

**Minority Vote Report of the Cornish Library Exploratory Committee  
submitted by Heidi Jaarsma to the Cornish Select Board  
January 26, 2023**

On November 1, 2022, the Cornish Library Exploratory Committee voted 4-3 to find the relocation of the current library to the general store building advisable and feasible. The Cornish Select Board has requested that those who voted not to approve the Library Exploratory Committee's recommendations submit a report containing the reasons for their "no" vote including any dispute of submitted data and any pertinent data which was omitted from the final report of the committee. Each member who received the request has submitted an individual response.

**Summary**

- ❖ The offer of the general store building to be a library and community center is a kind and generous one, but it is not in the best long-term interest of the Town. We need to consider the proposed community facility within the context of existing town and school services and facilities. We need to consider the long-term sustainability of the addition of a 6,000+ square foot community facility, a building that would be larger than every town-owned building with the exception of the town highway garage.
- ❖ The voters are being asked to make a decision based on incomplete information.
- ❖ Both plans are too large to be fiscally prudent from an operating budget standpoint. The 2019 *Cornish Accessibility Concept Designs* commissioned by the library trustees could be used to create ADA access and provide water service to the Stowell building at a cost that would be much less than what has been proposed in the committee report. While the general store renovation would depend on third-party fundraising, a renovation by the town could incorporate fundraising, grants and non-tax revenues.
- ❖ Current town and school owned buildings provide ample, accessible meeting and community gathering space: the Town Offices, Town Hall, Cornish Elementary School, and Cornish Flat Fire Station. These spaces are some of the more than a dozen

municipally-owned buildings maintained by the town. Town-owned public open spaces include the Town Forest, CREA, and the Meetinghouse green.

- ❖ The Stowell is a town-owned building and any renovation would be controlled by the town. The Cornish Community Initiative (CCI), a private nonprofit not subject to the right-to-know or municipal budget laws, would maintain ownership of the general store building and would control the process during fundraising and construction of the proposed library and community center.
- ❖ Construction of the proposed library and community center is contingent on a successful fundraising campaign by the CCI. The CCI will have five years to fundraise the estimated \$2.3M construction costs. The Town would be responsible for the cost of all furnishings for the library and community center and for all operating, staffing and maintenance costs of the library and community center going forward indefinitely.
- ❖ The \$61,922 operating costs for the general store library and community center proposed by the committee are not realistic. Area libraries of similar size have yearly operating budgets that range from \$95,000 to over \$200,000. Actual operating costs could be a burden to taxpayers.
- ❖ A vote to accept the general store building represents the permanent loss of one of the few viable commercial spaces and two affordable housing units in the Cornish Flat village district.
- ❖ The Town and Library Trustees have a duty to George H. Stowell and his gift of a library. It should take more than one vote by one board to walk away from all the Stowell building has offered and could continue to offer the citizens of Cornish.

### **Reasons for final vote to reject the recommendation and report of the Cornish Library Exploratory Committee**

*We need to make a decision about what is in the best long-term interest of our town.*

Colleen O'Neill's offer to donate the general store building to serve as our library is a kind and generous one. But we need to make a decision that is in the best long-term interest of our town.

We need to step back for a moment and ask which facility will best serve the town sustainably over the long term. Construction is a one-time expense. In a hundred years, will anyone remember who built or renovated our library? Operating costs are different. They are ongoing and addressed yearly. Our current librarian and trustees will not be in those roles forever. Will the next librarian be able to manage a large building and library and community center programming while working on a part-time basis? Will future trustees, who by statute cannot be paid, have the time and resources required to manage a 6,000+ square foot library and community center? When it comes to facilities planning, we need to think long term.

***The voters are being asked to make a decision based on incomplete information.***

By a vote of 4-3, the committee refused to obtain a cost estimate to renovate the first floor only of the G.H. Stowell Free Library. A first floor-only renovation would address the top concerns indicated in the committee's July 2022 *Cornish Library Survey*, running water and access. Renovating the first floor only would have significantly cut costs for the proposed Stowell renovation. Despite the August 10, 2022, statement by the Stowell architect that the basement renovations would be broken out of the Stowell cost estimate, a majority of the committee rejected obtaining this information on October 18, 2022.

The committee did not include the following submissions in the final report:

Information not Included by the Exploratory Committee

- Documentation of NH DOT traffic counts on NH Route 120: not included.
- Documentation of State Class II and local Class V highway rights of way in the green triangle (Tax Map 18, Lot 38) across from the general store building: not included.
- Operating costs for existing libraries in our area: not included.
- Current school library services (2022/23 school library annual appropriation=\$94,500) for students aged preschool through high school: not included.
- Documentation of the 2004 DES Groundwater Management Permit which addressed leaking underground storage tanks on the general store property: not included.
- Documentation from the town's insurance carrier regarding its liability exclusion for pollution: not included.
- Documentation that the G.H. Stowell Free Library is not and has not been the least funded library in the state: not included.
- Documentation of total grand list property valuations for towns included in the analyses of library funding by Tom Ladd and the library trustees: not included.
- Documentation of quality and construction data from the town's property tax database for the general store building and Stowell building: not included.
- Building capacity in relation to available parking at the general store building: not included.
- Zoning maps and information about economic development and affordable housing: not included.
- Documentation of the recorded 2021 annexation plan which brings into question the town's ability to sell the Stowell Building while retaining ownership of the Old Selectmen's Office (History Center): not included.

***It's our library. We decide what we need.***

Both renovations presented to the town in the comparative analysis were designed based on needs as determined by six-person subcommittee whose members were endowed with knowledge and experience in the library field, but while six may be able to design the ideal library, our real library belongs to the citizens of Cornish. A different vision for a library comes into focus through the 289 survey responses received by the committee. Over 65% of respondents indicated access and running water were the most important space or services that

we could add to our library. Less than 50% of respondents indicated that a community gathering space was most important, and less than 25% identified more public computers, coffee and tea service, or a library of things as the most important space or services we could add to our library.

***Both plans are too large to be fiscally prudent from an operating budget standpoint. Current town-owned buildings provide meeting and community gathering spaces.***

The 2022 Stowell renovation plans, which the committee and Trustees commissioned, attempt to turn the Stowell into a library and community center. The time for “apples to apples” is over: we are talking about two very different buildings which provide two different visions for library operations. If, as our State Librarian has stated, e-books are the future, then space needs for libraries will change. The Town Hall, Town Offices, Cornish Flat Fire Station, and Cornish Elementary School provide ample, accessible space for events, gatherings, and meetings at no cost to local organizations. The Stowell is a library, a center of community, but not a community center.

***The Stowell is a town-owned building. The town controls the process.***

The choice before us is one between a large library and community center, offering an array of services, and our current Stowell Library, made accessible, offering library services in scale with the facility. Both renovation plans developed by the committee are too big for what the town can afford to staff and maintain in the long term. The Stowell is our building. We, the town, can make it what we want. We control the process.

The library trustees now have five different plans for renovating the Stowell: four accessibility concept designs developed by the trustees in 2019 and one developed by the committee and trustees in 2022. Cost estimates are only available for the 2022 plan, the largest and most expensive of the five. A design based off the 2019 plans could be used to create access and provide water service to the Stowell building at a much lower cost. The Town’s legal right-of-way on School Street could be improved to offer on-street accessible parking at no cost to the taxpayers by using additional highway block grant funds previously received from the state. These improvements would allow for accessible library programming on a scale that the town could afford sustainably in the long-term.

During the renovation, the town would maintain ownership of the Stowell Library building. The town and library trustees would supervise the construction. Construction, supervision, and financials would be in accordance with NH right-to-know law and municipal budget law.

***The Cornish Community Initiative (CCI) maintains ownership and control of the general store building during construction.***

The CCI is a private non-profit organization in the process of becoming a Federally recognized 501(c)3. Ms. O’Neill is one of five officers listed on the CCI’s articles of agreement. If the CCI reaches its fundraising goal, Ms. O’Neill, the current owner of the general store building, would donate the building to the CCI. The CCI would maintain custody of donated funds and supervise the construction of the proposed library and community center. The CCI will have five years, until March 2028, to raise an unspecified amount of funds and will have an unspecified amount

of time to renovate the general store building to be a library and community center. As a private non-profit corporation, the CCI is not subject to the right-to-know law or municipal budget law.

***The proposed library and community center is contingent on a successful fundraising campaign by the CCI. The town would be responsible for furnishings and all operating, staffing and maintenance costs of the library and community center going forward.***

The Cornish Community Initiative proposes to raise the construction costs to renovate the general store to be a library and community center through fundraising. According to Ms. O'Neill's non-binding letter of intent, the CCI would have five years, until March of 2028, to raise an unspecified amount of money for the renovation. If the fundraising is not successful, the project will not go forward. The CCI has indicated that it will not fundraise for a Stowell renovation even if the vote for the store building fails. The CCI has received pledges, but apparently has not received or expended funds, at the date of this writing.

The cost for furnishing the new library and community center will be the town's responsibility, as will be all maintenance, staffing, and operating costs going forward. The cost estimate received by the committee for furnishing the new library and community center is \$206,717. The library trustees have stated that the cost will be much lower; however, no further cost estimates for furnishing the proposed library and community center were submitted.

***Operating costs for the general store library and community center are understated.***

The operating costs for the proposed library and community center are understated. The community center subcommittee studied the Grantham, Lebanon, and Hartland libraries. Since Lebanon's \$1.38M library budget is more than our entire municipal operating budget, it is beyond the scope of this discussion. If, as the subcommittee concluded, a community center and library are one and the same, then the library budget is the community center budget. Grantham and Hartland libraries are open 37 and 35 hours per week with current yearly operating expenditures of \$175,061 and \$213,148, respectively. The trustees have offered an estimated annual operating budget of \$61,922 for the proposed library and community center based on 20 open hours per week. The Trustees propose that the 6,000+ square foot library and community center will operate based on the current Stowell library model: for the portion of the open hours that the librarian is not scheduled to work in-person, a library aide will be responsible for the entire facility. It is difficult to accept that in the future, a facility as large as the proposed library and community center will be managed by a part-time librarian and open only twenty hours a week.

Payroll and benefits are the main drivers of municipal budgets. The greater the staffing hours, the larger the budget. From Table I, it is clear that larger libraries tend to have more open hours and more staffing hours per week. However, the budget proposed for the library and community center in the committee report is based on 20 open hours per week. (See Table I, following page).

**Table I**

| AREA LIBRARIES BY POPULATION, BLDG SIZE, OP BUDGET AND OPEN HOURS | Population Legal Sv'c Area | Local Government Revenue | Total Operating Expenditures | Library Sq Ft per state database | Effective Lib. Sq Ft per tax card | Open Hours per week | Staffing Hours weekly - | Full Time Librarian Y/N |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Acworth - Silsby Free Library                                     | 853                        | \$ 39,181                | \$ 47,008                    | 970                              | n/a                               | 22                  | 13                      | N                       |
| Lempster - Miner Memorial Library                                 | 1118                       | \$ 19,000                | \$ 19,000                    | 864                              | n/a                               | 14                  | 14                      | N                       |
| Springfield-Libbie A. Cass Mem.                                   | 1,259                      | \$ 55,165                | \$ 52,157                    | 2,200                            | n/a                               | 26                  | 32                      | N                       |
| Grafton Public Library  | 1,385                      | \$ 13,476                | \$ 17,612                    | 900                              | n/a                               | 12                  | 15                      | N                       |
| Rumney - Byron G. Merrill   | 1,498                      | \$ 48,525                | \$ 49,199                    | 3,000                            | n/a                               | 13                  | 30                      | N                       |
| George H. Stowell Free Library                                    | 1,616                      | \$ 26,834                | \$ 37,285                    | 3,000                            | 1,435                             | 15                  | 20                      | N                       |
| <b>Proposed Cornish Lib. &amp; Comm Ctr</b>                       | <b>1,616</b>               | <b>\$ 61,922</b>         | <b>\$ 61,922</b>             | <b>10,536</b>                    | <b>6,453</b>                      | <b>20</b>           | <b>45</b>               | <b>N</b>                |
| Lisbon Public Library   | 1621                       | \$ 59,258                | \$ 62,146                    | 3,892                            | n/a                               | 20                  | 33                      | N                       |
| Lyme - Converse Free Library                                      | 1,745                      | \$ 186,179               | \$ 196,630                   | 3,886                            | 3,196                             | 36                  | 89                      | Y                       |
| Alstead - Shedd Porter  | 1,864                      | \$ 44,673                | \$ 63,808                    | 2,430                            | n/a                               | 24                  | 47                      | Y                       |
| Plainfield - Philip Read Mem. Lib.                                | 2,459                      | \$ 84,152                | \$ 95,077                    | 6,200                            | 4,393                             | 37                  | 39                      | N                       |
| Sunapee - Abbott Library  | 3,342                      | \$ 464,445               | \$ 359,418                   | 7,300                            | 7,128                             | 53                  | 80                      | Y                       |
| Grantham - Dunbar Library   | 3,404                      | \$ 168,203               | \$ 175,061                   | 4,129                            | 4,138                             | 37                  | 101                     | Y                       |
| Hartland  | 3,483                      | \$ 213,148               | \$ 213,148                   | 5,150                            | 5,150                             | 35                  | n/a                     | n/a                     |
| Highgate Library & Community Center                               | 3,673                      | \$ 118,154               | \$ 118,154                   | 1,320                            | 1,320                             | 34                  | n/a                     | n/a                     |
| Charlestown - Silsby  | 4,806                      | \$ 133,116               | \$ 132,371                   | 4,325                            | n/a                               | 27                  | 100                     | Y                       |
| Newport - Richards Free Library                                   | 6,299                      | \$ 351,996               | \$ 486,398                   | 16,129                           | 4,319                             | 47                  | 214                     | Y                       |
| Howe  | 11,870                     | \$ 1,374,468             | \$ 1,590,198                 | 30,000                           | 17,863                            | 57                  | 309                     | Y                       |
| Claremont - Fiske Free Library                                    | 12,949                     | \$ 417,738               | \$ 417,738                   | 7,800                            | 7,251                             | 44                  | 261                     | Y                       |
| Lebanon   | 14,282                     | \$ 1,259,960             | \$ 1,352,983                 | 15,200                           | 14,622                            | 46                  | 320                     | Y                       |

*n/a = not readily available*

*Sources: 2021 NH State Library Statistics; various town and city tax cards and library websites.*

*Notes: The state library database appears to give total building square footage. Effective square footage, taken from tax cards where available, describes the useable space in a building. General store total square footage is an estimate based on the current tax card area of 15,441 sq. ft., less 2,814 sq. ft. for the slab under first floor, less 1,418 sq. ft. for the section of building to be removed, and less the portion of the finished second floor to be removed. The additional effective area over 6,000 is attributed to the useable space in the basement as shown on the tax card. The figures for the general store are approximate and depend on final construction drawings.*

Table I, above, is ordered by population. The data shows that larger libraries (the bottom half of Table I) have full-time librarians. Again, can a 6,000 square foot library and community center be run by part-time staff?

Table II calculates the anticipated non-payroll operating costs for the proposed library and community center as given by the committee:

**Table II**

| Calculation of non-payroll costs anticipated by committee for the library and community Center |                     |                                    |
|--|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Anticipated Library and Community Center Operating Budget                                      | \$ 61,922.00        | source: Lib. Exp. Committee Report |
| SUBTRACT Proposed staffing costs   | \$ (42,780.00)      | source: Lib. Exp. Committee Report |
| <b>Non-payroll items in proposed operating budget</b>  | <b>\$ 19,142.00</b> |                                    |

Town of Cornish employees who work at least 30.5 hours per week receive health insurance and retirement benefits. Taking this into consideration, Table III shows a library and community

center budget at 35 open hours per week with a full-time head librarian and a part-time assistant librarian. The approximated operating budget in Table III appears to be in line with those of similar-sized libraries shown Table I.

**Table III**

| <b>Proposed Operating Budget for library and community center with 35 open hours/week with FT Librarian and PT Assistant Librarian</b> |                      |  |
|--|----------------------|--|
| Non-payroll items in proposed operating budget   | \$ 19,142.00         | Estimate not prorated for increased useage |
| FT Librarian, 35 hrs/week  | \$ 58,197.05         | Includes health insurance and retirement   |
| Assistant Librarian, 15 hrs/week   | \$ 15,114.06         |  |
| Library Aides, 35 hrs/week   | \$ 25,469.99         |  |
| Janitor, 4 hrs/week  | \$ 2,574.99          |  |
| <b>Approx. operating budget for a 35 hours week</b>  | <b>\$ 120,498.09</b> |  |

Other concerns about the committee’s cost estimates: The committee’s quantitative comparative analysis did not prorate energy usage for the smaller Stowell building. It is unclear from the report if there was consideration of energy usage for the commercial kitchen or heat loss through operation of the range hood in the general store building.

To put the size of the proposed library and community center in perspective, Table IV shows the effective square footage of current town-owned buildings taken from the town’s property tax database. Please note that the Cornish Elementary School, owned and maintained by the Cornish School District, is not on this list:

**Table IV**

| <b>Effective Square Footage of Town of Cornish Buildings</b> |                         |                               |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Building</b>  | <b>Location</b>         | <b>Effective Area (sq ft)</b> |
| Hearse House   | Town House Rd.          | 392                           |
| Old Selectmen's Office                                       | 26 School Street        | 686                           |
| Little Town Hall   | 294 Town House Rd.      | 690                           |
| G.H. Stowell Free Library                                    | 24 School Street        | 1,435                         |
| CREA Barn  | Parsonage Rd.           | 2,000                         |
| Trinity Church   | 833 Route 12A           | 2,438                         |
| Cornish Flat Fire Station                                    | 187 Route 120           | 3,200                         |
| Town Hall  | 294 Town House Rd.      | 3,303                         |
| Town Offices   | 488 Town House Rd.      | 4,368                         |
| Fire & Police Station  | 283 Town House Road     | 4,536                         |
| Meetinghouse   | Meetinghouse Dr.        | 4,839                         |
| <b>Proposed Library and Community Center</b>                 | <b>226 NH Route 120</b> | <b>6,453</b>                  |
| Highway Garage   | 255 Parsonage Rd.       | 7,147                         |

The proposed library and community center would be the largest town-owned building second only to the Highway Garage.

The library trustees and committee have stated that a large library and community center building is required so that more programming can be offered to the town. It is a fair assumption that more library programming will require more staffing hours and that there is a relationship

between building size, programs offered, and staffing hours required. Quite simply, a larger building will cost the taxpayers more in the long run.

***Actual operating costs could be a burden to taxpayers.***

When young families move to town, the school, not the library, is likely their first consideration. Our town has moved beyond the previous decades of contentious school board meetings and school district meeting budget cuts. We are at a place where the voters of the town broadly support not only a K-8 foreign language program, but also all-day kindergarten, a preschool program, and a full-time nurse, guidance counselor, and school librarian. In the coming year, we will begin to see the full effects of inflation on the 2023 school and municipal budgets. In the next ten years, the school building will require roof repairs and other improvements which will total in the millions. Sullivan County will be seeking a roughly \$35M bond for a new nursing home. Rising tax bills are a near certainty. I do not want to see support for our library erode over the additional economic and budgetary stress that maintaining and operating a large library and community center facility would create over time.

***Economic development: loss of commercial space and affordable housing. No discontinuance of general store library and community center.***

In our state, libraries acquired by donation are forever. The chance of a successful petition to discontinue a library at the general store building is statistically zero. Once accepted as a library, the general store building would be a library and community center for lifetimes to come. Our Master Plan directs economic development and residential density to the Cornish Flat village district. A general store is one of several commercial uses allowed in the village district. Zoning an area for a general store does not mean that any particular owner will establish a general store or other business of similar scale. For example, if I own property in the village district, nothing requires me to have a general store; however, the possibility of a general store or other commercial use remains open to future owners. The likelihood of that property being used as a business will increase over time unless the town closes the door on future commercial development through action such as the permanent acceptance of the building as a library and community center. Acceptance of the general store as a library would likely represent the permanent loss of one of the few viable built commercial spaces, in addition to two affordable housing units, in our town.

***Cornish currently maintains a large stock of town-owned property, land and buildings, including a green space in Cornish Flat.***

The town's ownership of another building would add to the total tax-exempt properties in town. Of the \$12,567,000 in assessed property value that is tax-exempt, the town of Cornish is the top owner at \$4,381,700 in assessed value. The National Park Service, the Cornish School District, Cornish Fair Association, and the United Church of Cornish own the bulk of the remaining tax exempt properties in town. Town-owned buildings include the Fire and Police Station, Cornish Flat Fire Station, Hearse House, Highway Garage, Stowell Library, Meetinghouse, Old Selectmen's Office (History Center), Town Hall, Little Town Hall (school-owned, town maintained), Town Offices, CREA Barn, and Trinity Church. The town also owns significant public green and open space. The Meetinghouse green in Cornish Flat is protected from NH



Route 120 by substantial trees, landscaping, and monuments. Maintenance of the green is the town's responsibility and is included in the buildings and grounds department budget. The town's Memorial Day ceremony is held on the green as was the former Cornish Farmer's Market. Additional public open spaces include the 306-acre Town Forest on the west side of town and the 76-acre CREA property, which is more centrally located by the school, fairgrounds, and fire and police station.

Over the next ten years, the town estimates \$183,000 in capital and regular maintenance on town buildings (*Town Building Capital Reserve Schedule; 10/9/2022 Town Building Evaluation*). This figure does not include the highway garage, for which the town has received a building evaluation, but no cost estimates, for proposed repairs at the time of this writing. Building value, building size, and maintenance costs are related. Can the town really take on and maintain a facility, which after a \$2.3M renovation could increase the value of town-owned property by fifty percent?

***Private non-profit ownership vs. municipal ownership of the general store.***

If the town owns the general store after conversion to a library, the entire building will come off the tax rolls. The building will no longer offer commercial or affordable residential rental space. Under NH state law, a library accepted by donation cannot be undone without the consent of the courts and the NH Department of Justice.

If a non-profit were to own the building and conduct its operations in that space, only the space used by the non-profit would be tax-exempt. Should a non-profit choose to keep the residential and commercial rental spaces, those areas of the building would be subject to property taxation. If at some future point in time, the entire space was converted back to a commercial use, then the property would lose its non-profit tax exemption, and the entire building would be subject to property taxation.

***Location of proposed new community facility.***

Is it prudent for the town establish a large community facility designed for community meetings and gatherings in the northeast corner of the town, over 11 miles, a 20-minute drive, from the southwest corner of the town? Existing spaces available for community gatherings and meetings, the Town Offices, the Cornish School and the Town Hall, are centrally located. The Town House Road Fire Station and Police Station was sited in this location in part due to its centrality. The Town Hall on Town House Road is approximately 5 miles from Cornish Flat and 6 miles from the Claremont line on NH Route 12A.

***No feasible plan for the discontinuance and dispossession of Stowell building.***

There is no feasible plan for the discontinuance and dispossession of the Stowell Library. At committee meetings, the first public forum, and in answers to questions from the community, the trustees have identified private sale of the Stowell building as a viable option. The Stowell Building and the Old Selectmen's Office, lot and buildings, are pre-existing and non-conforming. Even if – and that is a big if – the town could subdivide the Old Selectmen's Office on a +/- 0.015 acre lot, operation of the History Center would create a negative impact on a private residence at the Stowell and vice versa. Should the town allow a local non-profit to use a

discontinued Stowell building as a municipally owned building, maintenance and improvements would remain the responsibility of the town. What is much more likely is that the Stowell, an architectural gem that has lasted 100 years with little maintenance, would revert to a town building and would find its place on the town's maintenance schedule.

***The Town and Library Trustees have a duty to George H. Stowell and his gift of a library.***

The acceptance of the donation of the Stowell Library in 1912 created an obligation and duty on the part of the town to preserve and maintain Mr. Stowell's gift. The 1988 *Survey of Cornish Historic Resources* by the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Council identified the Stowell building as potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. This criterion identifies "...buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and...that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction." (*How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1997). The 2021 acquisition of adjacent land has opened new possibilities to maintain and modernize the Stowell Library while preserving a valuable historic resource.

In the interest of equity and justice, the town and the trustees have a duty to make the Stowell gift accessible to all. The town created a library capital reserve fund in 2000 to address building access. Since the fund's establishment, the library capital reserve has been inadequately funded, and no plan for accessibility has been brought to the voters by the trustees or the town. On February 17, 2022, the library trustees voted "to not recommend any renovation of the existing {Stowell} building." It should take more than one vote by one board to walk away from the G.H. Stowell Free Library. We are not the only small town that has faced such a problem, but we may be one of the few towns that has never offered the voters a voice in the solution. Since the 1990 passage of the *Americans With Disabilities Act*, the town has never rejected a plan to make the Stowell accessible because the town has never been offered the opportunity to vote on a such a plan. The town and the library trustees need to stop looking for problems with the Stowell building and start finding a solution that will make Mr. Stowell's gift of a library accessible to all.

***Final thoughts on the 1912 Stowell Donation and proposed general store donation.***

There do exist parallels between George Stowell's 1912 offer of a library and Colleen O'Neill's 2022 offer of a library and community center. Both offers are generous and made with the best intentions towards our community, but there are important differences of which the voters should be aware.

In 1910, the Town spent \$100 to acquire real estate, a parcel of land, to house a new library. Mr. Stowell subsequently paid \$6,000, sixty times the value of the real estate, out of his own pocket to construct and to furnish the G.H. Stowell Free Library. In 1915, George Stowell bequeathed to the Town a trust in the amount of \$10,000 for the support of the G.H. Stowell Free Library. That trust exists today.

The 2022 offer of a library and community center is structured differently and is described in a non-binding letter of intent submitted by Ms. O'Neill to the town on 11/1/2022. The Town has been offered real estate at no cost, land and buildings valued at \$385,700. The construction estimate to renovate the general store building to be a library and community center is \$2,354,125, six times the value of the real estate. The 2022 donor has not offered to take on or pay the construction costs. Instead, she has created a non-profit organization, the Cornish Community Initiative (CCI), which would fundraise to cover the \$2.3M construction costs. Fundraising would begin only after a successful town meeting vote. The November 2022 letter of intent gives the CCI five years, until March 18, 2028, to meet its fundraising goal. Contingent upon successful fundraising by the CCI, Ms. O'Neill would donate the property, land and buildings, to the CCI.

The Town would not own the property during construction. The CCI would manage the renovation and construction of the new library and community center. Once complete, the renovated, unfurnished building would be turned over to the Town. Furnishings for the new library and community center would not be included in the gift. The Town also would be responsible for “for all costs associated with operating the public library and community center, including salaries, etc., and maintenance of the property going forward.” (November 2022 donor non-binding letter of intent)

The 1912 donor did not offer any real estate to the Town, but he did bear all the costs to construct and furnish a new library. The 2022 donor has made a generous offer of real estate, but she would not be responsible for the costs to construct or furnish a new library and community center. Construction of the proposed library and community center would be contingent on successful fundraising by the Cornish Community Initiative.

The Cornish Community Initiative and Ms. O'Neill have made repeated statements that should the general store proposal fail at a town meeting vote, neither the CCI nor the donors who have already offered pledges will support a Stowell Renovation. (7/23/2022 Message from Colleen O'Neill, owner of the Cornish General Store; answer from the Cornish Community Initiative to a question at the 10/4/2022 Library Forum)