functions. Over the years, the ground level floor was rented to various craftsmen and artisans. It was sometimes used to house fire equipment and a jail cell was added in the mid 1800's. From 1955 to 1978, the police department was located here. In 1978, all town government offices were moved to the newly renovated town hall, and the police relocated to their present quarters..

### Finding a New Use for the Town Hall

Simultaneous with the decision to convert Butterick School into town offices, were discussions about the future use of the town hall. No conclusion was reached. Among the uses proposed were a community center, a senior center, a police station, and a commercial building. These potential uses coincided with three identified town needs: meeting space for non-profit, non-government groups, additional space to ease the overcrowding of the police and fire station, and space for the Recreation Committee to conduct cultural, arts and craft programs for town residents. As part of its original design work, Preservation Partnership drew up a very rough plan of a town hall renovated as a police station. This plan did not exclude other uses, nor was it intended to be definitive. Though this plan compared the cost of construction of a new police

station with the cost of renovation of the town hall, it did not include the cost of an addition to the present police station. This question must be answered. The Building Needs Committee could not ignore this omission and the possibility of an addition to the present station has been an ongoing item of discussion for the Committee.

As early as May of 1995, the Building Needs Committee considered the town hall a "good site for town organizations to meet." The Committee explored what four other towns, Concord, Northboro, Princeton and Sherborn had done with their empty town buildings. The Committee was particularly impressed with the way Princeton had converted an old school into a viable Community Center, and provided the best example of what could be accomplished.

Located in the former Center School, which closed when the Thomas Prince school was built, the Princeton Center has become a self-supporting, multiple use community center. The Center houses several private groups, artists and artisans, as well as the Senior Center run by the Council of Aging. Rooms are also rented to individuals for specific events. Rental fees vary according to the group. Non-profits pay 25% of their gross receipts, artists pay \$3.50 per square foot, and room rental is \$25.00 for each event. Initially, the Center received support from the town on a diminishing scale for the first five years, from \$15,000 for the first year, \$12,000 for the second year, \$8,000 for the third year, \$6,000 for the fourth year, and \$2,000 for the fifth year. Since that time, it has been self-supporting. However, since it is a town owned building, janitorial services are provided for the public areas. The town plows the driveway and parking lot in the winter. The Princeton Center not only found a new use for an old building, but it answered a town need. As such, it is a good model to emulate.

In March of 1996, the National Trust for Historic Preservation awarded a matching \$1,000 grant to conduct a reuse feasibility study of the town hall. Provisions in the grant allowed for a structural analysis to determine the condition of the building and a feasibility study to explore its use as a community center. Grants from the National Trust are very competitive and the criteria is very demanding. Needless to say, the Committee was very proud of its success.

In conjunction with the grant, a town-wide survey was conducted to obtain citizen input on the future use of the town hall. Overwhelmingly, the townspeople supported its use as a community center. Of prime importance to townspeople was preserving both the rural character of the town and its historically important buildings. There was very little support for the renovation of the town hall into a police station. Armed with this knowledge, the Building Needs Committee focused on a community center as the best re-use of the town hall.

### **USE OF THE TOWN HALL AS A SELF-SUPPORTING COMMUNITY CENTER**

The Building Needs Committee has been approached by several groups and organizations, all of whom are interested in using the town hall to satisfy their requirements. Among them are the following:

### Potential use by Recreation Committee

With a growing population, more demand is placed on the Recreation Committee to provide recreation opportunities for youths and adults. Currently, the Recreation Committee provides a summer program at Lake Waushacum, a ski program during the winter and some activities at the various ball fields. In addition, the Committee would like to provide cultural activities, but needs indoor space. Members of the Recreation Committee met with the Building Needs Committee to explore the possible use of the town hall as a place to hold after-school cultural programs for youth and an expanded summer arts program, as well as recreational programming for adults. Several towns have implemented such programs successfully and profitably. Sterling could use their success as a model. In addition, there are many grants available for such programs.

### Potential use for Cultural Programs

Ever since it was first built in 1800, the Town Hall has been the center of community activity. Lectures, dances, plays, musicals, dinners, church socials, town fair, and exhibitions are just some of the many activities held in this building. Only in recent times, has the building been used solely for town government. With its stage, large hall and balcony on the second floor, the Town Hall would provide an appropriate setting in which to return these community activities to town. Several groups have submitted proposals for such programs to the Building Needs Committee. Among them is Susan Galvin of Arts Bridge, Inc. who for two years was the Artistic Director for First Night Worcester. She was instrumental in turning that evening into a profitable and entertaining event. With her background in theater, film, television and music, and most importantly, fund-raising, Galvin believes the Town Hall would provide an appropriate venue.

### Potential Rental of Space to Private Non-profit Groups or Individuals

Many town organizations are constantly looking for space in which to meet. Historically, the town hall was the place they met. These groups either paid rent or re-imbursed the town for any necessary janitorial services. Several groups would rent the space if the town hall were to become a community center. Rooms could also be rented to individuals for specific purposes. For instance in both the Princeton and Sherborn community centers. wedding receptions have been held in the large meeting rooms

### Requests from Artisans and craftspeople

Several artists and artisans have inquired about the possibility of renting both studios and exhibit space in the town hall. In concert with performing arts programs, this use would provide yet

another avenue to realizing a self-supporting community center. This use should be explored further.

#### Report from Harvey and Tracy

Before any definitive use can be determined for the town hall, it will be necessary to know the load bearing capacity of each floor. The architectural firm of Harvey & Tracy was hired by the Building Needs Committee to conduct, not only a structural analysis of the building but its load capability. This study is expected to be completed by the end of May.

#### Report from Suzanne Carlson, Architect

The second part of the grant from the National Trust allows for a study to determine if it is feasible to convert the Town Hall into a self-supporting community center. Suzanne Carlson, the architect hired by the Building Needs Committee to complete this study cannot begin until the structural survey has been completed.

In her proposal to the Building Needs Committee, Carlson outlined the steps she would take to accomplish the study. These are:

1. Develop needs program, i.e. consider all possible uses
2. Analysis of occupancy, egress requirements and other code impacts
3. Assessment and evaluation of existing conditions
4. Preliminary design and space use drawings
5. Report on results and recommendations for development

After completion of the feasibility study, it will be possible to define a scope of work for the town hall as a community center. The Building Needs Committee realizes that much work will be required to refurbish the town hall. It is the intent of the Committee to apply for development grants to begin this work. The Committee also believes the town hall can be restored as a community project. The town of Sherborn successfully turned their empty town hall into a community center in this way. With good planning and community support, the same can be accomplished in Sterling.

#### FIRE AND POLICE STATION

The present fire station was built in 1957. Prior to this time, the Fire Chief kept an office and all the fire records in his home, and fire equipment was housed either in the lower level of the town hall or in the fire house/library building which was located between the library and the First Church. In 1885, the library moved from the second floor of this building to the newly constructed library building and the second floor was used by the Fire Department for offices and training.

Before 1955, the Police Chief was only a part time position. In those days, the Police Chief maintained an office in his home and kept all records there. In 1955, the police chief moved the department to the second floor of the town hall, where they stayed until 1969, when the department moved to the first floor where it remained until 1978. By then, not only had the police outgrown their space, but their facilities no longer complied with state and federal regulations. The police department then moved to its present location in the new addition to the fire station completed in that year.. The Police have long since outgrown that space.

### Needs of Police Department

The need for more space for the Police Department is urgent. All of their services are crowded into a small 28 ft. x 60 ft. area on one floor. This small space includes office space, holding cell, toilet, a combined office/interrogation area and the chief's office. Lockers for police personnel are either on a narrow staircase or under the stairs. Files are jammed into the toilet area and anywhere else possible. The interrogation room is crowded with files, desks for police staff, and other equipment and provides no private or secure space in which to interrogate anyone or to obtain statements from victims of crimes. No provisions for privacy are possible, nor is there any secure area. .

With the layout of doors, stairs and hallways, the station is in violation of ADA requirements. No one in a wheel chair can gain entrance to the reception area of the police station. When the police secretary is absent, the front doors are locked, and anyone who needs information or help must use the intercom system to speak to the dispatcher. In addition, the dispatch center which is located on the second floor and services both the fire and police departments, is woefully overcrowded and is not handicapped accessible. There is no room for the updated equipment that should be part of a dispatch center. The only way to speak to fire, police or dispatch personnel after regular working hours is through an intercom located outside the main office doors.

The single cell is inadequate for holding anyone for more than a few hours. It does not meet any of the state and federal requirements of a lock-up for a man, woman or youth. The lack of a lock-up in Sterling makes the problem of handling a person under arrest difficult. A person under arrest can only be held for a very few hours and not overnight. For an overnight stay, a police officer must spend considerable time transporting a prisoner to Clinton, and if Clinton is full must be taken to police barracks in Holden or Leominster. The town is charged for the cost of the cell, and other expenses incurred in holding persons under arrest. This can be quite expensive for the town, especially if a weekend or holiday weekend is involved.

However, a bill was introduced into the legislature on April 15, 1997 calling for a regional lock-up in West Boylston that would serve central Worcester County. Should this legislation be passed, it would alleviate one need for a lock up in the police station. It would not, however,

eliminate the need for a holding cell.

Municipalities are required by Massachusetts statute to establish Wellness Programs to comply with medical and physical fitness standards regulations for municipal public safety personnel. Massachusetts General Law mandates that any personnel hired after November 1996 must be provided with Health and Fitness programs, either with in-house training facilities or health club membership. This mandate is expected to apply to all fire and police personnel in the near future.

#### Search for new site for police station

The Building Needs Committee explored thirteen possible sites for a new police station. These sites were; intersection of Muddy Pond Road and Boutelle Road, Bridge St. across from St. Richard's church and on the corner of Bridge and Route 62, land near the DPW, Butterick land behind the school, the tennis courts and off Meeting House Hill Rd., the Gulf station at the junction of Routes 12 and 62, and various parcels on Leominster Rd. The Committee also considered several town owned buildings including the town hall. Much effort was expended in the research of deeds, town records and newspaper articles. In addition, the committee examined and walked over each parcel. Finally, the Committee came to the unanimous decision that the best place for a larger police station was at its present location. At their January 1996 meeting, and again at the December, 1996 meeting, the committee unanimously voted in support of an addition to the present station

#### Needs of Fire Department

The main portion of the fire station was built in 1957, and is 60 ft. by 60 ft., with seven bays, into which are stored eight pieces of fire apparatus. Another fire vehicle and a trailer are parked outside. A small generator room is located in the right rear corner of the building. An addition was built in 1978 which houses the police quarters on the first floor and the dispatch center, meeting room and the fire chief's office on the second floor.

In order to meet their needs, the Fire Department needs a minimum of four additional bays, and additional space for office, training and meeting rooms. An exhaust extraction system is required by state code in the station to permit the safe startup of vehicles inside the station and to allow for indoor vehicle repair and maintenance. Currently, the fire department uses a makeshift system to vent exhaust fumes outdoors.

#### The Clinton Savings Bank Property

After this comprehensive study, the Building Needs Committee concluded the best place for an expanded Public Safety Building was at its present location, and advised the Select Board of this decision. The Committee then attempted to open negotiations with KB Realty Trust who had recently purchased the former Clinton Savings Bank. Initially, KB Realty considered selling the

property to the town, or exchanging it for another parcel. but eventually decided to sell it to the Leominster Credit Union. However, its very close proximity to the public safety building, its lack of off street parking, and the possible encroachment on town property for septic and drive through purposes render this location less than optimal for a bank. The town must resolve the safety issues that will result in allowing a bank to begin business operations at this location.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF BUILDING NEEDS COMMITTEE

### Recommendations For Town Hall

The Building Needs Committee believes that a community center is the best use for the town hall. With good planning and management, this goal can be successfully achieved. The justifications for this conclusion are outlined as follows:

- The needs of many town non-government organizations, such as the scouts, for meeting space is great, and the growing population of the town will only increase this need. Space could be rented to these groups for regular meetings and activities. Rooms could also be rented to individuals for specific events, such as for art exhibits or receptions..
- The Recreation Committee is looking for space in which expand the summer recreational program for indoor activities. In addition, they would like to conduct cultural and other arts oriented activities throughout the year for town residents. The town Hall, with its balcony, stage and large meeting rooms would provide the ideal place in which cultural and social functions could be held.
- In a similar vein, Susan Galvin has proposed a performing arts center. With her extensive network in the entertainment industry and fund-raising expertise, she believes she could provide a steady venue of activities that would draw sizable audiences.
- Several artists and artisans view the town hall as a good place in which to exhibit their work. In addition, the ground level floor would make good studios for such artists as potters. Space could be rented to them either for studios or exhibits.

The Building Needs Committee envisions that a community based program could undertake the task of rehabilitation similar to the project in Sherborn. Drawing upon the expertise of the Princeton Center, the Committee supports a five year plan beginning with approximately with \$15,000 in town money in the first year and decreasing to \$0 in the fifth year. With good planning and good management, turning the town hall into a self-supporting community center is more than a dream. It has been achieved by other towns; it can become a reality in Sterling.



## Recommendations for Public Safety Station

Ultimately; the Committee came to the unanimous conclusion that the best place for the Public Safety Departments was at their present location. The Fire department needs a minimum of four additional bays for fire apparatus and a larger office area. The Police department needs at least one holding cell that meets state and federal requirements, a larger and more secure reception area, increased office space for police personnel, separate interrogation and booking areas, a sally-port and locker room for police personnel. Moreover, both departments must comply with the state mandated Wellness Program for Public Safety staff.

Since an addition is necessary to meet the space requirements of the Fire Department, a larger addition to also meet the needs of the Police Department provides the most effective alternative. Such a strategy would allow both Public Safety Departments to share as many resources as possible. These include dispatch center and personnel, emergency power backup systems, meeting rooms, and training and fitness areas. In addition, sharing the same building would continue to facilitate communication between the two chiefs. Both Chiefs are in support of this solution to their space dilemmas. An adequately planned addition would satisfy public safety needs well into the 21st century.

The Committee met with the Clinton Police Chief who is overseeing an addition to Clinton's police station, and early in May will tour the newly enlarged Westminster Police and Fire Station. After consulting with these ~~two~~ towns, the Committee believes that ~~capitalizing and~~ expanding the present public safety resources is the most cost-effective way in which to address the urgent needs of the police and fire stations.

The Building Needs Committee recommends a two story addition to the present station with a full basement under the addition. The addition would include a minimum of four bays for the fire department, and three bays for police purposes. The basement would allow for the safe storage of archival materials and other storage needs. Included in the addition should be facilities to incorporate the requirements of the Wellness Program.

To facilitate and maximize the benefits of an addition, the town should seek to acquire the former Clinton Savings Bank property. The bank building could become the new dispatch center which would bring it into compliance with ADA regulations. A two story addition could connect both buildings that would satisfy the needs of both the Fire and Police Departments for many years to come. If necessary, the property can be acquired by eminent domain. It is incomprehensible that a commercial enterprise should be allowed to adversely impact the operations of the Public Safety Departments. It is not in the best interest of the town to allow this situation to continue.

Recommendation for the Butterick Land

From time to time, proposals are advanced to build some public building on the Butterick land. In her will, Mary Ellen Butterick specifically stated that this land was intended for "public enjoyment". Before she donated the land for a school in 1935, the land had been a public park. It was her specific wish that the land remain in that use. The Recreation Committee has drawn up tentative plans to build recreational pods within this land. A growing town population will only add to the need to provide recreational opportunities for Sterling youth and adults. It is the recommendation of the Building Needs Committee that this land remain true to Mary Ellen Butterick's wishes. In years to come, it may well be the only green space left within the center of the town.

Respectfully submitted,

BUILDING NEEDS COMMITTEE

Ronald Pichierri, Chair

Maryanne MacLeod, Secretary

Phyllis Fitch

Ruth Hopfmann

Sean McDonough