

From: [David Clough](#)
To: [Dean Charter](#)
Cc: [Roland Bartl](#); [Jennifer Friedman](#); [Robert Craig](#); [Doug Halley](#); [Finance Committee](#); [Doug Tindal](#); [Community Preservation Committee](#)
Subject: RE: Windsor Building project
Date: Tuesday, February 14, 2012 4:10:58 AM
Attachments: [2012 BOS CPC Priorities.doc](#)

Dean,

I have to agree with Doug. Until we assess the properties we have and come up with a plan, I think we should hold off on any more improvements and “meeting space” possibilities. While I think the project at the Red Building next to Town Hall is marginally valuable, the Windsor Building is fine as it is for how it is being used. I can think of many other uses that were not mentioned in your email, and I think there are many other issues that if resolved would make a bigger impact on West Acton than improving this building. For instance, having the HDC approve a sign bylaw that the town and merchants can live with is high on the list.

Even if we agree on the use, this project is a “nice to have” in my opinion. Attached you’ll find the “priorities” set by the BOS back in November. I think there has been confusion about these. I confirmed with the Town Manager that the BOS did not recommend these projects, but was simply ranking those that the CPC had received as of that date . You’ll see the Windsor project was last. I think we need to hold off on things that are not required, given the current economic conditions and near term outlook.

Sincerely,

- Dave Clough

From: Doug Tindal [mailto:doug_tindal@hotmail.com]
Sent: Friday, February 10, 2012 7:20 PM
To: Dean Charter; Community Preservation Committee
Cc: Roland Bartl; jfriedman@acton-ma.gov; rcraig@acton-ma.gov; dhalley@acton-ma.gov; Steve Noone; FinCom
Subject: RE: Windsor Building project

Dean, I commend you for your advocacy on behalf of the former West Acton Fire Station. As the Properties Director it would seem to be your job to pursue whatever avenues you can to preserve and defend the town-owned assets which are in your charge.

As you know, I am a firm advocate for the re-use of this building. Unfortunately, that said, I must say that I would oppose the expenditure of yet another \$50,000 on this empty building.

When the future of the Station came up last year I was very supportive of the idea that we should not engage in “demolition by neglect” even though there was no financially responsible community organization standing ready to step up and claim the building. Accordingly, there was an informal agreement that a budget made up of preservation maintenance items for a cost of around \$50k to 80k would be acceptable. This was intended to recognize that the building was in good, sound condition as it stood and required no extraordinary work for its preservation. So, the budget would be for totally repainting and caulking the building, making any strictly necessary roof repairs, and performing light carpentry where needed due to deterioration.

The scope of that project was subsequently increased to the point where historically correct fire truck entry doors were installed to turn-of-the-century fire station carpentry standards, and in the process somehow about \$125,000 was expended on what was supposed to be a mothballing exercise. Your

current proposal would therefore bring the total to over \$175,000 spent on a building for which no user has been identified.

Your initial proposal had been for over \$600,000 for a total refit. Those of us who opposed so much spending on the building were perfectly willing to see the building preserved against the day that a user could be found, and we were perfectly prepared to become advocates for any capital costs needed to make the building work once a responsible user was identified and a deal made for their use and occupancy.

The problem was in the past and is still today that no financially responsible organization has stepped forward, and there is consequently no one on the scene prepared or able to take up the role of custodian for this historic asset.

In the absence of a user with a clear set of facility requirements, we have no idea what needs to be done to the building to make it workable.

For example, if a user were identified which would use the building year round for offices and meeting space, the new fire doors, which apparently cost us tens of thousands of dollars would be redundant, since they would be useless to that purpose. If we were to put in air conditioning with all of its ductwork and distribution appliances, we might find that the future user does not need to be in operation in the Summer. If a user is identified who requires washrooms of a particular kind and placement, everything you are proposing to install by way of new plumbing could be ripped out later, since we have way of knowing how that user would configure his space. Without stretching to all conceivable possibilities, you can see that money spent now on the interior is very much in harm's way.

As for the conversion of the building into essentially a public washroom in service of the Farmers' Market, I can only point out that there are cheaper ways to meet that requirement (Porta Potties, for example), and these ways do not call upon the taxpayer to fund comfort stations for private enterprises which are not sharing their profits with the Town. We have already gone the extra mile in providing the Market operators with the use of one of our public streets, with the use of our public parking which would have otherwise served the tax-paying WAV merchants, and the provision of our fire, police, and other resources in order to preserve public order while they are in business on our property. To suggest that we should now provide them with a historic building for a restroom is really reaching too far.

All of this is occurring at a time when we are dealing with very tight budgets. We are still struggling with a nationwide Recession, and the Commonwealth's budgets have been cut repeatedly while our rainy day funds have been depleted. For the last three years the town has been forced to engage in deficit spending and to make up the differences by spending our reserves. Both the Town and the Schools have been asked to find hundreds of thousands of dollars in cuts to our proposed operating budgets in public services and education in order to prevent massive restructuring in the next few years. If we do not substantially reduce expenses and improve our revenues, our town is facing shortfalls totally well over \$13,000,000 in the next three fiscal years. There is little dispute on these points, and one can easily look up the red in our ALG Spreadsheets.

In this setting, spending another \$50,000 on this building is certainly inappropriate. The day will come when we should reinvest in this nifty town asset. It just isn't now.

Thank you, Doug

From: dcharter@acton-ma.gov
To: cpc@acton-ma.gov
CC: rbartl@acton-ma.gov; jfriedman@acton-ma.gov; rcraig@acton-ma.gov; dhalley@acton-ma.gov; snoone@lutco.com; Doug_Tindal@hotmail.com
Date: Fri, 10 Feb 2012 18:01:12 -0500
Subject: Windsor Building project

Roland has suggested that I provide some clarification on the Windsor Building project, which has been

a bit of a moving target recently.

Based on feedback from the CPC and others, I have revised the request for funds for interior renovations downward from \$225,000 to \$50,000. This lower figure will enable us to fix up the area on the ground floor that had been used for fire apparatus, and provide a new HP accessible restroom, janitor closet with mop sink, and a water source and counter. The degree of finish on the ground floor will be to the level of "street fair events"; that is, it will look like a garage or a fire station apparatus area. It will be excellent space for activities such as hands on workshops (like the window restoration workshop we co-sponsored with the HDC), book sales, Winter Farmer's Markets, Octoberfest, and similar events. Since we will not be building a ramp to a HP entrance on the side under this scaled down proposal, access will be through the new front doors. This will work fine for the events listed above, but would not be suitable for public meetings, as the doors are large and open directly into the meeting space. Generally, the operation would be to turn off the heat except into the restroom for these events, and leave one or more doors open to the street during the event. There would not be any air conditioning, and the upper floor would continue to be used for records storage, as it is now.

The new restroom would be a great addition in that it would provide sanitary facilities and hot wash water for vendors and the public for events such as the Farmer's Market on those occasions where these amenities are not provided elsewhere. For example, the West Acton Citizens' Library has been opening on market days, but there is no funding for employees, so the Trustees and the Director volunteer their time to open the library, allowing the use of that restroom. The fall back would be to allow public access to the restroom on the ground floor of the West Acton Fire Station, which is somewhat remote, and there are safety concerns with folks getting underfoot during emergency responses. Under either scenario Town employees are cleaning the restroom and the town is providing supplies already. If all this came to fruition and there was a regular event every week that used the Windsor Building, we would work out some sort of license agreement to cover access, security, liability, and maintenance. This is a much better solution for all involved than bringing in portable units for every event.

The exterior work has greatly improved the neighborhood and is a credit to the Town. However, without the interior work to provide a purpose for the building it is just a movie set. Much has been made in the 20/20 process and other discussions about the importance of invigorating West Acton Village. This is a very positive step in that direction, providing a public venue in a historic setting and comparatively low cost. As the momentum increases in West Acton Village other opportunities for events will appear.