**Report for Town Office Feasibility Committee**- being a committee of volunteers directed to study the questions posed by Article 6 as it appears in the official town warning of March 2023 and approved by the voters of South Hero.  The article reads as follows: “*Article 6:* *Shall the town of South Hero conduct a study of the feasibility, cost and seek grants for moving the town offices to the Old Meeting House site?”*

Questions about the deteriorating conditions of the present town hall, i.e. cracks in the masonry exterior walls, inadequate winterization, standing water in the crawl space accompanied by mold and a rusting metal roof led to a building inspection (see attached copy).  This report verified all these problems, identified additional areas of concern, and confirmed the need for a new town office.

To reassure taxpayers that a new building was truly necessary the committee followed the recommendation of the inspection report and commissioned a certified structural engineer to evaluate the building.  (see attached report). This report confirmed the findings of the original inspection and provided a detailed list of upgrades needed to bring the present building up to code. The estimated cost of these repairs to a building which has grown too small for the needs of the town reinforced the need for a new building.

In light of these two reports the discussion moved to choosing a site for the new town office building. We concluded early on that the White Meeting House itself was not a viable option. We felt its historic preservation path would be too expensive, place too many restrictions on the town office project and push the timeline too far into the future. We agreed that the best options would be to raze the Old Red Fire Station on the north side of route 2 and build there or build next to the current town office building on the south side of route 2.

        Septic disposal possibilities for both sites were investigated. The new site on the north side of route 2 would have access to a new septic system. The current site on the south side of route 2 has existing septic but would likely require upgrades.

        Parking was discussed.  Fears of congestion on the north site were never quite alleviated by the prospect of the projected 86 parking spaces at the rec park and almost a dozen spaces around the office itself.  Parking on the south site would be similar to that presently available.

        Aesthetics and emotion continue to divide the group.  Some are enthusiastic about combining the town office with the rec park and others wish to stay on the current site although the logistics of construction next to the present building would be challenging.  The loss of the old Rescue building which houses a co-op artists group is also a factor, and though the rent only covers the town’s costs, it would mean the loss of a local business.  At this time no consensus has been reached.

Cost—the second leg of our study: Keeping in mind that construction costs are difficult to project, it is impossible to do anything but guesstimate based on cost per square foot.  The Town Office staff estimates that the new building will need to be at least 3,600. Current construction cost estimates for a single story on a slab with very few frills run from $350 to $375 per square foot.  At the $350 number the cost would be $1,260,000.  (Remember, this is a rough guess.)

Grants: We were unable to find grants to construct a new municipal building because of South Hero’s high income average. We did apply for and receive a planning grant for $20,000 which should help with preparation for applying for a bond.  We will continue to search for further grants.

At this time, the committee questions whether we have fulfilled the study parameters set by the article.  Unless it is our responsibility to decide where the new building should go, we feel that a recommendation be presented to the Select Board, at which time this committee be dissolved and a building committee established.

Attached Reports

Building Inspection Report by Inspection Technologies = $450.00

Air Quality Test by Green Home Solutions = $425.00

Structural Engineering Assessment by Engineering Ventures = $2030.25