

MEETING MINUTES

Princeton Facilities Assessment & Master Plan
October 25, 2017, 5:30 pm @ Town Hall Annex

Project Kick-off Meeting

Princeton: Karen Cruise (Chair, FSC), Mary Jo Wojtusik (FSC), Chris Conway (FSC), Edie Morgan (FSC Selectboard Liaison), Stephen Mirick (FSC), Nina Nazarian (Town Administrator), Judy Dino (Advisory Committee), and an interested citizen/audience member.

JWA: Margo Jones, George Dole, Helen Fantini

Introductions

JWA had an opportunity to introduce itself to the committee in a more detailed format than at the interview. The FSC members had several questions about the process and costs associated with JWA's Brimfield and Whately municipal building projects. The FSC noted that the Brimfield approach, which included improvements at all of 4 town buildings at a projected cost of \$12M would not work in Princeton. The group was very interested in the Whately project, which addressed only the Town Hall at a cost of \$1.3M.

Existing Documents & General Information

- Karen provided some original drawings of the Princeton Center Building for JWA use. JWA will scan these and return them to the town at the next meeting.
- Steve mentioned the existence of a programming document produced in 2016. A copy will be provided to JWA.
- The FSC noted that there may be a hazardous materials situation in the area of Bagg Hall. JWA's civil and landscape consultant, Berkshire Design Group, should have reports documenting this situation.
- There are 2 fire stations in Town; each one serving the upper and lower elevations in town. Fire Station was not included in this project given its condition. The Town does wish to retain both stations to provide better service.
- Some police department functions have been regionalized: dispatch and detention. Additionally, animal control and hazardous clean-up functions are regional.

Process

- JWA reviewed the process for the existing conditions assessment and programming activities. The design team is ready to begin once timing of interviews and site visits to the buildings can be coordinated.
- JWA is planning to interview representatives of the 18 departments that were identified in the RFQ. JWA agreed to provide a questionnaire ahead of these meetings as well as a way to capture the needs of some of the other small boards and committees.

Discussion

The following comments were made by the FSC in response to the prompt, "What do we (JWA) need to know about Princeton?"

- Princeton is a small town and is mis-perceived as being a "wealthy town;" 19% of residents have incomes less than \$20K
- Residents are very concerned about their taxes rising (currently it \$17.78 - \$17.80/\$1,000)
- High percentage of long-term residents; many of whom are retired

- Low turnover of residents (6%); population growth in Princeton is slow
- There are 27 houses currently on the market right now; it typically takes 12-14 months to sell a home
- There has been a “contentious fight” to bring broadband to town which was characterized by older population not seeing a need and younger residents interested in working from home
- There is anger in Town over the state of town buildings
- Princeton places a high value on open space though some feel they have met a “tipping point” as concerns additional Town purchases of land for open space preservation
- 30% of land is owned by non-profits—DCR, Mass Audubon, etc.
- Princeton has more tennis courts per capita than any other U.S. town
- “You really have to want to live here”
- You need to drive 10 miles to get groceries or gas
- Winters are tough
- No infrastructure (sewer or water)
- Poor soils and a lot of rock ledge, so septic is difficult to install
- Princeton is in a watershed, over which there is strict regulation (The Conservation Commission meets frequently)
- There is no longer any industry in Princeton
- Princeton does see many visitors that want to take advantage of Mt. Wachusett; skiing, walking and hiking trails though no public swimming spots in town
- Princeton has an active Arts Society
- Princeton pays a higher per-pupil rate than surrounding communities in its regional (Wachusett) school system (which also includes Holden, Paxton, Rutland and Sterling)

Expectations

- Chris stated that he envisioned a master plan that covered an 8-10 year process with some expenditures made each year. Nina noted that projects costing \$1.5M or less would not require OPM services, and that the FSC should be mindful of keeping project costs as low as makes sense.
- Chris requested that confirmation of the structural integrity of the Princeton Center Building be made a priority.
- Edie noted that some of the Town’s debt service is falling off in the next few years so borrowing capacity will be increased.
- The FSC discussed whether or not the Arts and Historical societies should be included in the programming process. These groups have strong support in the community and were formerly housed in the Princeton Center Building (currently the Council on Aging has been relocated to Post Office Place in rented space). Concern about expectations in terms of making this project go beyond the scope of Town departments was expressed. JWA noted that they would keep these groups in mind and rely on guidance from the FSC regarding inclusion in the plan.
- The FSC members encouraged JWA to consider Bagg Hall as not necessarily town hall, but rather what its best use might be. Edie remarked that being able to utilize the 2nd floor for larger meetings and events once again would be a benefit.

Schedule

- The FSC members confirmed that the deadlines as outlined in the RFQ were correct; draft plan is due on January 31st and the final is due February 28th in order for the Town to have ample time for researching financing options and public outreach.
- Facilities Steering Committee prefers to meet on Tuesday evenings. The next FSC meeting was not set.

Prepared by: H. Fantini / JWA
 Distribution: Princeton Facilities Steering Committee, JWA Team
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