

Jacob Edwards Library

Board of Trustees/Southbridge Town Manager Special Meeting

September 4, 2014 @ 3:00 p.m.

Pioppi Room, JEL

Present: JEL Board members: Chairman Dick Whitney, Mel Blake, Robin Weber, Jim Dyer

Library Director: Margaret Morrissey

Town Manager Kevin Paicos, Fire Chief Mark DeFronzo, Police Chief Dan Charrette,

Town Assessor Wil Cournoyer, Building Inspector Nick Tortis

Chairman Whitney opened the meeting by thanking all in attendance and expresses the JEL Board's wish to hear from the Town Manager and his team regarding several issues including the properties for sale adjacent to JEL, the retaining wall currently in place and in need of attention and the long term plan for the JEL parking lot and possible expansion.

Town Manager Paicos gave an overview of the improvement plan that the Town Council is currently working on, which includes the demolition of a number of properties in town (blighted, unoccupied, unsafe). This plan will work toward improving property values and the overall appearance of the community. There are 58 abandoned buildings in town. The cost to demolish each building bears a cost of \$25,000 - \$50,000. The town has identified the "top 20" properties to demolish first. Funding for this project is still in the works with some Community Grant money available, possible private funds, and other town accounts. Paicos has approached the JEL BOD to open up the possibility of the library's involvement in this plan, specifically regarding three properties adjacent to JEL: 10 Wardwell Court, 22 Foster Street and 28 Foster Street.

Wil Cournoyer gave specifics on these three properties. 10 Wardwell Court is on the list to be demolished and has a tax lien in excess of \$10,000. The lot itself appears to be worthless. 22 Foster Street is currently on the market, asking price of \$69,900. This is an estate sale, has been on the market for some time, is current on taxes, and could probably be bought for less than \$50,000, as the house is in poor condition. 28 Foster Street is vacant and expected to be put on

the market in the near future and is also in poor condition: the asking price is expected to also be low. Wil expressed his opinion that the purchase/demolition of these three properties and the conversion of the lots into additional parking for JEL along with benches is an opportunity not to pass up. Thinking in the long term, he feels that this would be a plus for JEL and the community at large and expressed the idea that some urgency does surround this project, as all 3 properties would need to be part of the plan.

Chief Charette and Chief DeFronzo both expressed concern over the many properties in need of demolition from a safety point of view. Every house on “the list” that is taken down is a step in a positive direction. The Wardwell Court /Foster Street area has long been an area of police concern. Moving forward with this idea would greatly improve living conditions in this area.

Building Inspector Nick Tortis explained that the demolition of properties often becomes complicated, often with asbestos removal as part of the deal.

Chairman Whitney expressed the JEL BOD interest in these issues but explained that much of our endowment money is in a restricted account. He will contact the account manager and research the details surrounding this restriction. A question and answer period ensued which enabled the board members to ask the Town Manager a variety of questions on this topic including the responsibility of property owners, repurposing funds and the potential role of JEL.

Library Director Morrissey reported that there is capital money that has been appropriated for the retaining wall in the JEL parking lot. If this money is not used or needed for the wall then Town Manager okayed the use for the JEL ceiling project.

It was noted that before the 2000 renovation of JEL, the JEL BOD looked at Wardwell Court and the surrounding area as a potential area that could be used for parking/ expansion. At the time, the BOD did not have the funds to proceed.

After continued discussion on the many facets this unique opportunity may bring to the town and the JEL, it was decided that Town Manager Paicos will put together a detailed plan which will pull together various groups in the community including the Planning Board, the Redevelopment Authority, the Town Council and the JEL BOD. This report will include options for the properties adjacent to JEL, the retaining wall and the long term vision for this area. The key term evolving from this meeting is “partnership”. As someone who has successfully worked on similar projects, Paicos is confident that he can move forward such a plan/partnership in a short amount of time.

It was noted that any further questions on this proposal should be directed to the Town Manager's Office. The next JEL BOD meeting will be held on September 23, 2014.

Chairman Whitney expressed his thanks for everyone's valuable input. The meeting adjourned at 4:45.

Minutes recorded by Mel Blake

Approved October 21, 2014