

Library Exploratory Committee & George H. Stowell Trustees
Minutes for the Community Forum
September 29, 2022

Committee Members Present: Laura Cousineau, Susan Chandler, Larry Dingee, Dillon Gallagher, Heidi Jaarsma, Kathi Patterson, Caroline Storrs.

Trustees: Cousineau, Patterson and Richard Scheuer [arrived late]

Members of the community [see attached]

Meeting called to order at 6:36 pm

Caroline Storrs Introduced this forum and informed the audience of the next forum on Tuesday, October 4. She informed the audience that both forums would be videotaped by Tamsin Orion (9/29) and Billy and Larissa Sharff (10/4). She informed the group that they would be able to ask questions of the architects after their presentation, but stressed that questions relating to subjects beyond the scope of the architects would be noted and answered at a later date in writing.

Caroline then read from prepared comments.

Welcome! Thank you for coming tonight. This is the first forum of two. The next forum will be taking place on October 4th, Tuesday, again here in the Town Hall and starting at 6:30 PM. Tonight's forum will be a presentation by Banwell Architects of Lebanon NH who have developed schematic drawings of what a future library might look like in the "general store" in Cornish Flat, and the 2nd forum on Tuesday will be a presentation by MAKE Architectural Firm from Hanover who will present schematic drawings of renovations to the present George Stowell Library. A few announcements: the water is not potable here in the Town Hall so please do not drink the water. There is a refreshment table being manned by Sandy Guest at the back of the room if you need anything. The toilets do work though so feel free to get up and use them at anytime. Tonight's forum is being videotaped by Tamsin Orion, so if you know of someone who was unable to come tonight, we will be putting it out to the public fairly soon. Both forums will be videotaped and The Library Exploratory Committee wishes to express their appreciation to Tamsin for tonight's work and to Billy and Larissa Sharff for their work on Tuesday evening. Tonight's presentation will start with a short introduction by me, and then Colleen O'Neill will give a short synopsis of her one time offer to the Town; how the idea came about and what her offer to the Town actually entails. And finally, Ingrid Nichols, from Banwell Architects, will present her vision of the future library. She is also accompanied by Jeremiah Goulet, a fellow architect, who grew up in Cornish and is a part of her team. Briefly, the journey of where we are today, began in the summer of 2018, when the trustees identified several deficits at the present George Stowell Library on School St in Cornish Flat. The deficits are: only 1,226 square feet of

space on the main floor, no handicap access, no running water, only a composting toilet in cellar space, no off-street parking, no designated meeting space, limited space for library programs, limited expansion space for books and physical outdoor space. The trustees held a forum to get feedback from the public, and plans to address some of these deficits were developed by MA&KE architects in September of 2019. Because not all of the needs, that had been identified, could be met on the small parcel of land that the library sits on, the trustees approached Colleen O'Neill about the possibility of moving the library to the general store since it appeared that all the deficits and needs could be addressed in that building. Colleen will fill in the details in a few moments, but she considered the request of the library trustees, and then accepted that she was open to the idea of that vision. She also, as the vision of this new library took form, in a non-binding letter of intent, wrote that the "Town of Cornish will have NO cost to acquire the real estate and NO cost to renovate the building". A Library Exploratory Committee was formed by the Selectboard in July of 2021 and the Committee was charged with conducting a feasibility study of relocating the Cornish Library (George H Stowell Free Library) to the Cornish General Store building. The committee has gathered information of the financial and operational impacts, and the practicality and expected benefits or liabilities to the town. Now, after much data collection, we are in the phase of presenting the schematic plans by a chosen architectural firm to the public. Tonight Banwell Architects will give a vision of a future library in the general store in the Flat. At the next forum on October 4th, the architects from MA&KE will give a vision of how the present George H Stowell library building might be renovated as a comparison, and the particulars for that vision will be presented next Tuesday. Colleen will now give a short introduction of her gift and how it will work.

Caroline introduced Colleen O'Neill who presented from the following prepared statement.

Message from Colleen O'Neill, owner of Cornish General Store

Good afternoon! I want to express my gratitude to the Library Exploratory Committee members for all their work this past year. And I want to thank everyone here today for taking the time to learn more about this project.

I also want to make it clear that the suggestion to move the library to the Cornish Store Building was not mine. As has been noted, the Library Trustees approached me back in May of last year. When we met at the store and I heard about the issues at the Stowell Library, it made sense to consider the possibility of making the store into a library. It also made sense, to me, to offer the building as a donation to enable this project to move forward.

Last Fall, as the committee met, the direction for the store donation changed. My accountant suggested that rather than donate the building directly to the town, it would make better sense to PLEDGE the building to a non-profit group, contingent on successful fund raising for renovations. This would allow me to maintain the store building and rentals during a fund raising campaign. Then, when the funds were in hand, I would turn over the property to the non-profit which would then manage the renovation. At project completion, the non-profit group would present a gift to the town - a new library and community center with no cost to the Town to acquire the real

estate and no cost to renovate the building.

By the way, the property donation would include the green, grassy, triangle space in front of the store. Many people actually think the town owns that land. Right now, it does not.

You will learn that a vote will be required at the 2023 Town Meeting to determine the future of our public library. Voters may be asked if they are in favor of authorizing the select board to accept a future gift of a renovated Cornish Library and Community Center on Route 120. No fund raising can begin until this project is given a green light. If the community rejects this idea, I will make other plans for the building and will likely put it on the market.

A new non-profit organization called the Cornish Community Initiative (CCI) is forming. We have an active board of directors and the pro bono assistance of attorney Alyssa Chandler for our 501c3 designation. The board has been meeting for months and we already have our NH Non-Profit status.

The CCI is excited to report that even before any fund raising has taken place, three remarkable pledges have been made. One donor has offered \$32,000! Another has pledged \$100,000! And Laird Klingler, a retired Princeton Librarian, has offered a gift of appreciated stock valued at \$375,000! This brings us to more than \$500,000 in pledges before any official campaign. It is likely our fund raising goal will be close to \$2M.

The CCI would only raise funds for a library renovation at the store. The donors who have already offered pledges are also only interested in seeing a Library and Community Center at the store. The CCI would not get involved in fund raising for a Stowell renovation.

It is very exciting to imagine the possibility of seeing a new Cornish Library and Community Center, well-placed on Route 120, in Cornish Flat. The architect plans include a generous community space and retention of the commercial kitchen. Location, ample parking, and a single level for library services provide great benefits. This library project feels like one of those “once in a lifetime” opportunities. I have seen other times when this community has adapted to changing needs. Years ago, George Edson drove around town with a model of the new Cornish School Gym. Our town offices moved from School Street to Town House Road. The fire station in the Flat was rebuilt, we added a police station here across the road, and we have the new Fred and Shirley Sullivan Pavilion at the Fairgrounds. Cornish has found creative ways to adapt, update, and modernize.

I know that change can be challenging. I also know that when it’s time to think about change, we do it carefully and deliberately. I hope you will consider the possibility of a new asset in town that could serve us all and be a rich resource that builds and strengthens our community. Please give it your full consideration as you learn more about the project this year. We are lucky, indeed, to have new prospects.

Thank you for your time.

Caroline introduced Ingrid Nichols and Jeremiah Goulet of the Banwell Architects firm. Ingrid shared a PowerPoint [attached] which contained an overview of the property, the existing

conditions, the proposed plan and its advantages, and the anticipated construction costs (\$2,159,748.00) as updated by Trumbull-Nelson.

After Ingrid's presentation, several present asked questions of the architects. Questions beyond that scope were recorded by Laura Cousineau and will be responded to after the October 4 presentation.

The meeting ended at 7:35 pm