

Town Hall Expansion



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Project Summary

During the Town Forum on July 26, attended by over 70 residents, First Selectman Tim Griswold outlined the Town Hall's three serious shortcomings: its inaccessibility to people with disabilities, the overcrowding within certain offices, and shortcomings related to the building's mechanical systems and floor plan. He reviewed three possibilities that have been considered to expand and improve the space in the Town Hall.

The first option was to renovate about 1,200 square feet of space in the lower level of Town Hall and add an exterior elevator. This option was rejected when the building and fire code issues were considered.

The second option was to add an addition on the south side of the building that would include a large meeting room at street level and additional office space below. The addition would provide for an elevator to enhance accessibility. This option is being pursued.

The third option was to vacate and sell the existing Town Hall and relocate to a 5 to 7 acre parcel in another part of town on which a new Town Hall could be built. No one has spoken in favor of abandoning the Lyme Street location, so this option has been rejected.

A nine member Town Hall Expansion Committee was formed in March 2006 with John Forbis as its Chairman. The charge to the Committee was to develop a plan to expand and improve the Town Hall in keeping with its historic location and past.

The Committee solicited Requests for Qualifications from 17 architectural firms and interviewed 7 before deciding to retain Paul Bailey Architect of New Haven. Shortly after the selection of Paul Bailey as the project architect, the Committee was approached by representatives of Regional District 18 who asked the Committee to consider the possibility of sharing space with the school district's Central Office.



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Preliminary Town Hall expansion plans were revised to illustrate this possibility. The Committee and representatives from the District believe that by sharing common space, such as conference rooms, storage space, bathrooms and a break room, the space requirement of the District can be reduced from 4,200 square feet to about 3,100 square feet. This could represent substantial savings of taxpayer money and there may be other benefits as well. The District is currently reviewing six options and hopes to advise the Committee of its decision by mid-September.

The Committee recommended, and the Town has secured, an eight-month option to purchase the Speirs property at 50 Lyme St (the brown house just south of Town Hall) at a cost of \$8,000. The Speirs property is available to the Town because the prior tenants of 38 years vacated the property this spring and the Town has a window of time to purchase the property before the owner chooses to renovate or sell it himself. There is no other land adjacent to the Town Hall.

Regardless of whether the District relocates its administrative offices to the Town Hall, the Committee believes that the addition of the Speirs property to the Town Hall property is critical. One reason is that the existing Town Hall is non-conforming because it exceeds the floor area coverage ratio. This means the total square feet of all the floor space (about 11,000) and the paved surfaces for the drive and parking are greater than 30% of the square footage of the lot. By adding the Speirs property, the existing nonconformity would be reduced. Construction of an addition to the south would require a zoning variance, and the addition of the Speirs property would mitigate the nonconformity. Acquisition of the Speirs property would also reduce the impact of the new addition when viewed from Lyme Street by enabling the screening of the parking to the rear and allowing landscaping around the addition to create a park like effect.

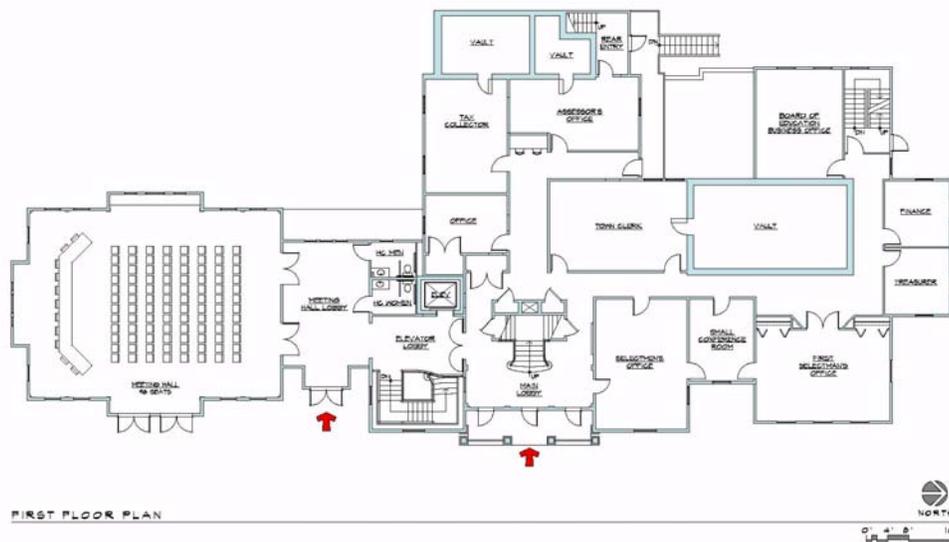


The Committee has not yet obtained formal approvals from the Town's various boards and commissions, although there has been a presentation to the Historic District Commission. While the Commission was not in a position to render a decision, members present were supportive of the plan. The Committee will present to the Planning Commission and the Board of Selectmen on August 14 and to the Board of Finance on August 15. Land Use approvals cannot be secured until more information is available.

At the Special Town Meeting on Monday August 28, 7:30 PM in the Middle School Auditorium, voters will be asked to approve the expenditure of up to \$475,000 to acquire the Speirs property (\$350,000), to provide for additional architectural and engineering work (\$60,000), to provide funds to remove the Speirs house (\$20,000), and to provide a contingency for unforeseen expenses (\$45,000).

A fair question is, what will happen if the Speirs property is acquired and voters subsequently reject the plan to renovate and expand the Town Hall. In that event, the Committee believes the Speirs property could be resold, similar to the way the Roche property at 47 Lyme Street was resold, and the Town would recover most or all of the purchase price.

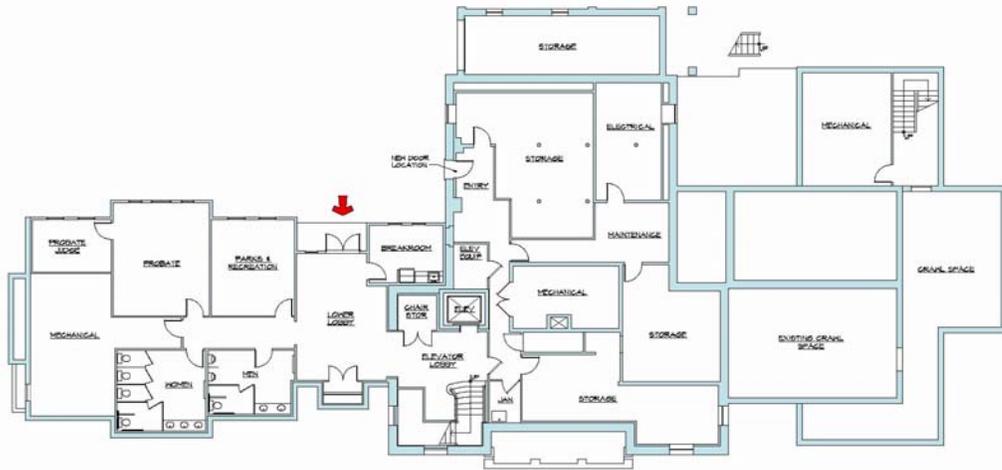
The Committee is working toward an expansion project that will preserve the aesthetics of Town Hall while improving its functionality and making it accessible to all of



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

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LOWER FLOOR PLAN

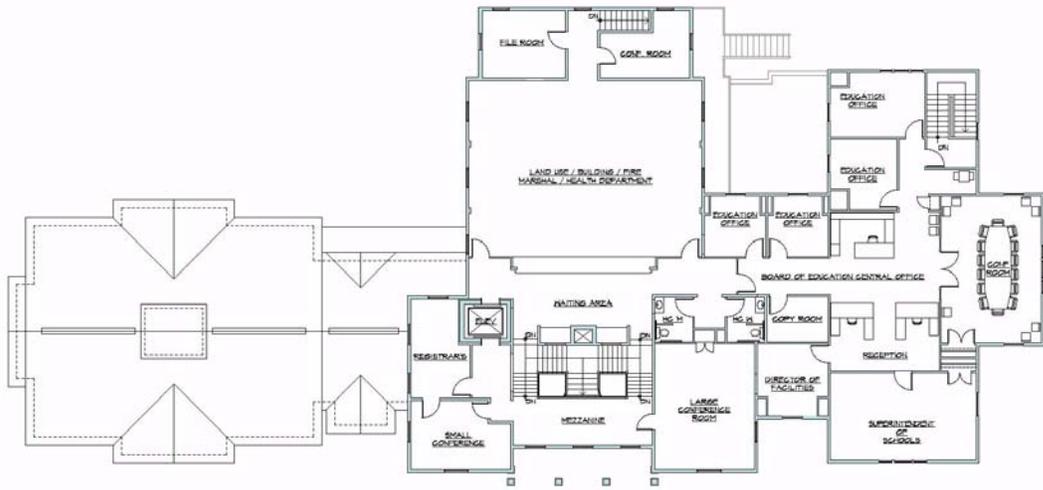


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our residents. A future Town Meeting will be called to approve the necessary construction funding. The Committee anticipates that the net amount will be reduced by grant funding for which the project seems eligible.

All residents are urged to come to the Special Town Meeting on August 28.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



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SITE PLAN

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