

Re: Town of Wheelock Report to the US Department of Justice

Date: August 13, 2020

To: Julia Torti, Chief, Civil Division, Assistant US Attorney Julia.Torti@usdoj.gov

From: Ann Lawless, Town of Wheelock Selectboard alawless@vtlink.net

Attorney Torti:

Since we last were in touch in late May finalizing the agreement, Wheelock has made good progress on our plans to resolve the ADA issues at Wheelock Town Hall. Here is our report.

TASK FORCES As outlined in the Wheelock's Future forums with the VT Council on Rural Development in winter 2020, two task forces have formed, and are meeting at least monthly, with agendas and meeting notes. Both groups are following the work outline from the Wheelock's Future process. The Facilities Task Force is looking over the past proposals and doing more research to see if they still have merit. One subcommittee is reviewing the Black River Design proposal to upgrade the current Town Hall that was put before the voters in 2017 and 2018 and subsequently voted down. The second subcommittee is exploring "out of the box" options. These include a new town office/community center at a nearby town-owned property on Sutton Road.

The Communications Task Force is charged with communications, promoting unity and town pride. As requested by the Selectboard, CTF has recommended a website vendor proposal (that emphasizes accessibility) for the Town's first website, to be voted on at the August 10 Selectboard meeting. It has also developed a communications protocol. Wheelock Community Initiative began publishing and distributing a monthly newsletter *The Miller's Run*. The July issue featured the Town Hall DOJ situation. So far 90 copies are being printed, with 60 and growing being taken from the distribution boxes. For internet users, there are electronic postings on Front Porch Forum, Wheelock Current Events Facebook group, and a gmail list of 100.

Both Task Forces share their meeting notes and the chairs report at the monthly Selectboard meetings.

SURVEY No matter what plans the groups come up with, they won't get a positive response in a bond vote unless people feel their voices are heard and they can be part of the process. A survey to gather opinions on the Town Hall situation will be included with a survey that is part of a Hazard Mitigation planning process underway. The survey will launch in August online and in print, most likely going out with the tax bills in early fall. The survey responses will help guide the work of the Task Forces.

GRANTS The Town is in the process of seeking grant funding to help with a workplan that includes: (1) Community meetings in fall 2020 and spring 2021 prior to Town Meeting, if they are workable and we think people will attend in Covid time. Whether in person or via Zoom, we need a trained facilitator who is knowledgeable about similar successful projects, and also conversant with grant funding for upgrades for historic buildings as well as for new construction. (2) Technical assistance with both architectural and engineering services, and grant writing. Architectural and engineering services are needed to update the designs and cost estimates. Grant writing help is needed for the larger, more complex grants and their management that we will seek to cover construction drawings

and bid development in order to keep taxpayer costs as low as possible. (3) Outreach and communications like mailings are needed since many in town do not use the internet due to lack of or poor connectivity and lack of skill with calling in or using video to participate in on-line meetings. Three grant applications are underway, VNRC SmartGrowth, Vermont Community Foundation NEK Fund, and the State's Municipal Planning Grant program. We envision the project cost to be in the range of \$20,000.

OF NOTE The Selectboard has rented an accessible porta-potty for the primary and general elections.

Thank you for your patience, and we will keep in touch with updates as the project moves forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ann Lawless". The ink is dark and the signature is written in a fluid, connected style.

Ann Lawless,

on behalf of the Town of Wheelock Selectboard of which I am a member