

## TOWN OFFICE BOND VOTE FAQ

### 1. WHERE IS THIS COMING FROM?

In 2013 then Town Clerk, Renee Patterson, approached the Selectboard with her concerns that we were running out of vault space. The volume of land records alone had nearly doubled since 2003. She asked the Board to do something.

The Board determined expansion of the existing (50 square foot) vault was needed but it would not leave enough office space in the current building unless the Post Office was moved out. Other existing issues with the structure, including those related to flooding, led the board to explore options around new construction. The Board hired Cross Engineering to do a study on the feasibility of four potential sites (the Baptist Church, the existing site, the PSB and the Cota greenhouse), and on building design. The Board reported this in the 2013 Town Report (March 2014) and solicited citizen input.

After receiving the study the Board unanimously put forward a ***Bond vote held on Town Meeting day 2015***. The bond put forward several scenarios and asked for authority for the most expensive (1.2 million worst case) with the understanding they would keep working to refine the options and reduce the cost. ***The vote failed by approximately a 2:1 margin with about 25% voter turnout***. Voter consensus was that it was too expensive and too confusing since it had two preliminary floor plan options and three possible locations, each with a different price tag. Voters essentially said go back and pick the one you think is best.

In April of 2015 the Board appointed a citizen's committee to re-examine the need and, if validated, recommend a site and preliminary design. The committee looked at additional locations as well. The committee revalidated the need and recommended the PSB site as the most cost effective solution. They also reduced the cost by slightly reducing the size and eliminating several design features from the original plan. Based on this, the Board moved ahead ***with a second vote in Nov of 2015. This vote also failed by a similar margin with turnout as before***. Feedback this time focused on the price tag again, and requested more information on the alternative of taking over the entire building on Main Street.

The Board went back to the drawing board and fleshed out the costs associated with staying at the current location. The Board concluded that building a new, smaller, facility at the existing main street location was not cost effective, or the best value for the town, nor would it provide room to grow. There was also concern about moving the Post Office and the septic system. The Board still felt the best value was a new facility at the PSB location. The Board also felt voters wanted a guarantee the Town would not press on with the new facility if grant(s) reducing the price tag to the town did not come through. The Board provided the additional information in the 2014 Town Report and structured the bond article to only cover the portion of the project requiring town tax dollars. ***That vote was held on Town Meeting day 2016 and failed by 2 votes with approximately 43% voter turnout***.

Since then the Board, comprised of three new members, has re-examined the issue. Three of the five members believe the need is still valid, and a new facility at the PSB site is the best value for taxpayers. The majority voted to bring this to the voters again in November of 2016. Construction costs have risen and the projected price tag had to be raised 8%.

### 2. CAN DIGITIZATION REDUCE THE VAULT NEED?

Digitizing doesn't mean you can get rid of original documents and printed copies from a digital source are not considered legal documents. Originals still need to be stored in a vault and made available to the public in a timely manner when requested. Storing them offsite would mean the town would have to pay for storage and to have someone travel to get them and return them. Access would have to be by appointment. This will be more expensive and less responsive for those needing access. Space for computer terminals would need to be made available in the

office for public records searches. While digitization remains a goal in the future, it will not solve the vault space shortfall.

### **3. WHY ARE WE VOTING ON THIS, AGAIN?**

- The need is still urgent for safe / secure vault space. **We are out of room.**
- While the topic is the same, each vote was different based on feedback from the voters and also upon the analysis of a citizens committee appointed in 2015 to study the matter (which included the survey mailed to every Montgomery voter as part of their work).
- The most recent vote failed by two votes, with less than half of registered voters turning out
- Waiting increases the costs both due to construction material prices and anticipated interest rate increases.
- Repairs to the existing building (e.g. roof, flooring, ramp, steps) have been deferred until we know what makes the most sense. These repairs can no longer be put off, and until we know the future of the building certain repairs cannot be made
- The majority of the board, in a 3-2 split, feels that the option presented in the bond is still the best option out of the alternatives before us.

### **4. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE BOND PASSES?**

The bond vote is the beginning of a long process. First steps will be working out both the grant and loan applications. The Town is eligible for a grant of up to 35% of the anticipated total cost under the USDA Community Facilities Grant program. Additional grants / financing will also be investigated in hopes of reducing the price to the tax payers. Once financials are in place we will hire an engineer and work on a final design for blueprints and other documents needed to go to bid. Bids will then be solicited according to federal and state rules. The Town does not have to accept any bid.

### **5. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T GET THE GRANT?**

The project would not be possible.

### **6. IS THIS VOTE LEGAL?**

Yes.

The board acknowledges a perception of ambiguity in Vermont law regarding the allowable timetable for bringing a bond vote before the voters. Given the timeline of past bond votes, a vote on November 15<sup>th</sup> removes this ambiguity and any potential threat of the town acting against statute.

### **7. IF THIS PASSES, WHAT HAPPENS TO THE OLD BUILDING?**

The board would like to work with the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to convert the whole building to a rehabbed Post Office. The subject has been raised with USPS, but management are not in a position to enter into negotiations until the town makes a decision on the future of the town office. With passage of the bond, the board would seek to lock the USPS into a long-term lease as part of any potential renovation. The board would also seek for the USPS to bring resources for any required renovations.

## **8. WHY NOT JUST ADD TO THE EXISTING PSB RATHER THAN BUILD NEW?**

An addition to the PSB was considered by the Town Office Committee, and while no formal engineering study was completed, the alternative was discounted as not being cost effective when compared to new construction on site.

## **9. HOW WILL THIS AFFECT MY TAXES?**

Based on what we know now, the tax would be about \$27 for every 100,000 of assessed value. This means the average tax payer (with a \$250,000 assessment) could see an increase of about \$68 annually to cover debt service to the bond. The total municipal tax rate could be higher or lower dependent on other budget changes. The term of the bond would likely be 20 or 30 years.

## **10. RESOURCES FOR ADITIONAL INFORMATION:**

Feel free to contact the town clerk for more information on the proposed new building, the operations/needs of the municipal office space, or copies of any of the material referenced above (studies, town office committee documents, etc.).

## **11. WHAT ARE THE EXISTING OPERATING COSTS FOR BUILDINGS IN TOWN?**

A summary of operating costs for all town buildings can be found in the most recent town report (pages 30 and 31).