

**Middletown Springs Building Committee
c/o Middletown Springs Public Library
P O Box 1206
Middletown Springs, VT 05757**

A Community Building: Building Community

October 7, 2019

The Middletown Springs Selectboard recently contracted with CPG Enterprises, a non-profit consulting firm, to do a feasibility study to help determine the capacity of Middletown Springs residents to provide private monetary and in-kind donations toward the construction of the new town community building.

This study, together with the results of the Listening Tour they helped facilitate for us last year, has provided valuable information for the Selectboard and Building Committee as we work to achieve the goal of a combined Town Office Library building in the heart of the village.

The purpose of this letter is to summarize the findings and respond to the recommendations outlined in the Executive Summary of the Feasibility Study. The Executive Summary below is followed by the Building Committee's response to the individual recommendations.

As you will see the summary provides some clear recommendations. The Selectboard, Building Committee, and Library board agree with some of those recommendations, but heartily disagree with the ones that suggest increasing the funding request to voters. The Selectboard and Building Committee have discussed the recommendations and have formulated a plan for moving this project forward. The Selectboard is preparing a ballot item for a November vote which addresses the Town Office/Library building as well as the other pressing infrastructure needs of the town. This fall there will be public informational meetings on the ballot initiative.

It's important to keep in mind that this report and study was focused solely on the Town Office/Library project and did not include specific questions or solicit ideas or support for any of the other proposed town projects. Even so, there is information in this report that can and will help us succeed with the other projects as well.

Begin CPG Summary

CPG Enterprises Feasibility Study Executive Summary

Construction of a new community building that is home to a fully functioning and accessible Town Office and a vibrant Library presents an opportunity to bring Middletown Springs together and create a building the town can be proud of. To achieve this, the Town must create opportunities for every community member to take part in the effort. Fortunately, there are a lot of opportunities to participate whether it be through financial donations, material donations and/or donations of labor and skill.

Our findings lead us to recommend a fundraising goal of \$215,000. While this charitable component is modest, Middletown Springs can also achieve a community philanthropic goal by approaching the campaign as a modern day “barn raising,” in which community members are invited to work together to see this project to fruition. Naturally we encourage the community to seek any outstanding leadership contributions that might become available, but this is the goal we can reliably predict.

The campaign will have two distinct components, both of which rely on active community participation. The first is a bond vote for \$1.6M. This vote is tentatively scheduled for November 2019. Because this will be a specially scheduled vote it is critical that the Building Committee develop an informed and supportive voting base. This can be achieved by holding informational sessions about the project and sharing written materials too.

The second component of the campaign will focus on the community’s commitment to giving to the project. A campaign that invites donors to give at the level he/she can while equally engaging individuals who can bring their materials, skills and labor to the project, is necessary to meet the community goal of \$215,000.

At a time when rural Vermont communities are struggling with declining populations, and more locally when the surrounding area is navigating the impact of college closings, the town of Middletown Springs is committed to investing in its community. People choose to live in Middletown Springs because of the natural beauty of the area but they also want a community that values education, community and resourcefulness.

Middletown Springs residents are committed to investing in its community assets and have demonstrated this by voting in favor of allocating funds each year toward the construction of this project. Now after many years of discussion, planning and saving, residents have the opportunity to invest in the Town Green – the heart of every rural Vermont town or village – by constructing a community building that is as inspiring as it is utilitarian.

End CPG Summary

**The Middletown Springs Building Committee's Response
to the recommendations outlined in the CPG Executive Summary**

First recommendation: Create opportunities for every community member to participate in the construction of the building.

Building Committee's response: We wholeheartedly agree.

- a) The focus will continue to be on community participation and engagement. The Selectboard and Building Committee will hold meetings and provide updates on the progress and will invite community members to take part as we move ahead. The initial thought process is to employ a project manager to oversee and manage the project from the very initial stages. A search for the best candidate for this position will begin soon after a successful funding vote. A project manager will allow us to take full advantage of in-kind labor and services as well as help us organize community workdays for pieces of the project that can be completed easily by community members.
- b) Campaigns to fill the budget gap will be developed in order to raise the necessary funds and capture "cost avoidance opportunities". Every member of the community will be encouraged to participate to the best of their ability and capacity.

Second recommendation: Set an estimated realistic fundraising goal of \$215,000.

Building Committee's response: We can and need to do better than that, through gifts, grants, and in-kind donations of services and materials.

- a) The committee and Selectboard will work to achieve and exceed this suggested fundraising goal. You will notice in the third recommendation that we will need to exceed this goal in order to cover the estimated cost of the building as currently planned. We will need to augment our funding and donated services as much as feasibly possible. We hope to do this by applying for grants, looking for donated materials and skilled labor, as well as the cost-saving measures touched upon in the next section.

Third recommendation: Ask the taxpayers to approve 1.6M in financing for this project.

Building Committee's response: We will NOT increase the financing request to the taxpayers.

- a. The Building Committee does NOT feel that the town's taxpayers should be asked for an additional \$400,000 above the initial bond estimate of \$1.2M. The Selectboard is in agreement that asking the taxpayers for more than \$1.2M is not an option, especially when considering our other pressing infrastructure needs.
- b. The committee and Selectboard will also explore alternative building methods, such as pre-fab construction, to determine if this route will reduce costs. Initial research indicates that there should be significant savings with prefabrication. This could help us reduce the overall cost of the building and therefore, the overall budget gap.

In closing, it's important to note that a successful vote in November will authorize the Selectboard to seek financing for the project in the amount of \$1.2M, but financing will not be sought until we have reached or exceeded the full cost of the project through pledges, in-kind donations, reserve funds, and taxpayer approved funding.

With a successful funding approval vote, the Building Committee is confident that grant funders and community members will be more willing to support the project financially, through donated goods and services, or by helping with grant research, letters of introduction or support to granters and so on. We believe that together we can make this new building a reality.

As the executive summary states, we have the unique opportunity to invest in the heart of our village by constructing a community building that is as inspiring as it is utilitarian. We hope that you will agree that this investment is vital to the well-being of our town. There will be ample opportunities to become involved as we move toward the November vote and beyond. We welcome your advice and support along the way.

With our thanks, and with great hopes for our new Town Office and Library,

Patty Kenyon, Chair
Middletown Springs Building Committee

Kristal Haynes Hier, Vice-Chair
Middletown Springs Building Committee

APPENDICES

Confidentiality: Please note that CPG and the building committee take our pledge of confidentiality to the interviewees, a condition of their participation, very seriously. Because this is a municipal project, transparency is also a high priority. The full report, edited to protect the privacy of those interviewed, will be available upon request. Sections of the full report with information that could be personally identifiable to the participants or the general public will be redacted.

Funding: We have identified a list of potential grant opportunities that we would like to pursue which we believe could be a good fit for our project. We welcome your recommendations for grant funding agencies as well.

Some of these possible funders do not take unsolicited applications. We ask that you let us know if you have connections to any of these individuals or foundation board members or have had experience with any of these grant makers. Your help in providing an introduction could lead to significant help in us achieving our goal.

- ❖ ***Matthew & Josephine Birnbaum – Bridport VT***
- ❖ ***Oakland Foundation – Stowe VT***
- ❖ ***Georgia Hulett – Concord NH***
- ❖ ***Nella M Grimm Fox – Providence RI***