

Calais Town Hall Use and Funding Plan -- Summary Report

Prepared and submitted by: Arc & Arrow Consulting LLC, December 15, 2011

Revised by: {name of person}, {date}

Introduction: The following document provides a summary of the full Calais Town Hall Use and Funding Report prepared and submitted to the Calais Selectboard in December 2015. The full report is a presentation of the public process that was undertaken to establish a plan for the future use(s) and level of rehabilitation/restoration for the Calais Town Hall. This work was spurred by a 2013 conditions assessment report of the Calais Town Hall by Arnold & Scangas Architects which identified a variety of building repair needs and made preliminary recommendations on how to address repairs. In light of the maintenance and repair needs of the Calais Town Hall, and in view of its historic and practical importance for the people of Calais and the surrounding area, the Calais Selectboard established the Calais Town Hall Task Force to evaluate meetings space needs and to conduct a public engagement and outreach process around the future uses of Town Hall. The recommendations within the full report and this Summary are informed by a public engagement and outreach process that was conducted with the residents of the Town of Calais during fall 2015 and through an evaluation of meeting space needs for official town committees, boards and community groups. A copy of the full report is available on the Town's website and at the Town Offices and includes a recommendation of funding options that might be pursued in order to finance the cost of rehabilitation/restoration efforts.

Background & Condition of Building: In 2011 the Selectboard authorized the Calais Historic Preservation Commission to secure grant funding and seek the services of qualified architect to evaluate the condition of the Calais Town Hall. In 2013, the Town procured the services of Arnold & Scangas Architects to complete the assessment. The assessment included all major building components and a preliminary review of floodplain mapping, Life Safety and Building Code requirements. While a number of issues were identified in all areas of assessment, the building was found to be in good condition for its age. Three areas of concern identified by the report have since been addressed by the town and include replacement of the roof (2014), restoration of the windows on the second floor (2015), and further evaluation of the roof framing related to the steeple and the chimney (2015). The remaining issues identified in the report include rotted floor joists and beams on the first floor and a recommendation to replace or rebuild the foundation, the need for code compliant exit signage and the need to renovate the building to meet current ADA Accessibility Standards. While these repair needs are critical to the future use of the Calais Town Hall, the building has not officially been closed, nor has the Fire Marshall recommended closure of the building. As a necessary precaution and to limit further damage to the foundation and floor joists, the town has limited the use of the building temporarily while Calais Town Hall Task force identify next steps.

Public Outreach Process and Public Opinion Results: In order to elicit as much community input as possible, the Calais Selectboard voted to establish the Calais Town Hall Task Force ("The Task Force"). Arc & Arrow Consulting LLC worked with the Task Force to design and conduct a town-wide survey and facilitate two community input meetings. Calais citizens were invited to meet and discuss their thoughts and opinions about the potential uses and scope of revitalization that should occur with the Town Hall. Input from the survey and the community meetings helped guide the work of Arc & Arrow Consulting LLC and the Task Force to ensure the building is put to its highest and best use, based on the needs and desires of the town. A total of 32 people attended the community meetings and 187 people responded to the survey, though not everyone answered every single question. Complete Survey Results are available on the Town's website and at the Town Offices.

Survey results indicated the Town Hall building is seen as an important part of the community's identity. The majority of those who responded indicate that the Town should explore weatherizing the space for year-round use, improving the heating system, exploring a more flexible seating plan within the building and improving and increasing parking at the Town Hall. 65% of those who responded believe there is a need to provide space for public meetings and community gatherings that is accessible to people with disabilities. Survey results and comments received at community meetings indicate a concern about the cost of repairs and improvements to the Town Hall and its impact on taxpayers. 89% of those who responded to the survey encourage the Town to seek grant funding to pay for repair needs at the Town Hall. 65.1% of people who responded support using a combination of

grant and taxpayer funding and 53.7% would support the Town in exclusively using taxpayer funds. A significant majority of those who responded would like the Town to consider charging rent to help support expenses related to operating the building. 68% agree that the Town should consider establishing a plan to promote and manage the space for private events and gatherings. The top five (5) most important activities that people would like to see at Town Hall were: Town Meeting (85.4%), a Summer Craft and Farmer's Market (67.1%), Historical Displays (65.2%), Musical Performances (64.6%) and a Winter Farmer's Market (62.8%).

Results indicated that more than half of those who responded to the survey believe there is adequate meeting space in Calais for 125 or more people. The Task Force wants to note that while the Town has worked with the local elementary school to ensure there is a location for Town Meeting, availability of that space is not a guarantee. Availability of the school for meetings of any size are contingent on availability of space and subject to the approval of the school. The Town only owns two buildings that have public meeting space: the Town Hall and the Town Offices. Securing meeting space in one of the two town-owned buildings can be a challenge, with over 18 town-appointed committees and 10 active community organizations meetings regularly throughout the course of the year. As the Task Force looks 5-10 years into the future, it encourages the Town to consider a broad range of meeting needs and the benefits of having meeting space that can accommodate large groups of people and is owned and controlled by the Town.

Recommendations/Action Items: Based on an extensive exploration of meeting space needs, the condition of the building and the results of the survey and comments received at the community meetings, Arc & Arrow Consulting LLC worked with the Town Hall Task Force to identify and recommend the following action items to the Town of Calais:

Action Item #1 - Floodplain Determination: It is recommended that the Town of Calais work with the Department of Environmental Conservation to clarify floodplain boundaries and fluvial erosion hazard areas. Currently, the Town Hall is not considered to be within the Floodplain. The outcome of the determination of the floodplain status of the Town Hall may impact the level of review required for state and federal grant applications.

Action Item #2 - Update Arnold & Scangas Report: It is recommended that the Town of Calais work with the Calais Historic Preservation Commission and Arnold & Scangas Architects to update the original architectural report to include the weatherization of the lower level of Town Hall for year round use and to identify the most energy efficient, zoned heating system to allow the lower and upper levels of the building to be used independently and in the most efficient way possible.

Action Item #3(A) & (B) & (C) - Accessibility Improvements and Major Building Repairs: Arc & Arrow Consulting LLC has identified potential grant funding sources, included in this report. Eligible uses of these funds include bringing the Town Hall into compliance with the American with Disabilities Act, and offsetting the cost of building repairs and improvements, including replacement and rebuilding of the building foundation, improved parking and site access, and the installation of a more energy efficient heating system.

- (A) It is recommended that the Town of Calais apply for grant funding for planning and predevelopment work related to improving accessibility and major building repairs.
- (B) It is recommended that the Town of Calais apply to a variety of funding mechanisms to include grant funding and/or low interest loan(s) for the implementation of the repair work to the Town Hall as identified in the planning and predevelopment phase of this work.
- (C) It is recommended that the Town of Calais explore the details and implications of municipal bond funding for a portion of the implementation of the repair work to the Town Hall as identified in the planning and predevelopment phase of this work.

Action Item #4 - Interior Space - Seating Reconfiguration: It is recommended that the Town of Calais work with the Calais Historic Preservation Commission to explore the possibility of creating a more flexible seating

plan on the second floor to allow for a variety of uses and increased capacity. The configuration may be predicated upon the ultimate uses established for the second floor of the building. In addition, the floor plan layout could change with updates to the ADA features of the second floor (such as the re-location of the elevator/shaft), which could provide additional space for seating. This would be determined during the planning and predevelopment phase of the rehabilitation work to the Town Hall.

Action Item #5 – Partnerships: It is recommended that the Town of Calais explore partnerships with existing community organizations that are interested in additional meeting space or a permanent physical location. For example, it was noted at the community meetings and appeared in the comments section of the town survey that the Calais Historical Society does not have an official ‘home’ or a physical space to house its historic collection. The survey also indicated interest in using the hall for musical performances, and winter and summer farmer's markets. Partnering with an existing or newly formed town organization that can share in the management, promotion and stewardship of the Town Hall building has potential to increase community use, support operating expenses and bring new vitality to an otherwise underutilized historic asset.

Action Item #6 - Plan to Promote the Town Hall for Community Use: It is recommended that the Town of Calais develops a plan to promote the Town Hall for increased community use. Options the town may want to consider in developing this plan include; establishing a Town Hall Committee to develop policies and to oversee management of the space; issuing an RFP to the public to engage an organizations or individuals to put forth its own proposal for the use and/or management of the Town Hall in collaboration with the Town; or establishing a Friends of Town Hall group who will oversee the management, promotion and stewardship of the space. Examples of the towns that have developed plans to promote Town Hall can be found in the full report.

Action Item #7 - Fee for Use policy: It is recommended that the Town of Calais explore the option of establishing a fee for use policy to help offset the cost of general building operations for the Town Hall. Depending on the outcomes of Action Items #5 and #6, the fee for use policy may be developed by the Selectboard, an appointed town committee, in coordination with a community partner or by a friends group. Examples of towns with Fee for Use Policies that are available for review can be found in the full report.

Funding Recommendations

Planning and Predevelopment Funding: Arc & Arrow Consulting LLC’s recommendations on how to proceed with the funding is based the scope of work identified through the Arnold & Scangas Report, on evaluation of the Town’s meeting space needs, and on feedback received through the community survey and meetings. Both in the survey and at the community meetings, citizens wanted more information about costs of rehabilitation and proposed building improvements, as well as a sense of how the project would be funded. While the Arnold & Scangas Report from 2013 gives the Town a basic idea of what needs to be done, Arc & Arrow recommends that the Town pursues Planning and Pre-development grant funding. Potential grant sources include: The Vermont Community Development Program, The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, The Division for Historic Preservation, The New England Grassroots Environment Fund and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The results of the pre-development work will provide the Town with a solid roadmap and basis for applying for implementation funding.

Major Building Repairs and Rehabilitation: Once the Town has done the predevelopment work and established a solid plan for the rehabilitation of the building, Arc & Arrow Consulting LLC recommends pursuing implementation funding through the Vermont Community Development Program (accessibility), The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (for foundation replacement/rebuild and building rehabilitation), and from other smaller grant funding sources and low interest loan programs. For a complete list of potential funding sources, see the full report.

Other Considerations: Should the town decide to pursue a partnership with a community group that provides cultural programming, arts or humanities based events, the Town may be eligible for additional funding through groups like the Vermont Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Cultural Facilities Grant from the Vermont Arts Council can be used for a variety of building related projects including but not limited to: the installation of acoustical tiles for improved sound quality, and purchasing archival storage, theater seating, lighting and equipment.