

TOWN OF BETHANY

PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING

OLD TOWN HALL

27 April 2011

The public informational meeting concerning the possible sale of the Bethany Old Town Hall began at 7:05 p.m.

Town Officials in Attendance were:

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| Louis Gayton, Supervisor | Bill Gick, Councilman |
| Walter Wenhold, Councilman | Ed Pietrzykowski, Councilman |
| Sue Neer, Councilwoman (7:15 p.m.) | Debbie Douglas, Town Clerk |
| Lee Hendershott, Co-Historian | Michelle Hendershott, Co-Historian |

Others in Attendance were:

David Carli, Old Town Hall Preservation Committee, Architect
Roger Muehlig, Batavia Daily News
Jeff Fluker
Ray Cipriano

Edna Wenhold



The following handout was provided to all attendees.

**Bethany Old Town Hall
Public Information Meeting
April 27, 2011**

The citizens of the Town of Bethany have been invited to attend a Public Information Meeting to consider the Town's potential options to sell or lease the Old Town Hall on Bethany Center Road. Due to the rising costs of maintaining the historic building, the Town Board believes this to be in the public's best economic interest.

Located in the heart of Bethany, this building has been a centerpiece in the community since it was first built in 1832 as a Methodist church. Throughout its 179-year history, this building has been an important community focal point and has served as a gathering place for community events and civic functions. In 1890, it became the center for town government as the first "Town House". From around this time well into the 1960's the building also served as a meeting place for the local Grange organization. Its use as the Town Hall was abandoned until a series of renovations in the mid-1980's allowed it to be reopened as the Town Hall and Court facility. The building housed these functions until 2005.

Due to the advancing age and rising maintenance costs of the building, the Town considered several different options for its facility needs. In 2003 it commissioned an architectural study to explore the potential costs of major renovations to the Old Town Hall to improve its structural stability, mechanical systems, and use of the second floor as a court facility meeting the requirements of recent improvement mandates (copies of this report are available for inspection in the Town Clerk's office). The Town also worked with an engineering firm to develop a cost to construct a new Town Hall and Court building, and to develop a cost to construct an addition to the existing Fireman's Recreation Hall that would house the required facility program spaces and functions. After carefully considering each option in terms of the benefits to the residents of Bethany (following a public informational meeting on 10/28/03), this last approach was chosen as the most cost efficient solution, and the Town Offices and Court moved in to the new Town

Hall and Community Center in 2005. The Old Town Hall has been virtually vacant since, with the exception of the office and exhibits of the Town Historian, which are open to the public to this day.

On June 12, 2000 the "Town Hall Replacement Review Committee" held its first meeting. These meetings were held until around 2003. Soon after, a group of concerned townspeople formed the Bethany Old Town Hall Preservation Committee. For the past several years the group has met and discussed, brainstormed, and researched different ideas for the potential reuse of the building which would not require the spending of the towns' taxpayers' money, but would keep the Old Town Hall preserved and utilized for a new function. Among the potential new uses discussed were: Professional Offices; Church; Daycare; Restaurant; Residence; Antique/Craft Shop; Theatre; etc. In each instance, the key component of a potential new use for the building was not present: a new tenant or owner with the financial resources to renovate and maintain the building for the desired new use.

In the last 3 years, interest by two local businesswomen was raised in opening a general store and craft shop (financially unfeasible); a nearby church group (financially unfeasible); the owner of the Rolling Hills property (no further discussion); and a group of Masons were interested until they located a suitable property elsewhere.

For the last 3 consecutive years, the Preservation Committee has researched various grants that would provide funding for some of the necessary repairs and upkeep of the building envelope. The Rochester Area Community Foundation Historic Preservation Grant has been applied for in 2008 through 2010; the Committee has been unsuccessful thus far. In 2008 a grant was secured through Senator Mary Lou Rath's office. This \$25,000 grant was used to replace the existing roof shingles, repair sheathing, flashings, and roof trim, etc. in 2009. The shingle replacement was just one of a list of critical items that are badly in need of repair, including foundation and structural repairs, which have not been undertaken due to lack of funding.

In the last two years, the group has continued to explore all the avenues of potential reuse of the building, and have discussed various renovation scenarios with representatives of the Town Board, the Western New York and the Genesee County Landmark Societies, the State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation; the Town Attorney, the Town Code and Zoning Enforcement Officer, the Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council, and several preservation consultants. The Committee has also debated the advantages and disadvantages of applying for historic landmark status for the Old Town Hall, and has contacted various agencies and consultants for information regarding this process and what it would mean to the use of the building. The creation of a local Preservation Law and local Historic District were also considered, but not pursued. At one time, the committee contacted the Genesee Country Museum in Mumfordsville to ask if they would consider taking the building, for installation at their site (they could be interested, but had a large backlog of other structures at the time).

The group has discussed the possibility of advertising the building for sale or lease in historic preservation journals and periodicals, in hope of attracting the interest of persons that might be looking for just such a building. The cost of these ads in some of the better know journals was deemed prohibitive, so the idea of placing an advertisement on a free, online listing site, such as **craigslist**, was examined. It was determined that the Committee and the Town should consult the citizens of the Town before any of these listings were undertaken, which is one of the reasons for this Public Information meeting.

Besides the critical replacement of the roof shingles in the last 2 years, the building is in dire need of foundation and floor framing repairs, and surface water drainage improvement to prevent the flooding of the existing crawlspace. The estimated cost of these repairs is approximately \$51,000, and the conditions of the existing building continue to deteriorate as time goes on. The Town Board realizes that being a small, rural town in today's weak global economy would make it very difficult to justify the spending of large amounts of money to make the major maintenance and restoration improvements necessary to the Old Town Hall. As an example, the average taxpayer in the Town would see an annual tax increase of \$0.015 per \$1,000 of assessed value of their property for an expenditure of \$10,000 in Town-funded repairs to the building. For an assessed value of \$100,000, this would be a tax increase of \$15.00 for the \$10,000 spent on the Old Town Hall.

After paying the minimum utility and maintenance costs to keep the Old Town Hall stable and useable for the last six years, the Town has recognized that it will be an increasing burden to taxpayers in the community in the future, and believes the best solution to this issue may be to sell or lease the structure for private or commercial use to a person or entity which has the need, interest, and capital to maintain and restore this proud building for a new life.

The Town would like to find a new use or owner for the building that will be respectful of the Old Town Hall's place in the history of the Town, including maintaining the exterior character of

the building and the appropriateness of any new use. Before either selling or leasing the building to any person or entity the Town would establish design guidelines and possible deed restrictions for the reuse, renovation, restoration, and/or alteration of the exterior and the interior of the Old Town Hall. The main objective of the Town is to retain the Old Town Hall as a part of our cultural heritage, and for it to remain reasonably intact or restored in appearance.

Breakdown of 2010 Costs: Old Town Hall please note – the building has been heated to a minimum temperature during the winter to prevent freezing and to avoid further damage to interior finishes, structural components, etc.

Electric: \$ 840.

Heat: \$1,400.

Maintenance: \$ 900. (approx., incl. benefits)

Insurance: costs not identified

- The content of this document was explained by members of the Board and Mr. Carli.
- The Town cannot afford to maintain the building in a manner that would preserve it.
- If sold the Town would most likely use a realtor as suggested by the Town's attorney.
- Deed restrictions are being considered to preserve the exterior appearance of the building.
- The Town Attorney is working on an easement with the Cemetery Association.
- New owner would need to install septic and well.
- Amount of land to be sold with the building (from Highway Department lot) would need to be determined.
- No one present voiced any objections to the sale of the Old Town Hall.

The meeting ended at 7:45 p.m.

By Order of the
Bethany Town Board
Dated: April 28, 2011

Respectfully Submitted,

Debbie L. Douglas
Bethany Town Clerk