

## **Schoolhouse Task Force**

Minutes of Meeting

April 9, 2014

**Present:** Brian Bigelow, Pete Czaja, Carla Hochschild, Greg Leech, Susan Thomas

**Guest:** Ann Cousins, Preservation Trust of Vermont

### **Meeting with Ann Cousins**

This meeting at the Schoolhouse was devoted to consulting with Ann Cousins, Field Representative from the Preservation Trust of Vermont. After touring the second floor, Ann explained what the Preservation Trust is and does. Their Condition Assessment Grants are their primary grants for projects like ours, but they partner with other grant-funding organizations and provide assistance. She explained how a rehabilitation project would proceed.

### **The Process**

After the condition assessment, the project should be broken down into phases. A Case Statement should be prepared stating what the group wants to do, why, and the importance of the building to the history of the town. Use local talent – tradespeople, bakers, etc. – and keep in touch with local legislators, which can open doors for state funding. Identify who can help. A “sparkplug” person is often important to the success of a project. Put together a book about the project, including the history of the building. Identify collaborators who will use the building. In developing the money piece, consider creative ways to give, such as stocks. She encouraged us to attend one of PTVT’s preservation retreats in Grand Isle or their annual conference. Ann distributed handouts on the annual conference in Island Pond, on fundraising steps, and on Vermont Arts Council Cultural Facilities Grants. She also distributed PTVT’s Restoration Directory and pointed out important articles in the back on “Getting Started on Your Preservation Project,” “Choosing a Contractor,” etc.

### **Grants and Funding**

The Vermont Arts Council awards Cultural Facilities Grants for “new fabric” improvements such as bathrooms, electrical work, handicapped accessibility, etc. The application deadline is May 1 each year, and they are not overly competitive. The Vermont Division for Historic Preservation awards grants for “old fabric” which have a Sept. 1 deadline. There are some advantages to Town ownership of the building because there are special grants for municipalities. Towns can also use more experimental waste treatment methods than other groups. There are Community Development Block Grants for access modification – lift to the upstairs, accessible bathroom, etc. They are a minimum of \$50,000. Leahy Village Revitalization Grants and USDA Rural Development Grants are other possibilities. The Vermont Community Foundation has entry level grants. The Preservation Trust maintains a revolving fund for endangered buildings going on the market. UVM Historic Preservation students have to do a feasibility study for a building each semester, and we could ask them to do one for the Schoolhouse. Susan will contact the director.

### **Other Similar Projects**

Ann mentioned several similar projects around the state that could be helpful to the task force: Morrisville River Arts Project, Peacham Town Hall, Huntington Town Hall, Plainfield Town Hall, the Lincoln Library. Plainfield is raising money for mold abatement in a town owned building. When Richmond surveyed the town about uses for a town building, they used Survey Monkey online as well as paper surveys in the local newspaper, in the Town office, and in the local bakery and café, followed by a final meeting. They had 200 respondents.

### **Potential Uses**

Ann suggested possible uses for the building, including a co-op workspace or a paying tenant upstairs. The Sudbury stone schoolhouse partnered with Vermont Bicycle Tours. The Putney Historical Society rehabilitated the Congregational Church, and it now houses a puppet theater.

### **Questions**

Regarding ownership of the building, Ann mentioned that Richmond granted a 99 year lease of the Round Church to the Historical Society. Regarding restrictions placed on work by historic preservation grants, Ann said it depends on the funding source, but 95% of projects follow the Secretary of the Interior rehabilitation standards. She mentioned façade easements as a way to preserve the exteriors of privately owned buildings. Asked about historic preservation grants not being awarded to a moved building, she said it depends on whether it is moved a long distance or has to be moved just a short distance, e.g. to be put on a new foundation. Asked about the possibility of a creative water source, e.g. holding tanks, Ann said the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development would be the agency to ask.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be at 6:30 pm on Wed., April 16, 2014, at the Town Hall.

Minutes submitted by Susan Thomas