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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices at Cole Hall

Meeting Minutes

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Special – Town Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting: February 11th, 2025

Town of Shaftsbury Special Town Meeting

The Special Town Meeting was scheduled for February 11, 2025 to begin at 5:30 PM in the Shaftsbury Elementary School gym. Due to the number of people to be checked in, the meeting commenced at 5:45 PM with Mr. Thomas Daily moderating. After the Pledge of Allegiance, Mr. Daily read the meeting warning in full. He then briefly described the procedures to be followed. At 5:50 PM Mr. Daily asked for and received a motion and second to open the meeting. The meeting was opened, and the warning was reread as the business to be conducted: "Shall the Town of Shaftsbury expend \$375,000 on the purchase of the former Shaftsbury Medical Associates building at 677 Route 7A, Shaftsbury, and an additional \$178,486.08 on the renovation and repair needed to make the building appropriate for Municipal Offices?" Mr. Daily introduced Select Board Chair, Naomi Miller, and asked her to introduce the rest of the Select Board and the Community Center Development Committee (CCDC).

Ms. Miller greeted the attendees and introduced Select Board members Martha Cornwell (Vice-Chair), Mike Cichanowski, Brad Peacock, and Tony Krulikowski, and Town Administrator, Paula Iken. She then turned the meeting over to the CCDC, introducing Marie Watson, the first presenter. Ms. Watson introduced CCDC members Zoe Contros Kearn (co-Chair), Paula Iken (co-Chair), Ben Benedict (citizen representative/architect), Sarah Costin (Recreation Committee representative), Joan Dornhoefer (citizen representative), and Marlene Hall (Cole Hall representative). Ms. Watson laid out the purpose of the CCDC and its evolution from the Town Green Committee to its current role researching best options for a community center. She touched on the findings of the town survey, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money, and historical use of Cole Hall as a central gathering place for Shaftsbury. Ms. Watson then introduced Zoe Contros Kearn.

Ms. Contros Kearn presented a PowerPoint that expanded on Ms. Watson's overview, with details of the purpose the CCDC, the history behind it, survey results, and proposed community center uses. She then detailed the discoveries of the CCDC in the process of researching various types of community center builds and the costs. Ms. Contros Kearn noted that while this process was occurring, conditions at the current town offices in Cole Hall deteriorated to the point where employees working downstairs needed to be moved for health and safety reasons. She then presented the CCDC's recommendation that the former Shaftsbury Medical Associates building be purchased for use as town offices and community space. Rationale for the purchase--fiscal responsibility, Cole Hall issues, building features, efficiency, location, and

services--were expanded on. Some features of the medical building were touched upon and a list of inspections already performed was displayed. Ms. Contros Kearl noted that binders containing inspection results were available for review at the back of the room. She then turned the presentation over to Mr. Ben Benedict. A display of Mr. Benedict's proposed plan for the building was displayed on the screen. Note: The entire PowerPoint is available for review on the Shaftsbury Town website.

Mr. Benedict went over the facts about the medical building, including its history, size, materials, lighting, heating and AC, and current condition of the interior and exterior. He then discussed the needed repairs and renovations, both immediate and those that could be temporarily delayed. Mr. Benedict touched on expected utility costs and costs shared 70/30 with Shaftsbury Dental, the other occupant of the site. He noted that the cost per square foot to move in ready was around \$120, much less than the average \$400/sq. ft. of a new build. Mr. Daily then announced a break after which questions could be asked.

Mr. Daily opened the floor for questions, comments, discussions, and debate at approximately 6:25 PM. The first speaker was Ms. Andrea Bacchi, member of the Shaftsbury Energy Committee and Economic Development Committee, and Chair of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council. She noted her approval of the potential purchase as an ADA compliant building that made the town more inclusive of and accessible for its population and visitors with mobility issues and disabilities.

The next speaker was the Hon. Lon McClintock. He asked if the money being voted on was part of the budget and if the tax rate would change. Ms. Miller answered that it is not included in the budget and will not change the tax rate because it comes from the budget excess created when the ARPA money was moved. Mr. McClintock then asked if provisions had been made for additional funding, should it be needed to cover costs to the building. Ms. Iken said that she had estimated higher and was hoping to also keep costs low through community collaboration. She is also exploring grants. Mr. McClintock then asked if the basement was accessible. Ms. Iken stated that the basement is accessible by stairs, not handicapped accessible, but it was not a public space. Mr. McClintock then asked about the cost of the vault, which is not included in the estimate. Ms. Iken discussed the one estimate of \$110,00 and the need to assess the size needed to get a more accurate estimate. She also noted that grants and other avenues of funding were being researched. Mr. McClintock stated that he thought Cole Hall had come to the end of its useful life and that it becoming a community center is unrealistic. Ms. Miller reiterated that the future of Cole Hall is an issue that will be decided by the townspeople. The cost of bringing Cole Hall to a workable ADA compliant space far exceeded ARPA monies. Cole Hall is on the list of Vermont registered buildings which also adds to potential cost of restoration.

Mr. Mike Harrington spoke next, recalling the work he did on the medical building when it was constructed. He approved the new use. Mr. Harrington asked if the ARPA funds might disappear with the new government. Ms. Miller said that the ARPA funds were now a budget surplus, so they were secure.

Ms. Karen Mellinger then asked some questions about money for the vault- was it coming before the town tonight? and Cole Hall- responsibility for cost heating when not in use, if Cole Hall is given back, what happens to the property behind it? Ms. Miller discussed the use of the land as a town green and for workforce housing. All this would be on a vote for the townspeople.

Mr. John Tiffany noted his concerns that \$500,000 of property was being removed from the grand lists. Ms. Miller said that the medical building taxes were \$4000 and the other 2 properties bought by the town (i.e. sites for green and workhouse housing) had been off the lists for some time. She also noted that workforce housing would go on the list, though at a reduced rate. Mr. Tiffany wanted to know what the purchase would do to the tax rate. Ms. Iken stated that it would not affect the tax rate because the money was not raised through taxes. She also noted that workforce housing would improve the economic outlook

for the town. Mr. Tiffany then asked several more questions about Cole Hall which were answered by several members of the Select Board and CCDC.

Next speaker, Carlyn Mickle, was in favor of the purchase for the community space for younger families. Then Jennifer Hoffman, real estate agent, spoke in favor of the purchase, noting that it was very affordable and that the price per square inch is a good value, as average prices are far above that. A motion was then put forward and seconded to vote on the pending motion "Shall the town of Shaftesbury expend \$375,000 on the purchase of the former Shaftesbury Medical Associates Building at 677, Route 7, a Shaftesbury, and an additional \$178,486 and 8 cents on the renovation repair needed to make the building appropriate for municipal offices?". A voice vote was held. Ayes won decisively by voice vote. A motion to adjourn was then put forward and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 7:09 PM.