



Town Hall, Needham, Mass. 1902—2002

Sketch of Town Hall by Robert Y. Larsen

Report to Town Meeting

**The Needham Town Hall Study Committee
27 October 2008**

CONTENTS:

- I. List of Committee Members and Affiliations
- II. Summary of the Committee's Work
- III. The Charge to the Committee (Article 24)
- IV. The Report of the Study Committee to the Board of Selectmen, 15 September 2008
- V. Parking Study undertaken by Citizens for the Preservation of Town Hall (CPOTH)
- VI. Survey Report and Questionnaire – Use of Assembly Halls in Other Towns
- VII. Use of Town Halls' "Great Halls" as Performance Space: Assessment of Impacts on Needham's Downtown Economy and Revitalization (Prepared by Joyce Moss, AICP, Economic Development Coordinator, 11 August 2008)
- VIII. A List of Supplementary Documents available on the Town Website

I. Appointed to the Town Hall Study Committee, June 2008

Committee Member	Representing
Jeanne McKnight, <i>Chair</i>	Planning Board
Gloria Greis, <i>Clerk</i>	Tercentennial Steering Committee
Kate Fitzpatrick	Town Manager
Steve Rosenstock	Finance Committee
Jim Healy	Board of Selectmen
John Connelly	Permanent Public Building Committee
Michael Niden	Citizens for the Preservation of Town Hall
Claire Messing	Needham Cultural Council
Paul Good	Needham Business Association
Carol Boulris	Needham Historical Commission
Jane Howard	Community Preservation Committee
Town Meeting Member (not appointed)	
Architect (not appointed)	

II. The Needham Town Hall Study Committee – Summary of Work

The Needham Town Hall Study Committee was created by the passage of Article 24 at the Annual Town Meeting on May 12, 2008.

In April 2008, McGinley Kalsow and Associates (MKA), who had been hired by the town to conduct a feasibility study for the needed renovation/restoration of Town Hall, presented three possible options for this project. All options provided for the restoration of the first floor offices. In addition, Option 1 proposed the restoration of the second-floor assembly hall space, then the installation of partitions to use the floor for offices; a “tower” addition on the north side of the building would accommodate mandated restrooms and accessibility features (elevator, additional stairways) as well as machine space for the HVAC system. Option 2 proposed gutting the second floor and installing two floors of permanent offices in its place; there would be no tower and elevators and systems would be built within the structure. For Option 3, the second floor would be restored to use as a public assembly hall, and the tower would be expanded into a full addition to hold the additional offices. (See the Needham town website for complete details of the feasibility study and options, <http://www.needhamma.gov/index.asp?NID=1759>).

Prior to the Annual Town Meeting (May 2008), the Board of Selectmen voted to recommend Option 1. Article 24 was placed on the Warrant by The Citizens for the Preservation of Town Hall, who advocated the restoration of the assembly hall on the second floor of Town Hall, for use as a public meeting and events space. By passing Article 24, the Board of Selectmen’s request to go forward with Town Hall Option 1 was, in effect, referred to the Town Hall Committee for further study. The vote of 114 – 75 in favor, indicates that Town Meeting members wished to have more information about the possibility and logistics of restoring the assembly hall before they would be ready to approve funding for construction.

Following Town Meeting, the designated boards and committees were requested to submit the names of their representatives to the Town Hall Committee. Eleven members were appointed in mid-June; no names were submitted for the remaining two appointments. The Committee met throughout the summer, first convening on June 28 and then meeting every one-to-two weeks until late September, for a total of ten meetings. Committee members also attended meetings of the Board of Selectmen, Permanent Public Building Committee, and Finance Committee when the topic of the Town Hall renovations was on the agenda.

Also in response to Town Meeting’s desire for further discussion, the Board of Selectmen convened, on June 23, a “Town Hall Summit” of all of the Town’s boards and committees, as well as interested members of the public. MKA made a brief presentation of the three proposed options. Participants were invited to make comments or ask questions. Following the summit, MKA was asked by the Town administration to provide another possible design incorporating the participants’ comments. MKA presented this additional design, designated Alternative (or, Option) 4, in July.

The Town Hall Study Committee began its discussions by evaluating the relative merits of Options 1 and 3, as well as the proposal raised at Town Meeting that additional space could be added to the new Public Facilities Building. The introduction of Option 4, which incorporated features favored by members of varying viewpoints, narrowed the discussion to a comparison of Options 1 and 4.

Following its charge, the Committee also looked into the use of assembly halls in other towns nearby, with particular reference to types of use, parking issues, costs and fees, and whether or not they generated revenue. The reports delivered to the Committee on these topics have been summarized in Section IV, and included in their entirety later in this packet.

Near the end of its deliberations, following its report submitted to the Board of Selectmen on September 9, the Committee voted to convey its support for Option 4 as the preferred option for the renovation of Town Hall. The vote to recommend Option 4 was 7 in favor, 2 abstaining pending additional financial information, and 2 absent.

In closing, the Town Hall Study Committee would like to express its appreciation to the Needham town administration for its unfailing cooperation and assistance, and to the Boards and Committees that its members represent for supporting this effort, undertaken in the best tradition of community collaboration.

III. Charge to the Committee

At the Adjourned Annual Town Meeting held on Monday, May 12, 2008, under Article 24 it was VOTED: To refer the subject matter of Article 24 to a new committee, called the Town Hall Committee, which will conduct a study of the use of the Great Hall as a public meeting and events space with capacity to accommodate at least 350 people, and report back to the Town Meeting in November of 2008. The committee will have **thirteen** members, including the Town Manager or her designee, one representative each from the Board of Selectmen, Needham Historical Commission, Planning Board, Permanent Public Building Committee, Needham Cultural Council, Needham Business Association, Citizens for the Preservation of Town Hall, Needham Tercentennial Committee, Finance Committee, Community Preservation Committee, a Town Meeting Member appointed by the Moderator, and an architect appointed by the Moderator. None of the committee members, other than the Town Manager or her designee and the representative of the Board of Selectmen, will be town employees. The committee will select a chairman from its members, and will study and report back to Town Meeting on the following matters: seating capacity in a renovated Great Hall, hours of the hall's use, parking, potential uses and users of the hall, benefits to the Town, costs and staffing needs, management, user fees, extent and types of uses of such halls in other municipalities, arrangements for housing displaced town departments and other functions, and other matters relating to the restoration of the Hall for use by the Town. The committee will be convened within three weeks by the Needham Historical Commission representative, acting as temporary chairman until a permanent chairman is selected by the committee. The Town Hall Committee shall continue in existence for the remainder of the fiscal year, and if so authorized by Town Meeting, for succeeding years.

Yes 114, No 75

IV. Report to the Needham Board of Selectmen

Submitted by the Needham Town Hall Study Committee, 3 September 2008

Summary: Option 4 provides for the restoration of the “Great Hall” for civic and community use, preservation of the Town Hall’s historic appearance and function, co-location of core departments, retention of key departments downtown for residents’ convenience, and adequate provision of space for long-term needs. Based on initial surveys of on- and off-street parking resources, use of the Hall on weekend evenings for community functions does not appear likely to create difficulties with parking, but this should be studied further. The cost of Option 4 is higher than that of Option 1 (+\$2.78M), which will require some re-ordering of capital improvement priorities. Modest economic benefit can be expected from an increase in downtown foot traffic resulting from both municipal and community use of the building; a potentially greater economic benefit associated with larger-scale performance use of the Hall cannot be determined at this time.

Charge: The Committee was charged to study and report back to Town Meeting on the following matters:

- 1. Seating Capacity in a renovated Great Hall:** Seating capacity is estimated at 356 people (MK&A study, Alternative #4, July 2008).
- 2. Hours of Use:** To be determined by the Town Manager, pursuant to the Town Charter.
- 3. Parking:**
 - According to MKA, an assembly hall with a seating capacity of 350 would require 114 parking spots.
 - Over three weekends in March and April 2008, the Citizens for the Preservation of Town Hall (CPOTH) monitored parking in the follow lots: Emery Grover, Dedham Ave, Chestnut Street, Lincoln Street, MBTA (Eaton Square), Chapel Street and on-street parking spots in close proximity to Needham Town Hall. CPOTH reports finding between 298 and 351 open parking spots. Also according to the CPOTH report, owners of nearby private lots have indicated willingness to make their spaces available, increasing the potential total. *(A full copy of the CPOTH report is appended to this report, below).*
- 4. Potential Uses and Users:** Municipal functions (meetings, public health clinics, workshops), town celebrations and events (e.g. Sunita Williams reception, Tercentennial activities), community cultural events (e.g. New Year’s Needham, art shows, etc). Other possible uses are to be determined at a later date.
- 5. Benefits to the Town:** These fall under several categories -
 - Historic Preservation
 - o Of the plans presented, Option 4 adheres closely to the MA Historical Commission’s guidelines for historic preservation by preserving both its appearance and function.
 - o Option 4 restores the “Great Hall,” making it available for both civic and community events.
 - o The Option 4 addition reflects the design of the original structure, and is less aesthetically disruptive than the Option 1 “tower.”
 - Community Building
 - o Option 4 provides a central space for town celebrations, civic meetings and community events.
 - Economic Development

- o A fee structure can be developed to help defray the operating and capital costs of using the hall.
- o Keeping employees downtown maintains the economic activity generated by Town Hall staff and visitors during the day.
- o Analysis by the Town's Economic Development Coordinator suggests:
 - Some benefit to restaurants and food take-away business as a result of increased downtown foot traffic (weekend events, weeknight municipal meetings);
 - Benefit to retail businesses would be minimal at this scale of use; and
 - Benefits to businesses resulting from larger-scale use of the Hall (such as, for performances) may be greater based on surveys of surrounding towns.

The Economic Coordinator's report is appended to this report, below.

- Operational Considerations:

- o Option 4 allows for all government departments and personnel included in Option 1 to remain in Town Hall.
- o Option 4 provides for greater amount of office space on the first floor than Option 1.
- o Option 4 provides additional space for expansion to meet long-term municipal needs without significant additional construction or alteration.
- o Option 4 provides additional storage space over Option 1.

- Financial:

- o Based upon the MK&A estimates, Option 4 potentially allows for a high percentage of CPA dollars to be allocated to the project
- o Approval by town of a "Great Hall" renovation makes it possible to seek additional grant funding to help defray costs

6. Costs and Staffing: Operating costs are being calculated by the Finance Director. It is estimated that Option 4 will result in an increase of \$123,283 in operating costs when compared to the current operation. The estimated operating cost of Option 1 is currently being calculated.

7. Management: Town Manager

8. User fees: To be determined by Town Manager, Board of Selectmen, and Finance Director.

9. Uses of Similar Halls in Other Municipalities (*see also attached report, below*):

- Communities surveyed: Arlington, Framingham, Holliston, Newburyport, Weston, Winchester
- Seating capacity: Ranges from 160 (Holliston) to 1700+ (Framingham). The others are in the 350-600 range.
- Usage: Falls into 4 categories -
 - o Uses/users:
 - Private parties, such as wedding receptions, allowed at all halls except Weston
 - Local theater groups are main users in Holliston, Winchester and Weston
 - Other uses include fundraisers, concerts, and public meeting
 - o Audience size: Generally 60-300, depending on type of event
 - o Hours of use: Non-municipal uses generally limited to weekends (Fri. night-Sun. night), except in Weston and Winchester
 - o Amount of use: Hall used most week-ends in Arlington, Framingham, and Holliston. In Weston, the theater group uses the hall at least 3x/week most of the year. Halls in Newburyport and Winchester used 1-2x./month
- Management/scheduling: These duties performed within the town's administrative staff, except in Framingham (facilities manager) and Arlington (part-time event coordinator)

- Fees:
 - o Rental fee: Community-based non-profits are charged \$100/evening in Holliston, Weston, and Newburyport (only when admission is charged); appx. \$100/hr. in Framingham and Winchester (with 4-hr. min.); \$250/hr. in Arlington (custodial fee included)
 - o Custodial fee: req. Framingham, Newburyport, and Weston (and/or building monitor); amt. varies
 - o Liquor: “permitted” at all halls; amt. varies or not known
 - o Safety details: may be req., depending on size or crowd or type of event; amt. varies
- Gross Revenue: (Data not available to calculate net revenue.) Amounts vary considerably by town and by year, from \$1000 (Newburyport) to \$55k+ (Arlington and Framingham); others in \$5k-\$9k range. The greater revenue in Arlington and Framingham appears to be generated by private parties. This is also true in Holliston where the hall is the smallest but revenue is third highest. These three communities also have staff most actively involved in Hall management. Several towns cite additional management staff, better publication, and/or higher rental rates as key to higher revenues.
- Parking: Staff interviewed in all communities cited report parking to be adequate.
- Other features:
 - o Kitchens: None have kitchens available for food preparation but all allow catering
 - o Air conditioning: Only Weston and Holliston
 - o Stage lighting and sound system: Only Weston and Holliston

10. Housing Displaced Town Departments/Functions: All departments and functions scheduled for the renovated Town Hall can be accommodated within the building or addition (MK&A study, Alternative #4, July 2008).

11. Other Matters:

- Additional \$2.78M cost of Option 4 over Option 1 will cause deferral of other items on the town’s Capital Improvement Plan to keep the town within its 3% debt limit
- Four more employee parking spaces are lost with Option 4 than with Option 1
- Upgrade of sound and lighting systems to accommodate performance function (if approved) can be added without significant reconstruction
- Loss of outdoor window view on the original north side of the building
- The Committee is not in agreement over the issue of whether the renovated “Great Hall” should be used for larger-scale performances and events. This is an issue that does not need to be decided at this time. Although surveys have been made of surrounding communities’ experience with performance venues, further information and analysis of the situation in Needham is needed before an informed decision can be made.
- The Committee has submitted a question to MKA concerning acoustically-appropriate HVAC for both Options 1 and 4. The information is forthcoming.

V. Parking Study undertaken by Citizens for the Preservation of Town Hall (CPOTH)
Reported to Town Hall Study Committee, 19 August 2008

Attached is an informal study which the Citizens Committee performed over several week-ends in late March.

We drove to all the public lots with in close proximity to the Town Hall. All were town owned lots. They include: MBTA, Emery Grover, Chapel Street Lots, Town Hall Rear, Chestnut Buddy Lots, Dedham Ave and several street space areas.

We visited these lots between 7:00 PM and 8:00 PM. There were 433 spaces counted, not including the full Chestnut Street main lot. Over several week-ends we found a high of 355 open spaces and a low of 298 open spaces.

Events planners use a factor of 2.5 people per car. Base on that factor, a 350 seat venue would require 140 spaces.

We did not include privately-owned lots in these numbers: Dedham Bank, Needham Bank, Kinko's/Coldwell- Banker, and Walgreens.

Parking Lot	Spots Open / Total Parking
MBTA Lot	72 of 85 spots open
Emery Grover Front	8 / 8
Emery Grover rear	58 / 60
Highland Ave	25 / 37
Chapel Street (nr Lewandos)	6 / 8
Chapel Street Lot	40 / 127
Town Hall Rear Lot	26 / 27
Dedham Ave	52 / 87
Lincoln Street Buddy A	15 / 15
Lincoln Street Buddy B	12 / 15
Chestnut Main Lot	full
Chestnut Street (nr Pho Pasteur)	8 / 10
Chestnut to Great Plain	6 / 7

All public and private lots listed above were photographed. For brevity, the photos were not included here, but are available on request.

VI. Survey Report and Questionnaire – Use of Assembly Halls in Other Towns

Four members of the Town Hall Study Committee questioned orally or in writing the municipal staff most directly involved in the scheduling of use of assembly halls located within six city and town halls. Those who collected the data were: Michael Niden – Arlington and Framingham; Paul Good – Holliston; Jeanne McKnight – Newburyport and Weston; and Jane Howard – Winchester. The data is summarized on the attached chart.

Seating capacity ranged from Holliston's 160 to Framingham's 1,700+. The hall that is most comparable to Needham's in size is Weston. Typical audience size varied, but 300-350 was cited as the upper end for three of the medium-size halls.

Weston and Winchester permit non-municipal functions on weeknights, but other cities and towns permit only weekend usage as a general rule, including Friday through Sunday evenings. Extent of usage varied as indicated.

Arlington employs an events coordinator and in Framingham usage is managed by the Town's public facilities manager, but for Holliston, Newburyport, Weston and Winchester, usage is managed by staff within the office of the town administrator, town manager or mayor.

All but Weston permit private parties such as weddings and bar mitzvahs. Holliston, Weston and Winchester halls are each used by a local theater group for rehearsals and performances.

Community-based non-profits pay fees ranging from \$100 per evening (Holliston, Newburyport and Weston); about \$100 per hour (Framingham and Winchester); to a high of \$250 per hour (Arlington). (Newburyport charges a fee only if the non-profit group charges admission, waiving the fee for free events.) Fees are typically higher for private parties than for community events, and Arlington and Holliston increase the fee even more if the party-giver is not a local resident. Framingham tacks on a "restoration fee" that is a percentage of event ticket prices. Some percentage of the fee is typically paid in advance to secure the hall and some towns require an additional refundable security deposit ranging from \$100 to \$500.

Arlington includes custodial services in the relatively higher fees that it charges; other municipalities typically require a custodian to be present when the hall is used for events and charge extra for this service - \$35/hour seems to be about average. For smaller events and rehearsals Weston employs a "building monitor" who generally keeps an eye on things, directs attendees and makes sure the hall is closed up, and this fee is only \$12 or so an hour.

Whether police or fire department staff is required to be present depends on the type of event and whether alcohol is to be served. Additional per-hour fees are charged for police/fire coverage (e.g., approx. \$50/hr. for police/\$40/hr. for fire in Weston).

Annual revenue varies quite a bit – from only \$1000 in Newburyport to a 2-year average of \$42,000 in Arlington and a 3-year average of \$48,000 in Framingham. With such a large range, an average may be meaningless, but it is approximately \$18,000. It is also hard to pick an example that is most comparable to Needham. Weston's hall is physically comparable but it appears that bargain fees are charged to a local theater group that uses the hall most of the year. In contrast, Arlington's hall is of similar size but is heavily used – it is perhaps more "grand" than Weston's or Needham's hall and has lovely grounds for wedding photos, etc. Holliston's hall, which generates \$7,200-\$9,300, is perhaps most comparable to what Needham's hall could be (Holliston's hall having been recently renovated and being more actively managed than Weston's or Winchester's) but Holliston's hall seats only 160, about half of the 350 Needham's hall would seat, and Holliston's population is half that of Needham (13,801 Holliston; 28,911 Needham).

Another way of presenting this data is by annual gross revenue per seat. By this measure, the halls that are actively managed and permit private functions (Arlington, Framingham and Holliston) yield nearly \$40.00 per seat, while those which are not actively managed yield less than \$10.00 per seat. Please note, the annual revenue figures on the chart represent gross revenue. We couldn't get full and reliable data for operating costs in order to present net revenue figures. Some municipalities use a revolving fund so that expenses are funded by income.

None of the halls have kitchens that can be used by caterers for cooking. This does not seem to be a barrier to use of the halls for functions involving food, since it was reported that caterers bring their own warming and cooling equipment and do not expect to cook on the premises.

Liquor is allowed at all the halls with proper permitting and even Weston (a "dry" town) permits bring-your-own-bottle cabaret events.

Remarkably, only two of the halls are air conditioned – Holliston and Weston. Arlington and Framingham thus do well to have so much activity and income presumably excluding the summer months.

Holliston and Weston also have stage lighting and sound systems. Even halls that have no stage lighting or sound whatsoever though, such as Newburyport, can still accommodate solo or ensemble performances, since performers bring their own sound systems and can even provide their own lighting.

All of the halls were reported to have adequate parking available.

As to "problems" the only concerns raised for some halls were that attention should be given to the fee structure with an objective of raising rates; increased marketing effort would help with utilization, and some need facilities upgrading.

A spreadsheet summarizing this information is attached at the end of this report.

VII. Use of Town Halls' "Great Halls" as Performance Space: Assessment of Impacts on Needham's Downtown Economy and Revitalization

Prepared by Joyce Moss, AICP, Economic Development Coordinator, 11 August 2008

A copy of this report is appended to this report.

VIII. A List of Supplementary Documents available on the Town Website

Detailed presentations of the four Town Hall renovation options, including feasibility studies, conceptual cost estimates, and floor plans and elevations are posted on the Needham town website at <http://www.needhamma.gov/index.asp?NID=1759> (or, Government > Documents > Town Hall Historic Preservation/Renovation).

The Town Manager's recommendation to the Board of Selectmen (9 September 2008) is posted at <http://www.needhamma.gov/DocumentView.asp?DID=1897>.

Information about the Town Hall Study Committee is posted at <http://www.needhamma.gov/index.asp?NID=1891>, and minutes of the Committee meetings can be found at <http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.asp?AMID=85>.