

Old Town Hall Stow Massachusetts



Fundraising Assessment Executive Summary

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Stow Old Town Hall

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Introduction

In April, 2022, I was asked by Don Mills of Mills Whitaker architects, to prepare a list of grants suitable for capital repairs to the Old Town Hall in Stow, MA and to recommend a possible funding mechanism for raising money. Estimates for repair and/or full restoration of the building varied between \$250K and \$4M. After some initial conversations and an assessment of the current situation regarding the Old Town Hall, it was clear that there were several steps that needed to be taken before any fundraising efforts were initiated. To restore this historically significant building will require many donors, several varied sources of support and a comprehensive plan.

Pillars of a Plan

A significant undertaking with long-term impact on the community requires planning. In this report, I will lay out the pillars of any planning effort for a preservation project like Old Town Hall. Within a strategic plan there will be other plans: leadership, architectural, fundraising, and a business plan to name a few. A strategic plan would identify all the other plans needed, and would include a workplan with responsibilities assigned to individuals and a timeline. Ordinarily a budget would be included as well but projects costs will be embedded in these other plans.

Vision

In order to attract support, it's important to have a clear vision and business plan for how the building will function and how operations and ongoing maintenance will be supported. The vision will include defined uses for the building. This involves some assessment of what kinds of uses will conform to building codes and what uses the Town will allow. In order to successfully restore a building, a vision needs to include some revenue-generating activities. In the case of the Old Stow Town Hall, leased office space, meeting space or even event rentals might be possible. Leased space build out might be the responsibility of the tenant, although the Select Board might prefer to select a contractor.

In order to develop a vision and to increase support for the project, it's important to hear from as many people as possible about their visions for the building. Guiding questions might be: What does the Town need? What spaces are lacking for recreational activities, meetings, events? What groups might need storage space, like the local historical society for its collections or a theater group for its sets and props? (Storage cannot be the sole use of the building-the cost to repair it wouldn't be feasible but it might make up the mix of uses that this

building will require to be sustainable.) To develop a vision, listening posts or focus groups are held to elicit advice and opinions from the community. Listening posts are held with a moderator and recorder. Focus groups are groups of invited participants (usually 10 to a group) and a facilitator to discuss their vision for the building. Usually there are three or four of each type held at different times of day and on different days to accommodate many different schedules. Whether listening posts or focus groups, it's important to widely publicize each. Be sure to include elected officials at the local, state and federal level, in these discussions and/or call on them individually to discuss vision and plans.

Once a vision is formulated, it is important to have drawings and/or a model as well as a brochure with photos about the building to gain enthusiasm and support for the building restoration. A Power Point presentation would be important, as well. Remember to include a bit of "glitz" to get people excited about the building.

Leadership

In order to raise money independently from the Town of Stow, a friends group or new committee will need to be formed. Ideally the committee would be composed of people with knowledge and/or experience in the following areas: governance, fundraising (including major donors), preservation, architecture, and finances, as well as connections to people and businesses within Stow and outside the area. A committee of ten to twelve members would be ideal. Everyone on the committee should have the financial wherewithal to make a significant gift to the fundraising effort.

Community Support and Marketing

Broad-based community support as well as support from other potential donors interested in old town halls or preservation in general are essential to a successful fundraising effort and restoration project. There are several ways to build support.

- Use the building-particularly for programs for children and families.
- Give tours of the building. Plan a series of Get to Know Your Town Hall, with refreshments on various days at various times. For elected officials and potential major donors, invite them to a dance recital or some other program, preferably with children and families and give them a "behind-the-scenes" tour.
- Invite the neighbors for a special program and tour.
- Find someone who knows something about the architect who designed and built the building and host a lecture. Record it so that some of the talk can be included in other media forms like a video or posted to social media.
- Publicize events and programs in the building through the local newspaper and social media.
- Establish Facebook and Instagram pages for the Old Town Hall and find a few people of all ages to post something every week.
- Leave brochures (see above) at public places like the library and Town Hall, school lobbies, convenience stores-places that draw lots of people.

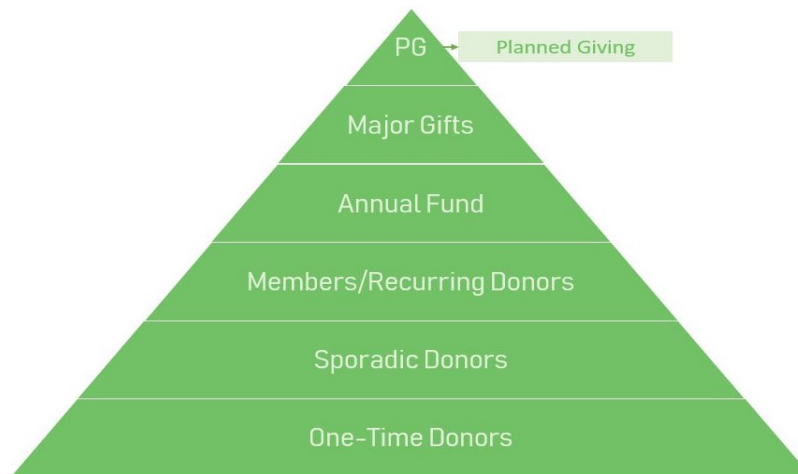
- Recruit a young person to develop a video about the building, with various people speaking in support of its preservation and use. Include old photographs, photos of people using the building now and make it 10 minutes or less. This will be an important fundraising tool. Show it often.

Fundraising Plan

An important component of any fundraising effort is to establish a fundraising plan. The first step is to sit down with each member of the leadership team and brainstorm a list of people who might be involved in the campaign from serving on various committees to making large donations. Next, a few members of the team need to identify their gift/pledge so that they can ask other members of the leadership team to do the same. Funders and donors want to know that 100% of leadership is contributing to the restoration project. At this stage, an outside consultant can be very helpful in coaching leadership and in helping to draw up a plan. Although most people think of “the ask” as something they don’t want to do, “the ask” is only 10% of the fundraising effort and only those who are confident about making an ask, will be requested to do so.

Some of the other components of a fundraising plan are:

- Brainstorm with as many people as possible to identify potential donors
- Identify committees and their members: Major Gifts Committee, Grants Committee, Corporate Donors committee, Social Media Committee (for platforms like Go Fund Me).
- Develop a gifts table that identifies how many donations at what amounts are required to raise adequate funding for the project. For example, if the project is \$1M, 2 donors may be needed at \$250 each, 4 donors at \$100K and all other donors for a total of \$100K. The usual configuration for donations is a pyramid with highest gifts at the top and smaller gifts forming the basis of the triangle. Gifts may include grants and donations from other sources.
- Identify the amount of the donation each prospective donor can give.
- Ask at least two major donors to make a gift.
- Adjust the fundraising pyramid as needed.
- Assign individuals to solicit gifts from everyone on the list.



Donor Pyramid

Working Capital

Most major grants require a match. A match is the amount needed to “earn” grant dollars. For example, some grants require matches that are 1:1. For every dollar raised, one grant dollar is awarded. However, many of the larger grants require a 3:1 match-for 3 dollars raised, 1 grant dollar is awarded. In order to meet these match requirements, it’s necessary to have working capital to begin a fundraising campaign. That’s why securing gifts from one or two major donors is essential to securing larger grants. Often, larger donors will issue a challenge-the donor will match the total amount given by other donors so that the donor’s gift is doubled, and so is the amount available for matching other grants. Sometimes matches can be made with the addition of in-kind goods and services. For example, a local hardware store might agree to furnish all of the door hardware needed for a building project. The total value of door hardware becomes a dollar match for matching grants. For most projects, 25% of the total cost is the amount needed for working capital.

Funding Mechanism

One aspect of my assignment was to review funding mechanisms. There are only two that might apply to this situation. One is to form a *separate 501 (c) (3) organization*, for the purposes of education; there may be other IRS tax-exemption categories that would be more appropriate like a Foundation, but this one is the most common. This organization would be a “friends” group whose primary purpose would be to help the Town government raise money to fund the repairs and restoration.

The second option is to identify a *fiscal agent*. A fiscal agent is an organization that receives and tracks all gifts, donations and grant award and distributes the funds to another

organization or pays the bills for a particular project. In this case, Town government would be the most likely fiscal agent, although a Friends group might identify a nonprofit organization with a similar mission, to take on the role of fiscal agent. Typically, a fiscal agent charges an administrative fee based on a percentage of the total funds received.

Next Steps

While the Select Board decided on its next steps, it's important to use Old Town Hall for as many meetings, events, programs, meets and greets as possible in order to convince the Select Board of its importance to the community. Once that hurdle is overcome, it will be important to form an independent committee of citizens who will organize and host listening posts to develop a vision and determine uses for Old Town Hall. Once that information is compiled, with names and email addresses of those in attendance, additional people might be added to the committee, and a vision and use plan and business plan can be developed and approved by the committee. A brochure can be developed using old and new photos to illustrate the future of the building, based on the community vision. The committee can begin to host coffees and tours of the building to build community support. Committee members might begin to call on important stakeholders in the Town to solicit their support and to discuss plans with elected officials. During this period, it will be important to define acceptable uses of the committee, approved by the Select Board and to discuss the Board's willingness to act as fiscal agent for any monies raised. It will also be important during this period to develop a strategic plan, business plan and fundraising plan. These initial steps might take as long as one year but shouldn't take much longer or the project will lose momentum. Once these steps are completed, it would be wise to bring in a fundraising consultant to assess feasibility for a capital campaign and to outline next steps in building community support and in obtaining funding.

Conclusion

Restoration of Old Town Hall is only possible with broad-based support from a wide variety of donors, including many from beyond the confines of Stow. Developing an exciting, engaging vision with defined uses, supported by a realistic business plan, is critical to this effort. These efforts are pillars to a successful fundraising campaign and long-term sustainability of Stow's precious resource.

Submitted by,

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STOW TOWN HALL

A Strategic Plan for Using and Preserving Significant Landmark

PILLARS OF THE PLAN

- Planning
 - Vision
 - Clearly defined use and business plan
 - Enthusiastic broad-based support of several communities of interest
 - Experienced knowledgeable working leadership
 - Working capital
 - Funding mechanism
 - Marketing

PLANNING: CLEARLY DEFINED USE

- Steps in Determining Use
 - What uses will the Town allow?
 - Allocation of income-producing space and defined uses
 - Town-wide survey of needs and interests
 - Public hearing or listening posts for different interest groups
 - Market assessment of planned uses
 - Cost Estimates for: Restoration, Operations, Maintenance, Fundraising
 - Use determined based on all factors gained as result of planning work

COMMUNITY CULTURAL CENTER



DANCES



KID STUFF-AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS



PROFESSIONAL OFFICE OR MEETING SPACE



WELLNESS ACTIVITIES



THE INEVITABLE



PLANNING: BROAD BASED COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Building Support:

- Drawings depicting use
- Exciting brochure with great color photos outlining uses
- Meet and greets in building
- Neighborhood meetings in private homes
- New programs in Town Hall, or on grounds-build affection for the building
- Local news articles
- Building relationships with elected officials at federal, state and local level
- Building relationships with National Park Service, MA Historical Commission, Stow CPC, National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Trustees, Historic New England
- Identify donors beyond Stow with town connections, preservationists, town building enthusiasts

EXPERIENCED KNOWLEDGEABLE LEADERSHIP

- Before embarking on the planning, fundraising, overseeing project, ask yourself if you have the physical stamina and financial wherewithal to work on this project for at least 5 years.
- Build working committee with people who have:
 - Unlimited enthusiasm for the project
 - Deep commitment to the project
 - Preservation experience
 - Fundraising experience
 - Social connections
 - Financial connections

EXPERIENCED KNOWLEDGEABLE LEADERSHIP

- Appoint chairperson:
 - Experience with major preservation projects
 - Ability to interact well with people
 - Prior experience leading groups
 - Deep commitment and enthusiasm for this project
 - Recognized “name” in the community

EXPERIENCED LEADERSHIP

- Appoint Advisory Committee with well-known “names”
 - With good connections
 - Specialized areas of expertise like construction, nonprofit experience, areas related to use
 - Financial wherewithal to make large gifts

LEADERSHIP PLANNING

- Brainstorm list of people to serve on working committee and people to serve on Advisory Committee.
- Provide each person with basic info about the project, what is expected of them, and the time they will need to devote to it.
- Assign people to speak with others directly about a possible leadership role.
- Come back together as a group and make recommendations about whether an individual is suited to the task and about which committee they might serve on
- Meet in person to recruit.

WORKING CAPITAL

- Identify a group of donors who can provide up to \$100K in working funds because:
 - Grants are often reimbursable, that means that grant funds are transferred to organization or fiscal agent **after** expenses are paid by organizing group.
 - Most funders don't want to provide initial funding.
 - Most funders require matching funds. Some matches are 1:1, that is one dollar awarded for every dollar raised. Some are more than 1:1 and can be as much as 3:1 or \$1 awarded for every \$3 raised.
 - Cash flow can be problematic.
 - Consider asking a donor to offer a challenge grant-I will donate \$x amount but that must be matched by \$x amount.

WORKING CAPITAL PLANNING

- Identify potential donors for initial gifts/pledges and challenge grants.
- Consider Go Fund Me campaign or other on-line fundraising vehicle.
- Avoid considering anyone who is capable of making a donation over \$10K – these folks will be considered for naming rights and other major gifts.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

- Options
 - 501 (c) 3 tax exempt status
 - Fiscal agent-funds are funneled through fiscal agent. Usually requires administrative fee. Fiscal agent might be Town of Stow or other large non-profit.
 - Friends group-separate 501 (c) 3

Public-Private Partnership

Examples:

- Olana State Historic Site, Greenport NY and the Olana Partnership
- Gloucester City Hall, Gloucester MA-Gloucester Fund

PLANNING FOR FUNDING MECHANISM

- Investigate each option and determine which one seems best fit for this project.
- Discuss with Town officials and determine which mechanism will work best in a public-private partnership.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities for public-private partnership. Talk with leaders of other such ventures and find out what works and what doesn't.
- Make sure leaders on both sides understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Use legal counsel to draw up a contract.

PLANNING: MARKETING

- **Goal:** Generate interest and excitement
- Outline social media campaign on FB, Instagram, Twitter
- Assign people to post weekly to each site
- Identify appropriate media outlets
- Assign people to write and submit press releases
- Try for coverage on Chronicle, NPR and local access TV

ASK FOR HELP

- There are dozens of professional associations, and experts in many fields associated with this project. Ask for help! People love to give advice.
- Some groups you can turn to:
 - Mass Historical Commission-Paul Holtz
 - Mass Cultural Council-Jay Paget
 - Massachusetts Nonprofit Network
 - Historic New England-Ken Turino
 - National Trust for Historic Preservation-Saving Places program
 - New England Museum Association
 - Trustees (of Reservations)

ASK FOR HELP



GET TO WORK! IT'S WORTH IT!

