

Michaela Moran 263-0216(H)

Att. A. 1

Memorandum

To: Acton Public School Committee
From: Mary Ann B. Ashton
Date: February 14, 2001
Re: Towne Building Reuse

Background

The Towne Building is the brick, two-story facility located on Massachusetts Avenue adjacent to the entrance to the central campus on Charter Road. It was opened in 1925 as the first Acton High School, and served the town of Acton's high school population until the new high school was located in the current Junior High Building in 1954. The Towne Building has been used as an elementary school building until the present time. Additions to the building were constructed in 1952, 1961, and 1975.

The original plan for the Twin School construction project recommended the demolition of the McCarthy and Towne portions of that school to make room for the driveway and playfields required for the new school building. A group of concerned citizens intervened, and the Acton Historic Commission designated the Towne School for the town's Cultural Resources List in October 1998. The Building Committee agreed to re-work the initial plan so that the Towne Building could remain standing, pending further plans for its re-use. The Acton Public School Committee formed a committee to study possible uses for the building in May 2000, and the committee has met several times between June 2000 and the present (see Attachment A). The committee members are Bill Ryan, Superintendent; Jo-Ann Berry and Mary Ann Ashton, members of the Acton Public School Committee; Dore' Hunter, Chairman of the Board of Selectmen; Bob Evans, member of the Finance Committee; Anita Dodson, member of the Acton Historic Commission, and Kay Hartung, resident. Other individuals have participated and provided information at several points in the discussion, including Robert Rowe, a local realtor; Roel Krabbendam, an architect with the Office of Michael Rosenfeld; Bill Klauer, a member of the Acton Historic Commission; and various members of the municipal staff, including Don Johnson, Town Manager, and Nancy McShea, Recreation Department head. Committee members are grateful for the assistance of these knowledgeable individuals.

The committee reviewed information about the commercial real estate market and the condition of the building. Working with Roel Krabbendam, they revised the estimates of

maintenance and capital improvements required for the McCarthy-Towne school to list the work required for the Towne Building alone. The committee considered the needs of the school district for playing fields and playground space, and the overall congestion of people and traffic on the central campus. This was weighed against the arguments to preserve the Towne Building, best articulated by the Acton Historical Commission as follows:

- “This building, constructed in 1925, opened in 1926 as the Acton High School. Architecturally, it is typical of schools built in the 1920s era and Acton’s only example of this type of structure.” – Letter from Acton Historical Commission to Garry Rhodes, Building Commissioner, dated October 21, 1998.
- “The Towne School is a focal point in the Kelley’s Corner area of Acton. Over the years it has been used by numerous groups (ex. Scouts) for meetings. Citizens of Acton are proud of this building, especially those who graduated from it when it was Acton High School.” – Document prepared for the Massachusetts Historical Commission by Anita Dodson, Acton Historical Commission, October 1998.

The committee decided that it would favor a community use over a commercial use, but would not rule out any interested parties at the early stages.

Zoning and Building Considerations

The committee discussed the need for parking if the building were to be used for some purpose. Acton’s zoning bylaws dictate the number of parking spaces required; for most uses, this would be one space per every 300 square feet of building space (therefore between 50 and 75 parking spaces). Because the site is very small, the only place to locate 50-75 parking spaces would be in front of the building between the Towne Building and Massachusetts Avenue. This avenue is currently grassy and has several large shade trees.

The Towne Building, like all the other school facilities located on the central campus, is currently zoned R2, or residential zoning. If the building were to be leased to a commercial tenant, a zoning change at some future date would be required.

A member of the committee met with Garry Rhodes, Building Inspector for the Town of Acton, in late January. Mr. Rhodes confirmed the parking requirement for 50-75 spaces, but indicated that the parking requirements could be reduced by a Zoning Board of Appeals decision or by a decision of the Board of Selectmen. Using the property for a commercial tenant with many employees would probably not provide sufficient reason to seek a change in the requirement, but renting the space to 15 artists might do so. Mr. Rhodes gave a cursory review of the preliminary list of capital improvements that might be required, specifically to comment on improvements that might be required for code or Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. He indicated that these changes might not be required unless the improvements comprised 30 percent of the assessed value of the property.

Although no assessment has been done of the Towne School alone, the current assessed value for the McCarthy-Towne School and its associated land is \$1,145,000 for the building and \$151,500 for the land. Applying an assessment based on the relative square footage of the Towne Building (for lack of a better number) would result in an approximate assessment of the Towne Building and land of \$632,400. Thirty percent of this assessed value would be \$189,720.

These numbers should be analyzed by Town of Acton staff now that we have more specific numbers (described below) regarding the expected work to be undertaken.

Receipt of Proposals

In the fall, we collected proposals from the Boston-area YMCA, from ArtistSpace-Wellesley, and from several interested commercial tenants. At our meeting on January 16, we concluded that use of the building by the YMCA or by the commercial tenants would exacerbate the parking and traffic issues on the central campus. The committee continued to be interested in a proposal from ArtistSpace, which would use the Towne Building for artists' studios. (Details of this submission are attached as Attachment B, dated December 26, 2000 and February 14, 2001.)

In early January, Mike Coppolino, Jo-Ann Berry and Mary Ann Ashton walked the construction site and the existing building site with David Lewek, Project Manager for the construction projects. The School Committee members viewed the proposed location for playground space for the Parker Damon Building at the rear of the school (parallel with Main Street/Route 27). Jo-Ann and Mary Ann conveyed to the committee their opinion that the proposed playground space was insufficient for the number of children who would be using the playground (approximately 300-400 students). They further recommended to the committee that it would be advisable to ensure that any use would make at least the area for the current McCarthy-Towne School playground available to the new school for playspace. This led the committee to conclude that any use that required large amounts of parking would be less desirable than some other use that did not require so much parking.

The committee met again on January 30 but was unable to reach a final recommendation. The committee felt that it needed specific information on the income and expenses expected for the proposal, and needed assurances that the potential tenant could cover all costs before voting a specific recommendation. However, many of the committee members expressed strong points of view. Three committee members felt strongly that the Towne Building should be demolished. Their collective point of view was that the land was best used for educational purposes by demolishing the building and using the space for playgrounds and/or an all-purpose athletic field. One member of the committee expressed strong sentiments that the building should be preserved regardless of any other consideration. This committee member felt that using the space for playfields was not a good enough reason to tear down a

historic building. The remaining three members of the committee felt that they had insufficient information to make a recommendation.

School Committee Decision

Town of Acton By-Laws articulate the procedure for demolishing historically or architecturally significant buildings in Chapter N (see Attachment C). Article N5 states that "No provision of this bylaw shall apply to buildings owned or operated by the Town of Acton or the Acton Water District." This would indicate that despite the designation of the Towne Building to the Cultural Resources Inventory, the School Committee has the authority to vote that the building is no longer needed as a school building, that the land is more valuable for educational purposes as a field or location for a playground, and to demolish the building. (David Lewek has estimated the costs to demolish and keep the building that are NOT included in the construction project as currently planned. These costs (Attachment D), either to keep or to demolish, will need to be addressed by the Building Committee so that they are planned for in the construction project budget.)

Throughout this process, we have heard repeatedly from members of the community (or individuals who no longer live in Acton) about the significance of this building. At our most recent meeting, six individuals came to express their fond memories of the building and to urge us to preserve the building. Jo-Ann and Mary Ann attended the November meeting of the Acton Historical Commission and listened to strong opinions expressed by all five members of the commission that the School Committee needed to preserve the building.

Given the split decision from the Towne Reuse Committee, it seems one course of action would be for the School Committee to vote tonight that the Towne Building will no longer be needed as a school building (after the completion of the Damon Building) and that it would use the land for playgrounds or fields. Town Meeting could then vote a "sense of the meeting" article about whether to preserve the building or not. If Town Meeting voted to keep the building standing, then the next article would request Town Meeting to turn over the building to the Town of Acton and the municipal managers could then negotiate a lease with the proposed tenant or pursue some other tenants, if they chose.



ACHC

TOWN OF ACTON
P.O. Box 681
Acton, Massachusetts, 01720
Telephone (978) 263-4776
Fax (978) 266-1408

Acton Community Housing Corporation
Nancy E. Tavernier, Chair

TO: Acton Historical Commission
Acton Historic District Commission
Acton School Department
DATE: 6/21/01
SUBJECT: Proposed reuse of Towne School Building
CC: Acton Board of Selectmen

At the request of the Board of Selectmen, the ACHC is forwarding to you the attached letter we sent to the Board in advance of our discussion held with them on June 19. We had been asked to explore a multi-family housing option for the Towne School building under our committee charge of "facilitating affordable housing opportunities in the town."

Our initial explorations are very positive and we have recommended to the Selectmen that this option be selected as the optimum reuse of the building without the use of local funding. They are reviewing other options and expect to make a decision about priorities at their July 17 meeting.

Our proposed concept would be the following:

- Up to 12 units of multi-family units from 1-3 bedrooms each
- A mixture of condominiums and rental units
- A mixture of income eligibility for residents
- A local preference for the affordable units
- The affordable or subsidized units would be counted toward the state required 10% of affordable housing in the town
- A separate and new entrance from Rt. 111

As soon as the Selectmen make a decision, we are prepared to move ahead seeking initial funding to develop a feasibility study and marketing plan. We believe there are several sources of funds to accomplish this goal including long term, low interest financing and tax incentives.

If you have any questions about our proposal, do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you,

Nancy E. Tavernier, Chair

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Robert B. Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>
To: "Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>; "Kevin McManus" <KevinM@NEHE.com>; "Betty McManus" <aha@fiam.net>; "Dan Buckley" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>; "Peter Berry" <pjb@dwbboston.com>; "ryan bettez" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, July 20, 2001 12:04 PM
Subject: RE: Update

Hi Nancy

I have your update and would be glad to attend the meeting on August 14th or whenever. I believe it would be wise to have at least two or three of the committee attend if that is ok so that we appear to represent a constituency of interests.

I will discuss our situation first with Rita Farrell, who is very supportive, and have a meeting with Clark Ziegler before the meeting on the 14th. Continued municipal ownership will pose problems both for the developer and the town. However, a land lease would be possible but it would have to be a long term lease and would most likely make the sale of individual units problematical. I will speak to MHP about their experience with these alternatives. There are nevertheless, a variety of housing options. Ryan's idea of studio kinds of units and mix of housing types might be appealing to others. There are possibilities with regard to some community space in the building but that introduces added problems of management, parking, use requirements, etc. It is also very hard to finance. But we could at least suggest that there are a variety of housing and related use options.

If you could give me the names of those I should contact before you leave town, I will then follow-up as necessary.

Let me know if this is OK .

Bob

-----Original Message-----

From: Tavernier [SMTP:tavern@ma.ultranet.com]
Sent: Thursday, July 19, 2001 8:25 PM
To: Nancy Tavernier; Kevin McManus; Betty McManus; Dan Buckley; Peter Berry; Bob Whittlesey; ryan bettez
Subject: Update

Betty spoke to Kathy Peagler at DHCD today and found that she has been communicating with Roland Bartl about the Harris Village problem. The state will be prepared to put in writing (this has not been confirmed with Roland) that should Harris Village Condo Assoc. not approve the original LIP condo fee arrangement as approved by DHCD, they will be in a zoning violation. The lawyer for Harris Village has apparently been in contact with the DHCD counsel and I believe Roland has been too. Roland was out of

7/23/01

the office today, we will attempt to confirm tomorrow.

On the Towne school issue, I taped the first part of the SC meeting where the same presentation was made by OMR, have not watched it yet and then watched the last 30 minutes of that part when Selectman Walter Foster presented the BOS position to the SC. It is fair to say that the SC members at the urging of the superintendent Bill Ryan do not want the town to lose "ownership" of the Towne School, what ever that means. The big question outstanding is "Why not?"

There will be at least 2 meetings called for interested parties who have ideas about the reuse options and the first may be on August 14. I will be out of town that week so we will need to have someone else volunteer and perhaps Bob would be the one to do that?

I am not clear how we can retain ownership AND do housing and still satisfy the SC's unspoken desire to retain the building for future use but hopefully we will be able to flush that out during the summer. Peter Ashton called me today to reassure me that he and Don Johnson are very supportive of the affordable housing option and they think it is the most viable option but they feel they have to give political room to all concerned.

I would urge Bob to contact Clark Ziegler to have an initial conversation and structure the proposed option to be something that would retain municipal ownership. It is possible that when push comes to shove the schools really only want to be sure the building remains standing and it is not that they want to ultimately use it as a school facility. I think the strongest competition for the space right now is an artist collaborative and those proponents must be forced to be more specific in my opinion.

Nancy

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
To: <wkfoster@erols.com>
Cc: <DoreHunter@aol.com>; <pkashton@aol.com>; <BShupert@achievementtech.com>; <75321.66@compuserve.com>; <djohnson@town.acton.ma.us>; "Nancy Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>; "Kevin McManus" <KevinM@NEHE.com>; "Betty McManus" <aha@fiam.net>; "Dan Buckley" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>; "Peter Berry" <pjb@dwbboston.com>; "Bob Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>; "ryan bettez" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, July 22, 2001 9:42 PM
Subject: SC Towne School presentation

Hi Walter,

I just found some time to watch the tape of the Local SC meeting from last Thursday where you addressed the SC on the Towne School issues. I want to tell you what a spectacular job you did and thank you for it. You exhibited a strong grasp of the issues while making a persuasive pitch on the BOS's and ACHC's behalf to determine early on the "ownership" issue.

The overriding question that still hangs out there in regard to ownership is "Why?". Why do the Superintendent and members of the school committee want the town to retain ownership and therefore control of the land and/or the building? Until this question is answered, it will be difficult for the Selectmen to narrow the viable options. I think you made it very clear that this answer should be forthcoming sooner rather than later.

The ACHC is going to seek some opinions from the state as to whether or not housing can still be an option with a land lease arrangement. If so, I do not think it has to go to town meeting. My suspicion is that it would then be an all rental arrangement, with mixed income, but perhaps the property management responsibilities could be placed in the hands of someone other than the town. I do not know how that would be handled within the comp permit process.

Whenever I hear people attempt to characterize town meeting votes by knowing why people voted the way they did, I am amused. Some of the people who were sitting around me made it very clear in the little mini-debate we were having during the discussion of the transfer article, that they simply wanted to get the Towne school out of the school budget and over to the town budget because "the town has the money". As you can well imagine, that rankled me quite a bit. The fact of the matter is Town meeting "said" three things on the subject of Towne School and they can be proven by the votes that were taken:

1. they resolved that the school committee could not demolish the building as part of the Twin school construction project (remember it was a resolution!).
2. they voted to transfer the jurisdiction of the building from the local schools to the town.
3. they voted to appropriate \$90,000(?) to close and board up the building.

Funniest thing is that I haven't heard anyone mention item 3! The more

complex this process becomes, the more likely it will be that we have a boarded up building sitting on the school campus as an eyesore for all to see.

I applaud your efforts to press for an answer soon on the ownership issue. ACHC will participate in the meetings that will be held in the near future. Acton is an "uncertified community" in the area of affordable housing. MA DHCD has begun the process of certifying those communities who have either reached their 10% goal or who are working toward it. We are mandated by Executive Order 418 to be trying as hard as we can to increase our supply of affordable housing. The effort to develop Towne school will be viewed positively by the state and since some future discretionary state funds will depend on this certification, I think it is extremely important that this process be as decisive as possible.

Thank you and the other Board members for your continuing interest and support.

Nancy

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Don Johnson" <djohnson@town.acton.ma.us>
To: "Nancy Tavernier" <tavem@ma.ultranet.com>; "Walter Foster I" <WKfoster@erols.com>
Cc: "Dore' Hunter I" <DoreHunter@aol.com>; "Peter Ashton" <pkashton@aol.com>; "Trey Shupert" <bshupert@achievementtech.com>; <75321.66@compuserve.com>; "Kevin McManus" <kevinm@nehe.com>; "Betty McManus" <aha@fiam.net>; "Dan Buckley" <djb01720@hotmail.com>; "Peter Berry" <pjb@dwoboston.com>; "Bob Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>; "ryan bettez" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>; "Board of Selectmen" <BOS@town.acton.ma.us>
Sent: Monday, July 23, 2001 2:34 PM
Subject: RE: SC Towne School presentation

Nancy and Board of Selectmen:

I spoke with Alice Wong of MHP this morning regarding both the Town's continued interest and the various aspects of lease arrangements. On the subject of the Town's continued interest, I assured her that there was a significant level of interest but that we had to sort out the issue of retaining ownership and/or control of the property before we could make any significant commitments to any approach. That having been said, we discussed their approach to long-term lease arrangements.

It is not MHP but, rather, the lenders who must be satisfied that their investment is secure when it comes to leases. They are comfortable with then customary 99 year leases. They are apparently working on a project currently that involves a 75 year lease. Those seem to be the areas of comfort. Beyond that, there was mention of a 30 year term with a 30 year renewable option, as well as a statement that 30 years would certainly be the minimum, since it would typically be the term of a loan. MHP's interest is in securing the property in perpetuity. Hence, leases work counter to their purposes.

I asked Ms. Wong to send me a copy of the model RFP they have been developing. I understand it is still in draft form, but it should be helpful - if we get to that point.

Regards,
 Don

-----Original Message-----

From: Nancy Tavernier
Sent: Sunday, July 22, 2001 8:42 PM
To: Walter Foster I
Cc: Dore' Hunter I; Peter Ashton; Trey Shupert; 75321.66@compuserve.com;
 Don Johnson; Nancy Tavernier; Kevin McManus; Betty McManus; Dan Buckley;
 Peter Berry; Bob Whittlesey; ryan bettez
Subject: SC Towne School presentation

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I applaud your efforts to press for an answer soon on the ownership issue. ACHC will participate in the meetings that will be held in the near future. Acton is an "uncertified community" in the area of affordable housing. MA DHCD has begun the process of certifying those communities who have either reached their 10% goal or who are working toward it. We are

mandated by Executive Order 418 to be trying as hard as we can to increase our supply of affordable housing. The effort to develop Towne school will be viewed positively by the state and since some future discretionary state funds will depend on this certification, I think it is extremely important that this process be as decisive as possible.

Thank you and the other Board members for your continuing interest and support.

Nancy

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Robert B. Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>
To: "Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
Cc: "Kevin McManus" <KevinM@NEHE.com>; "Betty McManus" <aha@fiam.net>; "Dan Buckley" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>; "Peter Berry" <pjb@dwbboston.com>; "Ryan bettez" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, July 23, 2001 1:39 PM
Subject: RE: Update
Hi Nancy

Clark's piece is a wonderfully concise statement of the current affordable housing situation. I will meet with Rita on Thursday and discuss alternatives. Clark is on vacation this week and I will see him the following week. I think you have it right. A land lease (to be avoided if possible) is not a big draw back and would help with local approval and rental is the most likely kind of housing if the land is leased. There should be no problem with full responsibility for maintenance resting with the leasor/developer. The development will be small but it should still be OK.

I am enthusiastic about the possibilities of an interesting development with some special units and ties to the adjoining play and other spaces. We should be able to please the historical preservation people.

Let me know when you hear of the meeting schedule.

Bob W.

-----Original Message-----

From: Tavernier [SMTP:tavern@ma.ultranet.com]
Sent: Monday, July 23, 2001 8:50 AM
To: Robert B. Whittlesey
Cc: Kevin McManus; Betty McManus; Dan Buckley; Peter Berry; Ryan bettez
Subject: RE: Update

Hi Bob,

Talk about a timely issue, today's Globe has an excellent op-ed by Clark Ziegler. I can only hope the local officials will read it. As you read from the message I sent to Walter Foster, the school officials are pressing for municipal ownership of at least the land. They also want the least amount of impact on playground space for the Twin School and seem to want to guarantee that the building remains standing and preserved. Those are the most likely parameters that should guide your discussion with Rita and Clark. It sounds to me like it would be a rental arrangement rather than individual condos. That raises the issue of who will be the landlord and assume responsibility for the maintenance of the building, something the town manager is reluctant to commit the town to.

7/24/01

I will be out of town from August 10-17. Notice of the first meeting should be known well before I leave and I will be sure the committee is informed about it. This will be an open meeting in any case and anyone from ACHC is welcome to attend. We can work out the details when we hear more about the plans to meet.

Feel free to report to ACHC by email on any of the discussions you may have with MHP. Thanks for your help.

Nancy

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Don Johnson" <djohnson@town.acton.ma.us>
To: "Roland Bartl" <rbartl@town.acton.ma.us>
Cc: "John Murray" <jmurray@town.acton.ma.us>; "Garry Rhodes" <grhodes@town.acton.ma.us>; "Acton Community Housing Corporation" <ACHC@town.acton.ma.us>; "Planning Board" <PB@town.acton.ma.us>; "Board of Selectmen" <BOS@town.acton.ma.us>
Sent: Tuesday, July 24, 2001 11:24 AM
Subject: RE: Towne School Building

Roland:

Ms. Wong of MHP called me yesterday for an update of our current status. I explained that we are still in the process of sorting ourselves out and will need a bit more time to know which direction to go. She noted (with no pressure) that the next round of funding will be next month (I presume this is consistent with your 8/17 date) and that they do funding rounds about twice per year.

MHP seems to be very interested in this opportunity but they are not interested in investing unless we are serious. My guess is that we will not be ready for their August round. That may not be a big problem though. Ms. Wong indicated that there are other programs that we might utilize.

Stay tuned. I hope to know more about our direction in the next several weeks.

Don

> -----Original Message-----

> From: Roland Bartl

> Sent: Monday, July 23, 2001 10:24 PM

> To: Don Johnson

> Cc: John Murray; Garry Rhodes; Acton Community Housing Corporation;

> Planning Board

> Subject: RE: Towne School Building

>

> Today I received a reminder that HDSP (Housing Development Support

> Program) notices of intent are due August 17, 2001. Full applications

> are due October 5, 2001. No applications without notice of intent. An

> updated Community Action Statement may be needed.

>

> -----Original Message-----

> From: Don Johnson

> Sent: Thursday, July 12, 2001 12:19 AM

> To: Roland Bartl

> Cc: John Murray; Garry Rhodes; Acton Community Housing

> Corporation; Planning Board

> Subject: RE: Towne School Building

>

> Roland:

> The Board of Selectmen will receive a presentation Tuesday

> evening regarding zoning issues for reuse of the Towne Building. The
> ACHC was in at the Board's last meeting promoting reuse under a state
> grant program that would seemingly pay for everything for converting
> to residential with a strong affordable component. After next
> Tuesday's presentation I expect the Selectmen to give us some
> direction as to how they would like to have us structure the FRP for
> this reuse.

>
> Don

> -----Original Message-----

> From: Roland Bartl

> Sent: Wed 7/11/2001 1:49 PM

> To: Don Johnson

> Cc: John Murray; Garry Rhodes; Acton Community Housing
> Corporation; Planning Board

> Subject: Towne School Building

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>

>

> Where are we in the thinking and planing process for
> reusing the Towne School building?

> The reason for my question is that I have received the
> annual CDBG program package for non-entitlement communities. In the
> past I could never identify a project that would qualify for funding
> or financing under these programs.

>

> Rehab and reuse of the Towne School building may be the
> first opportunity. In particular the "Housing Development Support
> Program" (HDSP) would be applicable. It is intended to support, among
> other housing development efforts, the "conversion of obsolete or
> underutilized structures such as vacant school buildings" (from grant
> alert notice). HDSP has an estimated allocation for FY 02 of \$2.5M.
> For FY 02 funding, a notice of intent to apply must be submitted by
> 8/17 and the application must be in by 10/5.

>

> Funds would not cover the entire project cost, but are
> intended as supplements to other public or private funding sources.

>

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
To: "Nancy Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>; "Kevin McManus" <KevinM@NEHE.com>; "Betty McManus" <aha@fiam.net>; "Dan Buckley" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>; "Peter Berry" <pjb@dwbboston.com>; "Bob Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>; "Ryan Bettez" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, July 27, 2001 11:59 AM
Subject: Towne Reuse committee

In response to the town manager's memo received electronically today, the first meeting of the Towne School Options committee will be Wed. Aug. 15 at 7:30 in Rm 204 of Town Hall. I will be on vacation that week and have asked Bob Whittlesey to represent ACHC on this committee. As an open meeting, all members are welcome to attend the meeting and in fact Bob would be more comfortable if other members were there to show support for our proposed housing option. He will also have gathered more information from MHP especially as it relates to a land lease arrangement.

I will respond to the town manager.

Nancy

7/30/01

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Robert B. Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>
To: "Nancy Tavernier (E-mail)" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>; "Kevin McManus (E-mail)" <KevinM@NEHE.com>; "Betty McManus (E-mail)" <aha@fiam.net>; "Peter Berry (E-mail)" <pjb@dwbboston.com>; "Dan Buckley (E-mail)" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>; "Ryan Bettez (E-mail)" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>; "Pam Shuttle (E-mail)" <shuttlep@ummhc.org>
Cc: "Rita Farrell (E-mail)" <rfarrell@mhpfind.com>; "Alice Wong (E-mail)" <awong@mhpfund.com>
Sent: Monday, August 20, 2001 5:41 PM
Subject: Meeting of Towne School Reuse Committee August 15

The Towne School Reuse Committee met on Wednesday, August 15. Peter Ashton, Chairman of the BOS, was the only selectman present. Don Johnson was present. Present from ACHC were Bob Whittlesey, Betty McManus, Kevin McManus and Ryan Bettez. Representatives from the Historic Commission and School Committee were there. The Cultural Committee, Recreational Committee and Transportation Committee had been invited but were not represented. Eight or ten others attended, most interested in seeing the Towne school used for cultural purposes - artists studios or community activities. The town manager has the list of attendees.

Peter Ashton opened the meeting. He said that the BOS were interested in hearing from proponents of various uses for the Towne School. He did say that any reuse would have to meet certain criteria. These include conforming to the required zoning, not costing the Town any money, and not adversely impacting the school development program. He said that the Town planned to issue an RFP to developers and needed to determine the requirements that are to be included in the RFP.

Don Johnson described the zoning issues. The site is zoned single family. Some uses are allowed under special permits. The Town as a public owner, could use the property as they wished. However, the private use of the property on any sale or lease of the land would have to meet zoning requirements.

Multifamily is not currently allowed and would require a zoning change and a lot size of 100,000 sf. There is a frontage issue which can be solved in several ways. He stated that educational uses would require substantial parking and that housing seemed to require the least. He said that the town had explored the question of leasing the land and that could work. If multifamily were the future use, the town would lease 100,000 sf of ground and require a lease back of unneeded lot area for the school playground. Achieving zoning approval through a comprehensive permit that is only available for an affordable housing development was mentioned.

Don Johnson also stated that the town was anxious to follow up on the various proposal that had been presented for artists studios, an educational center, a cultural center, etc but had not learned the specifics of any of these ideas. He said he welcomed any specific proposals that anyone wanted to make.

I described ACHC's proposal for affordable housing. I said that -

an attractive development of approximately 12 units could be developed, probably rental as that is what the state agencies favored; that it would enhance the Kelley Corner area; was suitable for small family units with a grocery store, a shopping center, a Kmart, etc. within walking distance.

I stated that the Massachusetts Housing Partnership Fund was willing to provide assistance for a feasibility study and that I was confident that we would have a priority for state subsidies. I said that we could do the development with a land lease - 75 to 99 years - but would probably require ownership of the building to obtain the necessary housing subsidies. We could provide the required 20 to 25 parking spaces on the side of the building as requested by the Historical Commission. The development could be accomplished at no cost to the town other than lease of the land and transfer of the building.

I stressed that if the planned use were housing, there would be a two step process. The first phase would involve ACHC working with Town staff and consultant retained by MHPF to select the kind or kinds of housing the Town wants and completing a feasibility study. This would allow the Town to put detailed criteria in the RFP and allow the Town to select a developer which was most responsive to the request, not necessarily the highest bidder.

Don Johnson had mentioned that if the Town were to go out with a general RFP looking for a variety of use proposals, the Town would have to select the highest bidder. Assistance from the MHP Fund would require a commitment from the Town that if housing were found to be feasible, the Town would proceed with the housing reuse.

The housing proposal was favorably received but left some of the people present unsatisfied. Suggestions were made for an arts center, housing but with the auditorium or some part of the building renovated for community use, elderly housing, "something more imaginative than housing consistent with the historical character of the building."

The representative of the School Committee said that all the School Department wanted is to have someone else responsible for the building but with the proviso that the Town have the ability to get the property back at some future time. The land lease idea seemed to constitute a possible answer to their position.

Betty McManus spoke of the difficulties in renting elderly units.

A representative of the Historical Commission said that the building has not been declared a historical building and that it was not certain that it would be. A submission is being filled.

Don Johnson asked that persons interested in alternative uses to housing come to the next meetings with detailed proposals.

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for Thursday, September 13

at 7:30 p.m..

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
To: "Robert B. Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>
Cc: "Nancy Tavernier (E-mail)" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>; "Kevin McManus (E-mail)" <KevinM@NEHE.com>; "Betty McManus (E-mail)" <aha@fiam.net>; "Peter Berry (E-mail)" <pjb@dwbboston.com>; "Dan Buckley (E-mail)" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>; "Ryan Bettez (E-mail)" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, August 21, 2001 7:17 PM
Subject: Re: Meeting of Towne School Reuse Committee August 15
Bob

Thanks for your excellent report. Peter told me you did a great job and convinced almost everyone (except the historic people) that housing was the best alternative. He feels certain it will wrap up after the next meeting. I hope you can attend that one too for the ACHC. I have another meeting that night but I may skip it but still want you to be the representative. I was especially curious to see that the building has not yet been declared a historic building??? Funny how that didn't come up at town meeting.

By way of this message, I want to alert the ACHC to the potential of my not being at the meeting on Thursday, Aug. 23. Today I had jury duty and I have been empaneled for a 2 week trial. I am not sure about the schedule for Thursday yet but all the other days this week begin at 9AM in Cambridge and I have to assume this will too. I do hope there will be a quorum present without me.

As for agenda items, Roland is out of town so I don't have anything to report from him about Harris. I don't know whether or not they have responded to his letter. Betty might want to check with the planning staff.

Hope to see you but if not, it can't be helped. Sorry.

Nancy

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Robert B. Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>
To: "Nancy Tavernier (E-mail)" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>; "Kevin McManus (E-mail)" <KevinM@NEHE.com>; "Betty McManus (E-mail)" <aha@fiam.net>; "Dan Buckley (E-mail)" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>; "Ryan Bettez (E-mail)" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>; "Peter Berry (E-mail)" <pjb@dwoboston.com>; "Alice Wong (E-mail)" <awong@mhpfund.com>; "Pam Shuttle (E-mail)" <shuttlep@ummhc.org>
Cc: "Rita Farrell (E-mail)" <rfarrell@mhpfund.com>; "Alice Wong (E-mail)" <awong@mhpfund.com>
Sent: Friday, September 28, 2001 5:01 PM
Subject: Towne School Reuse Committee meeting on Sept 13

The Towne School Reuse Committee met for a second time on September 13 at 7:30 PM in the Town Hall. Present were Peter Ashton, Chairman; Town Manager Don Johnson, ACHA members Tavernier, Whittlesey, Betty McManus, Bettez; representatives from the Planning Board, Historical Commission, School Committee and a few others.

The housing proposal was not reviewed in any detail. The proposal for artists' studios and a cultural center was presented again. There was a discussion of the details of such a reuse and the outcome was that a meeting would be arranged with Peter Ashton, Don Johnson, proponents of the cultural center and the consultant who had made the feasibility study which had been referred to at the meeting. After such a meeting, Peter Ashton would reconvene what was hoped to be the final meeting of the Reuse Committee.

The issue of demolishing the building came up. A proposal was made that demolition of the building be a "reuse option" and that the issue be brought back to the Town for a vote. Peter Ashton stated that that would not be done on the basis that the Town had voted to give responsibility for reuse to the Selectmen and that they would make a decision in the matter.

The housing plan was viewed favorable by most attendees as the one which would not cost the Town any money and that had the advantage of solving the zoning issues through the use of a comprehensive permit. Peter Ashton asked whether the RFP for housing could solicit options for special studio units or spaces and design features. Whittlesey said that this might be possible to some degree but that any special uses would be limited by both their impact on financial feasibility and the regulations of the financing agencies.

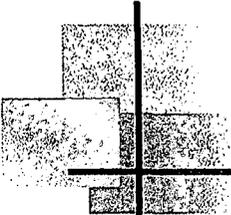
Peter Ashton would advise everyone when the Reuse Committee was to meet again.

Acton Housing Authority

From: "Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
To: "Nancy Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>; "Kevin McManus" <KevinM@NEHE.com>; "Betty McManus" <aha@fiam.net>; "Dan Buckley" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>; "Peter Berry" <pjb@dwbboston.com>; "Bob Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>; "Ryan Bettez" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 18, 2001 10:23 AM
Subject: Towne school update
Here is the report from Peter Ashton:

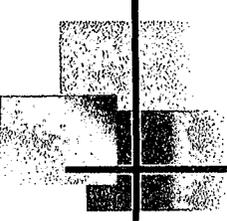
Don has met briefly with Jero Nesson (late of Emerson Umbrella, now manager in Maynard of the Fowler project). We are trying to set up a more detailed meeting with him as well as possibly with the new person at Emerson, but it has been slow going. I had hoped to have this done by now, but we have all been a little sidetracked. I am traveling the better part of the next two weeks which makes it all the more difficult. Once we meet, we plan to have another Towne committee meeting and make a decision.

10/22/01



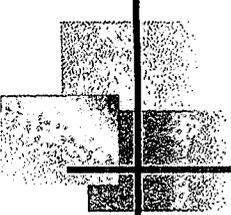
Current Status

- 04/01 Town Meeting:
 - Demolish building using contingency funds
 - Article 37 defeated, keep building
 - Appropriate \$90K from free cash to board it up (article 38 passed)
 - Task BOS to find new use, assuming
 - Maximize leftover space for School
 - No taxpayer funding for preservation
 - Self-sustaining use with the "least possible impact" to Schools and School Campus
 - This point could be a "sticky" one...



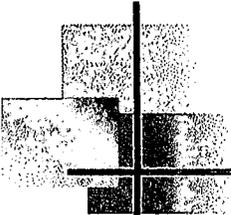
Other Constraints

- School Committee
 - Maintain ownership of land
 - Maintain design of (South looped) access road
 - Stack entire bus shift at once
 - Allow CASE and private vehicles independent access/exit from buses
- Acton Historical Commission
 - No parking on South side (old front entrance)
- HDC
 - Preservation of building envelope and important exterior landscaping



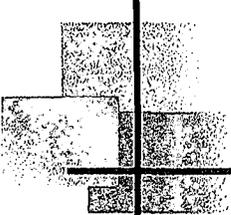
OMR Reuse Study

- Funded by School Committee
- Published 6/20/01
- Examined various reuse alternatives according to different zoning options
- Gross area: 20,000 ft², Net area: 15,000 ft²
- Assuming existing zoning options, minimum parking needed would be 20 spaces (Housing), maximum 250 (Conference Center)



Towne Building Reuse Committee

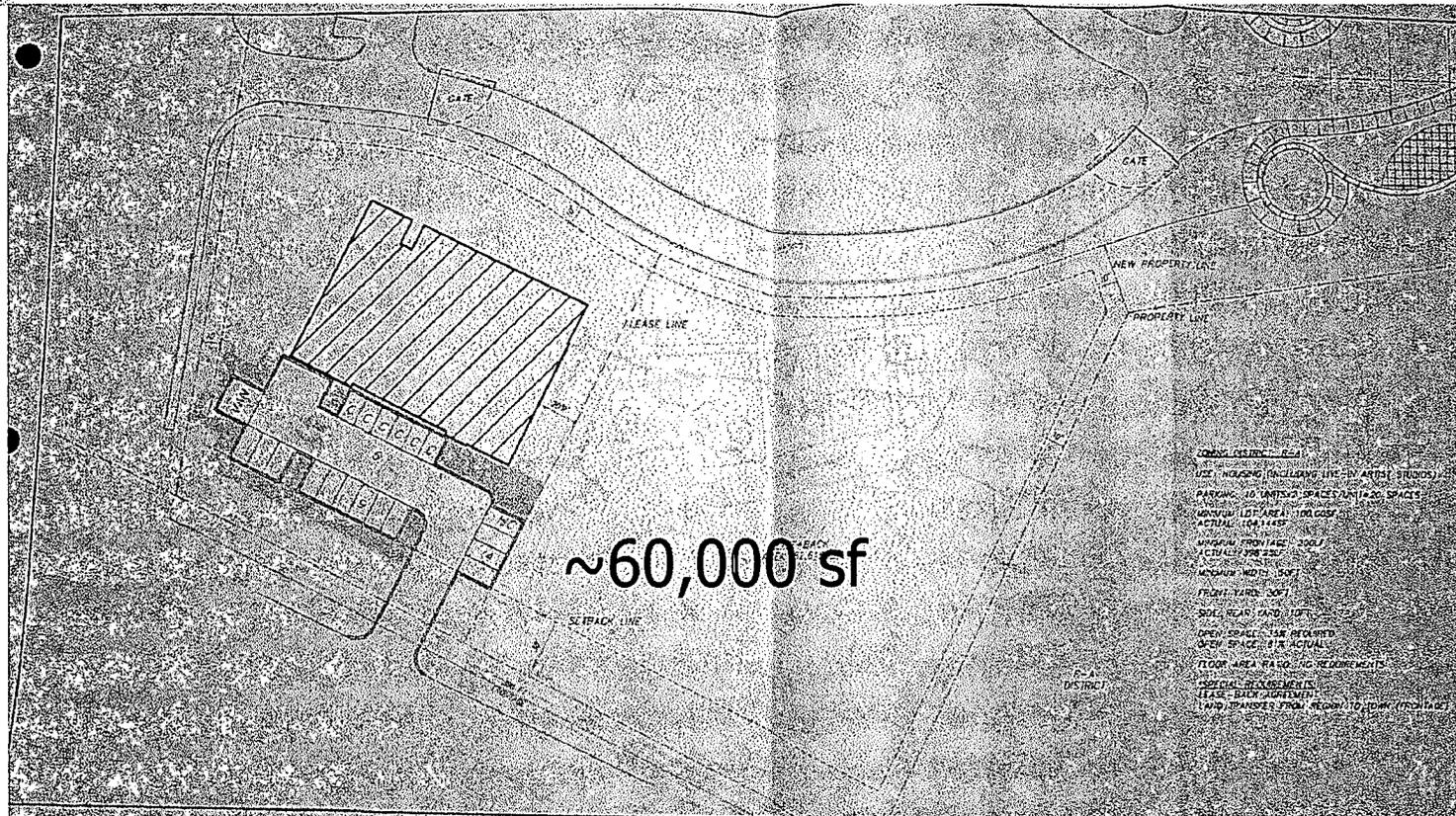
- Formed by Mr. Ashton as a result of Town Meeting vote
- Members of all boards and interested parties
- Met four times over a period of six months
- First consideration: Artists Center
 - Met with Jero Nessen
 - Explored other facilities in neighboring towns
- End result: Jero Nessen officially withdraws support



Towne Building Reuse Committee

- Second consideration: Affordable Housing
- Potentially meets reuse criteria
 - Feasibility study funded by Mass Housing Partnership
 - Developer can qualify for various tax credits and loans
- Most likely to be done under Comprehensive Permit
 - This option was NOT explored by OMR

Reuse Option: Multi-Family (OMR)



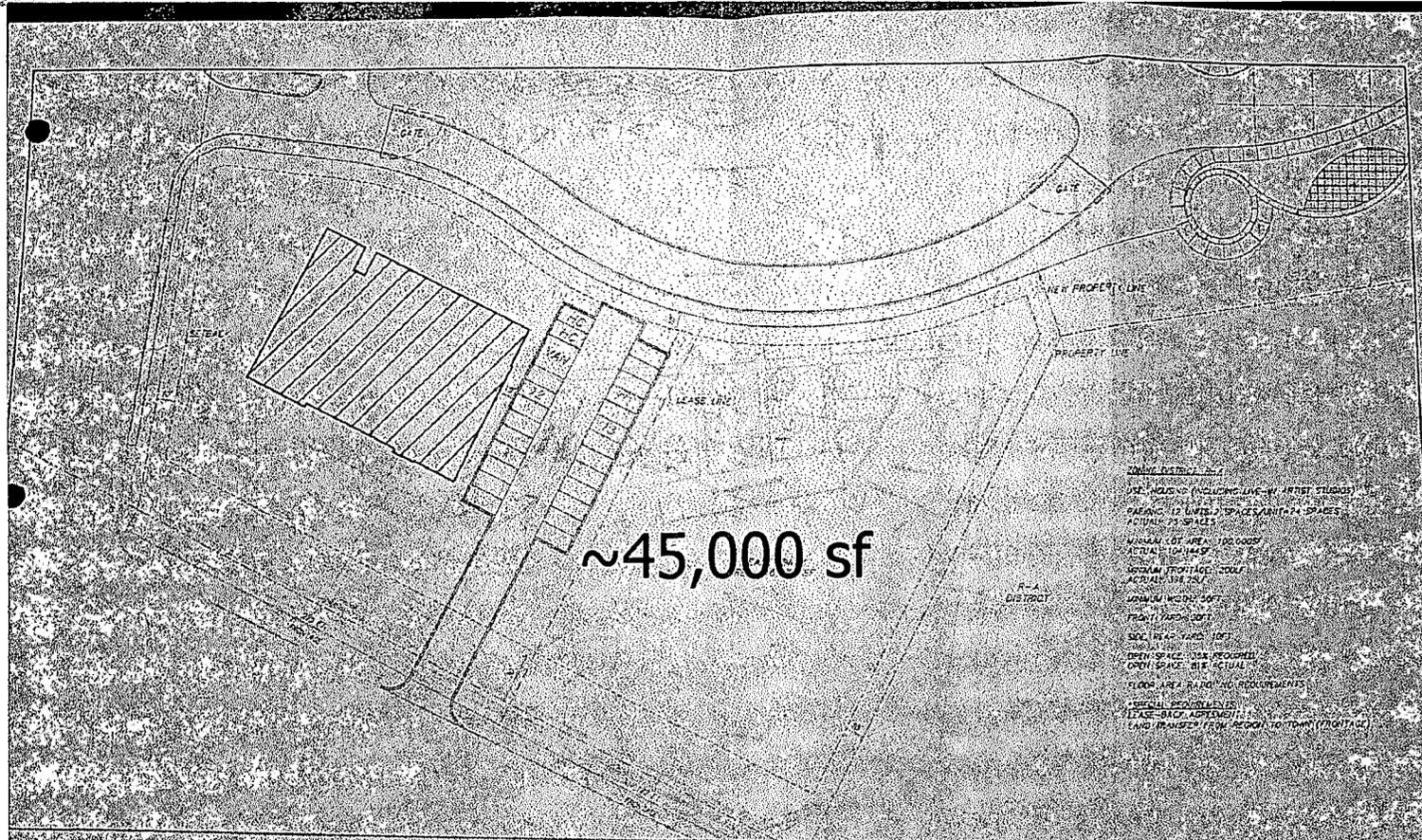
Towne School - Site Investigation

June 20

Acton & Boxborough, Massachusetts

The Office of Michael ~~North~~ Architects
West Acton, MA

Reuse Option: Multi-Family (OMR)

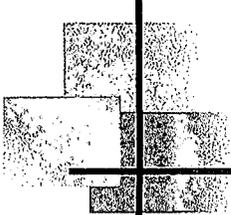


Wne School - Site Investigation

on & Boxborough, Massachusetts

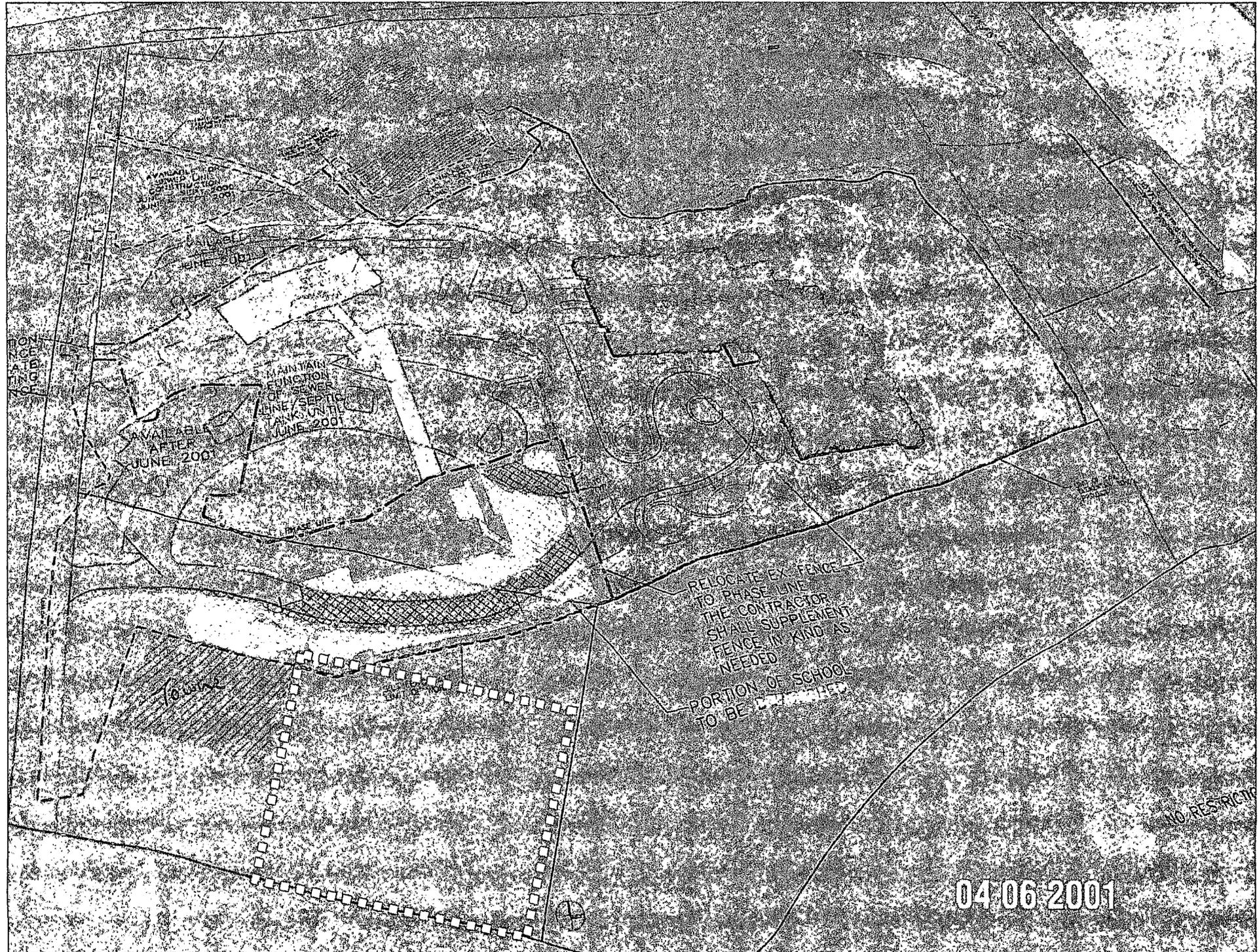
03-04-2007 June 20, 20

The Office of Michael Rosenfeld, Inc., Architects



Third Reuse Option: Open Space

- School Committee's PREFERRED option!
- Best case scenario
 - Remaining MCT space 48,000 ft²
 - New green space 36,400 ft²
 - New cement circle 10,000 ft²
 - Total 94,000 ft²
- For 1,000 kids
 - Each lunch shift 325-350 kids/adults
- Gates, Conant & Douglas each have 120,000+ ft²
 - For HALF as many kids!



MAINTAIN
FUNCTION
OF SEWER
LINE / SEPTIC
TANK UNTIL
JUNE 2001

AVAILABLE
AFTER
JUNE 2001

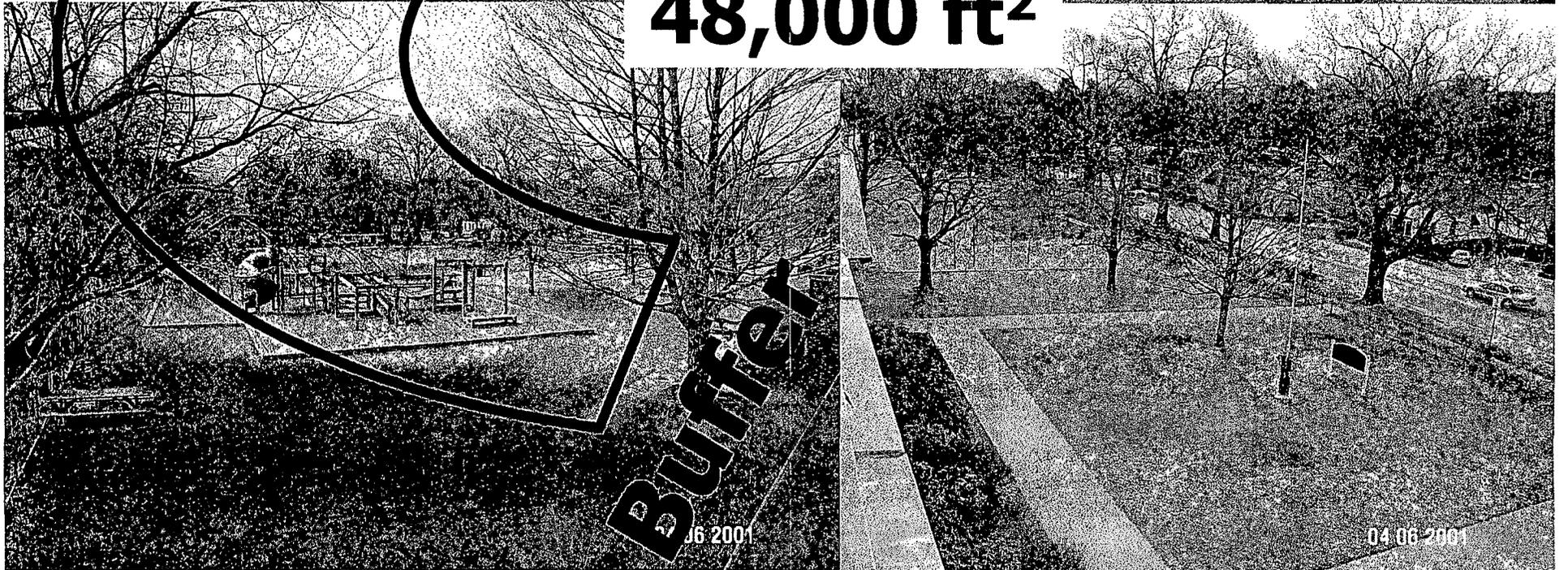
RELOCATE EX. FENCE
TO PHASE LINE
THE CONTRACTOR
SHALL SUPPLEMENT
FENCE IN KIND AS
NEEDED
PORTION OF SCHOOL
TO BE DEMOLISHED

NO RESTRICTIONS

04 06 2001



48,000 ft²



04.06.2001

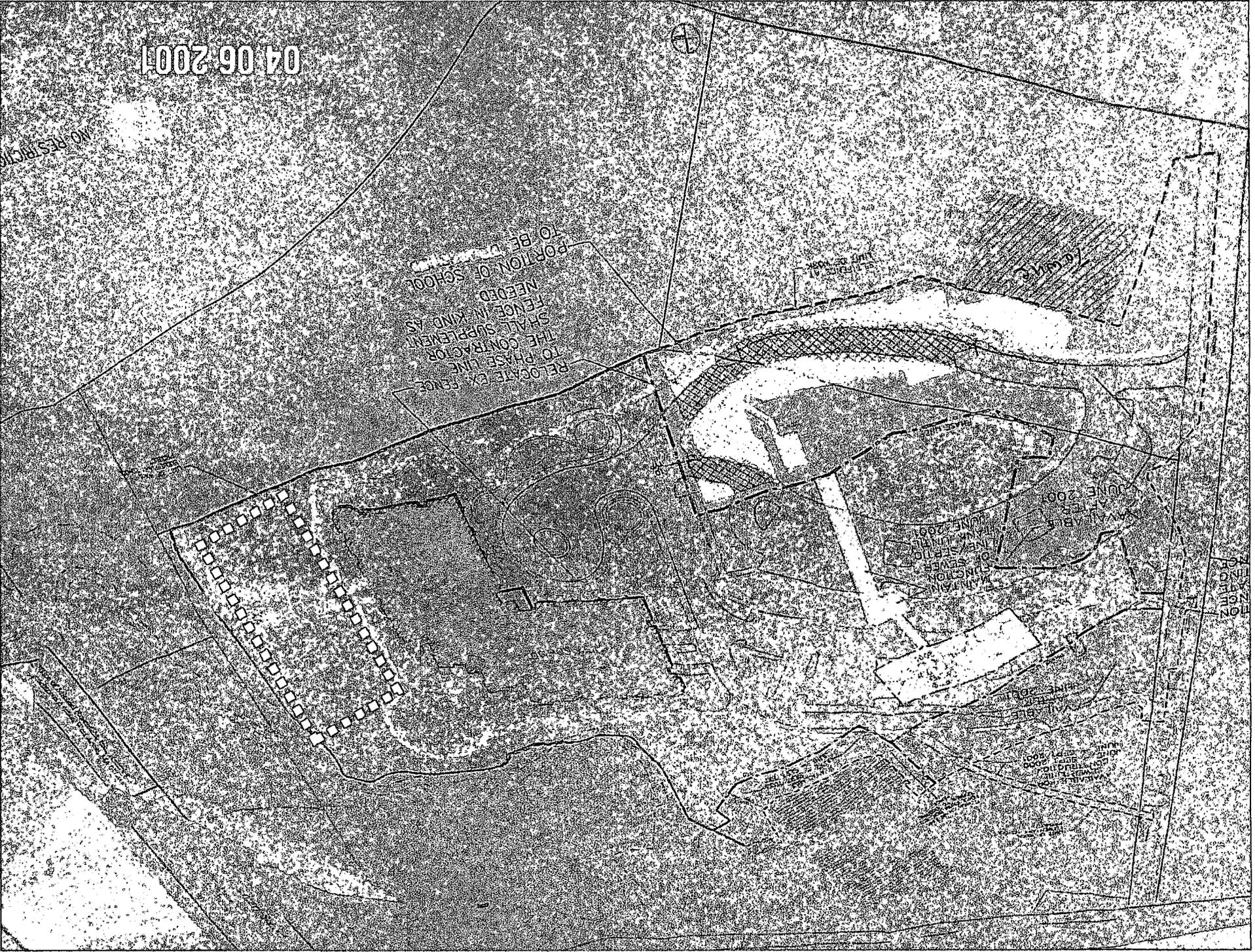
NO RES. BLDG.

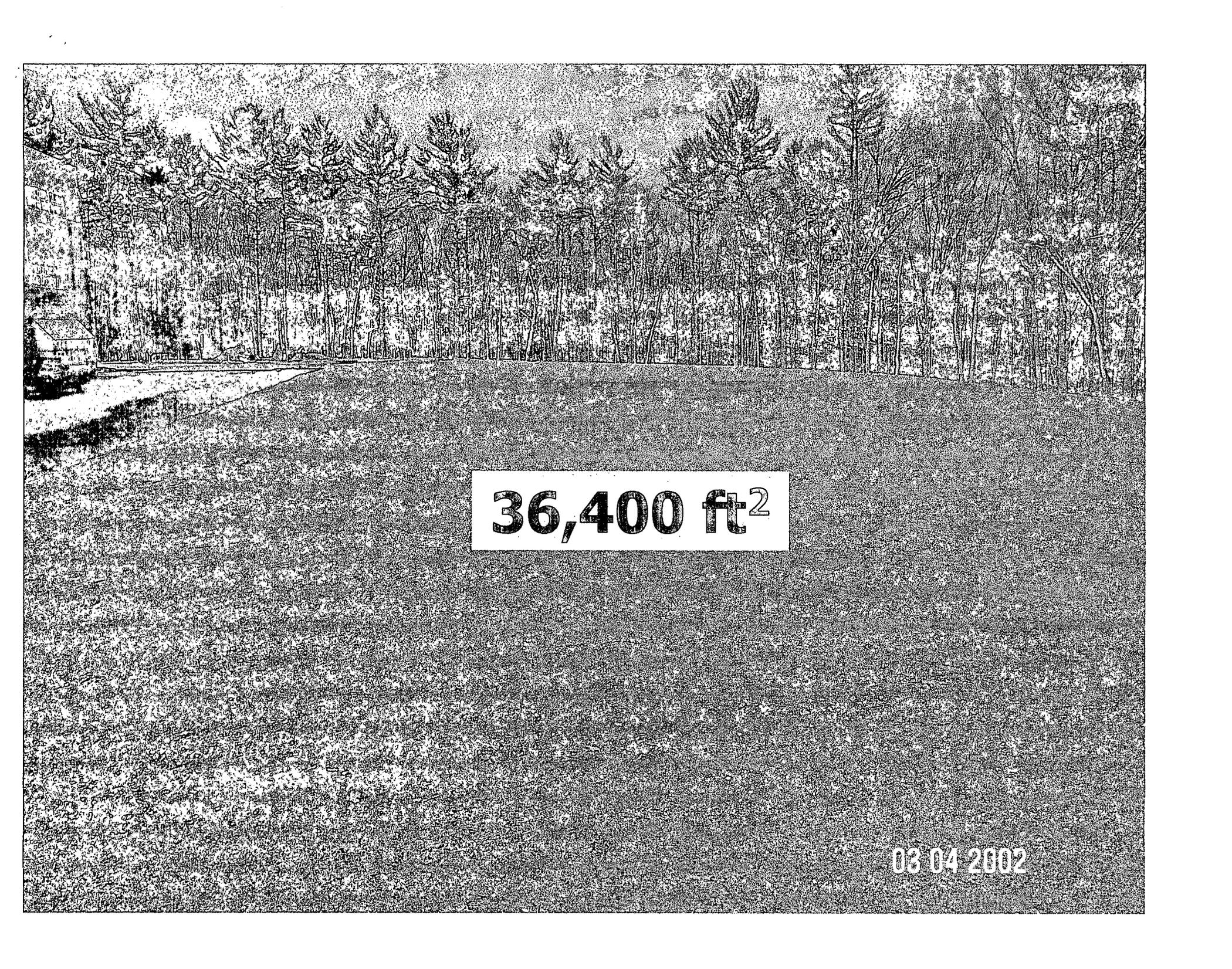
RELOCATE EX. FENCE
TO PHASE LINE
THE CONTRACTOR
SHALL SUPPLEMENT
FENCE IN KIND AS
NEEDED
PORTION OF SCHOOL
TO BE MAINTAINED

MAINTAIN
FUNCTION
OF SEWER
LINE
JUNE 2001

00% LATERAL
0000' HORIZONTAL
0000' VERTICAL

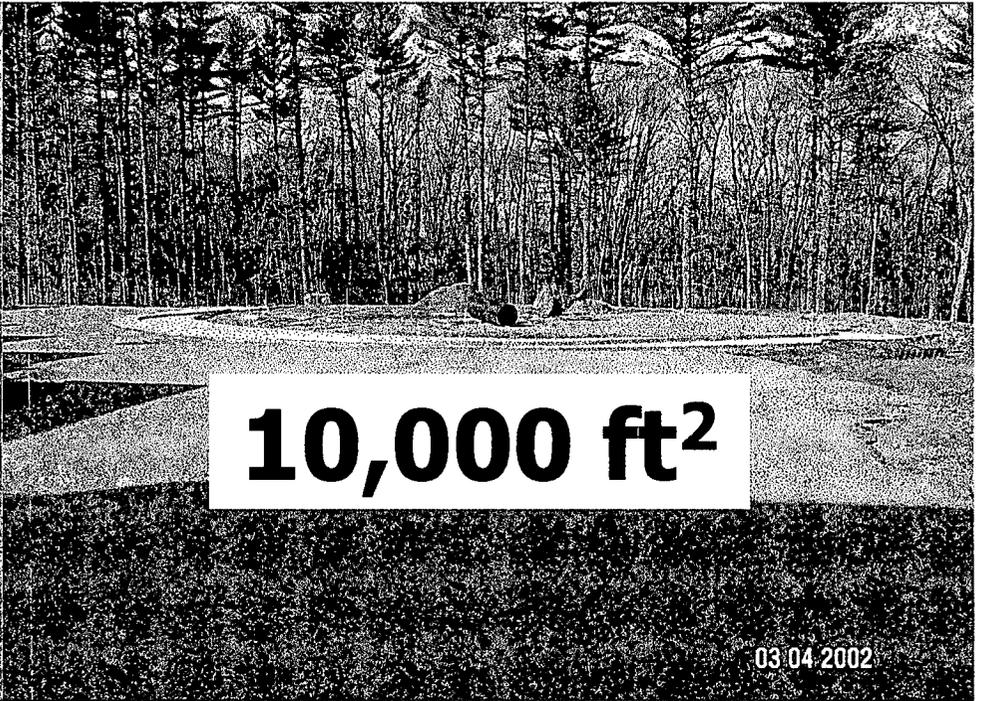
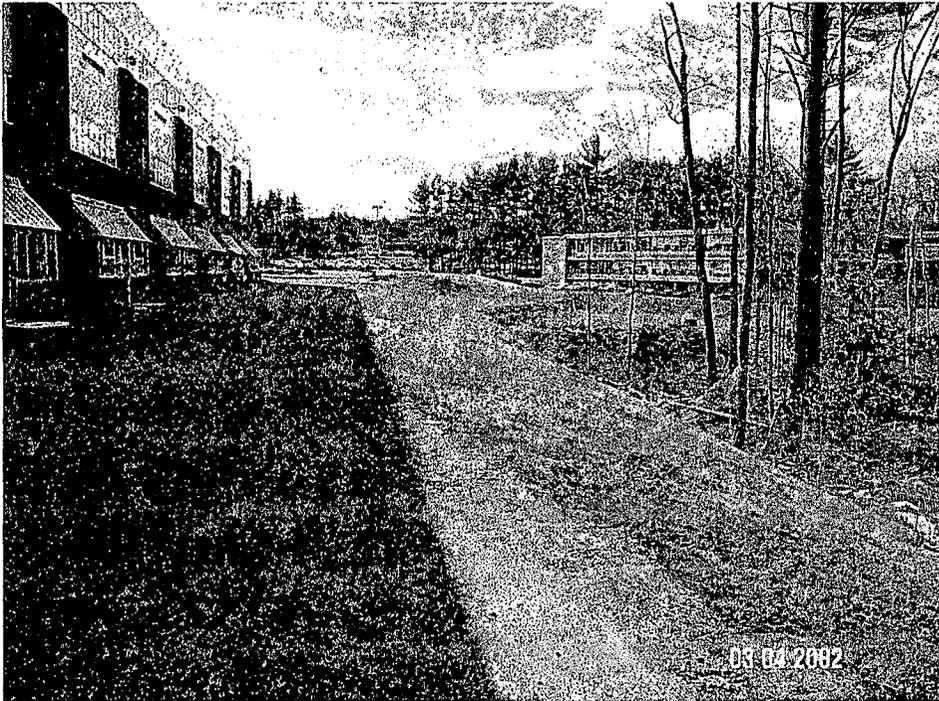
NON
AGE
RANGE
NO.

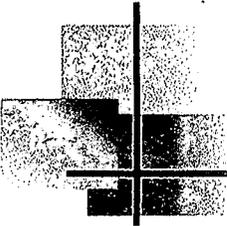




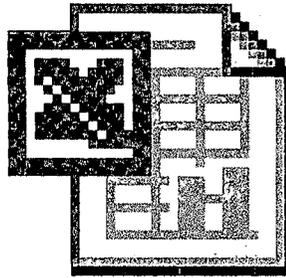
36,400 ft²

03 04 2002





Estimated Renovation Costs



Microsoft Excel
Worksheet

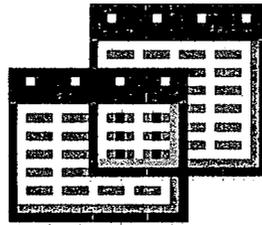
Renovation Expense

Infrastructure		\$1,040,000.00
Interior	\$170,000	
Roof	\$100,000	
Exterior	\$100,000	
ADA	\$70,000	
Mechanical	\$400,000	
Electrical	\$200,000	
Sewer		\$31,000.00
Renovation (Interior)		\$720,000.00
Walls		
Plumbing		
Electrical		
Floors		
Parking		\$72,000.00
Landscaping		\$50,000.00
Curb Cut		\$100,000.00
		\$2,013,000.00
Contingency	10%	\$201,300.00
Total		\$2,214,300.00
Cost per square foot		\$110.72

\$60,000 per unit, 12 units

24 spaces @ \$3,000

Estimated Income



Microsoft Excel Worksheet

Income

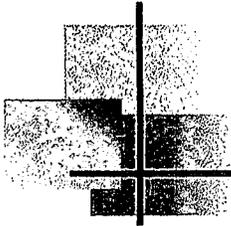
Units	Monthly Rent	Annual Income	
6	1900	\$136,800.00	Market Rate
6	1200	\$86,400.00	Affordable
12		\$223,200.00	Total

Sample Units

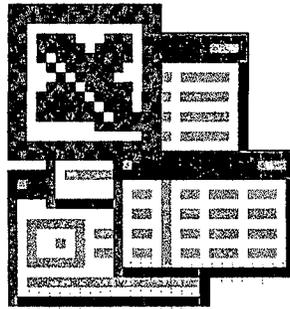
Elm St. Condo, 1000 SF, 2BR, 2Bath	\$150,000
Nagog Village, 1600 SF, 3BR, 2.5Bath	\$225,000
Beth Circle, 1144 SF, 2BR, 1.5Bath	\$222,000

Units	Sale	One-time Income	Assuming average	size 1200-1400 ft ²
6	\$200,000	\$1,200,000.00	Market Rate	
6	\$94,500	\$567,000.00	Affordable	
12		\$1,767,000.00	Total	

Units	Sale	One-time Income	Assuming average	size 1200-1400 ft ²
9	\$200,000	\$1,800,000.00	Market Rate	
3	\$94,500	\$283,500.00	Affordable	
12		\$2,083,500.00	Total	



Estimated Property Taxes



Microsoft Excel
Worksheet

Units **Property Taxes**
6 \$18,132.00 Market Rate
6 \$8,567.37 Affordable
12 **\$26,699.37**

Units **Property Taxes**
9 \$27,198.00 Market Rate
3 \$4,283.69 Affordable
12 **\$31,481.69**

Demolition

McCarthy-Towne Hazmat Abatement **\$201,000** Estimate by

McCarthy Demo @ \$4.25/sf \$32,600

McCarthy Abatement \$133,250

McCarthy Septic \$5,000

Total McCarthy **\$170,850** Estimate by

McCarthy-Towne Demo \$140,101

McCarthy-Towne Hazmat \$201,000

Concrete Demo \$142,954

Other \$33,445

Total McCarthy-Towne **\$517,500** Estimate by

Calculation I: Percentage of Total

McCarthy GSF 32,695

Towne GSF 21,677

Total GSF 54,372

Towne % 40% \$206,316.62

Inflation 6%/year for 3 years **\$243,453.62**

Calculation II: McCarthy-Towne - McCarthy

Total McCarthy-Towne \$517,500

Total McCarthy (\$170,850)

Total for Towne only \$346,650

Inflation 6%/year for 3 years **\$409,047.00** Note: mixec

Calculation III: By Unit Price

Towne GSF 21,677

Demolition cost per SF \$4.25

Towne Demolition \$92,127.25

Abatement \$67,750

Septic \$5,000

Total \$164,877.25

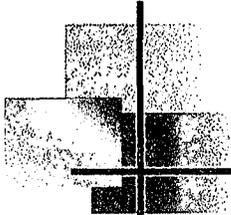
Inflation 6%/year for 3 years **\$194,555.16**

Universal Engineering Q3 '97

D.G. Jones Q2 '99

Essential Q3 '99

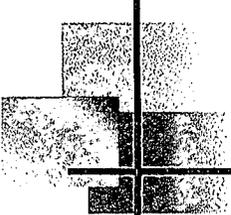
I estimates



Estimated Demolition Costs

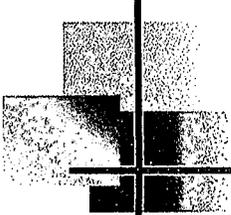
- Demolition ~\$250,000 Calcs
- Less article 38 (\$90,000)
- Total appropriation \$160,000

- If it qualifies for SBAB reimbursement, total cost would be \$95,000
 - Could be as simple as issuing a change order...
 - However, timing is of the essence...
- Source of Funds
 - Citizens Petition: Free Cash
 - Building Contingency Account



Considerations for the FinCom

- Prevent same mistake from happening twice
 - Undercurrent vote was for Artists Center
 - Not financially viable – but approved nevertheless
 - Do not want to end up being stuck with building a second time!
- Possible future expense to enlarge play area
 - Very difficult (read: very unlikely)
 - Sample cost for soccer field: \$60,000 (no irrigation/drainage)
 - End result: kids end up with the “short end of the stick”



Recommendation

- Convey to ACHC/Mass Housing concerns of this body re: viability of project
- Defer vote until feasibility study results available
 - Ask ACHC to make this available ASAP before Town Meeting
 - Convene meeting to discuss and vote at that time



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Massachusetts Historical Commission

March 15, 2002

Mr. Peter R. Grover
Acton Historical Commission
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

RE: Marion L. Towne School, 5 Charter Road, Acton

Dear Mr. Grover:

Thank you for submitting additional information to the Massachusetts Historical Commission regarding the Marion L. Towne School. The Marion L. Towne School has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places by MHC staff (36 CFR 60). The school is individually eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for its association with the history of public education in Acton and under Criterion C as an example of early 20th century public/institutional architecture in Acton.

You should be aware that under the provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (with implementing regulations at 36 CFR 800) and Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 9, Section 26-27C, as amended by Chapter 254 of the Acts of 1988 (with implementing regulations at 950 CMR 71.00), a proposed project which includes state or federal involvement requires consultation with the MHC, and in the case of federal involvement, with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, to evaluate the effects of the project on historic properties and to seek ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any adverse effects. Please note that state and federal involvement includes not only financial assistance from state or federal agencies, but also any licenses or permits from such agencies. Additionally, MHC should be notified of any project changes for projects previously reviewed. In order to request MHC's review under either of these regulations, it is necessary to provide the MHC with a completed Project Notification Form (PNF). For your reference, the MHC's Project Notification Form (PNF) is available on line at www.state.ma.us/sec/mhc/mhcpdf/pnf.pdf or upon request from this office.

Please note that MHC encloses prior correspondence concerning a school expansion project proximate to the Towne School.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann M. Lattinville".

Ann M. Lattinville
Director of Architectural Review
Massachusetts Historical Commission

Enclosure (MHC's 1999 correspondence)

Betsy.friedberg@sec.state.ma.us

220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
(617) 727-8470 • Fax: (617) 727-5128
www.state.ma.us/sec/mhc

X-Sender: tavern@pop.ma.ultranet.com
X-Mailer: QUALCOMM Windows Eudora Version 5.1
Date: Fri, 15 Mar 2002 16:45:23 -0500
To: Nancy Tavernier <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>, Kevin McManus <KevinM@NEHE.com>, Betty McManus <aha1@attglobal.net>, Dan Buckley <DJB01720@hotmail.com>, Peter Berry <pjb@dwbboston.com>, Bob Whittlesey <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>, Ryan Bettez <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>, Trisha Guditz <Guditz@cs.com>
From: Tavernier <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
Subject: Fwd: TOWNE SCHOOL: MHC reply (I)

FYI, this is a staggering piece of information. We will be meeting this Thursday. I have sent the message to the town manager asking him to advise us on what to do.

Nancy

Date: Fri, 15 Mar 2002 15:57:24 -0500 (EST)
X-Sender: forbes@pop.ma.ultranet.com
X-Mailer: Windows Eudora Light Version 1.5.4 (16)
To: Tavern@ma.ultranet.com, ahal@attglobal.net
From: Anne Forbes <forbes@ma.ultranet.com>
Subject: TOWNE SCHOOL: MHC reply (I)
Cc: p-jgrover@prodigy.net, tcp@mp-architects.com

Nancy and Betty:

On 3/9 I e-mailed Chris Skelly, Dir. of Local Govt. Programs at Mass. Historical Commission with a request for some background info. on contacts who could help with the Towne School situation, and to see about getting copies of the final version of that Municipal Preservation manual I gave you some pages from.

I have not heard from him yet, but just got a call from Ann Lattinville, an MHC staff member who deals with project compliance with state and federal programs and laws.

She is sending me a fistful of brochures on the tax credit, but more important, she is sending a copy of the MHC letter written in conjunction with their review of the original plans for the "twin school" construction. At that time, of course, demolishing the Towne Building was not part of the project. I believe the MHC letter found that the Towne Building would not be adversely affected, but warned that it might have historic significance, and asked that MHC receive updates on any changes.

Now, however, the building has been found to have historic significance (the MHC finding of National Register eligibility makes that official) AND its demolition has been added to the project plans. They have received no notification of the change in the project.

Both state law (Ch. 254) and MEPA regulations come into play in this situation. She said that, since SBAB funds are being used, in order to be in compliance with both the SBAB and MEPA regulations, MHC must (1) be notified of a change in the project, and (2) MHC must be afforded the opportunity (30 days) to investigate whether the change will have an adverse effect on a historic property. If MHC makes a determination of adverse effect, then the SBAB, property owner, developer, etc. enter into negotiations to work out an MOA for the mitigation of the adverse effect.

MHC works frequently with the SBAB on school projects, and she said that they are usually very receptive to the MHC commenting process. This makes the statements attributed by the School Committee to SBAB personnel about

funding the demo. as a quick and simple change-order all the more suspect.

When I asked her if the School Comm. might already be in violation of the reg.s (Town Meeting is less than 30 days away,) she suggested that, rather than pursuing that route, Christine Lynch of SBAB should be contacted directly about the situation—probably by the ACHC, perhaps together with MHP—I wasn't sure what the best way to go on that was. Christine Lynch's # is 781-338-3000, x 6520; calling the main number should get her e-mail address, also.

Ann has offered to have the MHC Director send out a reminder letter to the School Committee and the SBAB about notifying MHC of the proposed changes to the original plans; the ACHC should probably make that request. Her phone at MHC is 617-727-8470. The other person to contact there is Taya Dixon, who works on review & compliance with Ann. (E-mail would be Ann.Lattinville@sec.state.ma.us, but she suggests that a phone call gets a quicker response. She will be glad to talk to any of us.)

I will get the copy of MHC's initial letter to you as soon as I receive it. The NR eligibility letter should be received by the AHC by the end of the week. In the meantime, what do you think you want to do about this?

I have copied this to both Peter Grover of the Hist. Comm., and to Tom Peterman of the HDC, as he is preparing some responses to the TM article, and as an architect has come closer to finding the type of mitigation solution that is looked for in those MOAs than anyone. Do you think I should notify Peter Ashton at this point, or wait?

Anne

From: DoreHunter@aol.com
Date: Mon, 23 Apr 2001 14:34:57 EDT
Subject: Towne Building Potential ReUse as Affordable Housing
To: tavern@ma.ultranet.com
X-Mailer: AOL 6.0 for Windows US sub 10512

Nancy,

I had a meeting this morning involving Bill Ryan, Mary Ann Ashton, Don J. and Gary Rhodes to go over potential uses for the Towne Building, given various zoning and physical limitations. A strong contender, at least in theory, would be use for affordable housing. Is there any money available anywhere to buy/renovate old schools as affordable housing? If so would the housing group be interested in the building?

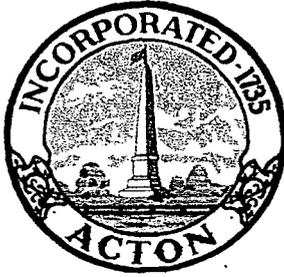
Regards,

Dore' Hunter

Selectman

Tel: 978-263-0882; Fax: 978-263-9230

Email: DoreHunter@aol.com & DoreH@rcn.com



ACHC

TOWN OF ACTON
P.O. Box 681
Acton, Massachusetts, 01720
Telephone (978) 263-4776
Fax (978) 266-1408

Acton Community Housing Corporation
Nancy E. Tavernier, Chair

TO: Acton Historical Commission
Acton Historic District Commission
Acton School Department
DATE: 6/21/01
SUBJECT: Proposed reuse of Towne School Building
CC: Acton Board of Selectmen

At the request of the Board of Selectmen, the ACHC is forwarding to you the attached letter we sent to the Board in advance of our discussion held with them on June 19. We had been asked to explore a multi-family housing option for the Towne School building under our committee charge of "facilitating affordable housing opportunities in the town."

Our initial explorations are very positive and we have recommended to the Selectmen that this option be selected as the optimum reuse of the building without the use of local funding. They are reviewing other options and expect to make a decision about priorities at their July 17 meeting.

Our proposed concept would be the following:

- Up to 12 units of multi-family units from 1-3 bedrooms each
- A mixture of condominiums and rental units
- A mixture of income eligibility for residents
- A local preference for the affordable units
- The affordable or subsidized units would be counted toward the state required 10% of affordable housing in the town
- A separate and new entrance from Rt. 111

As soon as the Selectmen make a decision, we are prepared to move ahead seeking initial funding to develop a feasibility study and marketing plan. We believe there are several sources of funds to accomplish this goal including long term, low interest financing and tax incentives.

If you have any questions about our proposal, do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you,

Nancy E. Tavernier, Chair

Acton Community Housing Corporation
P.O. Box 681
Acton, MA 01720
(978) 263-4776

June 13, 2001

Board of Selectmen
Acton Town Hall
Acton, MA

Dear Board members:

The members of the ACHC have prepared a recommendation for the Board of Selectmen for the re-use of the Towne School Building. We voted at our June 7 meeting to recommend the re-use of the Towne School for multi-family housing in a mixed-income development using a combination of condominiums and rental units.

This recommendation was developed as a result of the meeting held on May 23 with Rita Farrell and Alice Wong of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership Fund to discuss funding opportunities available for the rehabbing of public buildings into housing, including an affordable housing component. Selectmen Hunter and Ashton attended a portion of the meeting as did Don Johnson and Roland Bartl. We were all very encouraged by the enthusiasm displayed by Rita and Alice for our proposal. To them having an existing building is considered a "gem". Best of all, they will provide technical assistance at no cost to the community. This would take the form of a feasibility report including engineering and architectural review.

The Mass. Housing Partnership Fund (MHP) is a quasi-public state agency that promotes strong neighborhoods through the development and preservation of affordable housing. It uses lines of credit from the banking industry to provide long-term loans for affordable housing and neighborhood development. MHP provides communities, local housing partnerships (ACHC) and nonprofit and for-profit developers with technical assistance and below-market financing to create rental housing and home ownership opportunities that revitalize and stabilize neighborhoods. They are currently involved in programs in nearby Westford as well as Springfield, Brockton and Haverhill.

The process that follows is for the ACHC to file a grant application requesting technical assistance from MHP. We would hope to utilize existing studies prepared for the School Department that detail the structural analysis done as part of the new construction process as well as any other existing documents that would be helpful. We have the expertise among our members such that we believe we can prepare this request in a timely manner. We would need to have a letter of support from the Board of Selectmen, which would signal the intent of the town to proceed with this option for the reuse of the Towne building.

Attached to this letter is a Work List for the Towne School Project, prepared by our newest member Bob Whittlesey. This provides a framework for the task ahead and demonstrates there are many political issues as well as practical ones. We are prepared to take a leadership role in this endeavor.

We need to know the Board of Selectmen is committed to this option in order for us to proceed. We are aware of other "ideas" in the community about how the building should be reused but we are not aware of any that would be as economically feasible as this option.

We will await your decision before we proceed further. We will be present to answer any questions at your June 19 meeting.

Thank you for the continuing support of our efforts to provide affordable housing in the town.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Tavernier".

Nancy Tavernier, Chair
ACHC

Attachment: Work List for Towne School Project

Work List for Towne School Project

Decide housing preferences and tentative design schemes

Obtain necessary information for committee's work
What information and from whom?

Research building and environmental issues

Make preliminary appraisal of these issues

Community and abutter issues

Develop preliminary financing and feasibility of development proposals

Work with MPF; pro bono consultants

Review and select ownership option

Select pro bono legal assistance
Review legal issues

Discussions with possible developers

Negotiations with School Department

Coordination with Selectmen and Historical Commission

Preparation of preliminary recommendations

Presentation drawings and floor plans
By whom?
Decide developer role in proposal
Report to Selectmen

rbw. 06/07/01

**TOWN OF ACTON
INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION
TOWN MANAGER'S OFFICE**

DATE: July 24, 2001

TO:

School Committee	Acton Community Housing Corporation
Finance Committee	Acton Housing Authority
Historical Commission	Recreation Commission
Historic District Commission	Acton/Boxborough Cultural Council
Planning Board	Transportation Advisory Committee

FROM: Don P. Johnson

SUBJECT: Towne School Building Reuse

As you are probably aware, the voters at the 2001 Annual Town Meeting elected to return control of the Towne School Building to the Board of Selectmen. Shortly after Town Meeting, the Office of Michael Rosenfeld (OMR) was commissioned by the School Committee to study the zoning issues related to this property. OMR recently presented their findings to the Selectmen.

The Selectmen have identified several constraints and parameters to be applied to the reuse. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The historic façade of the building must be maintained.
2. Renovation/restoration of the building shall be accomplished without the investment of tax dollars.
3. Reuse of the facility shall be compatible with surrounding uses, comply with Town zoning (or available options) and impose the least practicable impacts on the lot.

In addition to the above general parameters, there are a number of reuse options that must be considered and explored. In order to thoroughly evaluate these options, the Board has asked Chairman Ashton to convene an advisory committee representing a broad spectrum of interests. The committee's charge is to review the available options and constraints and advise the Selectmen as to the best reuse possibilities for this facility. Chairman Ashton expects this work to require no more than 2-3 meetings.

If your board or committee is interested in participating in this important advisory function, you are asked to designate and send one (1) member as a representative. The first meeting will be convened on August 15, at 7:30 PM, in Hearing Room 204 at Town Hall. Please advise my office as to your board or committee's interest and/or your designated representative.

From: "Robert B. Whittlesey" <rbwhittlesey@earthlink.net>
To: "Nancy Tavernier (E-mail)" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>,
"Kevin McManus (E-mail)" <KevinM@NEHE.com>,
"Betty McManus (E-mail)" <aha@fiam.net>,
"Peter Berry (E-mail)" <pjb@dwbboston.com>,
"Dan Buckley (E-mail)" <DJB01720@hotmail.com>,
"Ryan Bettez (E-mail)" <bettezfamily@yahoo.com>
To: "Pam Shuttle (E-mail)" <shuttlep@ummhc.org>
Cc: "Rita Farrell (E-mail)" <rfarrell@mhpfind.com>,
"Alice Wong (E-mail)"
<awong@mhpfund.com>
Subject: Meeting of Towne School Reuse Committee August 15
Date: Mon, 20 Aug 2001 16:41:34 -0400
X-Mailer: Microsoft Internet E-mail/MAPI - 8.0.0.4211

The Towne School Reuse Committee met on Wednesday, August 15. Peter Ashton, Chairman of the BOS, was the only selectman present. Don Johnson was present. Present from ACHC were Bob Whittlesey, Betty McManus, Kevin McManus and Ryan Bettez. Representatives from the Historic Commission and School Committee were there. The Cultural Committee, Recreational Committee and Transportation Committee had been invited but were not represented. Eight or ten others attended, most interested in seeing the Towne school used for cultural purposes - artists studios or community activities. The town manager has the list of attendees.

Peter Ashton opened the meeting. He said that the BOS were interested in hearing from proponents of various uses for the Towne School. He did say that any reuse would have to meet certain criteria. These include conforming to the required zoning, not costing the Town any money, and not adversely impacting the school development program. He said that the Town planned to issue an RFP to developers and needed to determine the requirements that are to be included in the RFP.

Don Johnson described the zoning issues. The site is zoned single family. Some uses are allowed under special permits. The Town as a public owner, could use the property as they wished. However, the private use of the property on any sale or lease of the land would have to meet zoning requirements.

Multifamily is not currently allowed and would require a zoning change and a lot size of 100,000 sf. There is a frontage issue which can be solved in several ways. He stated that educational uses would require substantial parking and that housing seemed to require the least. He said that the town had explored the question of leasing the land and that could work. If multifamily were the future use, the town would lease 100,000 sf of ground and require a lease back of unneeded lot area for the school playground. Achieving zoning approval through a comprehensive permit that is only available for an affordable housing development was mentioned.

Don Johnson also stated that the town was anxious to follow up on the various proposal that had been presented for artists studios, an educational center, a cultural center, etc but had not learned the specifics of any of these ideas. He said he welcomed any specific proposals that anyone wanted to make.

I described ACHC's proposal for affordable housing. I said that -
an attractive development of approximately 12 units could be developed,

Printed for Tavernier <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>

8/20/01

probably rental as that is what the state agencies favored; that it would enhance the Kelley Corner area; was suitable for small family units with a grocery store, a shopping center, a Kmart, etc. within walking distance.

I stated that the Massachusetts Housing Partnership Fund was willing to provide assistance for a feasibility study and that I was confident that we would have a priority for state subsidies. I said that we could do the development with a land lease - 75 to 99 years - but would probably require ownership of the building to obtain the necessary housing subsidies. We could provide the required 20 to 25 parking spaces on the side of the building as requested by the Historical Commission. The development could be accomplished at no cost to the town other than lease of the land and transfer of the building.

I stressed that if the planned use were housing, there would be a two step process. The first phase would involve ACHC working with Town staff and consultant retained by MHPF to select the kind or kinds of housing the Town wants and completing a feasibility study. This would allow the Town to put detailed criteria in the RFP and allow the Town to select a developer which was most responsive to the request, not necessarily the highest bidder.

Don Johnson had mentioned that if the Town were to go out with a general RFP looking for a variety of use proposals, the Town would have to select the highest bidder. Assistance from the MHP Fund would require a commitment from the Town that if housing were found to be feasible, the Town would proceed with the housing reuse.

The housing proposal was favorably received but left some of the people present unsatisfied. Suggestions were made for an arts center, housing but with the auditorium or some part of the building renovated for community use, elderly housing, "something more imaginative than housing consistent with the historical character of the building."

The representative of the School Committee said that all the School Department wanted is to have someone else responsible for the building but with the proviso that the Town have the ability to get the property back at some future time. The land lease idea seemed to constitute a possible answer to their position.

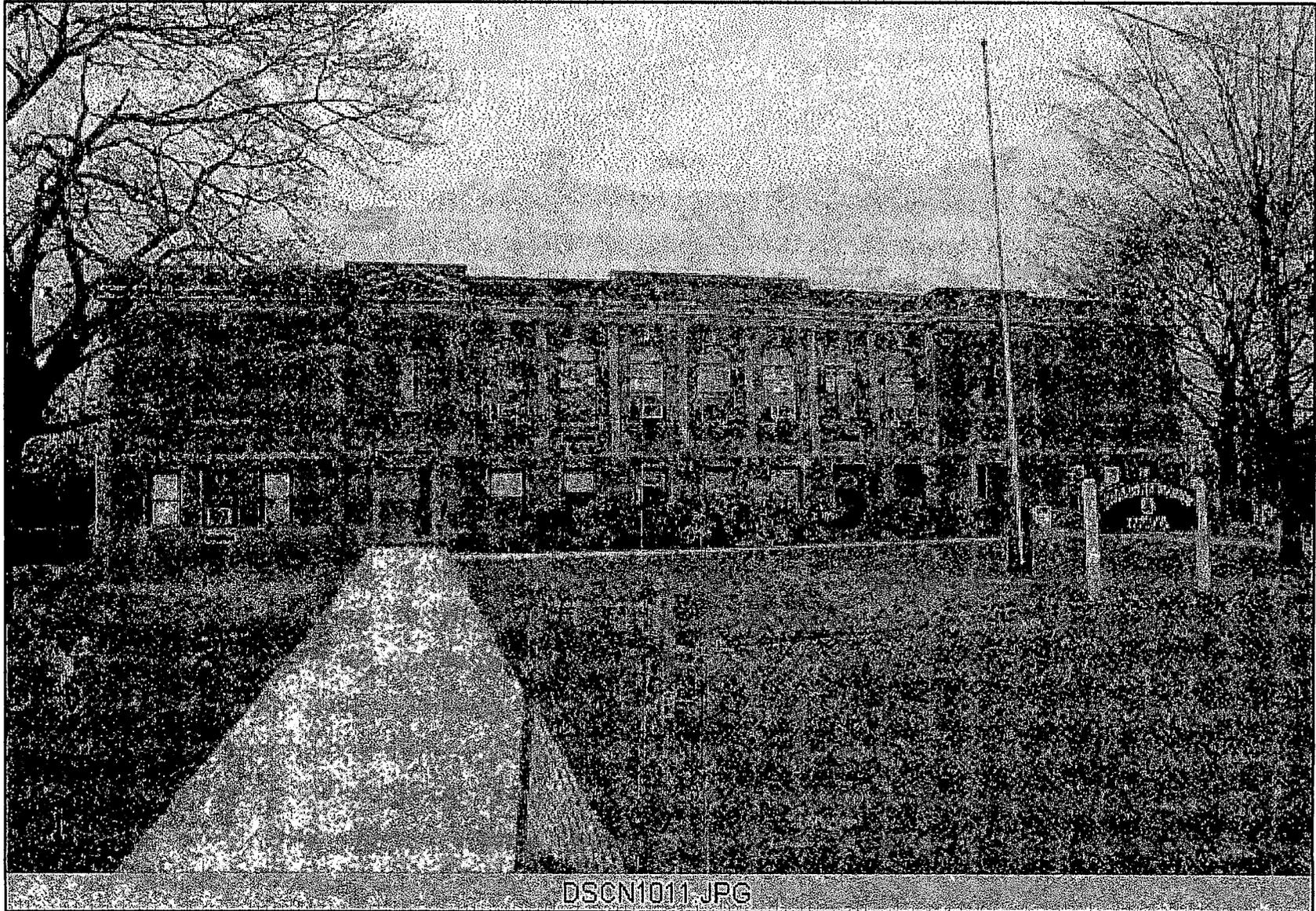
Betty McManus spoke of the difficulties in renting elderly units.

A representative of the Historical Commission said that the building has not been declared a historical building and that it was not certain that it would be. A submission is being filed.

Don Johnson asked that persons interested in alternative uses to housing come to the next meetings with detailed proposals.

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for Thursday, September 13 at 7:30 p.m..

Towne School “Revisited”



DSCN1011.JPG

Towne School “Revisited”

- Selectmen voted unanimously NOT to recommend this citizens’ petition
- Review the process
 - Town Meeting voted last year to preserve the building and give it to Selectmen to find reuse
 - Constraints placed on reuse:
 - Maintain façade, comply with zoning options
 - NO taxpayer dollars
 - Maximize play space, minimize traffic, parking impacts
 - Keep the land
 - OMR Site Option Review

Towne School “Revisited”

- Reuse Committee formed:
 - Board of Selectmen
 - School Committee
 - Finance Committee
 - Planning Board
 - Historical Commission
 - Historical District Commission
 - Housing Authority
 - Acton Community Housing Committee
 - Recreation
 - Cultural Council
 - Transportation Advisory Committee

Towne School “Revisited”

- Reuse Committee met several times
- Various options considered:
 - affordable housing
 - arts center
 - office space
 - recreation center
 - others
- Two options considered in detail
- Reuse Committee *unanimously* recommended affordable housing as the best and only reuse

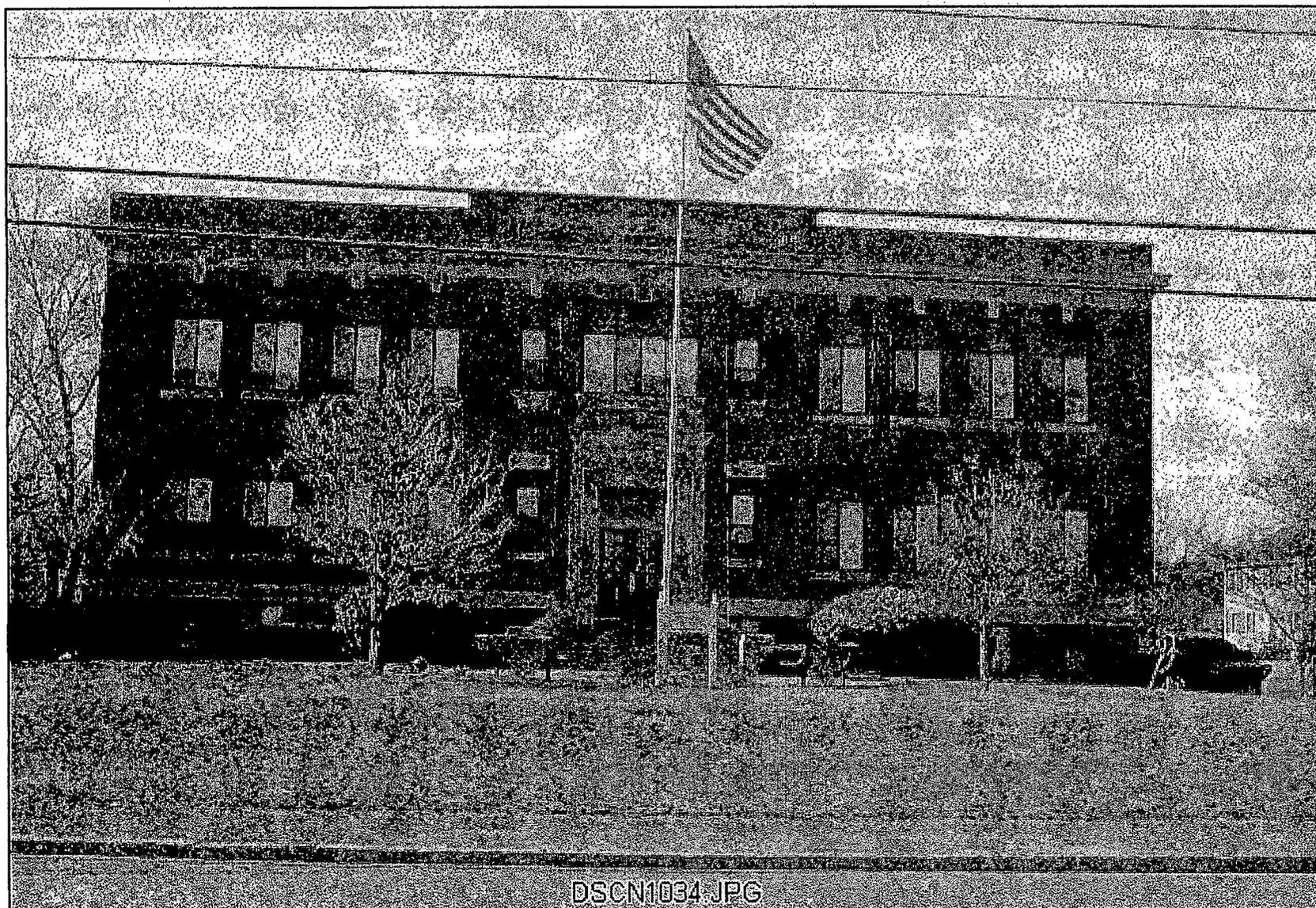
Towne School “Revisited”

- Arts center didn’t work for four reasons:
 - 1 Developer unwilling to pay infrastructure costs
 - 2 Greater impact on lot in terms of parking, traffic, encroachment on Parker Damon play space
 - 3 Zoning constraints
 - 4 Developer unwilling to compete against affordable housing
- Affordable housing was recommended to Selectmen as best reuse by Reuse Committee

Towne School “Revisited”

- Selectmen oppose this petition:
 - Proposed article costs us money
 - Gives us the opportunity to preserve a well-loved building - nothing has changed except a viable reuse has now been found
 - Affordable housing is greatly needed in Acton
 - Feasibility study shows that it can work

Towne School “Revisited”



SPECIAL TOWN MEETING, APRIL 2, 2002:

TOWNE SCHOOL MYTHS & FACTS

All of the following arguments have been made by advocates of the demolition of the Towne School over the past year. Please consider:

MYTH: The Towne School is an insignificant 20th-century building.

FACT: The Towne School, built in 1925 as Acton's first high school, is highly significant to our town as a representative of Acton's community life and culture in the early part of the twentieth century. Standing at the entrance to the central school campus, it anchors in both time and space the rest of the school buildings which were constructed in successively later eras. It is the only large masonry structure of its period in town, and is an excellent example of scholastic colonial revival architecture. For these reasons and more, the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has recently found the building eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

MYTH: The Towne School's condition makes it an unlikely candidate for reuse.

FACT: The deteriorated roof, antiquated mechanical systems, etc., are not unusual in buildings of its type and age. Across Massachusetts, school buildings with these kinds of problems have been successfully rehabilitated and converted to new, viable uses. Far from being worth saving just for sentimental reasons, the design of these 1920s schools actually makes them more adaptable than other types of buildings.

MYTH: A playing field on the Towne School site will provide needed play space for children in the new Parker Damon Building.

FACT: As shown in the schools' own 2001 publicized landscape plans, the area required for a regulation-size playing field, which its proponents state is needed for Jr. High, High School, and town-wide sports teams, would fill virtually all the space between the planned Parker Damon bus drive and the Mass. Ave. sidewalk. That would effectively eliminate the present playground south of the McCarthy wing, and preclude the construction of a new playground. The elementary school children will actually lose play equipment for recess activities if the field is built. On the other hand, other alternatives for increasing elementary school play space are available without demolishing the Towne School. The area the Towne building occupies is too remote and difficult to access to be of use for recess.

MYTH: The Towne School is too small to provide any significant amount of affordable housing.

FACT: While some demolition proponents have claimed that there would only be 3-6 affordable housing units in the building, the feasibility

study funded by the Mass. Housing Partnership has determined that it could comfortably accommodate a total of 19 units, at least 50% of which would be affordable.

MYTH: Constrictions placed on the building by local preservation boards and the Mass. Historical Commission will make it difficult to rehab the building, and will force parking onto the present playground.

FACT: National Register status or eligibility do not dictate what changes can be made to the building, nor do they restrict how a property can be used. On the contrary, National Register listing makes a property eligible for various state- and federally-assisted funding programs, including a 20% preservation tax credit on the building's rehab., even if the building remains under town ownership.

MYTH: The State School Building Assistance Board will reimburse the town for a substantial amount of the cost of demolition.

FACT: The SBAB must take into account the advice and comment of other state agencies. MHC must review any changes to state-funded school construction. If they find that a change will have an adverse effect on a historically significant structure, they will work with the SBAB to minimize or eliminate that effect. The SBAB does not usually provide funds to demolish a structure that the MHC has found historically significant. Not only is it likely that our tax dollars would have to pay the full cost of the demolition, tearing down the Towne School would mean the permanent loss of a major real estate asset of substantial value to the town.

MYTH: Housing, especially affordable housing is inappropriate so close to the schools.

FACT: The existing Redstone Townhouses are twice as close to the Damon Parker School than the Towne Building is. Under State guidelines and the proposed ACHC plan 85% of Acton's town staff would qualify for residence, including many of our teachers and their families.

MYTH: The quality of our children's education depends on the demolition of the Towne Building.

FACT: Regardless of its use the proposed demolition of the Towne Building has nothing to do with the "quality" of our schools. Indeed the Towne Building's preservation will serve to demonstrate to our children that we treasure our rich architectural heritage and refuse to "throw-away" when we can reuse.

PLEASE VOTE NO AT THE SPECIAL TOWN MEETING!

TOWNE BUILDING REUSE PROPOSAL
MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING
Acton Community Housing Corporation
February 2002

The members of ACHC have developed the following concept and submitted it to the Massachusetts Housing Partnership Fund to be used as a guideline for the feasibility study of the project. The study will proceed quickly. We are specifically calling this a "concept" because we recognize the findings in the feasibility study may dictate a different configuration of units and/or income mix. We expect to have future discussions that will fine-tune the proposal into a workable and politically viable project.

Conceptual Guidelines presented to MHP

1. Land lease arrangement with the length of the lease being a minimum of 50 years or whatever is the most economically feasible time period. The minimum required amount of land sitting under and around the Towne Building will remain under the control of the town through a land lease arrangement.
2. 100% Rental units. ACHC's recommendation is for rental units.
3. We would like the income designation to be Mixed Income using the most recent Boston median income figure of \$74,200:
 - 50% of the units designated as Affordable
 - 1/2 of those units for incomes up to 60% of median income (\$45,000)
 - 1/2 of those units for incomes up to 110% of median income (\$82,000)
 - Rents would be in the \$1000-1200/mo. range for the affordable units
 - 50% of the units to be rented at Market rates. Rents would be in the \$1900/mo. range.
4. For the Unit Mix, assuming 12 units, we would like the following:
 - 1 2 Bedroom Handicapped accessible unit
 - 2 3 Bedroom units
 - 2 1 Bedroom/Studio units
 - 7 2 Bedroom units
 - Any use of the unique spaces in the building for artist lofts or other creative options
 - If space is available, we would like to have a community room included
5. A mix of ages and family sizes for the occupants. This is not an elderly housing project.
6. Site Design
 - The building should be connected to the sewer system and betterments paid

- Parking areas should be the minimum required and should be sited in the rear of the building. We suggest the space currently occupied by the school library, to be removed.
- We wish to maximize the land area adjacent to the building for use by the schools as play areas.
- We recommend access to the building from Charter Rd.

This is the timetable for the process that we recommend.

2/21/02	ACHC send recommendations to MHP and Board of Selectmen
2/28/02	Consultant will be selected and will begin the financial feasibility, preliminary architectural and programmatic design for Phase 1 of the project.
3/21/02	Consultant will submit a preliminary report to the ACHC and the Selectmen
3/28/02	Final report will be submitted to the Town
4/1/02	Findings will be presented to Town Meeting by BoS and ACHC

MHP will submit a list of consultants to ACHC and the Town Manager for review and recommendation. The feasibility study will be at no cost to the town.

Date: Wed, 03 Apr 2002 10:33:26 -0500
From: Stow Laboratories Inc <stomail@stolab.com>
X-Mailer: Mozilla 4.7 [en] (Win98; I)
X-Accept-Language: en
To: "K, C" <stomail@stolab.com>
Subject: Acton - Results of town meeting(s), a brief update

Last night, both the special and the annual town meetings were completed. The auditorium was filled almost to capacity for the special town meeting proposal to demolish the Towne building. The proposal was very convincingly defeated by a vote of 467 "no" to 342 "yes". This success is due in large part to an excellent presentation by Nancy Tavernier of the plans being developed for this building by the Acton Community Housing Committee, a presentation even more impressive given the very short time available to the ACHC after the petition to demolish was filed to explain their "work in progress". This group has worked hard to find a viable reuse for this building, and they now have a clear mandate from Town Meeting for their project.

And Lauren will not have to tell her children that we demolished Big Bird's school.

As expected, the annual town meeting approved all the proposed operating budgets, setting the stage for a request for a \$2 million general override one year from now. It also accepted the Community Preservation Act and its 1.5% property tax surcharge. This will now be a ballot question for this November's elections, so the voters get another chance to consider the financial consequences of this ill advised tax increase.

Charlie

Date: Wed, 03 Apr 2002 12:34:53 -0500
From: Stow Laboratories Inc <stomail@stolab.com>
X-Mailer: Mozilla 4.7 [en] (Win98; I)
X-Accept-Language: en
To: Tavernier <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
Subject: Re: Thank you

Nancy :

I heard from several people that Amy Upham and her supporters were saying that "low income people from the ghetto (or words to that effect, it is not first hand information) will move into the Towne building" as they were soliciting signatures for her petition. Even if they used less blatant words, the sentiment was there. I was disappointed that they used such an argument and also that quite a few apparently signed the petition because of it, including some who I thought knew better. I resisted the urge to say at town meeting that I know many more undesirable high-income than low-income people.

You presentation was great, I particularly liked the maps showing the relative location of the Towne building and the Twin School. My daughter Anne told me after the meeting that the same "playground coordinator" woman who said that they needed the land for playgrounds had been at a building committee meeting saying that the playground equipment had to be located close to the Twin School building.

Thanks for your note.

CK

Tavernier wrote:

> Charlie,
>
> Thank you for all your support of the ACHC's efforts. I know you have been
> instrumental behind the scenes gathering supporters and it paid off. I had
> so hoped for a majority vote, I did not want it to be 1/3 +1 that defeated
> the motion. This was dream come true for my dedicated group of committee
> members. What is most rewarding to me is that the vote to retain the
> school was not as much for preservation but for housing. Maybe that is a
> biased view but I very much felt it. I was relieved too that we did not
> have to hear about the dreaded "those people" that might be living
> there. I have been appalled at the reports of disparaging remarks made by
> the petitioner. She was lucky to not be exposed publicly last night.
>
> So again, thank you. I thought this was quite a remarkable town meeting
> but as always I am glad it is over.
>
> Regards,
> Nancy

Date: Wed, 3 Apr 2002 19:55:29 -0500 (EST)
X-Sender: forbes@pop.ma.ultranet.com
X-Mailer: Windows Eudora Light Version 1.5.4 (16)
To: Tavern@ma.ultranet.com
From: Anne Forbes <forbes@ma.ultranet.com>
Subject: towne School
Cc: CHC@town.acton.ma.us

Nancy-

I echo Charlie's (!) characterization of your presentation on the Towne School. It was fabulous.

One thing I felt so strongly from the spirit in the auditorium last night, and even more on reflection today, is that in a very short time—maybe just in the course of the meeting—you, the ACHC, and some of last night's speakers from the floor, have raised the public awareness of both the advantages of and the need for affordable housing in this town several notches higher. And how nice that it has happened through a success, rather than a defeat.

It's been a pleasure (if that word can even apply to this type of effort) working with you on the Towne Building. I hope the progress toward an RFP is just as successful as last night's vote.

Anne

Date: Wed, 3 Apr 2002 11:52:10 -0500
Thread-Index: AcHbL7YmHKBMKDL7EdaARwCgzKF/8Q=
From: "Rosalie DeQuattro" <rdequattro@town.acton.ma.us>
To: "Nancy Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>

Hi Nancy:

I wanted to commend you on your excellent presentation at town meeting on Tuesday night. Although I had decided well in advance of the meeting to vote to preserve the Towne building, I began to have doubts listening to the debate and the need for playground space, etc. However, your description of the potential for that building and your obvious enthusiasm for the project tipped the scale for me. I'd love to get a shot at living there myself.

Congratulations and thank you.

Rosie DeQuattro, Administrator
West Acton Citizens' Library
978-264-9652

PS One of these days I'd love to hear your views on the future of this, Acton's "other" public library.

From: "terence lindgren" <tlindgre@concentric.net>
To: "Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
Subject: Re: TOWNE BUILDING
Date: Sat, 6 Apr 2002 07:03:09 -0500
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook Express 6.00.2600.0000

Hi Nancy,

I am sure I will be pleased when it is completed. I will admit it easily now: I like that building, always have.
terry

— Original Message —

From: Tavernier
To: terence lindgren
Sent: Friday, April 05, 2002 7:49 PM
Subject: Re: TOWNE BUILDING

Terry,

Thank you for those kind words. I am glad we all got through it without doing any real damage to each other's feelings. Don't worry, you will be able to do the same thing some day. I frankly didn't know I had it in me until that day. I woke up that morning knowing for the first time how much I cared about the affordable housing issue and the passion just poured out of my mouth at town meeting. That is what propelled me through. It was what they call a "defining moment". What made it especially easy though is that it didn't include a request for money. You would be amazed what a difference that makes in the relaxation factor.

I hope you will be pleased when this project is completed. There is a tremendous love for that building, even I looked at it adoringly today as I drove by and as you well know I voted to demolish it last year.

Nancy

At 07:31 PM 4/5/02 -0500, you wrote:

Hello Nancy,

While we disagreed about the best use of the land, I am glad it is over.

Your presentation was excellent. I wish that someday I might be able to do half so well.

terry

From: "Jane & Peter Grover" <p-jgrover@prodigy.net>
To: <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
Subject: RE: towne School
Date: Thu, 4 Apr 2002 22:28:11 -0500
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook 8.5, Build 4.71.2173.0
Importance: Normal

Nancy,

I guess some people have already commented, but I wanted to say what a great job you did in your presentation. The strength and determination in your tone really came through, and was moving. It really made the opponent's proposal seem trite.

Peter Grover

**TOWN OF ACTON
SPECIAL TOWN MEETING WARRANT**

APRIL 2, 2002

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

TO EITHER OF THE CONSTABLES OF THE TOWN OF ACTON,

GREETINGS:

In the name of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, you are hereby directed to notify the legal voters of said Town of Acton, qualified to vote at Town Meetings for the transaction of town affairs, to meet at 7:00 P.M. at the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Auditorium on Tuesday, April 2, 2002, then and there to act on the following Articles:

**ARTICLE 1# Demolish the Towne School
(2/3 Vote Required)**

No

Yes 342

No 467

58%

To see if the Town will vote to demolish the Towne School Building in its entirety and to appropriate \$250,000 and to raise such amount from free cash and to transfer the entire land area adjoined to the Towne School Building to the Acton Public Schools and to reuse that property for educational purposes; or take any other action relative thereto.

SUMMARY

This Article was submitted by Citizen Petition.

Direct Inquiries to: Don P. Johnson, Town Manager – 264-9612
Selectman Assigned: Peter Ashton

Selectmen: Not Recommended
Finance Committee: Recommendation Deferred

AND YOU ARE DIRECTED TO SERVE THIS WARRANT BY POSTING ATTESTED COPIES THEREOF FOURTEEN DAYS AT LEAST BEFORE THE TIME OF SAID MEETING, IN NOT LESS THAN SIX PUBLIC PLACES IN TOWN, TO BE DESIGNATED BY THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN.

HEREOF FAIL NOT AND MAKE DUE RETURN OF THIS WARRANT WITH YOUR DOINGS THEREON TO THE TOWN CLERK AT OR BEFORE THE TIME OF MEETING AFORESAID.

GIVEN UNDER OUR HANDS AT ACTON THIS 2ND DAY OF MARCH, 2002

**PETER K. ASHTON
WILLIAM H. SHUPERT, III
PAMELA HARTING-BARRAT
F. DORE' HUNTER
WALTER H. FOSTER
BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

**A TRUE COPY ATTEST _____
CONSTABLE OF ACTON**

TOWN OF ACTON
SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
WARRANT



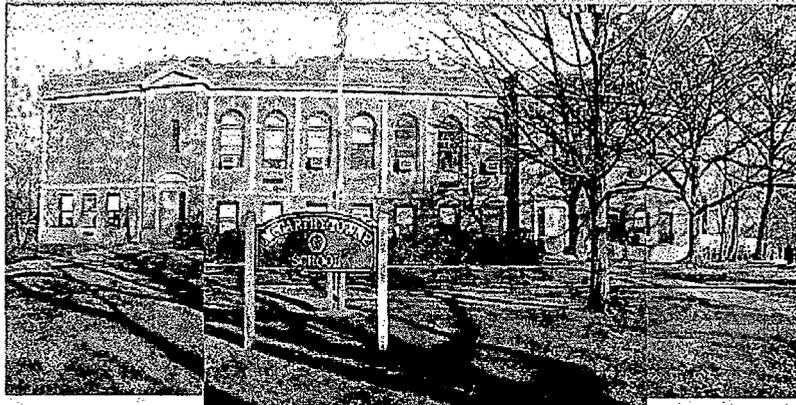
FOR APRIL 2, 2002

THE SPECIAL TOWN MEETING WILL CONVENE AT
7:00 P.M. IN THE ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL
HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM, 96 HAYWARD ROAD

POSTAL PATRON
ACTON, MA 01720

BULK RATE
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT #67
ACTON, MA 01720

Housing Acton's Working Families



Preserving Our Community

1

Good evening

We first presented our housing proposal for the Towne School to the BoS last June

We have participated in the process as all the other options were explored.

We are delighted that our proposal was chosen and we are very excited about this community opportunity.

Tonight we would like to tell you about affordable housing, how it is defined and what it means in Acton.

We also will show you the specific proposal for the Housing Reuse of the Towne Building...

We are pleased to have with us tonight Rita Farrell from the Mass. Housing Partnership Fund. She will be prepared to answer questions should the need arise later.

Housing Acton's Working Families

ACHC - Who we are

Nancy Tavernier, Chair	Associate Members:
Betty McManus*, Clerk	Pam Shuttle
Dan Buckley*	Ryan Bettez*
Kevin McManus	Peter Berry*
Bob Whittlesey*	Trisha Guditz*

*Current or past professional involvement in affordable housing

2

This is who we are. We are a Selectmen appointed town board.

Our Focus is to provide housing opportunities for families with modest incomes.

17 years of existence

Most of our members are experts in the field of affordable housing, very talented group

Housing Acton's Working Families

State Affordable Housing Goals

■ Chapter 40B

■ Executive Order 418

■ Acton total housing units: 7632

■ State Goal - 10% affordable

■ Acton - 2.07% (158 units)

3

What is Affordable Housing all about in Massachusetts?

1969 law passed Chapter 40B, called "Anti-snob zoning"

Set a goal for every community in the state to achieve 10% of their housing units as Affordable

Provided mechanism for development with Comp Permit, allows for density bonuses in exchange for 25% affordable units. A comp permit supersedes all local zoning requirements. Acton has several of these.

Law had no enforcement mechanism

Jan 2000 Gov. Cellucci issued Executive Order 418 to provide a financial incentive to communities to work more aggressively toward the 10% goal

EO418 requires every community to be certified every year

documenting efforts taken to increase afford. Housing stock. Acton is not yet certified, we expect to be this summer.

Incentive is tied to discretionary state funds, simply stated: no certification? No guarantees for future access to these state funds.

Example: Sewer Loan \$25M

Acton's current count toward the 10% is 158 units or 2.07%

Acton's total housing unit count is 7632

Housing Acton's Working Families

What can current Acton families afford?

■ 2001 Median Income Acton	\$ 95,000
■ 2001 Can buy House at	\$271,743
■ 2001 Median priced home	\$445,000
■ 2001 Needs Income of	\$155,000

4

Let's Measure Acton's affordability

If we were plucked out of the town and had to buy our way back in, could we do it?

Acton's Median income \$95,000

That would buy a \$271,000 house. Seen any of those lately?

To buy the current Median priced home at \$445,000 you need an income of \$155,000

Acton has an acute affordability problem as does most of the state

Housing Acton's Working Families

Real People

83%

**Of ALL town and local school
employees**

Earn LESS than \$50,000

(W-2 wages includes overtime)

5

I asked the town to calculate the number of town and local school employees whose W-2 wages in 2001 were less than \$50,000.

83% of 1050 employees earned less than \$50,000!!!

That means 83% or 875 of our own employees would be income eligible for affordable housing units if that were their total household income.

In many cases, it is.

Housing Acton's Working Families

Real People

Who is Income Eligible?

Starting salaries for Acton:

Teacher	\$33,000
Police officer	\$33,000
Firefighter	\$32,000
Librarian	\$38,000
Town nurse	\$37,000
H-way Laborer	\$32,000

6

Let's talk about real people using our own town and school employees for examples

Here are the starting salaries of some of the people who protect, teach, and serve you

Housing Acton's Working Families

Real People

Who can occupy Acton's affordable units?

Local Preference 70% of Affordable Units:

- Town, school, water district employee
- Adult child or parent of Acton resident
- Employee working in Acton private sector
- Current resident of Acton

7

ACHC has been permitted by the state to give Local Preference to 70% of the affordable units

Here is the criteria we have established (read list)

- Town, school, water district employee
- Adult child or parent of Acton resident
- Employee working in Acton private sector
- Current resident of Acton

These are people who are already vested in the community

Balance of the units available for those wishing to move to our community to take advantage of the same quality of life we enjoy

Housing Acton's Working Families

Towne School Housing Reuse Proposal

- Study finds housing reuse **FEASIBLE**
- Reuse at **NO COST** to the town
- Reuse will generate **NEW** tax revenue
- Use **CONSISTENT** nearby zoning with friendly Comp. Permit
- Minimum space, less than 1/2 acre used

9

Now we come to the UPBEAT part of the presentation

We are very excited to present our proposal for the reuse of the Towne Building.

Based on a Feasibility Study, hot off the press, This Project is Economically Feasible.

Study funded by the Mass. Housing Partnership

Ed Marchant was the consultant who did the study. He is a well known and highly respected consultant in this field with 30 years of experience. Ed presented his findings to members of the BoS, SC, Fincom and ACHC yesterday.

here are the advantages:

No Cost, New tax revenue, consistent with zoning, minimum space impact

Housing Acton's Working Families

Towne School Housing Reuse Proposal

■ 19 Units

■ 4 Studio, 4 1 BR, 9 2 BR, 2 3BR

■ rent range: \$550-\$1500/mo.

■ families at 50-100% of Median income

■ affordable income range: \$31,000-\$74,200

8

Here is the conceptual plan

Read unit configuration, rents, income

All 19 units will count toward the 10% goal, giving us a total of 177 affordable units. This is the case with a rental development using a comp permit.

Acton would go from 2.07% to 2.3%, that is more than a drop in the bucket.

Housing Acton's Working Families

- RFP property to developers
- Town provides long term lease of land (50-99 years)
- Developer secures financing
- All debt obligations are responsibility of developer
- At end of lease, Town can renew

10

Here is a brief description of the steps that are taken after this vote tonight:

RFP will be prepared by the town using MHP guidance to specify exactly what is desired in the housing proposal.

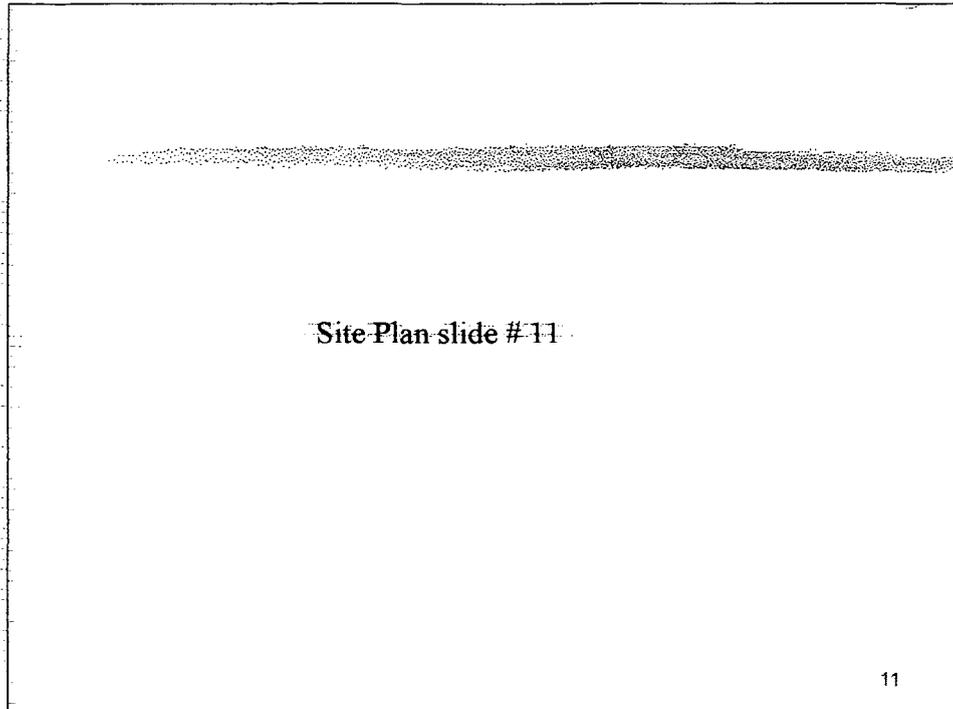
Developers will bid on the proposal

Town will provide a long term lease of the land, the developer will take the building

Developer will secure the needed financing

All debt obligations are responsibility of the developer, not the town

At the termination of the lease, the Town can opt to renew it.



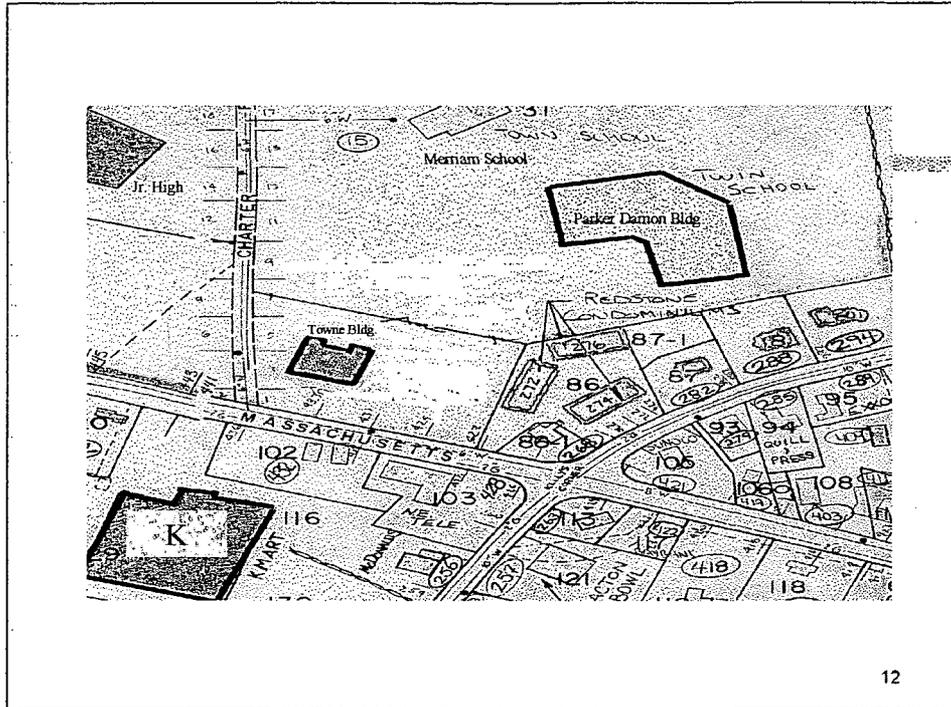
This is the site plan rendering by the architect.

The access to the property is off Rt 111 (new curb cut) with parking on the East side of the building.

The main entrance will be in the front

Private entrances to some of the units on the first floor

Note the placement of a regulation sized soccer field in the remaining open space. NOT that it would make sense to put one there perhaps, but to show the scale of the space available for the schools.



Take a closer look at Towne building and put it in perspective with the surrounding area.

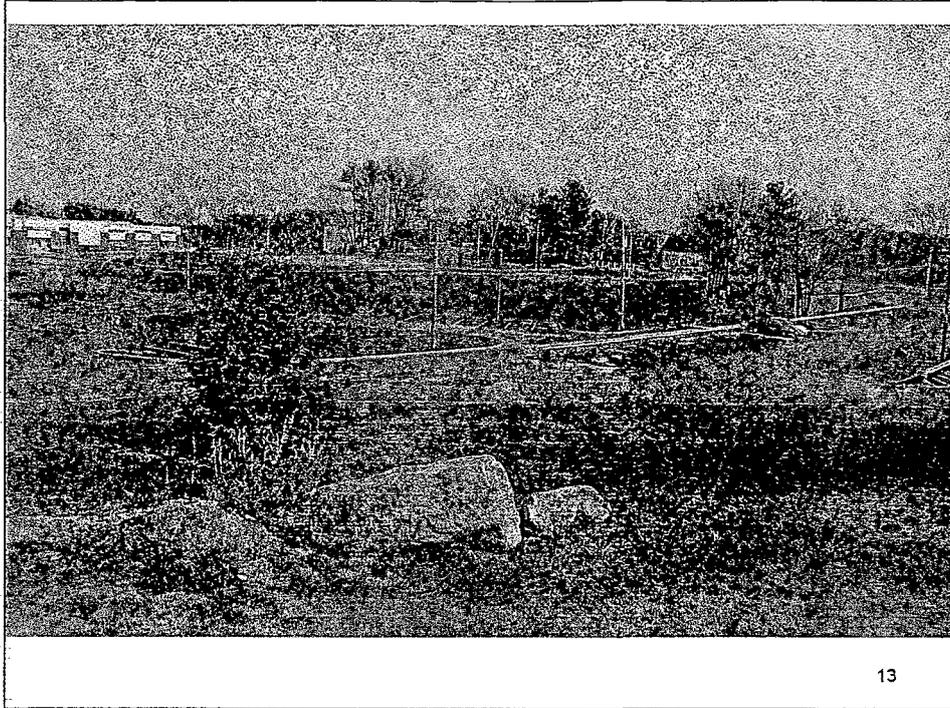
This map is from the Town Atlas. I have erased from it all the pieces of the McCarthy wing (classrooms, cafeteria, gym) and the school library on the side of the Towne Building. These are scheduled to be demolished soon as part of the construction project.

Towne Building is not in the middle of the school campus, it is on the very edge of the school campus, very definitely on Mass. Ave.

Towne Building is closer to K-Mart than it is to any school building on the school campus

We've been told that Multi-family housing doesn't belong near schools
Multi-family housing is already near the schools.

- Redstone Condominiums are 178 feet away from Damon Building
- 3 Single family homes ZONED FOR MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENCES are 150-210 feet away from Damon Building
- Towne School is 480 feet away from the Damon Building at its nearest point



This is a panorama view of the school campus with the new school way on the left and the Towne school way on the right.

These buildings are 500 feet apart.

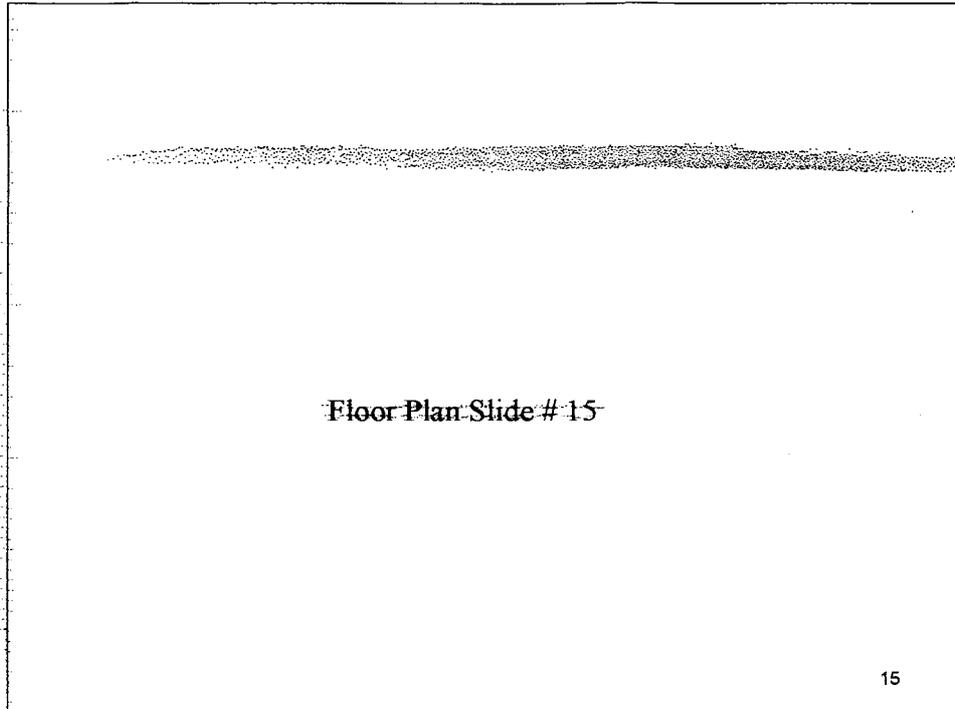
Everything between Towne and the new school is going to be demolished.



Everything you see in this picture will be demolished by the end of the summer.

School bus stacking driveway will be constructed in this space taking up 1/4 acre

This driveway has not yet been constructed but will cut through the current library and run down the length of the current McCarthy wing.



Here is very conceptual design of the 1st floor of the Town Building.

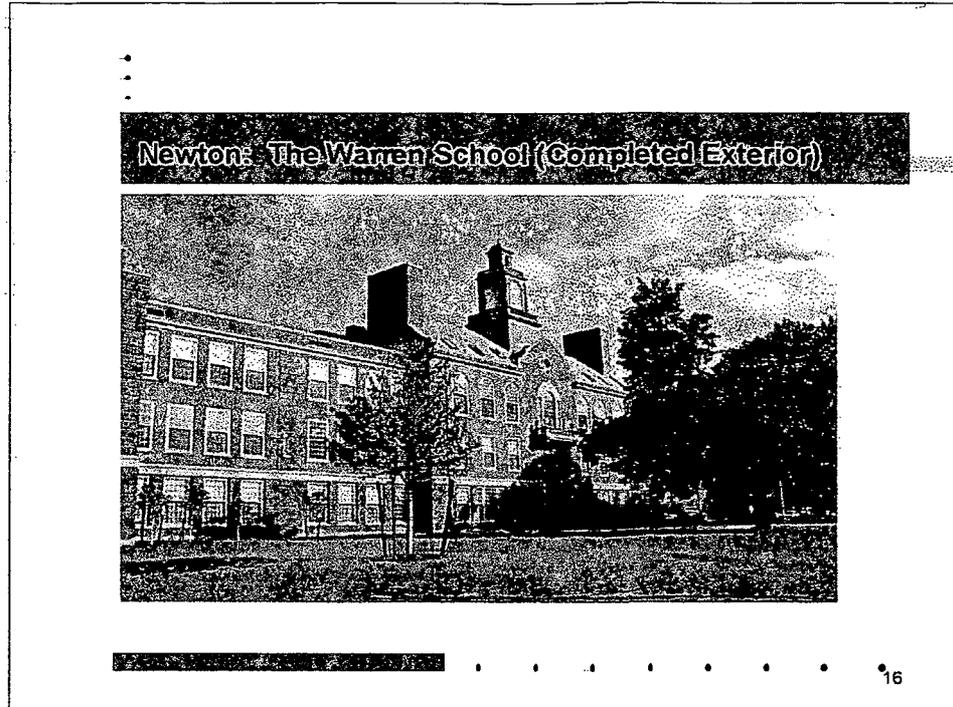
Note 2, 3 bedrooms with private yards and entrances

Square footage varies

Units vary from Studio to 3 BR

No interior rooms are sketched on this.

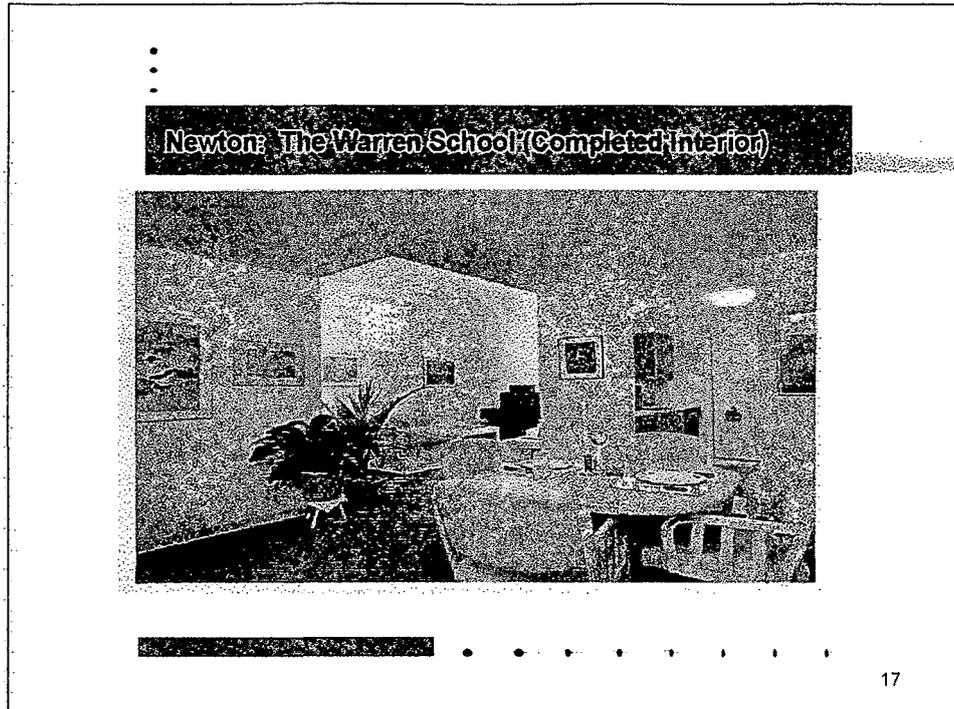
Second floor contains more units for total of 19



I want to just show you 2 similar projects to help you visualize a completed project.

Newton, The Warren School

59 units



The interior

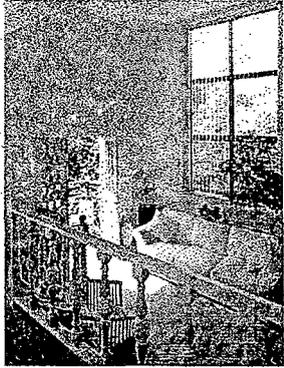
Boston: The Bullfinch School (Completed Exterior)



Boston Bullfinch school

15 units

Boston: The Bullfinch School



Completed Interior

19

The image shows a black and white photograph of a school interior. A person is standing on a balcony or walkway with a railing, looking out a large window. The room appears to be a classroom or a common area. The text 'Completed Interior' is positioned to the right of the photograph. Below the photograph is a horizontal bar with several small dots, likely a navigation or status indicator. The number '19' is located in the bottom right corner of the slide frame.

Interior

Housing Acton's Working Families

It's all about COMMUNITY

Vote NO to demolish Towne School

Say YES to Affordable Housing

20

In the end, *This is all about Community, Our Community*

We have in this housing proposal a tremendous opportunity to make a statement as a community. The eyes of the State are upon us.

This is our first municipal project after 17 years of hard work.

Acton is a special place full of thoughtful people. We have high hopes for the outcome here tonight

We urge you **not** to throw away this community housing opportunity

Vote NO to demolish the Towne School

Say YES to Affordable housing

Subject: FW: recall
Date: Mon, 8 Apr 2002 10:16:15 -0400
Thread-Topic: recall
Thread-Index: AcHcoNZhZzgNry26S++Wx5dPj0kP4wABc4wAAABY5ZAAI/XEAA==
From: "Don Johnson" <djohnson@town.acton.ma.us>
To: "Nancy Tavernier" <tavern@ma.ultranet.com>
Cc: "John Murray" <jmurray@town.acton.ma.us>

Nancy:
Forwarded for your information.

Regards,
Don

—Original Message—

From: Doug Halley
Sent: Friday, April 05, 2002 8:55 AM
To: Don Johnson
Cc: John Murray; Roland Bartl
Subject: RE: recall

The school's share of the sewer costs were assessed in accordance with their avoided costs (i.e if they built a treatment plant on-site). Those avoided costs were calculated by EarthTech and included the Senior High School, the Junior High School, the maintenance garage, the Merriam School and the Twin School. The Towne School was not taken into account in that calculation. Prior to the assessment of the final betterment any construction that occurs (such as Jimmy Fenton's apartment units on Railroad Street) since the estimated betterment will be charged betterments in accordance with their status at the time of the final betterment. Construction that occurs after that date can not be charged a betterment because the full cost of the project would have already been charged. However, the Board could adopt a fee policy for new construction that would mimic a betterment cost and would go to offset O&M. At least that is my understanding.

—Original Message—

From: Don Johnson
Sent: Friday, April 05, 2002 8:40 AM
To: Nancy Tavernier
Cc: John Murray; Doug Halley; Roland Bartl
Subject: RE: recall

Nancy:
Just delet my last response. This question is not symptomatic of the disorder I was describing.

By copy to John, Doug and Roland, I am asking them to put their heads together and respond to your question.

Regards,
Don

—Original Message—

Memo

To: Acton Board of Selectmen
From: Nancy Tavernier
CC: ACHC
Date: 04/25/02
Re: Towne Building parcel delineation

Members of the ACHC met today to begin the process of putting together all the details for the RFP that will be put forth for the housing development of the Towne Building.

This memo covers one of the outstanding issues for the Town, the detailed definition of the parcel required for the land, building, and parking area. We assume a deed will be prepared by the Town to finalize the vote taken in April 2001 that transferred the Towne School building and land to the Board of Selectmen.

These are the voted recommendations by ACHC:

1. ACHC voted to recommend to the Board of Selectmen parcel delineation as originally proposed by OMR in the Reuse Investigation from June 2001 be established as the land area required for the proposal. (see attached) This is listed in the report as the Zoning District R-A, Use: Housing. This same configuration was used in the MHP feasibility study and shows the needed parking to be located on the East side of the building accessed from a curb cut on Rt. 111. Here are the specifics of our recommendation:
 - Boundary on south and west to be to edge of ROW of Rt. 111 and Charter Rd.
 - Curb cut from Rt. 111 relocated slightly west of that shown on plan to be in flat area. This would necessitate the moving of the existing hydrant.

- Parking located to the east of the building in an area that uses approximately 90 feet of space from the edge of the building.
 - That the rear yard setback be a minimum of 40 feet.
2. The ACHC voted to recommend that the Town Manager contract with an engineering firm to provide a survey of the parcel and that the funding for this task come from the New View Affordable Housing Gift Fund.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me (978) 263-9611.



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Carroll Spinney, who plays Big Bird on "Sesame Street," points to a photo of himself in his feathered persona.

5/19/91

Birds of a feather

The man behind the Big Bird puppet

By Judie Glave
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Carroll Spinney for years has played one of television's most popular characters, but most people have never heard of him.

That doesn't bother Spinney. "I love it," he says convincingly.

Carroll who? Try Big Bird, Spinney's alter ego.

Spinney is the puppeteer who was hand-picked by the late Jim Henson, the creator of the Muppets, to play Sesame Street's lovable, resident mensch Big Bird and the irascible Oscar the Grouch. He decided early on that the bird, not the man, was going to be the star.

For years Spinney refused to be photographed at all, and he still bans shots showing him getting into or out of costume.

"It's a delicate situation because the children think of him as a real bird," he says. "That's something we hadn't planned on."

Spinney, 57, early on turned down chances to do the talk show circuit with Oscar. Showing the puppeteer as well as the puppet would have increased his fame and padded his checkbook, "but I would have lost something, too," Spinney says.

Like the wonder in children's faces when they look at Bird (his nickname, for the uninitiated), the love packed inside letters that come from around the

BIG BIRD, PAGE 7C

Acton native gets to ruffle Big Bird's feathers

BIG BIRD, FROM 8C

world, the anonymity to pull off the occasional bodacious prank.

Once the unfeathered Spinney was in a department store when he spotted a mother and daughter looking at talking Big Bird dolls. Hearing the child's name, Spinney crouched down and said in Big Bird's familiar falsetto:

"Hello, Elizabeth. Gee, that's a pretty red dress. It's snowing out, isn't it?"

The mother was dumbfounded, wondering how the doll knew the name, the dress color and the weather, Spinney says. But the woman, daughter in tow, just turned and walked away.

"You mean after all that you're not even going to buy the thing!" he yelled after her.

Spinney never did tell the woman who he was. And, looking at him, she would never have guessed.

Lean and wiry, with a thatch of white hair, cropped beard and rim mustache, Spinney is considerably shorter at 5-feet-10 than Big Bird, who stands 8-feet-2 from tip to toe. He bears a striking resemblance to his mentor, Henson.

His normal voice is discernibly lower than Big Bird's and infinitely more cultured than Oscar's.

He lives with his second wife, Debra, on several wooded acres in northeast Connecticut. He won't say where "only because I've actually had people drive into the yard, blow the horn and say, 'Do he voice.'"

"Yeah, get outta heeeeeeere," he says, slipping into Oscar.

Spinney spends part of his free time making tapes for Big Bird toys and doing voice-overs for bird appearances in Ice Capade-type road shows, which he refuses to see. "As a puppeteer it goes against everything I do," he says. The Big Bird in the show moves like Godzilla.

Not so with his own feathered arb, which is half costume and half puppet. Big Bird's head — all ½ pounds worth — is actually Spinney's right arm held "as straight as possible" over his head. He monitors Big Bird's movements via a 1½-inch television set strapped to his chest.

Spinney was bitten by the puppeteering bug as a youngster.

Along with his mother, he credits, of all people, F. Lee Bailey's mom.

She ran a day care school in their hometown of Acton, Mass. It was there that Spinney, a childhood playmate of the noted trial lawyer, saw his first puppet production.

He made his debut at age 8 in the family barn with a homemade monkey and snake, earning the princely sum of 36 cents. Spinney put himself through art school doing birthday parties and lodge shows, all the while planning a career drawing comic strips or books.

"I know and love the bird. I like the little guy's personality. I kind of think of him as, well, as a kid of mine."

CAROLL SPINNEY
"BIG BIRD"

"I didn't know that puppets would take over," he says. In 1960 while still in school, he landed a job on the "Judy and Goggle" puppet show, a summer replacement series at a local television station in Boston. His next stint was a nine-year run on the local "Bozo the Clown" show.

In 1969, Henson was scouting for someone to play Big Bird. He showed up at Spinney's outdoor animated light show and a friendship was born.

Henson died just over a year ago of aggravated pneumonia. "There's a vacuum there that is just never going to be filled," Spinney says.

Big Bird originally played "the village idiot on the show" because when Spinney asked Henson what kind of character he was, the Muppet maker described him as a Goofy-like sidekick.

Then one script gave him the real clue: Big Bird threw a tantrum because he wanted to go to day care with the rest of the kids. "From then on I suggested we play him as a kid."

As for the cantankerous Oscar, Spinney says he was having trouble deciding what voice to bestow

on the trash can troublemaker. Enter one cigar-chomping, vulgarity-spewing New York cabbie.

"I was going to meet Jim to do a run through on Oscar for the first time. I was supposed to have a voice ready and still couldn't decide when I got into a cab and the driver said, 'Where to, Mac?'" Spinney says in Oscar's whiny, distinctly New Yawk accent.

"And he proceeded to talk about (former Mayor John) Lindsay with a lot of 'f' words thrown in and how he was ruining the city — and I just kept saying to myself, 'Where to, Mac? Where to, Mac?,' and I realized that sounded just right."

Though Oscar's fun, Spinney confesses, "I like the bird better."

"I know and love the bird. I like the little guy's personality. I kind of think of him as, well, as a kid of mine."

He says that realization came to him years ago when the costume was vandalized during a performance at Georgia Tech.

"He was on a makeshift rack when I went to lunch and all of sudden I saw these ROTC boys and girls wearing their uniforms and in their officer hats each of them had a yellow feather," Spinney recalls.

He ran back to the dressing area only to find the bird lying on the floor, an eyeball hanging limp and an 18-inch circle of feathers ripped away.

"I ran out of the building and for about two minutes fell on the grass in absolute hysteria. ... It was like seeing your kid attacked. I never knew how I felt about him until I saw him lying there in the dirt. That really defined my feeling about him. He's my kid."

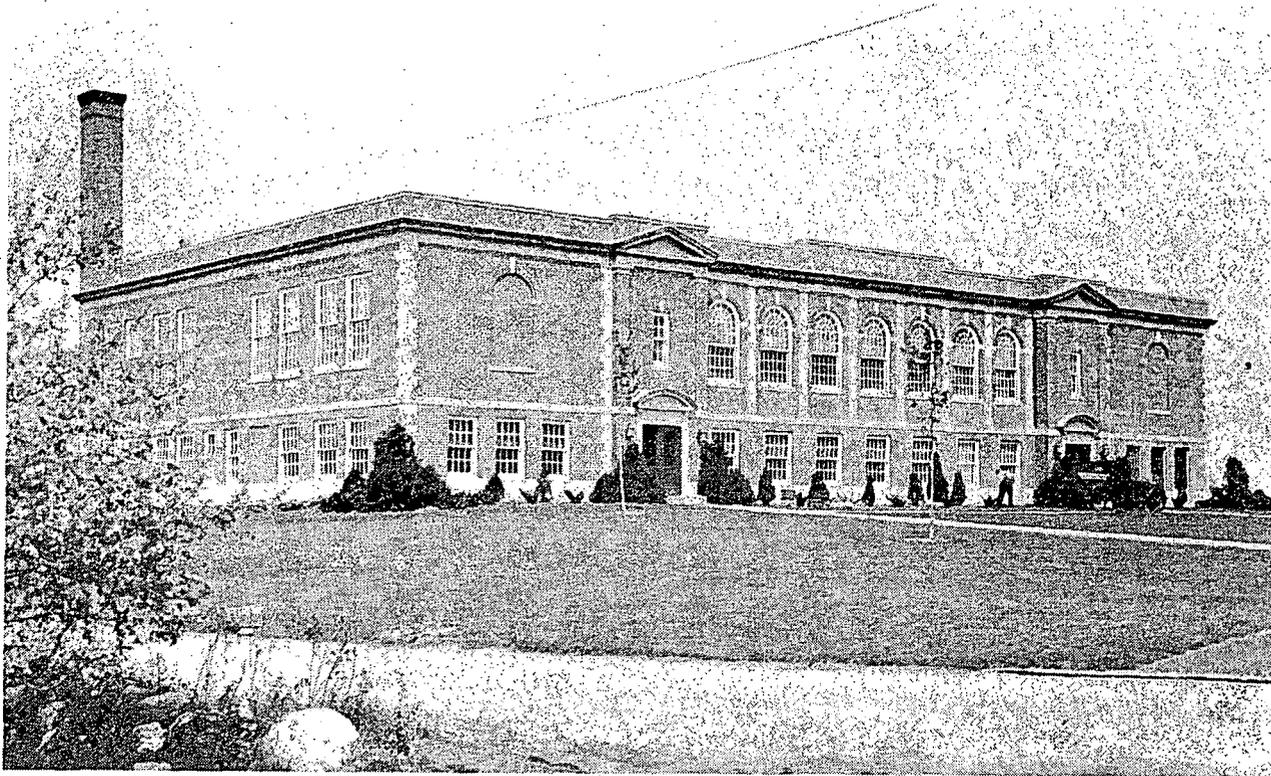
And after two decades, Spinney has no intention of moving on.

"I've been asked before are you tired of it? Do you want to go on and do other things and I say, 'Would you want to stop being Mickey Mouse?'"

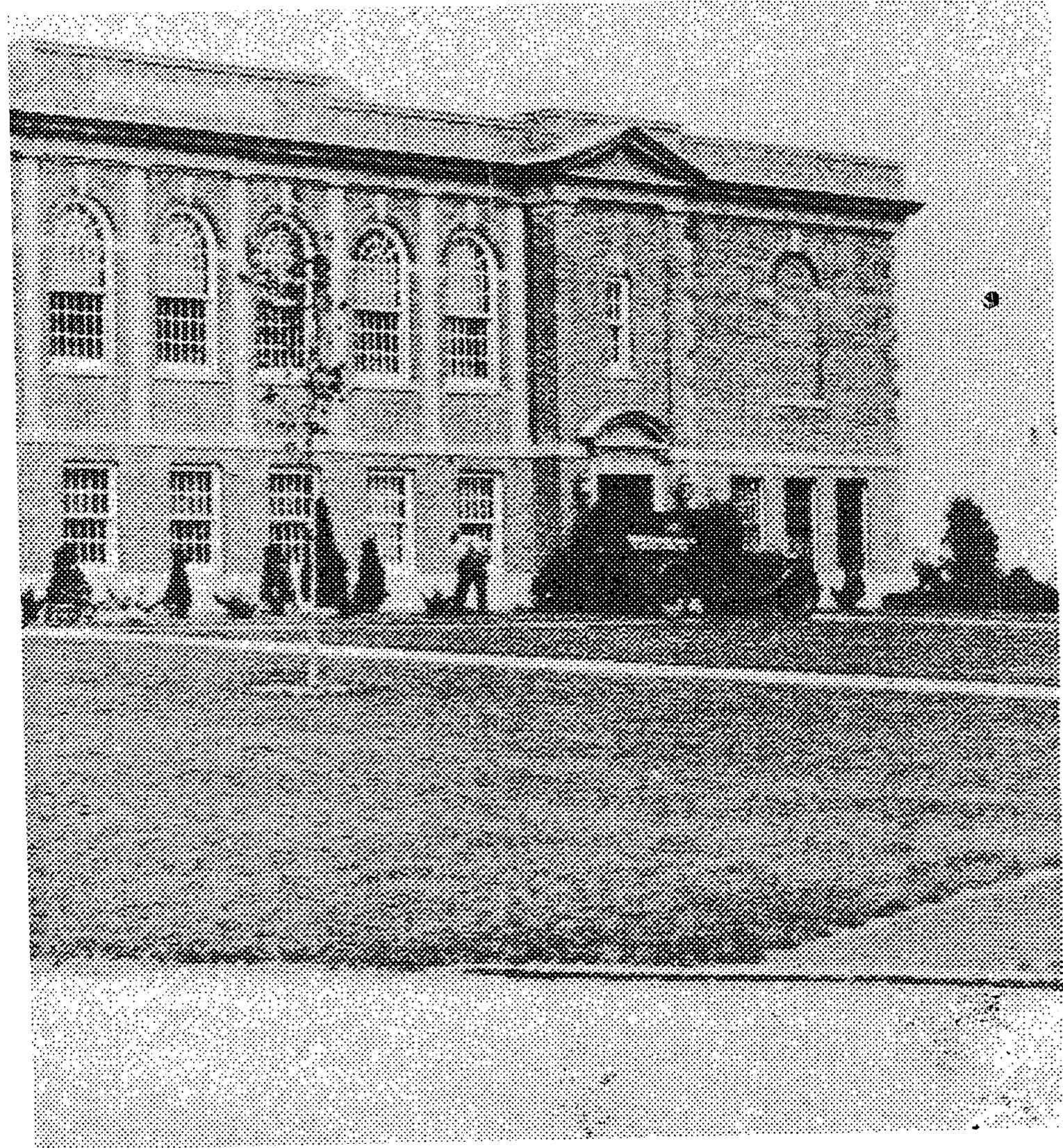
AHS

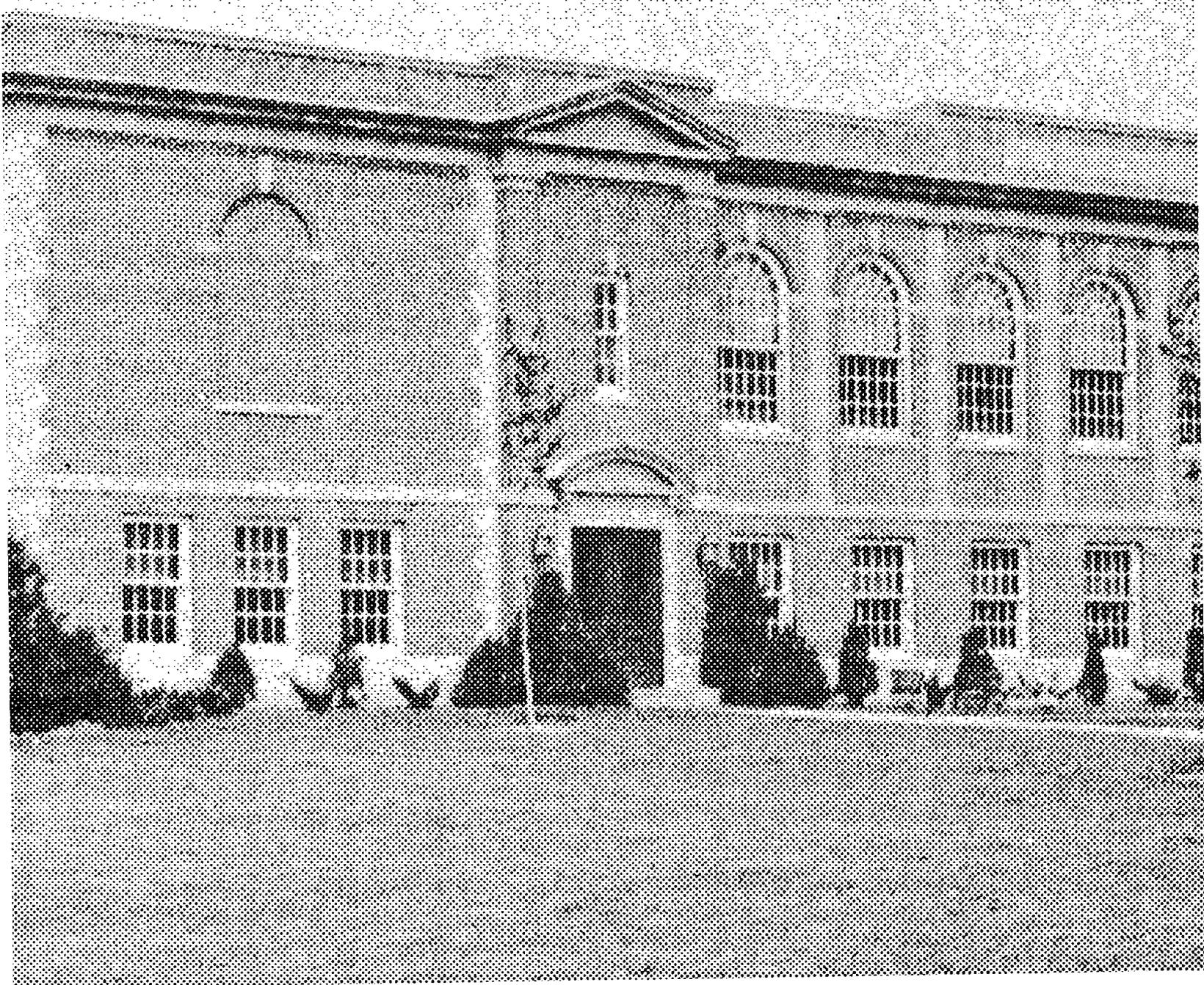
PC 83, 1, 51

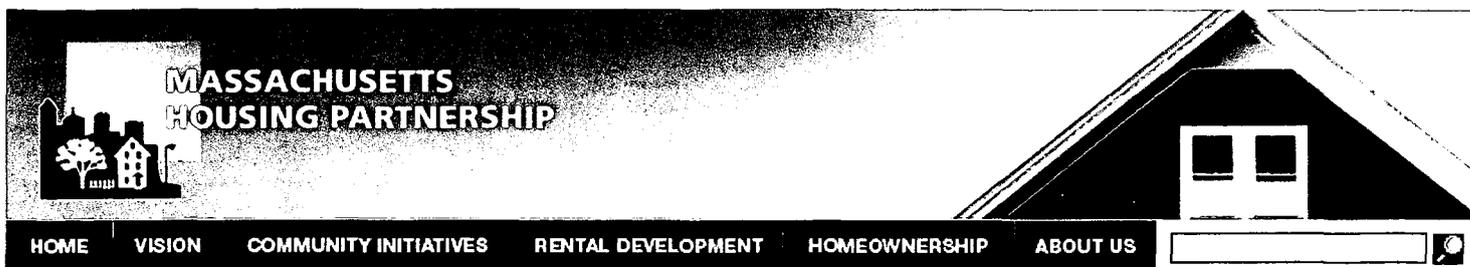
HIGH SCHOOL, ACTON, MASS.



81031







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MHP News

Lessons Learned: How Acton saved historic school from bulldozer

Memories of former high school will live on; building will be transformed into rental housing

February 2, 2007

BOSTON --- In the coming months, residents of Acton will no doubt notice that construction workers have started the job of turning the old high school into affordable housing. But what should not be forgotten is all the hard work put in by the Acton Community Housing Corporation (ACHC) to get this project off the ground.

Since 2001, ACHC worked alongside town leaders, community members, and developers, persevering in its vision to create affordable housing in Acton. In December 2006, the town signed a lease with Common Ground Development Corporation, marking the beginning of the final chapter in the school's long road to redevelopment.

The effort began as a fight to save the historic school from demolition. Built in 1925 as Acton's first high school, the Towne School could not compete with state-of-the-art classrooms that were built on adjacent lots, and it eventually closed. But when the school committee proposed the demolition of the school to make room for a playground, community members spurred by historic preservationists voiced their opposition by voting to return the property to the town.

Gaining public support

At this point, selectmen approached ACHC in hopes that they would find a way to redevelop the school as affordable housing. They, in turn, approached the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) for guidance and support.

MHP's Community Housing Initiatives team, led by director Rita Farrell, hired consultants and performed feasibility analyses which concluded that the school site would be amenable for affordable housing.

Armed with these results and with Farrell's support, Nancy Tavernier, president of ACHC, faced her opponents at a second town meeting in April 2002, where a citizen petition had called for another vote in favor of the school's demolition. Tavernier let the facts speak for themselves.

"A town salary chart revealed that if our employees had their salaries as their sole household income, 85 percent of them would be eligible for affordable housing," Tavernier recalls. "You could hear a pin drop when I said that."

Preparing for development

Once again, Acton community members voted against demolition of the school, clearing the way for ACHC and MHP to proceed with affordable housing plans. For the next three years, MHP worked closely with ACHC, providing support when needed, including funding for environmental studies, help to develop a financial plan, and selection of a developer for the effort.

When lease negotiations with a Cambridge non-profit fell through in 2005, ACHC members refused to give up. They stood their ground and worked with the town to reconfigure the lease details, and



A determined local group in Acton convinced voters to save the old high school and turn it into 17 units of rental housing.

then submitted another request for proposals from developers.

In 2006, Acton began negotiations with Common Ground Development Corporation to redevelop the school into affordable housing. With a long-term lease now signed, Common Ground will lead the development through the final stage of this long journey.

"This is an example of what towns can accomplish when they have the will to do housing," Farrell said. "Especially because this was ACHC's first attempt to develop rental housing, their perseverance and commitment were key to getting it done."

An experienced developer

Common Ground will redevelop the historic Towne School into 17 units of mixed income affordable housing. The effort is located within walking distance to downtown services, retail establishments, schools, and the commuter rail, and 70 percent of the units will be reserved for Acton residents.

In addition, no less than 40 percent of the units will be affordable to residents earning 60 percent of the area median income, which is \$50,460 for a household of four. At least 20 percent of the units will be affordable to households earning 50 percent of the area median income, which in Acton is \$42,050 for a household of four.

This is not the first time that Common Ground develops affordable housing on town-owned land. In 2005, Common Ground signed a long-term lease with Westford to develop 15 units of affordable housing.

In the Westford effort, MHP provided Common Ground with \$1.3 million in long-term first-mortgage financing and another \$750,000 in zero-interest deferred payment second-mortgage financing. To read more about this effort, [click here](#).

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About MHP: MHP is a quasi-public state agency that provides permanent financing for affordable rental housing, with loans ranging from \$250,000 to \$15 million. MHP uses private bank funds to finance affordable housing due to a 1990 state law that requires banks that purchase other banks to make funds available to MHP. Since 1990, MHP has provided over \$525 million in permanent loans for the financing of 13,500 units of rental housing. In addition to financing, MHP helps cities and towns initiate and develop affordable housing. It also provides homeownership opportunities through the SoftSecond Loan Program, a mortgage program for low and moderate-income first-time homebuyers.

About CHI: MHP's Community Housing Initiatives team (CHI) supports communities, local officials, local housing authorities and non-profit organizations in their efforts to create affordable housing for low and moderate-income families. It does this in two ways: It provides broad-based support through workshops and publications, and it provides direct staff and financial support through specific programs such as the 40B technical assistance program, non-profit capacity grants, and targeted community programs.