

**A REPORT OF RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE USE OF THE BRIDGE STREET SCHOOL
AND ASSOCIATED PROPERTY**

to

THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

JANUARY 21, 2009



**Presented by
STUDY Committee Members**

**JANET BANKS / TOM WARDELL - CO-CHAIRPERSONS
CHARLES ALFANO, JR., PAUL BASDEKIS, JUSTIN DONNELLY,
BRIAN FITZGERALD, CRAIG HARRIGAN, RAY PIOGGIA**

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1. Task Description -

In September, 2008, the Board of Selectmen appointed a committee of 8 individuals to explore and recommend the best possible use for the Bridge Street School. The committee was instructed to report back to the Selectmen by the end of January, 2009. The first meeting of the committee was led by First Selectman, Scott Lingenfelter, on September 22, 2008.

2. Committee Process -

A. Solicited comments and ideas from Town Boards, Commissions and Organizations having a need or interest in the building/property. This committee, at one of its first meetings, agreed to solicit comments and ideas from a cross-section of the Town. Tom Wardell and Janet Banks, as co-chairs of the committee, sent letters and/or e-mails to each town committee requesting their individual suggestions and/or recommendations. It was also advertised throughout the town that any input from individuals, no matter what their association was in town, would be welcomed.

1. The quantity and quality of the responses: Numerous responses were received from various board and commission members as well as individuals who had various associations with the building over the years. The boards and commissions which provided us with written comments included ACCE, the Police Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Parks and Recreation Commission, Library Commission, Economic and Community Development Commission, and the Heritage Committee. Additionally, it is estimated that another approximate dozen individuals gave written detailed opinions and recommendations.

Each of the responses which were to be received in writing were reviewed and disbursed among the Bridge Street School Study Committee and the various views were discussed and considered.

2. Summary of the Responses and Suggested Uses. The responses were varied as far as the recommendations for suggested uses of the building with a nearly unanimous feeling that the building should be saved and utilized for the Town in some capacity. The recommendations ranged typically around municipal and administrative uses and included town offices, senior center, park and recreation offices, library space, a community center, school classrooms as needed, community pre-school facility, arts center, storage of historical collection of books, conference center,

programming center for parks and recreation. All of these recommendations and suggested uses came with somewhat different views, but the consensus was that the building should be preserved and utilized by the town for its priority needs. The other underlying recommendation was to preserve the adjacent land for future needs, including an additional municipal building on the property at some time in the future.

B. Advertised in the Observer, the existence of the study committee and invited interested and constructive comments at our regularly scheduled meetings. This committee advertised in the Observer to the extent that we not only existed, but were soliciting comments and recommendations as a study committee and invited all types of public comments at all of our regularly scheduled meetings.

1. Public Input received. The committee also invited and received lengthy input from Joe Sangiovanni and Glen Neilson, giving their professional expertise regarding the cost analysis of utilization of the building and various opinions as to the condition of the building and its possible uses. They also provided the historical context of past committees' work and were able to summarize for this committee much of the historical perspective of what previous committees had accomplished. We also had the constant input and expertise from Jack Muska, our Director of Public Works, who attended all of our meetings and building tour. Jack was instrumental in providing us with much information about the building's needs and costs, as well as his historical perspective on past discussion for utilization of the building. Additionally, Bill Hawkins, the Town Planner, attended meetings giving the planning perspective input and advice from his expertise.

The committee members also received public verbal input throughout the months we met and were able to report at each regularly scheduled meeting any of the additional input received by our Study Committee Members.

C. Tour of the building to assess present condition and any recommended remedial action to protect the building. Each member of the Bridge Street School and Property Study Committee has had the opportunity to tour the building inside and out in order to personally view the condition of various aspects of the building in order to formulate an opinion for the immediate call to preserve and heat the building, as well as future utilization.

1. Our own observations of the present condition. All of the committee members, after viewing the condition of the building, viewed the building to be structurally sound and agreed that it can be and should be used for future town needs. This unanimous feeling of this committee was supported by a vast amount of input received during the last many months. The committee felt that the outside structure was sound, the roof was in amazingly good condition and very little work would be needed for the outside roof, foundation and exterior walls.

2. Conclusions based on the tour. Immediately after the initial tour, the members made a recommendation that the building should be continually heated throughout the winter in order to preserve the building and keep the options open, without having further deterioration. It was agreed by the Public Works Director to have some simple and inexpensive work done on drainage, gutters and water leak issues. Personal observations from the tour created the unanimous consent of this Study Committee that the possibilities for future use were advisable.

3. Why these conditions support our recommendations for reuse. The committee's unanimous recommendation that this building should be rehabbed and utilized center around many issues including the fact that the property is located in the center of town on 3 ½ acres, is prime commercial property with plenty of off-street parking. The building structurally is sound and the interior invites many different possibilities as far as its re-use. The vacant land surrounding the building should be preserved for future building needs and uses of the town which would be much less expensive in the future than buying additional land. It was felt that the building has historical significance and fit the town center aesthetically. It was felt that any thoughts of selling the building or the property to developers was somewhat short-sighted considering the almost certain future needs the town will have. The population of Suffield has seen dramatic increases which will affect greater demands on the town infrastructure and municipal needs, all of which enhanced our support and recommendation for the utilization of this building and land.

D. Review of previous Space Needs Study (12/9/05), renovation scope, estimates.

1. Highlights of building condition and needs for infrastructure replacement and/or modifications.

Both the exterior and interior of the building are in overall reasonably good condition. Items which need to be addressed prior to occupancy are:

- Determine actual usage of building and then get a design approved. If used for town office space, partitions will likely be needed.
- Existing boiler is very old and needs to be replaced – probably by a multiple boiler installation. A mechanical ventilation system would be required. Air conditioning is not required but may be prudent to provide.
- Water infiltration problem needs to be remedied by: 1) Regrading earth at the foundation to direct water away from building, 2) Cleaning and repairing the exterior drainage system, 3) Compatibility sizing of rain water leaders and drainage pipes.
- Child height plumbing fixtures in bathrooms need to be replaced. Space may need to be redesigned for handicapped accessibility. (Possibility that former teacher's restroom and/or nurse's restroom could be used for this purpose.) Plumbing system needs evaluation.
- Electrical service needs to be evaluated and probably replaced and relocated. The present power panels and wiring are under-sized for any potential use.
- Windows are single glazed and need replacement.
- Handicapped accessible entrances need to be provided and all doors sized appropriately.
- Sand hardwood floors and finish. Repair or replace any sections of wood floor which need attention.
- Remove any asbestos wrapping on pipes for heating system and remove floor tiles containing asbestos.
- Plaster areas in classrooms where blackboards have been removed.
- Insulation may need to be augmented.

Items which could be addressed following occupancy are:

- Roof, gutters, masonry and trim need minor repair and/or maintenance.

2. Description and Recommended uses of the building and property.

Physical Description:

- The property at 90 Bridge St. consists of 3.43 acres of land which is zoned Town Center Village District. The building was built in 1924.
- The first floor has 12,173 square feet of finished area including a large open area which was used as a cafeteria. There is an additional 1564 square feet of finished area at the east end of the basement. The remainder of the basement consists of crawl space and another floored area in the west end for a furnace/utility room.
- The property is in a strategic and convenient area of town. There is 20,000 Square Feet of asphalt paving which is used as a parking lot.
- The present appraised value of the property based on town records is: \$ 1,766,900.
- The present area of the lot which is not occupied by the building or asphalt is approximately 2 acres.

Recommended uses of the building and property:

- The committee is in agreement that the building is structurally sound and a great resource for the town. It has architectural integrity, a timeless design, and continuity with other town buildings. The additional land area affords the opportunity for expansion of the present building or even the construction of another facility – perhaps a community center or new library or combination of both.
- The 12,173 s.f. main level should be considered for multi-use. It could easily accommodate the 5,000 s.f. of space currently being rented by the land use and recreation departments on Mountain Rd. The additional area could be considered for the Board of Education Central Office and the large open area could be used for meetings and other town events.
- Lower level use will depend on amelioration of the water infiltration problem and possible grant funding for an elevator.

Cost Estimates

- Preliminary Renovation Budget estimates done 12/1/04. Estimated cost was \$1,783,860.
- A Space Needs Study done by the firm EDM and submitted on 12/9/05 carried the following estimates for the Bridge St. School facility:

Construction costs	\$1,919,633
<u>Construction contingencies and fees</u>	<u>759,284</u>
Total Construction Costs	\$2,678,917
<u>Soft Costs (45%)</u>	<u>\$1,205,513</u>
Total Estimated Project Costs	\$3,884,430

This is the \$3.8 million number which has been repeatedly reported over the last few years.

However, careful analysis of the numbers included in the contingencies and fees estimates as well as reasonable assumptions made for soft costs if the building is used for offices, which presently are furnished in other locales, lowers those numbers considerably.

Revised estimate:

Construction costs	\$1,919,633
<u>Construction contingencies and fees</u>	<u>509,124</u>
Total Construction Costs	\$2,428,757
<u>Soft Costs (30%)</u>	<u>\$ 728,627</u>
Total Estimated Project Costs	\$3,157,384

- When the Library Building Committee was considering the use of Bridge St. School as temporary quarters during the construction of a new library another estimate was made. That estimate in 2007 was in the \$ 2.5 million range.

3. Options Considered

- a. The committee reviewed the previous study committee and renovation scope and associated estimates. This included a conference with Messrs. Neilson and Sangiovanni which reviewed the work done during the ad hoc building committee's review of possible sites for the proposed new library. That committee had concluded the building was a fitting subject for renovations. The committee also reviewed the space needs report.

- b. The committee also toured the building to assess its present condition which resulted in the committee identifying the need for minor remedial repairs which would allow for the continued preservation of the building.
- c. The following options were reviewed
 - 1. Sale of the building and land as is.
 - 2. Demolition of the building and sale of the land.

These two options are simply unrealistic given the fact that the property is an absolutely prime location for municipal use whether immediately or well into the future.

- 3. Demolition of the building and warehousing the land.

Demolition costs are estimated to be \$300,000. Furthermore, each previous committee, assisted by extremely knowledgeable specialists in commercial construction, as was the case with the library committee, concluded that the building remains a viable candidate for renovation.

- 4. Renovation of the building for a single use

The committee rejects the renovation of the building for a single use. The size of the building lends itself to use by simultaneous multiple users. The renovation for use as a library would require an extremely expensive makeover and thus was rejected by the ad hoc library committee.

- 5. Renovation of the building for multiple uses using the existing walls and dividers.

Renovations that use the buildings existing features are totally in keeping with the construction analysts' observations and thus realistic and fiscally the most efficacious.

The potential users are:

- a. Board of Education central offices.

The school administration has been expanding in the Middle School taking away educational space and even removing the Youth Advisors office from the school. Their present space needs are approximately 3970 sq. ft. The cost of additional school space will be avoided by moving the BOE central offices as well as free up the space at the Middle School.

b. Town offices including Parks and Recreation.
The offices, now located at leased space on Mountain Road, would occupy a portion of the building. The town is presently paying \$90,000 per year in base and additional fees.

4. Study Committee Recommendations

The building and the adjacent land should be retained by the town. The school building is structurally sound but will need extensive renovation (previous studies indicate these renovation to be in the \$2.5 to 3.0 million range). The unused 2 acres to the east should be saved for future town use.

The building can be renovated for office space and be used as "swing" space to house various departments while the Town Hall is being renovated. Its permanent use could be a Town Hall annex, Central School Administration offices, Park & Recreation offices, Library annex/storage, community activities center or some combination of the above.

5. Further Recommendations and Follow-up

The study committee believes the following steps should be taken as a result of this report:

- a. Urge members of the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and the Advisory Commission on Capital Expenditures to tour the site in order to reinforce the conclusions drawn by the Study Group.
- b. Enlist the Department of Economic Development to assemble figures and paperwork required for all applicable State and Federal grants available. The Town should be poised to take immediate advantage of upcoming infrastructure funding coming from the Federal Government or any other source.
- c. Once the projected use is established, those Departments that will be operating from that space should be enlisted to pursue potential grants or other sources of funding that may apply to them. If part of the space is used for School Administration, there may be State funding available.
- d. If immediate funding is unavailable, consideration should be given to phasing the project in order to address critical needs immediately that will maintain the building, with further phases funded over time. If an incremental approach is used, make sure that all work is consistent with the final design.
- e. Enlist the First Selectman and the Director of Economic Development to assist in the presentations to the Advisory Commission on Capital Expenditures and the Board of Finance as their participation has proved to be essential in successful approval for all recent major projects.