

**TOWN OF RUTLAND SPECIAL SELECT BOARD MEETING
HELD VIA PUBLICALLY ACCESSABLE CONFERENCE CALL LINE
MAY 11th, 2021**

Out of an abundance of caution around the covid-19 virus, this meeting was held via a conference call line which was made publicly available for anyone to call into.

- Meeting opened at 5:00 P.M.
- Board members present Mary Ashcroft, Sharon Russell, John Paul Fagnant and Don Chioffi
- Rutland Free Library representatives present Barry Cohen, Anita Duch, Ed Ogorzalek
- Members of the public present Pat Hunter, Esther Swett, Lydia Flynn, Marcia Chioffi, Marty Wasserman, Barbara Pulling

This meeting was called for the purpose of discussing the relationship between the Town of Rutland and the Rutland Free Library with our library board representatives.

Barry Cohen, Library Treasurer, discussed how funds received from the Town of Rutland are used. He stated that 100% of the funds are spent on library operations. 77% of their revenue comes from tax support. 76% of the money is spent on salary and benefits.

Mr. Chioffi asked where the money that is being put into the building fund is coming from, commented that he felt the nearly 80% of their funds being spent on salary and benefits was not good for a 501(c)3.

Mr. Cohen reviewed information on an endowment they use for funding. It is set aside and can only be spent on very specific purposes. There are also some funds which they have access to which do not have restrictions. The endowments are audited annually. They can be used under emergency needs for specific purposes. During times of needed renovations, the City of Rutland has issued a bond which the library has matched funds with to do necessary repairs. This happens about every 10 years. Grants are also looked at and used to complete projects but usually require matching funds. These are all things the endowment funds can be used for.

Mr. Chioffi asked where the \$1.2 million needed for the proposed relocation plan for the College of Saint Josephs was coming from. Mr. Cohen said it is planned to come from the pool of unrestricted funds.

The renovation plan that was originally discussed for 10 Court Street was \$1.5 million. Plans were developed with a local architect from NBF Architects who had library work experience. VMS had provided quotes for the project, including infrastructure work, redesigning circulations desks, and work on the children's rooms. This cost was larger than the projected cost to relocate to the CSJ facility.

Mr. Chioffi brought up questions from the board meeting which were asked, and ultimately led to the scheduling of this meeting. They were, how many estimates did they get, who did they get them from and was the contractor that built the CSJ facility asked about the renovation project. Mr. Chioffi asked specifically if they received a bid from Mr. Giancola. Mr. Cohen stated they have not gone out to bid on any project. Mr. Cohen said they obtain competitive quotes for any work over \$5000. Giancola Construction has done work for them in the past, but they have not solicited bids yet. Mr. Chioffi asked Mr. Cohen what the estimate of \$1.5 million for renovations was based on and if that same scope of work could be given to Mr. Giancola so he could provide a price. Mr. Cohen said that figure was based on what they could afford and did not include all the projects they wanted to complete or address. Before any work would ever get done, they would seek competitive quotes. Ms. Ashcroft asked where the \$1.5 million estimate came from. VMS Construction and Engineering Services of Vermont assisted with creating this initial estimate.

Ms. Russell asked how many Town of Rutland residents hold library cards. The initial information provided gave an estimate only. The information given to board members states residents with library cards [est. at 1,730]. Mr. Cohen said he will get an accurate value for us. Ms. Russell asked what the cost of a library card is now. Mr. Cohen answered it is \$45 for a non-resident.

Mr. Cohen touched on the plan to relocate to the former College of Saint Joseph property and made clear that is no longer an option.

Mr. Cohen said based on all the plans being talked about, they sent out a survey and got responses back from 2 primary sources. These were children and their parents, and senior citizens. Based on the responses they feel their original renovation plan, with the \$1.5 million estimate, was no longer adequate. They are getting new estimates with a broader look at the facility. This is being worked on currently.

Mr. Ogorzalek commented on his feelings about some of the benefits of moving to that new facility, and why it was an improvement over the existing facility. Additionally, the cost associated with renovating or repairing an older building are increased. This factored into the move was being considered.

Ms. Duch said the group who worked to put together the current project proposed did a fantastic job with getting a lot of renovation work included, including a new roof. Ms. Duch commented on the benefits she saw the new facility offered. Increased line of sight, among others, offered a better experience. It also gave the ability to expand services in the future.

Esther Swett commented on the possibility of Town residents going back to purchasing their own library cards. Ms. Swett asked how many residents use the library with technology replacing some of the services. Ms. Swett also asked if the Rutland Board of Directors and Trustees plan to renovate the building or is the College of Saint Joseph option still available. Additionally, asked why the library turned down a grant opportunity in March. Mr. Cohen said approximately half of town residents have a library card. Mr. Cohen said their current plans are to actively look into renovating the current property. There are no plans to move to the former college building, that plan is dead. Mr. Cohen said he is unaware of the grant Ms. Swett referenced. He stated they did not apply for a grant and have not turned down any grants. There was not any specific information available from any of the attendees on this.

Ms. Ashcroft discussed a time in the past when town voters voted down the appropriation and town users needed to purchase their own cards individually. The impact on the services was noticeable. It affected operating hours of the facility. The library current serves town residents in a variety of ways, including the computer access available. Mr. Chioffi added it was in 2000 / 2001 when the appropriation was voted down, due to the cost. Mr. Chioffi said the library should

be able to provide our Town with a list of users, which could be compared to our voter checklist to verify accuracy.

Mr. Chioffi pointed out that only 60% of the voters who turned out voted to support the appropriation. Mr. Chioffi stated that he knows a considerable number of that 60% who only voted to support it because they like the concept of having the library where it is. Mr. Chioffi does not know how many of them are [library] card holders.

Mr. Chioffi said the Town of Rutland has only 13% representation, with the 2 members, on the Library board, yet have 21% of the population and stated we are underrepresented. The Board consists of 15 members, 10 of which are from the City of Rutland. Mr. Chioffi asked how those 10 members could allow the City to not make the necessary repairs to the building. Mr. Chioffi commented he was proud of the fact that Mary Ashcroft was the President of the Board from 2005 to 2008. Mr. Chioffi does not see how a board comprised of a majority of Rutland City residents could allow the City to not make the needed repairs to the building. Ms. Ashcroft commented that during her time as chair they had looked at moving out of that facility, due to the high cost of repair. They met with the City Recreation Committee and the City Treasurer. The City representatives asked about giving the library building to them. There were a large number of repairs needing to be done and Ms. Ashcroft had asked them if they would give them the building after they fixed it up. The conversation did not continue after that. The building is a treasure, albeit an expensive one. The board was doing its due diligence in looking into other suitable, and less expensive alternatives, to move the library services into.

Mr. Chioffi asked if the City would offer to sell them the building, and at what price. If the library vacates the facility, the City will likely have to sell it and would likely do so at a reduced price. Mr. Cohen said they would not be interested in buying the building. It was never designed to be a library. There are restraints they have to operate under, and it would not be a prudent move to buy it, and they have a superior arrangement. Mr. Chioffi said then they have made the decision they do not want to be in that building. Mr. Cohen answered that is not correct. Mr. Chioffi stated Randal Smathers had said they were looking for other places if CSJ didn't pan out and that they are definitely looking for other places. Mr. Cohen said they are looking at many options, including renovating the current building, and referenced his earlier statements. Mr. Cohen said the future is uncertain but they are clearly looking at staying in the current building.

Mr. Chioffi asked if they have looked into the cost to bond themselves to be able to complete the renovations. Mr. Cohen answered that considering they do not own the building, the current arrangement is the infrastructure is owned by the city. Mr. Chioffi said that is why he asked if they had approached the city and asked about buying it, to which Mr. Cohen had answered no they haven't. Mr. Cohen asked why they would buy the building when they have a better arrangement today, where the city owns it.

Mr. Cohen moved on to address the perception that the library board has allowed the building to deteriorate and allowed the city to allow it to deteriorate. Mr. Cohen said this is not correct. The building has not deteriorated. Most recently work has been done to fix the HVAC systems and boilers. They do continual maintenance. He acknowledged they cannot offer modern facilities, but it has not deteriorated and stressed that they have kept their budget flat. The most recently approved budget had no increase or increased ask from any town.

Mr. Chioffi asked that if they purchase a new building if they have considered changing the governance of their structure. Mr. Chioffi pointed out that every report points out the importance of their partners in the continual operation of the facility, citing when the town voted own the appropriation it put a financial strain on the library. Mr. Chioffi stated that if we are so valuable, shouldn't that mean we have more say in the control. Mr. Chioffi feels the town deserves representation through the board members and feels we do not have it since we have not heard any of the discussion prior to this evening and feels we should have. Mr. Chioffi stated there could be a simple town wide vote as to whether or not the library should move. It would give our board members the feeling of the town. Mr. Chioffi stated one option could be having the town pay for the membership cards on a per user basis, and the last time it was done individually, it did not work out well for the library and feels we were paying money for the concept and emotion of having the library even though it wasn't being used. Mr. Chioffi pointed out again that 40% of voters voted against the article so they do not support paying for the library at all.

Ms. Ashcroft commented that when she was on the board, she was an at large member, so it gave the town larger representation. There is still an at large member option available.

Pat Hunter commented on the variety of zip codes that apply to Rutland Town. Ms. Hunter thanked the library board members who are participating and thanked them for maintaining the

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endowment and keeping it sustainable which allows the library to operate a setting that is conducive to having the best library we can have. Ms. Hunter reminded everyone that these board members contribute on their own to keep the organization going. She commends the board for their work over the years. Ms. Hunter commented her use of the library has skyrocketed with the ability to use devices like Kindles. Having a quality library is essential to building a community and helps attract families and reminded everyone the library is critical.

Ms. Ashcroft thanked everyone who participated.

The meeting ended at 6:00PM.

Respectfully submitted, Mr. Bill Sweet

Mary Ashcroft, Chair

ABSENT

Joseph Denardo, Clerk

John Paul Faignant

Sharon Russell

Don Chioffi

Center Rutland, VT.