

## **If Approved, Town Hall Expansion Could Begin in Spring**

Referendum expected in new year for \$57 million project

While the Lyme-Old Lyme school board prepares to vote next month on a \$57 million proposal for a high school building project, Old Lyme residents are expected to vote in January or early February on a \$4 million project to expand and renovate Memorial Town Hall.

Residents attending special town meetings in past months have voted overwhelming in support of preliminary steps. In October, the town acquired property adjacent to Town Hall, giving it space to add a new auditorium and reconfigure parking. Last month, it gained approval to pay \$225,000 for architectural and engineering studies.

If the project is approved by referendum, the town would gain much-needed public meeting rooms, an elevator that reaches every level in the building, closer handicapped parking, more and improved off-street parking and expanded office and storage space. The building's historic design, and landscaping around it, would be maintained and improved.

First Selectman Timothy Griswold said providing handicapped access and better fire emergency egress are compelling reasons for the expansion.

"Fifteen percent of our population might be seniors requiring accommodation or disabled," he said. "Although legally the building doesn't need to be upgraded to current code, morally it has to be."

The building has no elevator, and there is only one large meeting room on the first floor. Existing handicapped parking is not conveniently located, Griswold said, and the current layout discourages visitors attending night meetings from using off-street parking.

Little has been done to Town Hall since it was constructed in the 1920s. Meanwhile, the town's population has quadrupled to 7,500 year-round residents and 16,000 summer residents, according to the Board of Selectmen.

A 10-member Town Hall Expansion Committee has been working on expansion options, proposals, architectural bids and cost estimates. Residents have been kept apprised of progress through presentations, architectural plans, artist renderings, questions and answers and a letter from the selectmen posted on the Town of Old Lyme Web site, [www.oldlyme-ct.gov](http://www.oldlyme-ct.gov).

Committee chair John Forbis said the planning has been a collaborative process with other town commissions and groups.

"The town's Conservation Commission did a very good study for us, and recommended that we look at photovoltaic solar power, geothermal heating, windows, how tight the doors are and insulation to reduce energy costs," he said. "We're looking very seriously at using part of the roof for photovoltaic cells. The architect is specifying insulation materials to meet the top standards."

Paul B. Bailey Architect, LLC of New Haven was selected from seven firms interviewed. The architect's plans have consciously positioned and sized the additions to keep the project to a residential scale, Forbis said. The Historic Commission has approved the plans.

"The Tree Commission is working with a landscaping architect to recommend plants for the tidal wetland behind one corner of the building and parking area," he said. "They have given us a long list of environmentally appropriate trees, bushes and shrubs that we're selecting from. This will carry all the way through the Duck River Garden Club's plants and flowers around the building."

Although residents will be asked to approve a \$4 million project and equal borrowing authority, the town is seeking ways to reduce the net amount. This includes a \$200,000 Culture and Tourism grant, \$600,000 Small Cities grant to address Americans with Disabilities Act upgrades, and four years of annual Local Capital Improvement (LoCIP) allocations totaling \$200,000.

"We hope to have outside funding of about a million dollars," Griswold said. "We'll ask state legislators and congressional folks if there's anything else we might bring to bear to bring the cost to local taxpayers down to \$3 million.

"We're projecting if you have a house worth \$425,000, assessed at \$300,000, and we borrow \$3 million at 4.5 percent for 15 years, it might cost you \$69 a year," he said.

Once the final \$700,000 in principal payments being made by the town for its support of upgrading the Phoebe Griffin Noyes Public Library is done and those funds are diverted to the Town Hall project, that figure would drop to around \$45 year. Town residents approved the library project about 13 years ago, Griswold said.

If approved in early 2007 Town Hall construction could begin by April 15, 2007 and be completed by August 2008.