Town Of Needham Board of Selectman
Minutes for July 29, 2008
Needham Town Hall

7:00 p.m. Call To Order
A meeting of the Board of Selectmen was convened by Chairman James G. Healy at 7:00 p.m. Those present were: John Bulian, Daniel P. Matthews, Gerald Wasserman, James Healy, Denise Garlick, Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick and Committee Secretary Sandy Cincotta.

7:00 p.m. Chairman Healy opened the meeting by commending the Needham Police and Fire Departments. There had been two recent instances in the last couple of weeks where each department provided outstanding service.

Mr. Healy also noted that the installation of synthetic turf has now begun at Memorial Field. He suggested that interested residents go to the field and check it out. Private funds raised for this project are currently at $5,350,000; $150,000 short of the goal of $5.5M.

7:05 p.m. Town Hall Project Discussion
Wendall Kalsow, McGinley Kalsow & Associates LLP (MKA), John Connolly, Chair of the Permanent Public Building Committee, and Steven Popper, Director of Construction and Renovation joined the Board of Selectmen for this discussion.

Mr. Kalsow presented to the Board a new alternative - #4. This alternative is a compromise of Alternative #1 (which includes a restoration of the second floor fitted out for use as office space) and Alternative #3 (which provides for a restoration of the second floor for use as an auditorium and includes an annex the size of the current parking lot on the north side of the building). Alternative #4 proposes to restore the second floor for use as an auditorium and construct an annex roughly half the size of the annex in Alternative #3. The original Town Hall and the annex would be joined by an eight foot corridor constructed of glass. Alternative #4 would provide for 15 parking spaces on the north side of the building.

The floor plan would allow for all of the heavily visited and transactional departments to be located on the first floor of both the existing Town Hall and in the annex.

Total project costs for Alternative #4 are projected to be $18.5 million. It is estimated that $14.5 million of the project would be eligible for Community Preservation Funds.

Mr. Wasserman asked if Alternative #1 could be constructed now and the annex contemplated in Alternative #4 be constructed at a later date. Mr. Bulian echoed this request. Mr. Kalsow pointed out that splitting the project into two different projects would not be advantageous for the Town. Economies of scale for construction costs would be lost.

Mr. Matthews asked if MKA could provide a list of a la carte costs for a minimal renovation approach. Mr. Kalsow responded that he will provide these costs before the next Selectmen’s meeting, but stated this approach has long term drawbacks. It is difficult to know what the correct stopping point is. Many Town Hall systems are beyond their normal servicing limits.

Mr. Connolly explained that implementing Alternative #1 now and Alternative #4 later would not be phasing one project as you would need to redo things that had already been done in the earlier project; there would be a need to rework areas that had recently been renovated.

Ms. Garlick stated that she is pleased to see Alternative #4 as it seems in alignment with the comments made at the summit meeting.

Mr. Healy asked if concern about locating offices in the lower level of the Town Hall is a legitimate concern. Mr. Kalsow answered that the lower level is only ½ a floor below the ground. There are still windows. There are many buildings with offices in the lower levels. There needs to be ventilation, something that is not currently available. There is no health risk to use the lower level for office space. Carbon monoxide monitors will be placed in the lower level of both the existing Town Hall and in the new annex.

Mr. Healy asked what the cost would be to abandon the use of the lower level for offices. Mr. Kalsow responded that it would be Alternative #3.

Mr. Wasserman suggested that perhaps private funding could be used to help fund the cost of Alternative #4 if the Town could not pay. Mr. Bulian agreed that this may be an opportunity for private funding.

Mr. Matthews asked how soon a decision would need to be reached (as to which alternative the Selectmen select) to keep the project on track. Mr. Connolly responded that a decision would need to be made very early in September.

Mr. Healy stated that Alternative #4 is a very intriguing option as that it allows for use of the second floor of Town Hall as an auditorium, and allows for the Town Manager to have essential services and accessibility to her staff in the downtown area. He raised three issues: (1) Historical Significance: the second floor auditorium is an important historical aspect, but so is the exterior view of the north side. Under Alternative #4 the Selectmen’s meeting room will be enclosed by a walkway. 2) Mixed Use: if the second floor is restored for auditorium use, it is critical that the mixed use not interfere with governmental services. The use of the building will be governed by the Town Charter and the Town Manager will have final say. Non-governmental use Monday through Thursday will not be allowed. Weekend use must be consistent with respect that the building is a working Town Hall, there is no lobby, nor parking. (3) Cost to the taxpayer: there is a difference of $2.7 million between Alternative #1 and Alternative #4. Funding for this would come from either a debt exclusion override or it would need to be found in the current capital plan, which would have impact on future capital projects.

Mr. Kalsow informed the Board that MKA had not planned for any extraordinary acoustical separation between the second floor and the rest of the building. Mr. Healy asked Mr. Kalsow to provide this in writing to the Board.

Mr. Kalsow added that the auditorium renovation provides for civic auditorium costs, not performance hall costs. Performance hall changes can be phased in if desired at a later date.

Mr. Matthews inquired about the code requirements for earthquakes. Mr. Kalsow responded that the seismological plans treat the existing Town Hall and the annex as two separate buildings and that no changes will be made to the existing Town Hall building.

Mr. Connolly reiterated the advantages of Alternative #4:

- all transactional space is located on first floor
- includes additional conference room space
- Improves the aesthetics of the addition.

Mr. Wasserman stated that there have been concerns about other projects where additions have been added to existing structures with the addition clearly standing out as an addition. Mr. Kalsow responded that the annex would be viewed as secondary to the original building and will be historically appropriate.

Ms. Fitzpatrick added that moving the Health Department from the lower level (as in Alternative #1) to the second level (as in Alternative #4) leaves only departments who do not normally see outside visitors in the lower level. The exception is Youth Services, which prefers to be located in the lower level.

Mr. Healy thanked Mr. Kalsow, Mr. Connolly and Mr. Popper for all of their efforts to date. He added that he is looking forward to the information collected by the Town Hall Study Committee regarding similar projects in other communities.

8:00 p.m. Executive Session

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Board of Selectmen vote to enter into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation, or to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel, not to return to open session prior to adjournment.

Second: Mr. Wasserman. Mr. Healy polled the Board members. Unanimously approved 5-0.

(The Board adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.)