

To: Wolcott Selectboard  
Date: September 7, 2016  
From: Committee Appointed To Review and Make Recommendations  
Relative To The Old Wolcott School Adjacent To The Current  
Town Office

Background:

About a month after the 2016 Town Meeting, the Wolcott Select Board appointed a five-member committee to review the Old Wolcott School adjacent to the current Wolcott Town Offices and consider options relative to its future. The Schoolhouse has sat unused and in further disrepair for 13 years. The Old School is part of the Wolcott School Street Historic District (original part of school dated 1855) and is (#0810-01) on the Vermont Historical Registry. One could argue The Old School should be the focal point of this district since it is from the school; the street and district are named. The original school predated the railroad station (all ready restored by the town and used as a preschool center) by some 17 years and the newer addition of the school (now converted into town offices) by many more years. Additionally, this district sits at a significant junction of The Vermont Rail Trail, a multipurpose trail along an old railroad line (bed) that will eventually cross most of Vermont. As such, this historic section of Wolcott has the potential to be a future positive trail use destination.

Wolcott is also not without other historic buildings and a documented, dynamic history. The village has many homes that predate the 1900's and a rather famous Fisher Bridge along the same rail trail. It should also be noted that the Wolcott Historical Society has collected many items and pictures from Wolcott's past, in 2008, had an architectural assessment of The Old School done to see if they could be a part of any restoration process, and perhaps use the school. The potential costs at that time, made that option seem impossible.

Committee:

The committee began meeting in late April 2016 and met about twice a month then on. At the first meeting, the committee toured the Old School and reviewed the 2008 assessment. Thereafter, it made email and personal contact with appropriate Vermont State staff involved in historic preservation, including a site visit on 6/22/16. In addition, it was quickly decided that an update to the 2008 assessment was necessary. An approved Vermont architect for the preservation of historical buildings, a condition necessary to receive any future Vermont Historical Grants, did that update

on 6/28/16. That review exists as a vital part (attachment #1) of this report. A matching Vermont grant of \$250.00 was obtained to pay for half of that assessment.

It was stressed to the committee by state personnel that proposed future use for the school would have a significant bearing on the availability of state or other grants. Therefore, the committee has done some collective thinking around this issue and solicited a wider input in order to give the Selectboard some suggestions.

#### Prelude To Recommendation:

The committee quickly concluded that just letting the Old School continue to deteriorate before our eyes was not an option. The Old School either needs to be restored and put to some meaningful use or torn down! We also feel, what happens re the future of this building, will be a testament to Wolcott's pride in itself and its respect for the history of yesteryear. Even though a number of us on the committee feel Wolcott has other, significant capital issues to address relative to the Village, we are drawn to this Old School as a symbol of what Wolcott can become. There are many towns in Vermont that have active groups engaged in their histories and many buildings that have been restored and serve as focal points for pride, use, and tourist attraction. Brownington, in the heart of The Northeast Kingdom and similar in many ways to Wolcott, is one example. There are five restored buildings in Brownington and one serves as a museum dedicated to the towns in its county. There is no reason Wolcott cannot use Brownington as a resource and model.

#### Potential Future Uses:

Wolcott does not seem to have an organized group that could lead any restoration or fund raising effort. Hence, we feel if the Old School is to be restored; the Selectboard will have to start the process and determine the will of the residents of our town.

Some potential uses are:

- A center for Wolcott's (and perhaps Lamoille County's) Historical Heritage. A museum for the past and a related meeting place for the future.
- The large open rooms could serve as studios for active art as well as art display. A Center For The Arts.
- Options associated with the Rail Trail. One Vermont town on the

Islands even made their old school into a Rail Trail Hostel.

- Numerous ways that The Old School with its large, flexible spaces could be used in total or part, that might return money to the town.
- An Adult Education or Agriculture Resource Center.
- Combinations or variations of the above.

It would be nice if we could give a definitive use for the future of The Old School, but we cannot. All we can say is we feel, if restored, The Old School could serve as a catalysis to energize uses such as envisioned above.

Recommendation:

**START THE PROCESS TO RESTORE THE OLD SCHOOL. HENCE, PUT AN ARTICLE ON THE NEXT TOWN MEETING (MARCH 2017) WITH ENOUGH FUNDS TO START THIS PROCESS.**

More Detail For Thought:

- Matching State Historical Grants are available of up to \$20,000 per year at an every other year interval. (Next grant cycle application due October 8, 2016.) In other words, a grant secured for 2017 will preclude a potential grant in 2018. Other grants such as federal are even more competitive. A grant writer will probably need to be hired if grants are to be pursued. A Vermont Historical Grant Application Form and Manual are attached as part of this report. (Attachment #2)
- The Town did the Railroad Station and Town Offices with the use of "Prisoner Labor" and saved a lot of money. There are parts of the Old School that may have to be done by specialized contractors, but much of the interior work could possibly be done by the same labor force that has worked on site before.
- The project can be done in phases. A licensed architect should develop an appropriate schedule. Just as an example, the exterior issues could be addressed first, interior structural second, and the rest third.
- The Town should consider including with The Article at Town Meeting enough money to start the project and potentially match any State Grants. For example an allocation in debt service of \$40-50,000. annually would allow the Town to borrow \$100,000+ paid off in three-year intervals for a nine plus year project. Even better, the Town could use that same allocation, do a longer/larger loan, and do the project much quicker. Time costs money and The Old School has

- already been subjected to too much time!
- Besides State Grants, fund raising and volunteer labor may also be considered to defray costs to the Town. We remember, Wolcott got a War Memorial through Town support and local fund raising. Note; grants carry requirements such as matching funds and the expertise to write them. In addition, any Vermont Historical Grant used on a building carries a five-year window that prohibits the demolition of that building. Fund raising requires an energized and dedicated group to be successful and takes time.

In Conclusion:

A Commitment Needs To Be Made By The Selectboard And The Town And A Project Started. There Are Also Electrical And Fire Marshall Issues Detailed In The Current Assessment That Need Immediate Town Attention. If The Town And/Or Its Voters Decide This Is Not A Project To Pursue, The Old School Should Be Promptly And Properly Dismantled.

As a committee, we thank the Selectboard for this opportunity to serve the town and offer what assistance we can to further this project along.