

MEMO

West Pawlet Village Center Master Plan

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**
Pot Luck Dinner Meeting 3 - Corner Store
February 11, 2023 6:00pm - 9:00pm WPV Firehouse



Introduction:

At the beginning of the Pot Luck Dinner, a short presentation was given to outline the background of the Village Master Plan project, goals and schedule. The presentation then reviewed some of the initial input collected from the Community Survey and Rail Trail User Survey before comparing options for new construction vs. renovation of an existing building for a potential store. The presentation concluded with case studies of how neighborhood general stores have been revived in several Vermont communities using a non-profit community-supported model. A discussion followed on the options available and what the community wanted. A copy of the discussion slides was uploaded to the project webpage.

Discussion Notes:

- There are many advantages to renovating an existing space over constructing something new, especially for historic structures where there are often additional grants to preserve the community.
- Preservation Trust of Vermont has many resources, educational tools and support it can provide to assist us in this effort. They have offered to come to town when we are ready to discuss ideas.
- Should reach out to former Dutchies owners Will and Eric to learn more about the profitability of their old store and what we can learn about it.
 - Second Time Around - Consignment shop
- **Celery Compound (former Fish & Game building)** would be a good candidate location for a store, however it is in private ownership by Bruce, who likely wouldn't want to sell the property to a non-profit. He deserves credit for fixing that building up as much as he has.
 - Community-supported model using a non-profit requires ownership of the building, the non-profit then leases the space to an operator who runs the store.
 - What is the plan for the Celery Compound building? They renovated to create new apartments upstairs and currently use the downstairs for a variety of flex space programming.
- **Former Antiques Building.** Also owned by Bruce, who has plans to renovate this building to create small shop / co-op space and open up west side with windows and porch toward Rail Trail.
 - Unsure if Bruce would be open to selling this structure to a non-profit to create a store.
 - Great location, and historic building, however building is very small, space would be limited especially after adding any restrooms, but still has potential.
- **Railroad Freight Shed.** 15 years ago spoke with the woman who owned the Railroad Freight building about buying it. Idea was to buy and move it. Believe we were quoted around \$50,000 to move the building, however that price included taking down many electrical lines which crossed the road in order to transport structure.
 - Moving shed across the street to town-owned property would be less effort. Should reach out to adjacent property owners (Duquette) about plans for small building, inquire about potential of incorporating shed there, with parking on wastewater treatment side, but leaving corner for greenspace, outdoor seating.

- If town still needed Dutchies land for wastewater treatment solution, could do a lot line adjustment to gain space they need, sell off remainder of Dutchies lot.
- There may be potential for Railroad Freight building to remain where it is, on State lands. Although ownership of structure is still in limbo due to bankruptcy, State has indicated that if the building was converted into a purpose which supported the Rail Trail, they might be able to entertain option where it could be left where it currently stands. State is looking into this option.
- Historic significance of railroad building may be compromised since the rafter tails and roof overhang were sawn off, that was a defining characteristic of the building.
- Railroad shed is in bankruptcy proceedings. Is it feasible that we could talk to them about donating the building to us, as a way to offset any debts they might have?
- **Why do we want a Store? How should it be organized?** We don't want a store just to get milk. It was also a gathering space, place to see your neighbors, an economic driver.
 - Dutchies was missed. A lot of money was raised to rebuild that store but it didn't happen.
 - Source of community pride, similar to what Mettawee Makers tried to do.
 - West Pawlet is very special, a unique place. We have a lot of full-time residents that other towns do not have. Many of us have lived here for years, it is a lived-in community. Need to keep West Pawlet funky.
 - Unique, creative people in this community. If we create a new local market, it should reflect the ethos of community, not just in visual character but the organizational structure of it.
 - On a spectrum of options from having a developer come in and build something for us, to renovating a space ourselves and lease it to a local co-op, where do we want to aim?
 - Probably something in between. We fundraise to get a space established, then work to find an operator for the store. Finding a co-op to come in may be difficult, might require an incentive.
 - Would utilizing a co-op create difficulty for out of owners and tourists, would they be able to buy things at the store if they weren't members?
 - Unsure if community is hardcore enough to take on that challenge of doing a co-op on top of everything else.
 - If we don't step up and do this, it is not going to happen.
 - Store should provide a place for a locals Farmer's Market.
 - Need to have someone look at the economics of how this might work, the right size of store, etc. What is the data that we need to understand how this could work?
 - Preservation Trust of Vermont may have data on this, they have hosted a few local stores, lease to the operators.
 - Rupert store is a great example of using a non-profit. They had good community support, and we could do the same here. But I think it is very important that whatever non-profit structure we set up here to be very inclusive. Include a wide variety or cross section of local members who oversee the organization, not just a few. That will help to build community support.
 - Make leadership flexible, allow turnover, be inclusive.
 - Non-profit charter should not be limited to only the store, but the greater economic benefit of the village. Charter should have broader mission to take on other roles / missions as well, will help to appeal to more interests in fundraising.
 - Co-op model like Hunger Mountain is currently running as many separate programs, would be better as a buyer club all under one umbrella.
 - Need to define a non-profit vision that many people can get interested in for this to be successful, to get people excited.

- Might be good to have Newmont Slate owners on board with this effort to be involved in local community revitalization, perhaps other higher-profile business groups such as Industrial Park, Telescope, Saint-Gobain to increase expertise and reach.
- Need to research more on the financials side of this, what are the metrics? Preservation Trust of Vermont and other non-profit community efforts should be able to give us data, other store owners to get advice on establishing this group.
- Preservation Trust of Vermont offers educational training, workshops, retreats oaths specific topic.
- **What should the store include?** Should the space also accommodate local community events?
 - Firehouse provides space for many different community events, however limited to smaller meeting room in winter when they can't leave their equipment outside. In those times don't have space for a larger event.
 - Mach's and Williams stores are doing fantastic business, but are also on major roads. Cater to both locals and tourists, though prices are very high sometimes.
 - There is a paradox - the tourists won't really like it if we make something "touristy" to appeal to them. They want authentic local Vermont. If we make something truly for the local population, the tourists will love it also.
 - Need the store to be inclusive. There are many different people in this area from many backgrounds. Need to make sure we address their needs, and also make sure they have a voice in this discussion.
 - There is a sort of "town & gown" division in the community, like in many rural Vermont towns, between different demographics. Need to recognize that.
- **Biking / Rail Trail.** Look at development in Poultney. A major philanthropist has been funding work there, biking events with Slate Valley Trails and putting big money into it as an event. They are very motivated by anything in biking culture, could be an opportunity to build upon this idea and expand it for tourism and economic development.
 - Trans has done a good job with fixing up the trail. Should there be a bike rental aspect to the store?
 - It has been suggested that a bike map be created for this area which includes the Rail Trail and how to get to off-shoot destinations such as Consider Bardwell and Merck Mountain, etc.
- **Other Building Locations.** Should look at the environmental report done for the Industrial Park (Hookery) - this could be an appendix to the Master Plan.
- **Economic Development.** Could investigate potential of negotiating internet service bought on a bulk basis / bulk purchase for everyone in the village, negotiate a better price.
- **Next Steps.** Once pot-luck dinner meetings are concluded, draft master Plan will be developed with direction from committee and presented to the community. Community will have opportunity to review and provide input if it aligns with their vision, what might be added, etc. Based on that feedback, draft will be revised before finalization.
 - Where to hold presentation / meeting? Firehouse meeting room may not be large enough, main garage bays can't be opened until April.
 - Could hold presentation at Mettawee School, much larger capacity and relatively close. Regrowth Planning to contact school about arranging this.

Reminder next meeting February 23rd to discuss the Firehouse and Community Events.

[** END MEETING 8:30pm**]

Written comments collected via the online comment form to date copied below:

- “I am concerned that none of the proposed intersection plans addresses the issue of a badly needed crosswalk in front of the post office” [submitted January 16]
- “Thank you for your presentation last night (1/26). Lots of food for thought. - Can Habitat for Humanity work with some village residences in revitalizing their buildings? I know they do work with revitalization projects for towns. Any plans for dialogue with town people outside of the Master Plan presentations? - Bruce's presentation for the small white building for trail - if this is for public use, is he able to get any grant money to contribute to the project? - Start "what's happening in WP Village" articles - newspapers, social media to attract people who might want to visit and invest in the town - buy property, start a business, etc. - I mentioned my restored slate side walk at 2724 Rt. 153 - could it be possible to restore the sidewalks down the hill to town? (can we convince Frank to at least clean the walkway?) The road is treacherous to even walk to P.O. - trucks and cars fly over that hill. Restored sidewalks that are slate - up to residences? - I think reconfiguring the traffic circle area as presented, and Bruce's enhancement to his little building will start to attract people to visit the town - having places for them to stop and visit - like a store, gallery, event would be great. Good to identify Pop-Up event space for craft fair, food fair, farmers market fair combined with music would be a boost. Thank you!” [submitted January 27]