

Frequently Asked Questions

#1 Why does the Town Hall need to be renovated and expanded? Old Lyme's Board of Selectmen decided two years ago to address several major Town Hall issues. The Board formed the Town Hall Expansion Committee which concluded that it was time to upgrade and expand the Town Hall:

- The building has had few improvements since it was constructed in the 1920s. Meanwhile, Old Lyme has grown four-fold to more than 7,500 permanent residents.
- Handicapped access is long overdue, especially with the increase of persons with disabilities and seniors. Emergency fire egress through the Assessor's office and the Auditorium creates fire code issues.
- The auditorium and conference rooms are too small and not equipped for today's audio visual requirements:
 - The auditorium is too small for many land use meetings.
 - When three or more meetings occur (usually at night), some meetings must be held in cramped offices.
- Several offices are small and wedged into inadequate or misshapen areas (e. g., land use).
- Twenty off-street parking spaces are sufficient for the current employees; however, the single handicapped parking space is over 200' from the front door. Visitor's parking is on Lyme Street.
- The basement's low ceiling is adequate for storage and HVAC; but, is inadequate for offices without very expensive renovations (lowering the floor requires digging a deeper foundation).

The Town Hall Expansion Committee is considering two alternatives to address these issues:

- ***Town Office only:*** Renovate and expand the Town Hall which will solely meet the needs of the town offices and conferencing requirements
- ***Combined Town & School Offices:*** Renovate and expand the Town Hall to satisfy the needs of the Town offices, meeting spaces and the central offices of Regional School District #18.

#2 What alternatives did the Town Hall Expansion Committee consider and why should the Town Hall remain on Lyme Street?

- First, we could convert the basement level into more offices and add an exterior elevator. This would alleviate the office crowding but would trigger a huge amount of fire code work for the entire building. This would be costly and would spoil the appearance of the building. Furthermore most of the shortcomings would remain after the work was completed, particularly the undersized second floor auditorium.
- Second, we could add an addition to the south of the building that would be totally code compliant and we would be required to make only limited improvements to the existing building. This would require the purchase of 50 Lyme Street in order to accommodate the addition, the driveway, and additional parking.
- Third, we could sell the Town Hall and purchase a 5 to 7 acre parcel on which we could build a new code compliant Town Hall. We don't believe that anyone wants the Town Hall to leave Lyme Street so the third option has little appeal.

The Town Hall Expansion Committee recommended and the Board of Selectmen concurred, that an addition to the Town Hall is the best choice.

#3 Why does the Meeting Hall have to be built on the south side of the existing Town Hall? The Town Hall Expansion Committee looked at three different options and concluded that the south side addition was the most practical option:

- First, they looked at acquiring land behind the Town Hall however Malcolm Speirs said that he did not want to sell that property.
- Second, they looked at building the Meeting Hall over the existing Town Clerk's vault. However, the peak of the Meeting Hall roof would exceed the zoning code's 35' height limit. Furthermore, a wing of this height would overshadow the original Town Hall's Colonial revival façade.
- Consequently, the Committee concluded that adding the Meeting Hall to the south is the only practical alternative.

#4 Why does the Town have to acquire the Malcolm Speirs property at 50 Lyme Street?

We have a window of opportunity to buy the Speirs property because of the vacancy of its long-standing occupants:

- In addition to the rationale laid out above, the current scaled down design for the Meeting Hall extends to within 10 to 15 feet of the existing property line.
- Additional space is required for the relocated driveway to meet the 15' zoning setback requirement.
- Furthermore, we believe that we need additional space so that there is sufficient "breathing room" between the Meeting Hall and 46 Lyme Street.

#5 Why do we need to construct the Meeting Hall for 100 people when there are larger, under utilized school facilities, especially in the Middle School, two blocks away? There are three core rationales:

- Certain Boards and Commissions often have large agendas and require the presence of a lot of applicants, attorneys, engineers, and other professions.
- Because it is often very difficult to forecast how many people will attend a land use meeting, the Meeting Hall will provide the flexibility to accommodate up to 100 people at a moments notice. It is inconvenient and inconsiderate to a Commission's Chairman to find an alternative location during the afternoon or evening of a critical meeting and to notify the residents before they attend. This is also confusing to the public and the press. Furthermore, scheduling the school space requires a 24 hour prior notice and a fee when school is not in session.
- The resolution of many issues brought before Boards and Commissions often requires timely access to additional files and information as the assembled Commissioners grapple with tough issues. Issues might not be resolved promptly, when key staff members are unable to access information from their files during a meeting.
- The 100 seat meeting hall will accommodate most meetings (e.g., Selectmen, Finance, Wetlands, Zoning and ZBA). In the rare case of more than 100, we plan to use the Middle School Auditorium. Currently we do not plan on charging a fee for town and non-profit organizations' use of the Meeting Hall. We expect that non-profit organizations such as the Florence Griswold Museum, American Legion, and the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts, to name a few, will use the Meeting Hall for educational, lecture, and other meetings.

#6 Is the 50 Lyme Street property required for both options that the Town is considering?

- Yes, the Malcolm Speirs property is needed for both options because the south wing is the same for both options.

#7 Will the proposed expansion of the Town Hall and the additional parking be in keeping with the Historic District?

- The south and north wings of the Town Hall are designed to respect the residential character of Lyme Street. The roof line of the south wing is several feet lower than the adjoining house and the roof line of the north wing is at the same level as the adjoining house. Both wings are several feet below the existing Town Hall roof. As shown on the elevations and rendering, the fenestration and siding of the wings will match that of the existing Town Hall.
- The parking area's elevation is at least 8 feet below Lyme Street. We plan to use trees, shrubs, and a stone wall to shield the parking from Lyme Street, the neighbors across the street and the adjoining neighbors on the north and south sides of the Town Hall.

#8 What will the \$475,000 appropriation requested at the Special Town Meeting on August 28th be used for?

- \$350,000 for the 50 Lyme Street property which includes two tenths of an acre parcel and a 2,704 square foot, two story, single-family house. It was built in 1915 over a full basement.
- The remaining \$125,000 is needed to pay for required architectural and engineering work and other costs associated with the preliminary planning of the expansion.
- Although the home will not be demolished until after a favorable vote to proceed with construction at a future town referendum, funds for demolishing are included in the remaining \$125,000.
- In the event the voters do not approve the construction funds at a future referendum, the Speirs property can be resold and the unused funds can be added to surplus (similar to the Roche property at 47 Lyme Street).

#9 What will it cost to construct the expanded and renovated Town Hall?

- Town only:
 - This option calls for adding 5,600 square feet to the existing 8,700 square foot building (usable for offices, etc.). We estimate that the construction costs will range between \$2.4 million to \$2.9 million (\$2.7 million mid point).
 - The Town will seek state grants that would offset a portion of these costs.

- Combined Town and School:
 - This option calls for adding 7,900 square feet to the existing 8,700 square foot building (usable for offices, etc.). We estimate that the construction cost will range between \$3.0 million and \$3.5 million (\$3.3 million mid point).
 - The town will seek state grants that would offset a portion of these costs.

#10 How do the economics look from the perspective of a Town resident? In addition to the above comparisons:

	<i>Town Only</i>	<i>Town & School</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>(\$ millions)</i>	<i>(\$ millions)</i>
<i>Gross Construction Cost</i>	\$2.7	\$3.3
<i>Potential Grants</i>	<u>\$0.9</u>	<u>\$0.9</u>
<i>Bonding Requirement</i>	\$1.8	\$2.4
<i>School Reimbursement</i>	<u>\$0.0</u>	<u>\$0.8</u>
<i>Net Cost to Town</i>	\$1.8	\$1.6
<i>15 yr Bond, 4.5% rate</i>	<i>(\$ thousands)</i>	<i>(\$ thousands)</i>
<i>Yearly Principal Payment</i>	\$120	\$107
<i>First year Interest Payment</i>	<u>\$ 81</u>	<u>\$ 81</u>
<i>First Year Princ & Interest</i>	\$201	\$188

Repayment Comments: The interest payment will decrease \$4,500 each year. The library bond will be paid off on June 30, 2009 and the \$100,000 of principal payment can be applied to the Town Hall debt service (1/2 of the debt service). The debt service amount of \$200,000 is about 1/10 of a mill.

#11 The proposed Town Hall expansion and renovation is a very attractive building; however, won't it be too fancy or very expensive to construct?

- ***Too fancy?***
 - Paul Bailey, the Town Hall's architect, is familiar with Old Lyme's tradition of fine buildings based on straight-forward, beautifully proportioned spaces, abundant natural light, and no ostentatious or pretentious detailing.
 - The Town Hall's conference room on the first floor illustrates this tradition. It is a beautifully proportioned conference room unencumbered with fancy molding or elaborate detailing and a fitting home for the very fine Impressionist paintings, Windsor chairs and conference table.
 - The Meeting Hall and the two major conference rooms will be designed accordingly.

- ***Too expensive?*** The Committee is taking many steps to contain the construction costs.
 - Nina Cuccio Peck, an Old Lyme architect, interviewed all of the Town employees who work in the building and prepared a program that met their high priority needs. The design conforms to that program.
 - If the Town Hall and the Central Office are combined, up to 1,000 square feet of central office space can be eliminated due to sharing.
 - The Committee has commissioned three detailed cost estimates (versus a more typical two cost estimates). After the first cost estimate, the Committee has scaled back the original cost estimate by 30% to 40% to arrive at the \$2.7 million to \$3.3 million gross cost estimates.

#12 Have we talked to the Boards and Commissions? Have any showstoppers been identified?

- We have held preliminary meetings with the appropriate Boards, Commissions and Town Hall staff.
- The discussions have been very supportive of the program and the schematic design. Issues have been identified that we are addressing but no showstoppers have been identified.

