

# TOWN OF STRAFFORD REPORT OF THE TOWN OFFICE COMMITTEE

Addition to and Renovation of the  
Strafford Town Office Building  
May 1, 2024

## Town Office Building is Under Threat of Condemnation

Over the last 20 years the Town of Strafford has set up a number of committees to address the problems of our current Town Office Building, including the need to make necessary repairs, provide handicapped access as required by law, and correct drainage and structural problems. While small fixes have been made during this time, the basic problems have not been addressed and the building has continued to deteriorate.

This report presents the plan to add to and renovate the town offices to meet current needs and requirements and to ask the voters to approve borrowing \$1,000,000 to cover the funds needed to do this.

Public Meeting		
May 4, 2024	1:00 p.m	Town House
Informational Meeting		
June 1, 2024	1:00	Town House
Vote		
June 3, 2024	7am-7pm	Town Office



Town Office Today (above) and in 2020

Why are we threatened with condemnation?

During 2023 the Fire Marshall made certain requirements for the immediate continuing use of the building, which were met. But the long term requirements have not been met, and the continued use of the building is contingent on the town's coming up with a plan to make the necessary improvements and approval of funds to do so.

Until we have new stairs, the upstairs of the Town Office Building cannot be used, meaning that there is no space for necessary Town committees, for instance, the Listers.



A number of previous committees have worked to find a way to renovate this building

- 2018 - 20. A committee set up by the Selectboard developed a plan and estimate for a total renovation at a cost of \$400,000. This plan was completed at the end of 2019 and for a host of reasons - COVID among them - never had a proper hearing and was shelved in 2020.
- 2020 - 2021 A second committee looked at sites owned by the Town of Strafford for suitability for Town Offices and developed a “program” for space needed to house the activities of Town government.
- 2022 A proposal was brought to the voters at Town Meeting to buy the Tilles property at the corner of Rte. 132 and Justin Morrill Highway for use as a Town Office Building. This proposal was defeated.
- 2022 - A further meeting convened to discuss alternative solutions for the Town Offices. As a result, the Selectboard set up the current Town Office Committee (TOC).



Columns 2024 (above) and 2020 (below)

Town Office Committee  
October 2022 to present

- The Selectboard hired the architectural firm Gossens Bachman Architects (gbA) to work with the committee to determine the feasibility of continuing to use the Town Office Building.
- The Committee and architects met with representatives of the Vermont Department of Historic Preservation and members of the community.
- Mid-November of 2022 gbA produced a conceptual plan for a building of approximately 2300 square feet, based on the findings of the 2020-21 committee regarding space needs.
- Late December of 2022, gbA presented a detailed analysis of costs for this building developed by a professional estimator. This estimate came to approximately \$1,400,000 including contingencies (unexpected difficulties encountered during construction, higher costs due to inflation if work is delayed, etc.) and “soft costs” (fees, consultant costs, architectural services, etc.)
- Developing a feasible conceptual plan moved quite quickly, but resolving site problems took up the entirety of 2023 and a bit of 2024.
- Since the site of the existing building is too small for an addition, the Town has acquired a .05 acre parcel from neighbor Morgan Smith, generously donated with the stipulation that it be used for the building expansion and not for parking.
- A survey was done on the new expanded Town Office lot, with an overlay of the proposed addition. When the extent of the Flood Hazard Zone (Elev. 918’) was added to the survey, it was discovered that one small corner of the proposed addition was in the Flood Hazard Zone. Finish floor (922’), however, meets FEMA requirements.
- In late 2023 the Selectboard hired the firm North Hill Solutions to produce a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Architectural and Engineering Services. The TOC interviewed two of the five firms who submitted proposals and, on the TOC’s recommendation, the Selectboard has sent a letter of acceptance to Giuillot Vivian Viehmann Architects (GVV) a small firm from Burlington with much experience with projects the size of ours, as well as with much larger projects.

## The Conceptual Plan



1 MASSING - COURTYARD  
SCALE: NTS

- The plan shows a gambrel roofed addition of 1200 square feet on two floors. This addition is set back from the street so that it does not compete visually with the existing building and creates space for a small courtyard at the entrance.
- In the current building, the plan shows the exterior stair removed, the ground floor reconfigured for more effective use of the space and an addition to the vault. The second floor provides the Selectboard meeting room, and offices for Listers and for the Selectboard.
- The addition includes the entrance, stairs, lavatory and additional workspace on the ground floor. On the second floor are mechanical spaces, an office for Auditors, for Emergency Management and a Break Room.
- This plan is a conceptual one. It demonstrates that the needs of Town Office can be met in a building of the proposed size on this site. GVV will redesign for more optimal use of the space and to correct the problem that the conceptual plan has a section of the building in the Flood Hazard Zone.

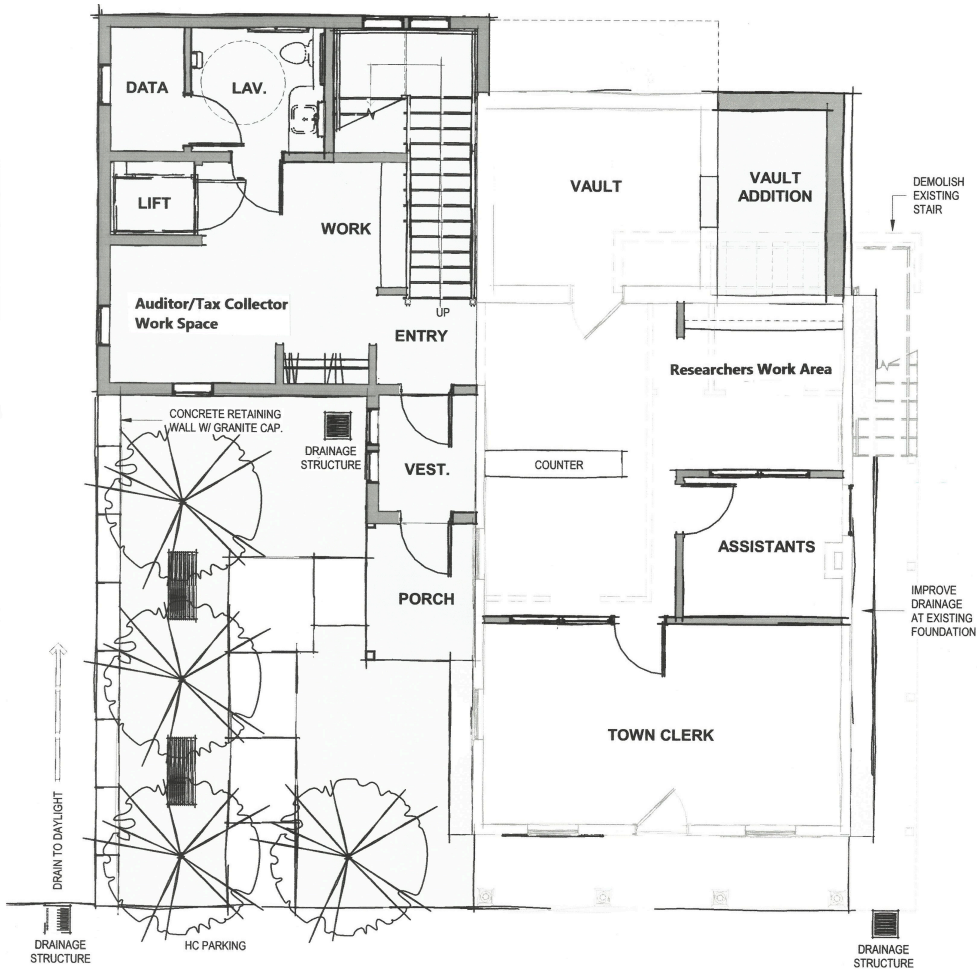


Strafford Town Office

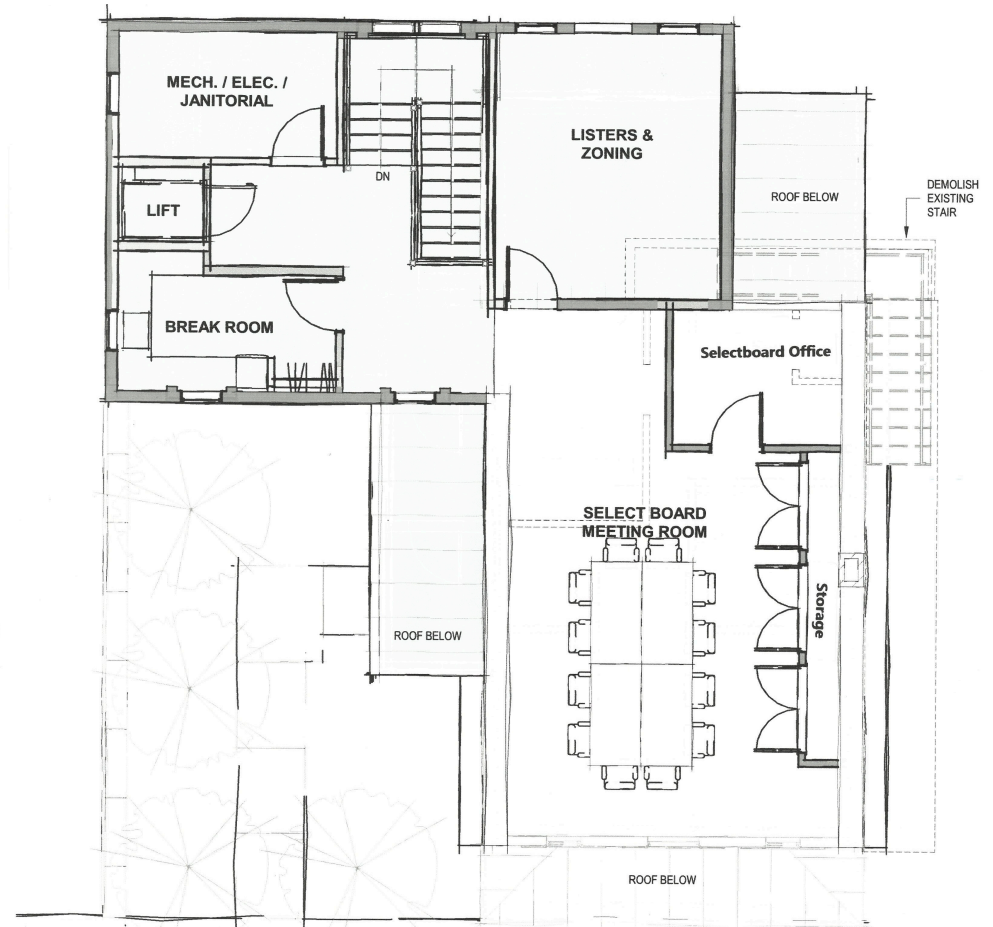
Strafford, Vermont

SKETCH - COURTYARD

NOVEMBER 2022



**1 LEVEL 1 - NEW WORK**  
SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"



**1 LEVEL 2 - NEW WORK**  
SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"



**Stafford Town Office**  
Stafford, Vermont

As indicated

DM



**Stafford Town Office**  
Stafford, Vermont

As indicated

DM

## Financing Options

Financing options were investigated on April 9, 2024 and based on an estimate of \$1,000,000. The Town has approximately \$250,000 on hand that is earmarked for the Town Offices and has received a federal grant of \$325,000 for renovations of the current Town Office Building, which makes up the difference from the Architect's estimate.

### Mascoma Bank

- Long Term Loan up to 20 years, 6.5% fixed
- Bond Anticipation note fixed at 6.25% for 12 months

### Vermont Bond Bank

- Long Term Loan up to 20 years, 3.95%
  - Annual principal payments of \$50,000 for the term of the loan
  - Interest payments of \$39,480 and reduced each year thereafter

\$89,480 divided by Municipal Grand List value  
\$1,936,541.00 = .0462

Based on the 2023 grand list an appraised property value of \$200,000 would increase taxes by \$92.40

### Vermont Bond Bank

- Long Term Loan up to 15 years, 3.63%
  - Annual principal payments of \$66,667 for the term of the loan
  - Interest payments of \$36,340 and reduced each year thereafter

\$103,007.00 divided by Municipal Grand List value  
\$1,936,541.00 = .0531

Appraised value of \$200,000 x 1% = \$2,000 x tax rate of  
.0531 = \$106.2

Based on the 2023 grand list an appraised property value of \$200,000 would increase taxes by \$106.20

Having a shorter term 15 year bond loan would save \$124,850.00 in interest.

The only other outstanding bond, for the Town Garage, has a balance due of \$103,369.00. This will be paid in full in 2027, offsetting the cost of the Town Office Building Bond for the following years.

## Pros and Cons of renovating the current Town Office

### Pros

We have the building, though we are under threat of the building's being condemned

If this project is not approved, we will almost immediately have to agree on an alternative site and plan

The Town has to renovate/maintain this building

We have a vault in place at this site

We have architects available to continue planning for the project

We have the site for an addition

With proper design, the foundation can be out of the Flood Hazard Zone

Level of the finished floor is 2' above the Flood Hazard Zone, as required by FEMA

Historic nature of the building

On the Historic Register

Given to the Town by Justin Morrill

We have an offer for temporary site during construction

We have money available for this project

\$325,000 federal grant earmarked for this building

\$250,000 plus in Town Reserve Funds, earmarked to provide Town offices

### Cons

Site is not large enough for parking or any future expansion

The addition will be within feet of the Flood Hazard Zone

Expense of the project

\$1,400,000, possibly more given time lapse since estimate