

TOWN OF WAITSFIELD, VERMONT
Town Office Task Force Public Forum
Minutes of Monday, April 30, 2012

I. The Public Forum Began at 7:00pm at the Waitsfield Elementary School.

II. Summary:

Valerie Capels, Town Administrator, explained that this was the third public forum held on the subject of the town offices with the intention of providing information to the public and gathering public input. The Town Office Task Force was created in 2010, and includes Jennifer Peterson, Town Clerk and Treasurer; Sandy Gallup, Former Town Clerk and Treasurer; Brian Voigt, Planning Commission; Charlie Hosford, Selectboard; John Riley, Library; and Brian Shupe, Development Review Board. Ms. Capels explained that a survey will be distributed following the forum to gauge the public's preferences.

Brian Shupe explained that the Task Force has explored Irasville and Waitsfield Village as locations for the future Town Office building and determined that this would be consistent with the goals set forth in the Town Plan. Bill Maclay was then hired to help with further analysis of possible sites. Three sites were identified as possibilities—the existing Town Office, the Wait House, and the Flemer Barns.

Maclay Architects were hired to look at the three sites originally identified as potential locations. Public discussion encouraged a broadening of these options, and there has since been three additional sites added as possibilities. The architects have determined that a minimum of one acre is needed for the town office. Bill Maclay discussed each option.

Site A-This proposed site is in Irasville, between the Post Office and Shaw's. This land is currently owned by Mad River Partnership. Parking can be potentially challenging at this site. It does have potential sewage capacity. Though land is generally wet in Irasville, this site is relatively dry.

Site B- This site is also in Irasville behind TD Bank and in front of Shaw's on the Slow Road. This site is considered wetlands, and getting it to the point where it is buildable may be challenging. It does have expansion capabilities for the future. It also has the potential to be hooked into the municipal wastewater system in the future.

Site C- This site is also in Irasville, just north of TD Bank. This is a wet lot and is less than one acre, so it would require purchasing an additional 1/3 acre from Skatium. The challenges seem to be most substantial with this site.

Site D- This site is in Waitsfield Village, and is a four acre parcel owned by the Flemer family and is also referred to as the Flemer Barns site. It is located behind the Valley Players, and it contains an early 20th century barn and a barn from the 1970's. This is the largest parcel under consideration and therefore offers more possibilities than the other options. It can potentially contain rentable space such as housing, offices, etc. The actual site for the Town office would be behind the church, close to Route 100. The right-of-way would have to be negotiated with Valley Players. It is also the closest option to Bridge Street. It has viable septic capacity.

Site E- This site is also in Waitsfield Village and is referred to as the Farm Stand site. Both of the Flemer properties are adjacent to the field that the Flemer family donated to the town. This is a one-acre parcel and it meets the requirements for septic and parking.

Site F- This site is in Waitsfield Village and is the site of the General Wait House and Fire Station. There would be shared use parking for all three facilities, as well as common septic, which would have to be upgraded.

Maclay also explored the existing Town Offices as well as the lot between the Town Office and the church. Challenges include parking, septic, and location within the flood plain, and for these reasons, they have been ruled out as options.

Building site plans that the architects are working with include a two-story building with approximately 5,000 sq. ft. and 20 parking spaces pursuant to permitting requirements. All of these options assumed new construction, so actual building costs are essentially the same. In some cases, approximate costs of the land are known, but many of them have been estimated. The estimates for three sites in Waitsfield are more precise as the price of the plots are available, whereas those in Irasville are not.

One townspeople asked if the Town would consider selling off a portion of the Flemer Barns property or develop for rental revenue. These are both possibilities.

Another said that he would consider supporting purchase of the Barns Site if this additional revenue could be generated. He also stated that he supports the idea of renovating historical buildings, as this is an historical town. He asked if the Masonic Lodge was considered, and was told that it was not because of its septic, parking, and size limitations. In addition, the vault would have to be located in the basement, and ideally the vault will be located on ground level.

One man asked if the Mary Brothers house was considered, and he was told that it was not because of its asking price of over \$800,000. Another person asked about the possibility of purchasing the old church. Maclay commented that the purchase and renovation of older buildings often far exceeds new construction.

A matrix outlining projected costs as well as challenges and benefits of each site was provided to forum attendees. One woman asked if improvements to the septic for Site F are necessary regardless of whether the Town Offices are constructed on that parcel, and she was told that they are not.

Forum attendees were reminded that one of the main goals of the meeting is to determine whether the Town Office should be located in Irasville or Waitsfield Village.

One woman commented that the Town Office should be a source of civic pride, and her opinion as that repurposing an historic building would draw upon this.

At this point, the discussion broadened to include what people would like to see this building bring to the Town.

One man commented that to obstruct the view of General Wait's cemetery would be an abomination.

Kirsten Siebert commented that Waitsfield is a linear village and whatever plans are made should be in keeping with that. She also commented that the speed of cars is an issue in the village, and this building should contribute to the speed reduction and safety of this area. She advocated exploring other options, including the old high school, but does support Site F. She acknowledges that Site E has some of the same attributes, but she feels that Site F would signal to cars that they have entered the center of town, which may contribute to general speed reduction.

A long-time resident favors Sites E or F, as they fall within the cultural center of the Town. She lives within the downtown area.

There were questions regarding the bonding that would be procured for this project, and Ms. Capels believes that it would be a twenty or thirty year term.

There were questions as to whether the Waitsfield Health Center might be a possibility, Bill Maclay responded that parking was found to be insufficient for the Town Office.

Another resident questioned the future use of Flemer Field, but Ms. Capels explained that the land is restricted from being built upon, so it will remain an open field.

One resident questioned if there are any zoning issues with any of these options, and Mr. Maclay confirmed that zoning was taken into consideration and all appear to be within the current zoning regulations.

Another resident pointed out that whatever property was chosen would translate into a loss of tax revenue, and the Barns site is a concern for this reason. He also added that the Barns are not historic structures.

Another resident advocates pursuing one of the Irasville sites, as this is the new commercial center of the town. He suggested the building where the Chinese restaurant is, as there is ample parking.

One resident said that there is a fine line to walk between what would be the best option for the town and what would be the most palatable to voters. He feels that voters would be more likely to vote in favor of building on a lot that the town already owns, and he favors Site F for this reason. He feels that the Barns property would be likely to be voted down.

Mr. Spinosa mentioned that timing is a concern of his, as there are several major infrastructural projects underway. He is in favor of pursuing Site F because it is already owned by the Town, and the building process could therefore be adjusted to accommodate the timelines of other projects.

One resident feels that the Town should select a site that would encourage visitors to stop and explore the Town Center and patronize businesses.

One resident expressed concern that moving the Town offices to Irasville would be a big mistake, as was moving the Post Office to Irasville.

Another person advocated for building the Town Office in Irasville, as that is the commercial center of town. Another questioned whether a civic office should be held in a commercial district.

Numerous people commented on the importance of adding to a pedestrian-friendly streetscape within Waitsfield Village that would encourage people to walk; this is missing entirely in Irasville.

One person commented that building in Irasville without providing parking might encourage people to walk. Another commented that placing an aesthetically-pleasing building in Irasville between TD Bank and Shaw's would be out of place. The town is a tourist attraction and this needs to be heavily considered.

One resident commented that Irasville should be restricted to commercial development, and Town buildings should be restricted to historic Waitsfield Village. Another commented that developing Town Offices in Irasville may cause a transformation into a more pedestrian area.

Kirsten Siebert reiterated that this is a linear village, and this must be embraced.

One person expressed concerns that there would be too many things packed onto Site F, so he is in favor of Site D or E, as he feels that the public has ruled out Irasville as an option.

Mr. Hosford expressed that he would like to see the Town Offices on the Farm Stand Site, but would also like to explore the Barns lot, as he does not want to see the entire area altered by commercial development.

Sandy Lawton urged the town to look at Bristol, which is also a linear village, but has joined the commercial and the civic together for a very pedestrian friendly feel.

Public comment ended, and Ms. Capels explained that survey results would be made available to the public as soon as possible.