

Jen,

Please pass on to the Select Board

Regarding Howes House:

I was greatly relieved to read that the Howes House Project has been put on hold for now. I know the committee worked very hard to come up with a workable plan. I regret that I didn't participate more than in the focus groups and I really don't like armchair quarterbacking or whatever they call it, but here goes:

As a participant in the Focus Groups lots of good ideas came up. BUT, we were asked to think of anything we would ideally like to see. Some pretty crazy ideas came up. That's appropriate – that's what focus groups do. BUT at some point there are limits put on all that brainstorming and things have to be brought down to reality. I'm not sure that happened. Maybe it did.

Along the way, I heard the Town had \$10 million left of bonding funds that could be spent, and so the target for the building was put at \$10 million. I hope that's a horrendous misstatement—the game Telephone gone awry. It seems to me that the town will have lots of call on our bonding capability, probably beyond \$10 million and we will need to make choices. I'm glad to see the choice was made to put the project as designed on hold.

Another concern became obvious during the Focus Groups – that is, that there were requests for lots of programming ideas –some the COA was already doing (possibly participants were unaware of this) and some were new. It looked to me like expanded programming was driving the building design before any management review of what we could reasonably do.

I think COA and the Library need to look at the Focus Group Findings and see how they might jointly come up with a realistic revision of how things work now. The Library and COA/Howes House function as a community center and could get more for the town out of a closer symbiotic relationship. Perhaps the "friends" of both organizations could provide some guidance to staff and they could work on programming.

Once we have recommendations for programming it's appropriate to determine what capacity we have across the two buildings and existing staff. At that point what we learned from the Howes House Committee through to the preliminary design might be useful.

As a taxpayer and a senior I never envisioned a "shiny new complex". We don't need it. We may need to claim the 2nd and 3rd floors of the existing Howes House building in a more modest approach to renovation. We won't know that until the staffs do their job in thinking about their programming and looking at both Library and Howes House space. Is the building in such terrible shape that a modest renovation can't be done? I hope not.

I see the Town is planning a visioning exercise in the spring. I don't think staff work has to wait for that. Visioning is usually a higher level of thinking than programmatic.

It would certainly help the staff check their work against a broader vision, but the nuts and bolts work can start now.

I will be happy to participate in future Howes House planning or the visioning work.

I do not intend to stomp all over the good work that's been done, I simply believe we missed a review and ponder phase which you have wisely put in place.

Regards,

Sue Hruby