

Town Hall Accessibility Improvements

For many years, we have known that our Town Hall is not fully accessible for all, as required by Federal law. Recently, our Town took the first steps to remedy this situation. As part of a larger, multi-Town grant application, New Marlborough was awarded a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) of \$80,000 to fund the hiring of an architect to create design documents for construction that would make our Town Hall fully accessible.

Following a competitive procurement process, under State rules, the Pittsfield-based architectural firm, edm, Inc., was selected to produce a number of conceptual options, called schematic plans, for physical changes in Town Hall. These changes would remove the existing architectural barriers to full access. A Town-appointed Design Review Committee of local residents reviewed and discussed these options, including the pros and cons of each, along with some mixing of good ideas from one option with another option, to arrive at a preferred plan that could then be turned into detailed, architectural design plans for construction.

Some of the considerations included:

- Choosing a combination of an internal lift (only one person could use at a time for a very slow lift process) for access to the upper level containing the main hall area and two departmental offices, combined with a compliant but lengthy exterior ramp, parking lot access and drainage changes; and applying for a variance on the current interior stair
or
Choosing an elevator for upper level access, eliminating the ramp, and adding a new set of compliant interior stairs
- Providing a new space for Select Board, Committee or Commission meetings separate from the office areas
- Enlarged bathrooms necessitated by the capacity of the main hall meeting space
- Lowering the stage area of the main hall to provide greater capacity for Annual Town Meetings, as well as a smaller meeting area for committees, and a new entrance to the main hall
- Enhanced and increased office area, plus a kitchenette/break room area
- Fixing external walkway access to the building and egress areas
- External “rescue” areas at the traditional front entrance and side entrance in case the elevator could not be used in an emergency situation. These “rescue” areas would be necessary if a no-ramp option was chosen.
- A cost-effective solution (somewhat surprisingly the elevator option is better from a cost perspective)

Accompanying this narrative is the preferred conceptual plan to correct the accessibility deficiencies at Town Hall. The elevator option was chosen over the lift/ramp option. This concept or schematic plan is not a fully developed architectural plan for construction, but it does show the primary changes intended for the building.

The next steps are to develop a preliminary cost estimate, followed by full architectural design drawings for construction. As we are working under a funding deadline, these steps must proceed quickly. The Design Review Committee and the Board of Selectmen would welcome, however, any public comments of residents prior to starting the final design. Because of the deadline, we request that any comments be submitted by email to the Town Administrator [nmbos@newmarlboroughma.gov] no later than November 11. Thank you for your interest and your thoughts.