

South Hero Meeting House Committee Town Report July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021

The Committee was first formed in January, 2019, to apply for and do the work funded through an initial planning grant to determine the structural integrity of the Meeting House as well as to gather community input regarding the desire to renovate the building and potential uses. The Community Survey results showed strong support for renovating the building for year-round use both for Granny's Attic as well as a wide range of other potential community activities such as a winter farmer's market, co-working space for people seeking shared office space to augment working from home, recreational activities, theatre, and meeting space for community organizations. The results of this survey, and Engineering Venture's Structural Integrity report, were published in October 2019 on the Town Website and reported on in public meetings.

A second Planning Grant was received in mid-2020 to cover the cost of hiring a firm specializing in historical architectural renovation to project the costs of bringing the building up to code as well as weatherization and stabilization. As a result of an RFP, the St. Albans firm of Arnold & Scangas has been hired to develop plans and costs to make this possible. Their final report will be received in February 2022.

In FY21, groundwork was laid to begin fundraising for the Meeting House renovation. This included establishing a donor database to assist with fundraising as well as a website for the South Hero Meeting House (www.southheromeetinghouse.org). Discussion also began about establishing a separate 501 (c) 3 non-profit to facilitate fundraising, especially from private foundations. This legal work is in process, with the group identifying the best people to act as officers of a Foundation formed to support the Meeting House renovation in the short term and longer term work creating community. Grant sources have been identified but most submissions were held until the full report is available from the firm hired to prepare a renovation budget. The first fundraising letter has been well-received, resulting in almost \$30,000 in contributions to date.

A young professional artist, who chose to shelter in place with her parents in South Hero, joined the Committee in 2020 and developed a striking visual representation of the Meeting House, which has been used for informational rack cards and posters placed around the community. In addition to her work, the Meeting House project has been featured in the Islander.

Based on their earlier report on the structural integrity of the building, the firm of Engineering Ventures, which works closely with Arnold & Scangas on historic renovation projects around Vermont and New England, was able to develop an estimated cost of \$275,000 to replace the current foundation, add a full basement for the building, and replace the garage doors with a structurally sound wall with historically correct windows. This estimate was used to submit a grant to Preservation Trust of Vermont's Paul Bruhn Fund for \$100,000 toward the cost of structural stabilization and a new foundation. This grant has been awarded and will require matching funds, which can be raised from private contributions or a combination of town funding and contributions.

Once this first phase of the building's renovation is complete, the Committee will work toward further improvements to the interior and exterior of the building, to make it a year-round community asset. This is particularly timely as the Town has accepted a donation of land directly behind the building that will provide septic capacity for the Meeting House as well as space for a recreational field.

The Committee will continue this work throughout FY22 and beyond and seeks outreach for more ideas about how to use this space and for continued fundraising. Anyone who would like to become an active participant in this volunteers group and/or the newly formed Foundation, can contact the Town Office, 372-5552, for more information.