

Danville Train Station Committee Minutes

Meeting of January 5, 2021, 5:30-6:45pm

Location: Choate House (Danville Historical Society) or by Zoom

Attendees: Michael Hogue, Sally Fishburn, Rob Balivet, Kate Whitehead, Patti Conley, Keith Gadapee, Ted Houle, Ross Meaders, Kitty Toll, Tim Ides, Alison Low, Lois Russo

Meeting opened at 5:31pm via Zoom by Kate Whitehead, the Planning Committee (PC) Secretary. The Danville Train Station Committee (DTSC) is a subcommittee of the PC. Kate took roll, and submitted the agenda for approval. Agenda approved unanimously.

Kate reviewed the duties of the chairperson for the DTSC and solicited nominations for the position. Michael Hogue was nominated by Kate and seconded by Sally Fishburn; no further names were submitted. Michael was elected to Chair by a unanimous vote.

Appointment of Secretary and Monthly meeting schedule

Michael then assumed control of the meeting and appointed Lois Russo acting secretary. He then discussed the meeting schedule, proposing the first Tuesday of the month. Rob Balivet thought that time conflicted with the School Board meeting. The second Tuesday of the month was then proposed. This was approved without dissent.

Review of the DTSC charter

The committee turned to a review of the PC charter for the DTSC. Rob identified a few grammatical errors in Section B Mission, Part 2, which Michael updated.

The intent of Section C Organization, Part 5, is reasonably clear however the wording was felt to be unworkable. The replacement language is provided for the PC's review.

According to their assigned responsibilities, committee members may represent the efforts of the DTSC and make any decisions pursuant to the approval for action made at a duly convened monthly meeting. Such action and scope of approval will be detailed in the minutes of that meeting. In specific, no raising or expenditure of funds and no actions binding the DTSC shall be made prior to presentation, discussion and approval at a duly convened meeting.

Section E Meetings, Part 5 should be replaced by the following:

The DTSC abides by 1 VSA para 321(a)(2) as respects in-person and participation by electronic means as well as the law's provision for public participation.

Michael will discuss changes with the PC at its next scheduled meeting.

Structure of the DTSC, Appointment of Co-Chairs and description of team responsibilities

The Structure of the DTSC was unanimously approved as submitted.

Michael nominated the three co-chairs for the three teams: Sally-Building/Land; Kate-Use and Kitty Toll-Funding. Nominations were unanimously approved.

Team responsibilities – unanimously approved as defined on the organization chart.

Reports by Team Co-Chairs and goals to be met by the next meeting

Building and Land Team

Sally began reviewing Building/Land tasks, starting with the chimney. The chimney is in danger of falling off the roof into the parking area. It has no internal support structure, but from a historic preservation perspective, it should be rebuilt. Currently it seems the chimney that is left on the roof is being held up by the flashing. If we want to preserve what is there, we need to brace it with two by fours until a rebuild can occur.

Michael proposed deferring the rebuild decision until later, simply addressing the safety concern so it does not injure someone or cause property damage. Rob wondered what the scope of the job was and how quickly it could be resolved. Michael asked if there would be associated costs. Keith Gadapee said removal was a minor fund note for the Select Board (SB) to allocate funds and remove it. Sally agreed that this as a maintenance/safety issue. It was agreed that rebuilding the chimney as part of the historical structure can be decided later.

Sally noted that other work was required to stabilize the building and asked what grants might be available. The 1772 grant is not available as it exempts municipal buildings unless managed and maintained by a nonprofit entity. Preservation Trust of Vermont's Robert Sincerbeaux Fund may be lined up already. Dan Lombowski is a timber framing expert who can complete the assessment via the Preservation Trust of Vermont. This action can be set in motion by acknowledging that we want to move ahead with the assessment. The town's share of the costs is \$250. Need to submit to SB for approval and funding.

Rob read in the UVM report on the condition of the station (1991) a recommendation to jack up the building, but he is not sure why. Michael wondered if they did this when they put the additional posts in. Sally indicated this was some of the work done in the '90's. Patti Conly thinks in 1996 there was some work done to the foundation to shore it up. Since Rob's note was June of 1991, this may have been addressed in that 1996 work. If so they may have done partial remediation.

Michael formed a motion to attend the next SB meeting:

1. to apprise the board that the chimney needs to be removed asap for safety concerns
2. ask the SB to absorb a \$250 cost for the remediation assessment

Michael proposed keeping all the funding concerns to Kitty's committee so she would be the one to go with Michael and Sally to the Select Board. The motion was approved.

Use Team

Kate reviewed the Use Team tasks:

Historic Certification: Ross Meaders and Patti have been working on the state and federal historic certification. This will position us to apply for additional preservation grants. Ross said that he wants to find additional photos of the surrounded area and newspaper verification of when the station was built. There are a few discrepancies as to the actual completion date of the station. Ross read the details from an article from the 1870s about when the station was raised. Ross believes we can safely say that it was complete except for finishing touches by August 1st 1871 and completely finished by Sept 1st for the arrival of the first train.

Michael mentioned the station is coming up to its 150th anniversary this summer, so we should consider an event to commemorate it. There was general agreement to pursue a celebration.

Michael indicated the location of the station is within the historic district and that Ross should update the area description. Ross will look to the new zoning map to include that information in the submittals. Michael asked if we are voting now on strictly state certification. Ross said he checked off both boxes because his discussion with the state indicated that this meets the criteria they use to determine the state and national registers – both A (events) and C (architecture). So he proposes applying for both state and federal filings at the same time.

Michael mentioned a number of people in town have proposed demolishing the building. And certifying both state and federal would make that very difficult. Alison Low mentioned that if it was to be demolished we would have to go back to VTrans for approval. A motion was made to approve Ross' submission for both state and federal certification. The motion carried unanimously.

Kate then discussed research on potential uses for the building. Kate, Keith, Ted and Patti plan to conduct a review of other train station renewals as to their successes and failures. In particular, the Hardwick Station is a location they wish to explore and perhaps have their team join us at our next meeting. Review of the effort by other Towns coupled with the research completed last summer during the V2V project (which had public input and an architectural review and rendering) will aid immensely in developing the best 2-3 uses.

Michael clarified this as a three step process:

- 1) Use determination (three best uses)
- 2) Hiring an assessment consultant to evaluate their viability
- 3) And for each use delineate the costs for building restoration and repair, fit out and the ongoing costs including a risk assessment of all aspects for each use.

Alison mentioned NVDA can help with identification of grant sources. Kate McCarthy of the Vermont Natural Resources Council has been keeping in touch, and Danville has tapped that funding source in the past. Once the choices have been narrowed down and the key issues identified we can go deeper in terms of design and looking at municipal planning grants.

Tim Ides opined that 'use' is the single biggest priority. Without identifying the uses, all the rest is irrelevant. Sally agreed with this. Tim expressed his concern that the railroad stations study should be of stations on the rail trail. Michael suggested not closing out a review of the station successes not on the rail as not all of the viable uses relate to the trail itself. Tim asked if there are any plans to move the Recycle Center. Alison said that yes there have been and that recycling is not highest and best use for that building. Keith said that due to not having a recycling attendant and the increased scope of recycling that a plan to move recycling should be made by the SB sooner rather than later.

Ross mentioned that there used to be an addition on the building and could be part of the plan both for a larger use foot print and, if the SB wanted to keep recycling at the station, we might still have room for another use.

Whatever we do has to support itself going forward without having to return to the SB every year. So there needs to be an economic engine in the station. Possibly the passenger side needs to be available for trail users with an historic overview of the Town and the railroad, along with amenities.

Michael agrees that the use has to be determined first before any other committee can really proceed. However it is important to research construction and funding possibilities so we don't waste time moving from the Use decision to implementation. Some of the funding sources may take considerable time to tap.

Kate said we need to evaluate the various barriers to development (sewer, water, etc) as well. For a feasibility survey NCIC covers 65% of the cost, and the town the rest. But she is not certain what the timeline is for completion. Depends how deep they go with the evaluation and research. Alison envisions the identification of

potential uses being fairly quick (as part of the feasibility study). By the time the funds are available the in depth study can be completed. She thinks maybe three months to complete that initial use phase for the three uses as well as determining their viability (based on market demand and their space needs).

Rob said the V2V station plan bleeds over onto adjacent property in the parking lot, thus the plan may not be achievable. Does this impact potential uses? Parking is a major issue considering that small wedge of property owned by the station. Can we use assets across the road or down the trail? Parking will be a major issue for any viable use.

Kitty asked whether these questions would be answered in the three month time frame to complete the initial study. Alison thinks any for-profit use will need more parking, so this will be a need in almost any income-generating use. Limited parking is a foregone conclusion so we should work from the assumption this is a constraint. It was never designed to be a commuter parking lot.

Ted thinks parking is already an issue and overflow parking is already in use. Goodfellas and Marty's had some pushback this summer because of this issue and he thinks this is only going to become a bigger issue as more people utilize the rail trail. Regardless of what the use may be, this will be a concern.

Michael asked about the land next to Town Hall. Keith said anything done to that lot has to be put in front of the voters. There is a plan and design, that work is done, it is just a matter of raising funds to the project. There is one last detail they are working on related to storm water, but it is mostly now in the hands of the voters about whether they want to pull the trigger.

Kate proposed the following for Feb regarding the studies:

- (1) reach out to other communities for models (more than two), and
- (2) to apply for some grant funds.

Alison mentioned that VNRC and NCIC should be asap because some of those deadlines for grant submittal are February. Funds probably won't release until April or May for the actual study.

Kate received approval to move ahead as discussed above with the outreach, use identification and funding needs.

Michael then asked to Kitty for her report.

Funding

Kitty acknowledged that Alison is key to their committee because they will rely heavily on her knowledge and experience with grants. Kitty then asked Keith about the building fund he mentioned (started for the depot and added to annually) and whether we were at risk of losing the current annual funding. Keith said that unless something else came up, he suspects not. There are some endowments the town uses periodically for the Town Hall and other things, so he feels the money is really set aside for the depot. Though there are never guarantees. Kitty wants to be sure that if we fundraise this doesn't jeopardize that funding with the Select Board.

These monies can cover the grants' required match by the town for planning and construction costs.

Kitty said she sees three funding sources:

- (1) grants,
- (2) town funding (and what is sustainable),
- (3) personal and business contributions.

Michael mentioned that applying for 501-C3 status may be important because it could open us up for additional funding opportunities as well as allowing personal donations to be tax deductible. Kitty questioned if donating through the town would accomplish the same thing. Michael said he thought it a bit more difficult, but she should look into it. Kitty then asked Tim if he could take point on evaluating obtaining 501-C3 status. Alison said that forming a 501-C3 was complex and had associated legal fees. If we looked into it we could determine if it would be feasible or whether it would be better to look at other funding options. Tim said he was willing to review requirements, uses, and costs.

Keith asked if the cost estimations and funding sources would include future costs like maintenance, heat and those sorts of things. Who would bear those costs? What is the plan? Or is this an annual cost to the town? Michael answered that once the three viable uses are identified, then the costs and revenues need to be assessed so we determine which would be self-sustainable without being on the town docket. Kitty reiterated her concern about jeopardizing the current annual town funding.

Kitty referred to the fire house that Keith said is owned by the town, and is in easy walking distance of the depot. If a larger enterprise (brewery, bike shop) came in along the rail trail, perhaps that building and lot would be available to supplement the station if the town moved the fire station elsewhere.

Kitty proposed that the 150th anniversary would be a perfect time to kick off a \$150,000 fundraising campaign.

Michael wrapped up the meeting saying a lot had been accomplished and we have tasks to be completed by the February meeting.

New Business

Patti said there is a North Star Monthly article she will be writing. What should be the emphasis? Perhaps something related to the depot and the coming 150th anniversary? Tim proposed the history of the building. Ross said it should include some of the articles Patti found—especially the one about the first train coming through—because the language was lovely. Patti said the reports are in the West Danville History book she is working on and she has some interesting historical documents that can be a source for this perspective. Alison said the original Village to Village project had some important information, conceptual sketches and community input that could be included.

Kitty said maybe this should be a monthly article where each month gives a piece of the puzzle – a series of articles that lead up to the 150th anniversary to keep it fresh in people’s mind. Patti thought that could be a good idea, but asked what the finale article would be. Michael said it would be the anniversary (Aug 4th). Could plan activities around it – events and activities are dependent on covid restrictions/gatherings. Perhaps including apple pie since the 1871 article said they were getting it in “apple pie order” for the first train.

Patti recommended extending the celebration to when the actual train arrived in September (with a Danville Fair theme Keith added).

Michael thanked everyone for their efforts and to have a good month until the next meeting the second Tuesday of the month.

Next scheduled meeting is Tuesday February 9, 2021. This meeting will be held by Zoom only.

Respectfully submitted,

Lois Russo, Secretary