

Old Stone School, Old Town Hall Meeting

**July 28, 2003
2:00 p.m.**

In attendance were members of the Historic District Commission, Recreation Committee, and the Reapers, Jonathan Austin of Austin Architects, Charles Smart Building Inspector, Jack O'Reilly Chairman of the Board of Selectmen and Cynthia Gillespie, Administrative Assistant.

The purpose of this meeting was to allow all interested parties to review the preliminary architectural drawings of the Old Stone School and the Old Town Hall. Also, this meeting was for the architect to get feed back as to the potential uses of these buildings, as perceived by the interested parties.

Jonathan Austin explained that the architectural phase is a three month process. It involves looking at the Old Stone School and the Old Town Hall. The process involves finding out the uses of the buildings, costs of changes to the buildings and the changes that would be made. There have been detailed surveys made of the buildings. This was achieved by literally measuring all the components of the building and making detailed drawings. An inventory of all structural information was done, to determine the buildings condition. It was also necessary to find out where the buildings meet code or not.

Mr. Austin also stated that his firm has applied for a \$10,000 grant from the State of New Hampshire's Moose Plate money to help pay for some of this project.

He went on to explain that Chapter 34 of the International Building Codes has to do with old buildings. These codes deal with life safety issues, such as egress and ingress to the buildings. With changes to old buildings there is a certain amount of gray areas where not everything has to be conforming to today's building codes. However, as far as the codes are involved, both buildings are substandard.

Chairman Jack O'Reilly stated that based on the reaction at Town Meeting, the Selectmen have asked that Austin make the Old Stone School a priority.

Mr. Austin pointed out that the most obvious problem is the exterior front stairs. The railing is not in good condition and neither is the concrete of the stairs. When you enter the building the stairs up to the Reapers' Room are not in good shape. The down set of stairs is in equally bad shape and lead to a scary looking basement. The rooms are very nice but the windows need to be cleared so that more light enters the basement. There needs to be electrical and lighting upgrades. As well as replacing the bathrooms.

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Another priority is that the building needs to be handicap accessible. Mr. Austin proposed that a wheelchair ramp be attached to the back right side entrance. To make all rooms accessible, a limited use elevator would be added to the left side of the back of the building. A bathroom also needs to be made handicap accessible as well.

The stairs need to be rebuilt, because the side stairs are too narrow. They also do not have a hand rail. By adding the handrail, the stair well will become even narrower.

Mr. Austin proposed inserting a kitchen space in the building. The kitchen would be in what is called the Reapers room at the top of the stairs. A new entrance would be made from this room to the outside of the building, providing another egress. Opening up the front stairs will almost comply with code. However, having another entrance and egress is a good idea. Mr. Austin stated that the building is otherwise unchanged.

Mr. Austin asked how the spaces within and outside the building would be used.

A member of the Reapers asked if all the closets would be there because the Reapers need storage for their November church sale. Mr. Austin stated that there will be ample storage space. If the Reapers switch rooms and moved downstairs they will have almost double the space that they currently have.

Mr. Austin stated that the Old Stone School is ideal for recreation and other activities and can be very flexible. Mr. Austin asked the recreation committee what they would use the building for. Keith Frizzell of the Recreation Committee stated that in the summer it was used by children for the summer program. One room would usually have a ping pong table, pool table, etc. Another room was ideal for tables to do crafts and things along that order. He stated that 40-45 children usually attend, from kindergarten age through the grade 6.

Peter MacDonald of the Recreation Committee said that he would like to see the building changed into a community center, such as adding a gym/basketball court. The field behind the school would also be used for recreation.

Keith Frizzell said that a concern of the Recreation Committee is the lack of air conditioning in the building because of the children being in the building during the summer.

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Mr. Austin said the building was originally cooled passively by a vent in the attic in the back of the school, the air was sent through shafts throughout the building. He asked how many days the air conditioning would be used during the year. Mr. Frizzell said probably about 60 days a year. Mr. Austin stated that a cost analysis would show how much and if it was worth it to air condition the building. Gail Pare of the Historic Commission asked if given modern technology it would be possible to add some windows to the back of the building, to increase air circulation and ventilation. Mr. Frizzell said that if the passive system and ventilation were upgraded the school might be okay without the air-conditioning. Building Inspector, Charles Smart stated that modern window replacements, using a low e-glass or high energy will reduce heat gain and loss. Chairman O'Reilly said that he would rather get the building functional again before adding air-conditioning.

A member of the Reapers spoke up and said that she felt it's a good plan. Instead of 2 rooms, there will be 4 and the elevator and new bathrooms and kitchen would be good additions.

Gail Pare asked if elevators are required in registered historic buildings. Mr. Austin said that the types of uses of the buildings dictate if the elevator is necessary. Chairman O'Reilly pointed out that the addition would be in the back of the building. He also stated that if the Town is going to all this expense, cutting corners is not an option. He stressed that if the building is going to be handicap accessible, then the Town should do it right. Building Inspector Charles Smart said that under current building codes, the elevator would be a leg up on compliance.

Mr. Austin said the estimated construction cost is \$440,000 but he reminded everyone that this is just an estimated cost and it still needs to be refined. How the Old Stone School will be used, needs to be determined in order to refine the costs.

Mr. Austin stated that there are also site changes that need to be addressed in order to be in compliance. Current exterior steps need to be replaced, in doing so they must conform. The landing needs to be made wider and the steps rebuilt. The stairs will extend out an additional two feet.

Gail Pare asked if there were provisions for handicap parking and an entrance in the back of the building if the wheel chair ramp was necessary. Mr. Austin stated that the elevator could be made accessible from the outside of the building, but he would have to review the costs. He stated that the ramp seems to be easiest to build and maintain.

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BI Smart responded that there is a 28 inch drop, so yes, a ramp is necessary. He stated that there is a restriction of one inch per one foot ramp stoop. So if there is a 28 inch drop the requirement is 28 foot of ramp. The problem with putting the ramp in the back of the school is that it will take up too much space. Mr. Austin stated that the ramp does not require a hand rail and that at the point that it goes into the ground there will be a stone wall. A detailed design will be made to see what the best options are and costs will be established then. Mr. Austin assured the group that there should be a minimal intrusion of the historic value of the building. The elevator will not be seen at the front of the building. This is the least intrusive way to do this.

Mr. Austin pointed out that the Old Town Hall is quite different than the Old Stone School. The kitchen is quite antiquated and is in need of repair. It was hoped that this building could be repaired for theater type events, dances, etc. Gail Pare said the downstairs was previously used as a school before the Old Stone School was built. Mrs. Watson said that there are pictures of the interior of the building available.

Mr. Austin said at some point the lower part of the addition is going to collapse. However, he said this is a great building and in fairly good shape. He purposed an addition to be added to back of the building to solve the egress and access problems. His plans included the addition of four new bathrooms, an elevator and a deck on the second floor over looking the picnic grove. Most of the changes will be out side of the historic shell.

He also pointed out the heat also needs to be looked at. Chairman O'Reilly stated that the heating and electric bills for this building are extremely high. Mr. Austin said that the heat is escaping through the roof. Gail Pare stated that the heat has to be kept up high so that the bathrooms are kept warm so pipes don't freeze.

Gail Pare asked if Mr. Austin had come up with the costs to make the changes to the Old Town Hall. Mr. Austin said that he had not, but anticipated the costs to be less than the Old Stone School.