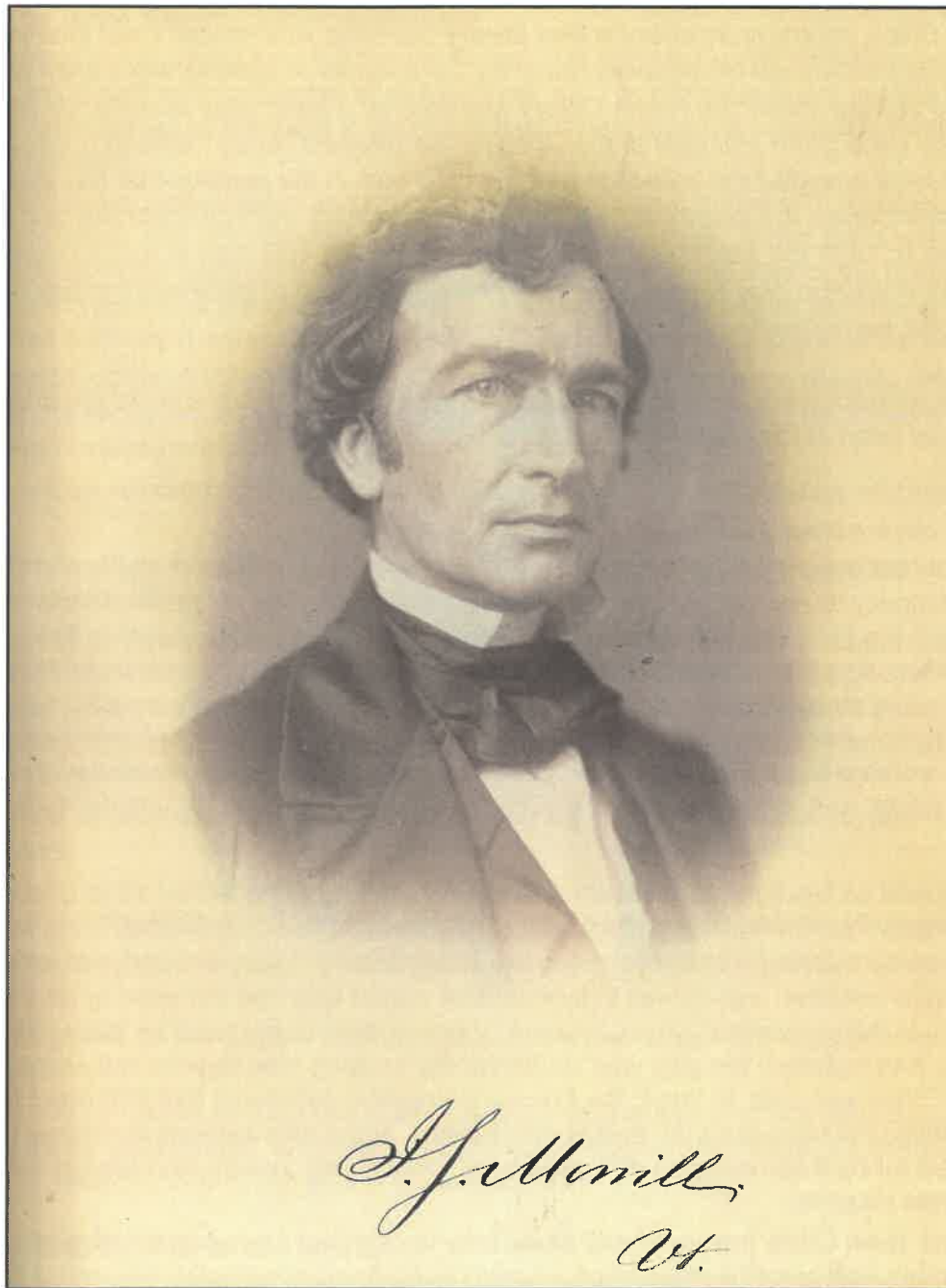


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## Community Building Restoration Project



*Questions & Answers  
for consideration....*

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# Community Building Restoration Project 2020

*At Town Meeting in March 2020, Strafford voters will be asked to consider the long-wished-for restoration of the Town Office, originally **Strafford's first library building**. At a special Town Meeting in 1855 the Town accepted the bequest of Jedediah Harris for the purpose of establishing a town library. The meeting voted to call the library the Harris Library and elected a committee to run it. Its books were first housed in the Brick Store and later in the Cobb house (present Nancy Gerlach house). In 1883, Senator Justin Morrill provided the collection a home of its own in the building that has evolved from the first permanent Library, to Library Hall, the Community Building, the Municipal Building and, now, the **Town Office**. In 1929 the Morrill Memorial and Harris Library was built across the road. This is where the Town's collection now resides. Throughout its history, the original building has been dedicated to use by the townspeople.*

*What follows are questions and answers about the proposal to fully restore and resurrect this familiar building which has been at the center of our community's life since 1883.*

## ***Why should I care about fixing up the Town Office?***

Well, probably *not* because it is your favorite place to pay taxes. It is, however, the last of the remarkable Morrill legacy to receive serious attention from the Town. One of Strafford's many celebrated attributes is the care we have taken of the historic treasures we have been so fortunate to inherit. The time has come to bring the Town Office up to the standards that give us pride in our treatment of historical structures. Many elements of the building are decaying, unsafe, out of code, and grossly inefficient. Aesthetically, the interior pays no respect to the historical considerations that are its due. The workspace for the Town employees has suffered from poor air circulation, rodent infestation, bad odors, and many factors contributing to an unpleasant and/or unsafe work environment.

## ***What has already been done by way of improvements to the building?***

When the Community Building was converted to the Town Office in 1969, a modern drop ceiling and vinyl panelling were installed, wall-to-wall indoor/outdoor carpet laid, and the existing partitions were built. In 2010, the building received a new, historically appropriate slate roof. The following year, a propane furnace was installed; the attic was insulated; the upstairs was cleaned out and painted; and the Listers' Office was built. In 2014, the Energy Committee secured a \$10,000 grant that was put toward insulating the vault area. All these undertakings, along with systems maintenance and repairs, were paid for by a combination of Town-appropriated funds, grants, and the generous contributions of private citizens.

The interior of the Town Office has remained essentially unchanged for the past half century. After 48 years, the wall-to-wall carpet was deemed a health hazard and was finally removed in 2017. The floors were sanded and refinished, revealing what the flooring expert believed were the original hickory boards. This was a major aesthetic improvement.

***What alternatives have been considered to meet these needs?***

A number of years ago there was serious discussion about moving the Town Office to the Brick Store. This idea was rejected by the voters. Other ideas have been considered, including buying a building and property in South Strafford, or creating an altogether new building to house the Town Office. None of these ideas has proved to be financially feasible or practical.

***What will be done during the renovation?***

The historic front porch will be kept but the old porch floor and post supports will be rebuilt to make the building safe and accessible to all residents. Also, a 100-square foot section will be added in the back corner by the vault to accommodate a handicapped-accessible bathroom and small kitchenette.

There is considerable deterioration and rot on the front and side porches with resulting damage to the main structure. The exterior stairs are a visual blot and unsafe. Those stairs will be removed and rebuilt in the inside of the building. The wood pillars at the front of the building will be replaced with replicas of the original structure. A newer slate roof will be patched in when the abandoned chimney is removed, and extended to cover the small addition at the back.

The entire inside will be stripped to the studs. Any insulation that has been recently installed that provides the recommended R-value will be retained. Those areas that have less than recommended R values will be upgraded with new insulation.

All windows will be removed and either replaced or retrofitted to current energy efficient standards.

The second floor will be reconfigured to allow for more office and meeting space and more room for the Listers office.

Lighting will need to be changed throughout the building to reflect the new configuration. Lighting is currently drop-ins on the first floor and it is assumed there will not be drop-ins after renovation as there will not be a drop ceiling. It is anticipated that new fixtures will be selected that are more appropriate for this historic building and these fixtures will be LED. With efficient LED fixtures, Efficiency Vermont will likely offer rebates.

The building will be very energy efficient and the town will pay far less in electric and heating bills in the future.

Air source heat pumps will be explored (once we have a mechanical engineer on board) that will provide efficient heating and cooling. Existing mechanical equipment will be evaluated to determine what is salvageable and what might be used to supplement the heat pumps.

***What will happen to the office and official business while the construction takes place?***

A work trailer will be leased and parked at the Town Garage, where electrical and computer hookups are easily established. Town business will be conducted from there. Vault time will be limited, but available during this time with special hours.

***Who will decide who does the work?***

The town will decide by a vote at Town Meeting if we can undertake this significant renovation. If voters decide to move forward, the Select Board will commission finished drawings and put the construction plans out for bid.

***When will the work take place?***

Hopefully, during the summer of 2020.

***Who is the architect and what are his credentials?***

Tom Bachman is a founding partner of gbA Architects in Montpelier. The firm has been involved in many historical preservation projects and is internationally known for its commitment to sustainable building practices and has been the recipient of numerous awards ranging from AIA Excellence in Architecture, Efficiency Vermont Best of the Best, Vermont Green Building Network, the EPA's National Award for Smart Growth Achievement, among many other achievements. Tom has been practising architecture in Vermont since 1990.

***Why isn't the information about the renovation on the Town website?***

We have been immersed in research, securing preliminary drawings, engineering reports, and viability studies to give this project some coherent shape. This information and preliminary drawings are now posted, along with the engineer's report. The preliminary drawings have been on display in the Town Office for over six months. If and when the project is approved, frequent updates will be posted to the website as the project continues to move forward.

***Who will do the work?***

All qualified builders are encouraged to submit bids to do the work. We are committed to keeping this job as local as we can.

***Can we do this with volunteer labor?***

Some of it we can, yes. We are committed to looking for ways to decrease the cost of this project. We are hoping to use volunteers to do the demolition (saving \$40–50k). There are limitations to how much volunteers can do, but it is the general opinion of the Board that having the demolition done and presenting the contractor with a 'clean slate' will be a considerable time and money saver. We will rely on the work of volunteers as much as we are allowed.

**FINANCIAL:**

***How much will the project cost? I heard it would be \$400k.***

The \$400,000 figure knocked all of our socks off. While we can not make promises, we are committed to reducing the actual cost significantly—both by reliance on a certain amount of volunteer labor, as above, and by taking into account that there is a built-in contingency fund of \$46,000 that is probably much more than we are likely to encounter.

The job will be put out to a competitive bidding process; builders will submit their best bids and the Select Board will choose the lowest bid that fits the qualifications.

***Why is the estimate so high? Wouldn't it be less expensive to build a new building?***

The estimate we received is an all-inclusive, formulaic estimate (including contingencies) submitted by the architect. Because this is a municipal building and not a house, it needs to comply with a certain set of safety and accessibility requirements. A licensed architect is required, and all contractors/subcontractors will need to carry proper insurance and licenses. There is no economy of scale with a 2000 sq.ft. building. Square-foot costs for a brand-new building will be in the \$300-sq.ft. range. Add to that all the costs associated with buying and/or clearing land, permits, water and septic, etc. and a new building becomes prohibitive.

The Board also feels that the current, central location of the Town Office is ideal.

***What are the financing options?***

The financing options that were investigated with the Mascoma Bank on May 29, 2019 are based on an estimated cost of \$400,000. *These figures assume that no grants or contributions would be applied to lower costs.*

- 5-year variable with an initial fixed rate of 3.15%. The rate would change each 5 years based on the Classic Advance Rate plus a margin of 2%, adjusted for the municipal rate, a 10- or 15-year term: 10 year term: annual payments would be \$47,363, for the first five years. 15-year term: annual payments would be \$33,984 for the first five years
- 10 or 15 year fixed at 3.25%:
- 10 year term: annual payments would be \$47,611 for the term
- 15 year term: annual payments would be \$34,235, for the first 10 years

***What would be the impact on town property taxes/How will this affect my taxes?***

This will be determined by the option we choose to finance the project (see above). If we were to rely on bank financing *alone*, an additional budget amount of \$47,611 per year would increase taxes on an appraised property value of \$200,000 by \$51.11.

An additional budget amount of \$34,235 p/a would increase taxes on an appraised property value of \$200,000 by \$36.75. We plan to get supplemental funding to reduce those costs.

***Are there any grants to support renovating this historical building?***

Yes. There are numerous organizations and foundations that might provide financial support for this project. Some organizations involved in historical preservation have very strict requirements about specifics of historical detail. Since there are no known extant photographs or descriptions of the interior of the original library, we will attempt to keep the decor and the furnishing simple and in keeping with the styles of the 19th century.

We will be actively pursuing grant funding and contributions once we gain the Town's permission to proceed. Any grants and contributions we secure will obviously reduce the amounts we need to finance.

***What is the current debt load of the town both in loans and bonds and how would this project fit in?***

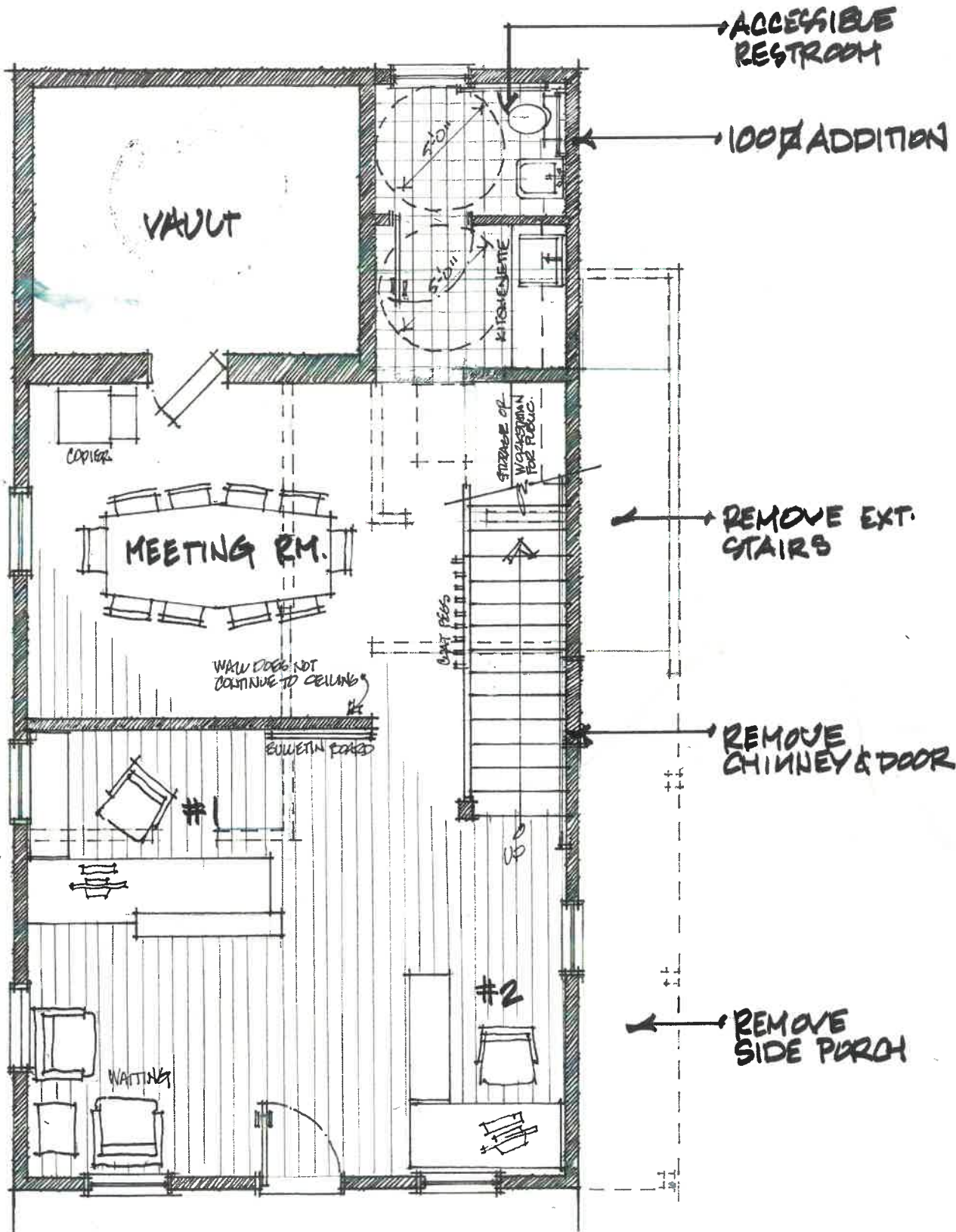
As of 12/31/18 total debt load is \$969,506 (\$793,893 in bonds and \$175,616 in loans). This project would increase the loan debt load.

Submitted by the Strafford Select Board  
December, 2019

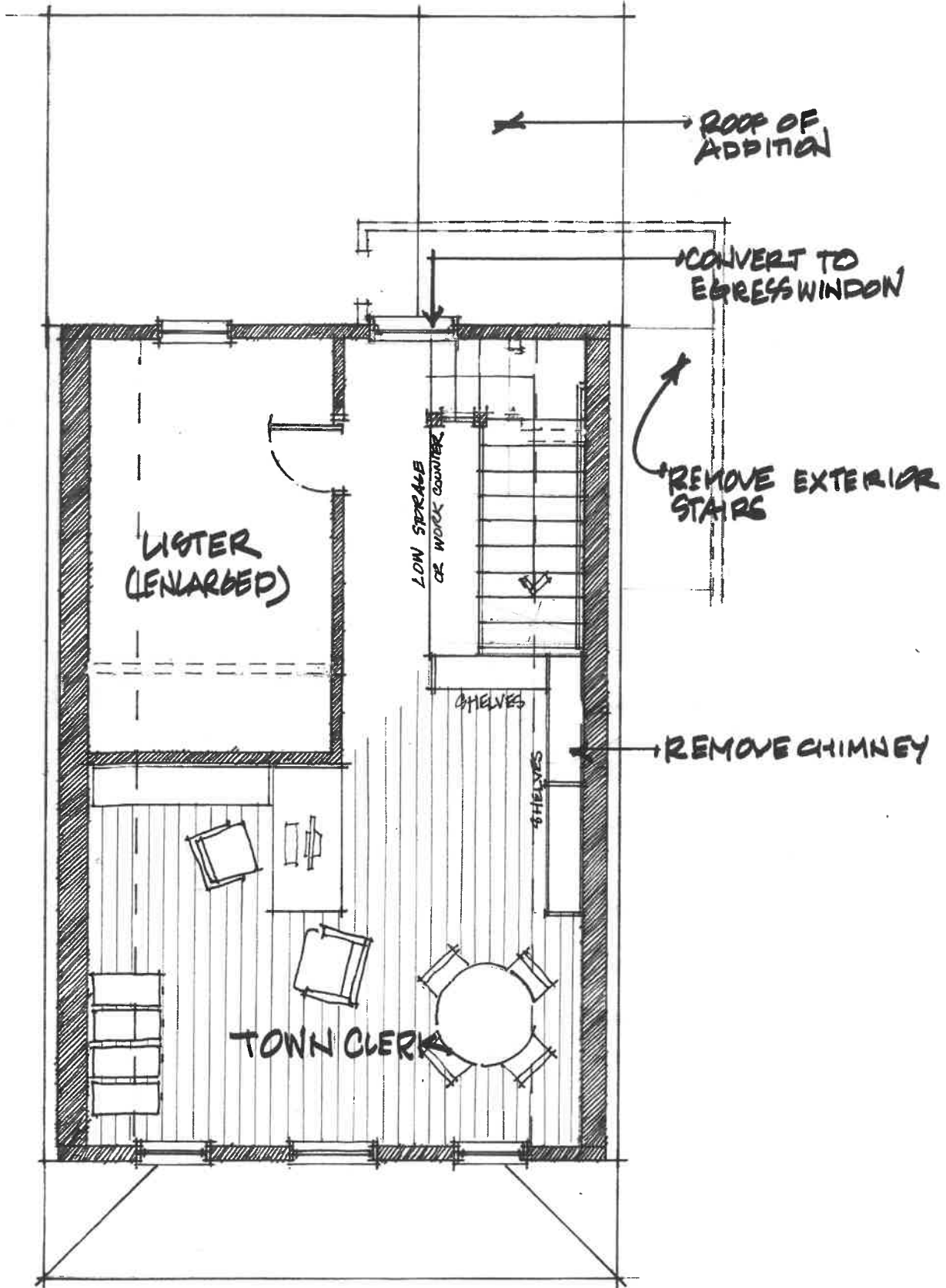
*Toni Pippy, Chair*  
*Lauri Berkenkamp*  
*Brian Johnson*  
*Patrik Kelly*  
*Kate Siepmann*

**Town Office Planning Committee**

*Lisa Bragg*  
*Curt Albee*  
*Tom Root*  
*Kate Siepmann*



PRELIMINARY DRAWINGS — MAIN LEVEL



PRELIMINARY DRAWINGS — UPPER LEVEL