

Report of the Old Town Hall Re-use Committee
To Westminster Selectmen

September 2011

Committee Members:

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Executive Summary

This report of the current Old Town Hall Re-use (OTHR) Committee first recaps the charges given the Committee by Town Selectman. After describing some of the history of the old Town Hall and the recent context for the OTHR committee's work, each of the charges its addressed. In conclusion, the pros and cons of each of three possible futures for the old Town Hall – demolish, sell to private developer, or retain as town owned – are summarized. On balance it is recommended that the old Town Hall be retained as town owned and be used as a community center for a variety of uses.

1. Introduction.

Members of the Westminster Old Town Hall Re-use Committee were appointed by Town Moderator John Bowen in 2009 and most were reappointed in 2010. The six members of the Committee for most of the past two years are those listed on the title page of this report –plus Selectman Joe Flanagan as an ex officio member. Since she is no longer a resident of Westminster, Barbara Friedman is no longer eligible to be an official member of the committee, and Betsy Hannula volunteered to replace her as committee secretary.

The charge given to the Committee by Town Selectmen in September 2010 was as follows:

Thank you for your service to our town. So that it may best act on your recommendations, the board of selectmen asks that during the course of exploring options for reuse you address the following charges:

1. Obtain our building inspector's evaluation of the structural condition of the building "today" and, if applicable, a punch list of the minimal requirements and costs to maintain the building's existing structural condition.
2. Obtain our building inspector's opinion as to whether the building could in fact be reused safely; that is, that there are no incurable structural defects that would result in higher than normal risk of, e.g., collapse or fire hazard.
3. With the town planner's advice investigate the availability of grants, or other sources of funding, to both maintain the building "as is" and renovate the building for reuse. The board recognizes that our planner is currently part-time so we now authorize her participation in an advisory capacity only; if technical assistance is required that conflicts with the planner's other priorities, the selectmen's representative to your committee will bring this before the board.
4. With the town planner's assistance investigate the short and long term municipal needs for space and evaluate the old town hall's ability to fill those needs; provide a time line, if applicable, during which the hall might be simply maintained and then renovated. Again, the town planner's involvement is contingent on workload responsibilities.

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5. Investigate municipal reuses elsewhere and report on what those initiatives may teach us in terms of reuse options and the contributory value of the existing building for reuse.
6. Analyze the market demand for space and provide the board of selectmen with the information necessary for it to determine whether renovation would reasonably be considered financially feasible to either the private sector or the Town.
7. Conduct a downtown survey of property owners' recommendations. Downtown is loosely defined as being Main Street and the northerly residential side streets bounded by Route 2, specifically those areas most proximate to the old town hall. The board recognizes that a broader survey may be conducted. We want those who are most interested in your work to know that their feelings are important and ask that this charge be completed and reported to the board at the committee's earliest possible convenience.
8. By September 14, 2011 report on reuse options and the pros and cons of each option.

2. Background and Context

Before describing findings of the Committee, it is useful to recount some of the history of the old Town Hall and the context for work of our committee. The building located at 3 Bacon Street that is now known as old Town Hall was originally constructed in the Greek Revival style as the Town House in 1839. The building was a one-and-half story structure consisting of a wood framed first floor, now the second floor, over a crawl space. By the late 1800s, the building was deemed too small to meet the needs of the growing Town of Westminster. So the Town expanded the structure by raising the building one story and inserting a new brick built first floor to create a two-and-a-half story structure.

Here is how this renovation was described in *A History of Westminister, Massachusetts 1893-1958* (N. F. Tolman, Ed., Peterborough, NH: Richard, Smith Publishers, 1961, p. 15):

Before 1893, the building was less lofty than today, having been built along the general lines known as a story and a half in 1839. But in 1893 more room was needed, and it was decided with true Yankee thrift to raise the structure one whole floor. Evidently Westminister workmen were practical engineers of no mean ability; one would never guess that the pleasing dimensions of the building as it is today were not its original form.

The *History of Westminister* goes on to explain that the building now known as old Town Hall served not only as Westminister's town hall but also as a venue for meetings for numerous town groups such as youth, musical and other arts groups, and for citizens in general at annual town meetings. By 1958, it was recounted, "the machinery of town business had become far more complex [and so] it was necessary to employ office workers on a more-or-less daily basis, and town offices on the ground floor had to be enlarged and modernized." (p. 16)

However in 2001, a major structural problem became apparent in the building. At the second floor level, the walls of the structure were bowing outward. The building was considered sufficiently hazardous that Town Hall functions were temporarily moved to offices of the fire-police station on South

Street. To solve the problem in the structure one-inch steel rods were used at the top of the second floor to hold the side walls of the building together.

Following a structural re-evaluation, the building was deemed safe for re-occupancy in June 2002 (Letter from John Wathe, Structures North Consulting Engineers to Bob Thorell, Building Inspector, June 6, 2002).

About this time the Town also commissioned a cost feasibility study to analyze the possibility of renovating and expanding the town hall building for continued use as town hall. The study carried out by McGinley, Hart & Associates of Somerville, MA resulted in a 40-page report dated April 2002. The report contains detailed floor plans of the Town Hall and numerous pictures of both the interior and exterior of the building. The study also describes two options for renovation and expansion of the structure.

The first option sought to maximize the reuse of the structure for town offices, by replacing the second floor meeting and stage areas with new office space. This option would include demolishing the one-and-a-half addition at the back of the building and replacing it with a new two-story (3,150 square foot) addition to contain restrooms, an elevator and other utilities. Including extensive renovation to the older (front) part of the building, this option was estimated to cost \$2.2 million.

The second option would retain and renovate the large meeting room and stage on the second floor of the building. To provide additional office space this option would include a larger (6,200 square foot) addition at the back of the old building. Together with installation of an elevator and renovation on the old portion of the building, this second option was estimated to cost \$2.75 million.

After this study, the Town decided not to renovate the old Town Hall for future use as Town Hall, but instead to build a new Town Hall on South Street. The new Town Hall was opened in 2007 and dedicated April 1, 2007. This development naturally raised the question of what should be done with the old Town Hall.

As a result an eight-member Town Hall Re-use Committee was appointed. According to the Westminster Town Report 2007 (p. 185), this committee recommended that the old Town Hall not be demolished, but be maintained either for town use or sold for private use with a deed restriction regarding maintenance of its historic character.

Despite this recommendation, at a special town meeting held May 3, 2008, a motion was advanced “to approve demolition of the Old Town Hall at 3 Bacon Street in preparation for converting the property to a town park”

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(Westminster Town Report 2008, pp. 40-41). The 2008 report records that this motion “Did not pass.” The report does not record the vote on this motion.

As a result a new version of the Old Town Hall Re-use Committee was appointed in 2009, whose members were Betty Aveni, Beth D’Onfro, Barbara Friedman, Walt Haney and John Firbanks (ex officio). (Town Report 2009, p. 12). A slightly different version of the committee, including its current members was appointed in 2010 (Town Report 2010, p. 10).

Members of the Westminster Old Town Hall Re-use Committee were appointed by Town Moderator John Bowen in the spring of 2010. The six members of the Committee are those listed on the title page of this report with Selectman Joe Flanagan serving as an ex officio member. The Committee has met approximately ten times over the last year and has worked together collaboratively to produce this report.

Before we proceed to address the specific charges given the Committee by Town Selectmen, several other points are worth offering. First we inquired of the Town Assessors office as to what the assessed value of the Old Town Hall was at present. Robin Holm of that office told us that the total assessed value of the property at 3 Bacon Street as of 2011 was \$404,200, including \$108,000 for the land at 3 Bacon Street and \$296,200 for the building. Second, we discussed with Mike Gallant, Town Building Inspector,

the first two charges given our committee. He was of the view that as far as he knew based on both previous documentation and his knowledge of recent inspections of the building by independent architects that the old Town Hall was structurally sound. Nonetheless he suggested if we wanted to have a formal update to the 2002 review by McGinley, Hart & Associates (mentioned above), it would be prudent to hire an independent engineering firm to do another structural review of the building. Our committee discussed this possibility but concluded that it would not be reasonable to spend town funds on another such review, since one of the possibilities we have been asked to consider is the selling of the old Town Hall to an independent developer or other party who would doubtless want to have their own architectural review of the building before purchasing it.

3. Grant Possibilities

The third charge given our committee was for us in consultation with the Town Planner to investigate the possibility of obtaining grants to renovate the old Town Hall for future reuse. We discussed this charge with our new Town Planner, Steve Wallace. Here was his response as of August 17, 2011.

“Old Town Hall: I have researched grant opportunities for the restoration of this building, but have not found any public facility grant programs that would be suitable for this effort. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

program is being funded at lesser amounts year after year, and the program's emphasis has shifted towards housing rehabilitation as its primary focus. I talked with the regional office of the USDA's Rural Development program, but Westminster's median household income is too high for the Town to qualify for their Community Facilities grant program. They do have a Community Facilities loan program which offers a 40-year loan period at 4% interest, but the Town Treasurer is able to borrow money at a lower interest rate and thus, this loan program does not make sense for the Town at present. I will continue to search out grant opportunities for the Old Town Hall and will share my findings with the policy makers."

4. Other Towns' Re-use of Old Town Halls

Betsy Hannula and Darlene Johnson have investigated how other towns in central Massachusetts have renovated their old town halls for new uses. They have found several examples of how towns have re-used old town halls and provided a Power Point presentation to the committee illustrating how several towns have renovated old town halls for uses such as general meeting space or art exhibition space.

5. Survey of Abutters to Old Town Hall

Another charge given by selectmen to our committee was to conduct a downtown survey of property owners' recommendations. In the process of pursuing this charge we obtained a list of abutters to the Old Town Hall property at 3 Bacon Street. From the Assessors office we learned that under

Massachusetts law, abutters are defined not just as owners of property physically adjacent to the property in question but owners of property within 300 feet of the property in question. Thus we were surprised to learn that there are about forty abutters to the Old Town Hall property.

Committee member Joe Serio interviewed immediate neighbors to Old Town Hall and the broader group of officially defined abutters. In September 2011, he reported the results of his inquiry as follows. “Future use of the Old Town Hall in the view of the neighbors drew a variety of responses, but there was a consensus of opinion as to its use. The majority favored making it a community center with a few saying specifically a Senior Center and others an Art Center with an emphasis on classes and studios. Three households in the neighborhood recommended a knockdown and making it into a park, but the majority would like to preserve and use the building. Most would like to see it stay in public use, but a few advocated selling it in a private sale and thereby not burdening the town with expenses. One of the “advocates of private sale would like to see a coffee and art space. The majority seemed to be concerned about large ventures such as restaurants and parking is a major concern of most polled. Most agree that something should be done soon as much time has gone by since the vacating of the building. I being an abutter am in agreement with the general consensus, believing that it should be a Senior Center on the first

floor, with community use of the second floor for productions and gatherings, as well as town meetings. The location of a Senior Center in the center should always be of importance. The access and use of the building enhances the vitality of the community and makes a statement of who we are and that we hail from a long and historical past.”

6. Real Estate Market Conditions

The sixth charge to our committee was for us to “Analyze the market demand for space and provide the board of selectmen with the information necessary for it to determine whether renovation would reasonably be considered financially feasible to either the private sector or the Town”.

We sought to address this issue in a number of ways. First we reviewed the current state of the residential real estate market in Westminister. According to the web site HomesForSaleInMA.com, as of September 2011, there were over 80 single family homes, condominiums, and town houses for sale in Westminister (as well as 37 parcels of land). Also the Town of Westminister web site (<http://www.westminster-ma.gov/>) indicates that as of this month there are two commercial properties available for rent in the center of town (at Village Square, # 97 Main Street and # 71 Main Street at Nichols.) It is the observation of

committee members that several of these residential and commercial properties have been on the market for an extended period (e.g. more than two years).

This is of course not surprising given the depressed state of the economy in Massachusetts. Nonetheless these findings lead us to conclude that renovation of the old Town Hall for residential or commercial use would not be financially viable in the foreseeable future.

There is however one notable exception to this general conclusion. Don Demaris a businessman who runs a retirement home in Fitchburg attended one of our meeting to inquire about the possibility of purchasing the old Town Hall to convert it into a retirement home. He indicated that this would meet a real need in Westminster and surrounding communities. He indicated that he was prepared to invest substantial money (\$1 million or more) to convert the old Town Hall for such re-use and that such re-use would have two additional benefits for the Town of Westminster: it would provide employment for a number of people to staff the facility, and as a commercial undertaking, it would provide tax revenue to the Town. Under questioning, Mr. Demaris indicated that he would certainly be willing to consider a deed restriction to preserve the historic appearance of the building. While he listened to

our conversation with considerable interest, the conversation ended with our explaining that it was not the role of our committee to act on such a specific proposal for reuse, but that our report on possible re-uses would be forthcoming in September 2011.

7. Survey of Town Households

In light of the suggestion in charge 7 to our committee that “a broader survey” of town attitudes toward future re-use of the old Town Hall may be conducted, our committee decided to undertake a town-wide survey. During Committee meetings in the fall of 2010, we decided to undertake such a survey inasmuch as previous experience at the Forbush Library had shown the sending a survey form out with the annual census of all town households could be a cost efficient way of conducting a town-wide survey. We consulted with Town Clerk Denise MacAloney about this possibility and she explained that this would be feasible under three conditions. First, the survey form regarding Old Town Hall would have to be kept to a single page in order to prevent the envelopes containing the annual household census from exceeding the weight limit for first-class envelope mailing. Second, the survey form would have to be printed and ready to go by the end of December 2010. Third, our Committee

would have to find volunteer manpower to stuff envelopes in early January 2010 before the annual household census was scheduled to be sent.

After reviewing another town's similar survey form, the Committee discussed possible content for our survey form. Betsy Hannula drafted a survey form and after this was discussed by our Committee, the survey form was finalized and 3000 copies were printed. During early January members of the Committee spent two half days stuffing envelopes so that the Westminster Old Town Hall Survey form could be mailed with the annual household census at no additional cost to the Town.

Between January and May 2011, 1150 survey forms were returned to Town Hall. Walt Haney periodically retrieved survey forms from Town Hall. As he did so he assigned each survey form with a case number and tabulated survey results.

The Westminster Old Town Hall Survey form was a single sheet of paper, printed on both front and back with five parts. The first part was simply a brief explanation of the survey. The second part contained two demographic questions regarding household size and age of respondents. The third part contained five questions regarding people's general attitudes toward the future of the Old Town Hall. On the back side of the form, part four listed 24 possible reuses of the Old Town Hall and asked respondents to place a check

mark for every use they favored. The final and fifth part of the survey form provided blank space and asked respondents “If you have any other suggestions or comments about the old Town Hall, please write them here.”

Before we summarize specific results of the survey we offer several general comments on survey results. First we were surprised at the number of responses we received. That more than a third of households (1150 out of 3000) responded seems to us to reflect widespread interest among citizens of Westminster in the future of old Town Hall. Second, it should be noted that though 1150 survey forms were returned, not all respondents answered each question on the survey form. For example, some respondents did not answer questions about household size or their age and a majority of respondents did not offer any written comments. Given these general observations here is a summary of the results of the survey.

Regarding the two demographic questions, given that not all respondents answered these questions, results indicated the following. Regarding household size, a clear a clear plurality of responses (37%) indicated that the most common household size in Westminster was two people. Nonetheless significant proportions of households (all equal to or greater than 10%) were reported to be one person (14%), three people (17%), four people (21%) or greater than four people (10%).

Question 2 of the survey, regarding respondents' ages produced more varied results. Data revealed that a slight plurality of respondents (30%) were aged 45-54, but nearly as many 56-64 (27%), over 65 (19%) or 35-44 (16%). Only 8% of respondents indicated themselves to be 19-34 and less than 1% reported themselves to be less than 18 years of age.

Part two of the survey form asked four questions about respondents' perceived importance about general future of the old Town Hall. Detailed results are presented in Table 1. below.

Table 1: Responses to Questions 3-6 of Westminster Old Town Hall Survey.

Q3 Imp to Preserve	Not Imp	344	30%
	SW Impt	448	39%
	Vry Imp	358	31%
Q4 Imp to Preserve appearance	Not Imp	291	25%
	SW Impt	427	37%
	Vry Imp	431	38%
Q5 Option to preserve	Town Ownshp	433	38%
	Non-profit Ownshp	288	25%
	Profit-making Ownshp	429	37%
Q6 If sold how imp fut use	Not Imp	337	29%
	SW Impt	466	41%
	Vry Imp	347	30%

As indicated in Table 1, in response to the question 3 "How important is it that the old Town Hall be preserved as a public asset that belongs to the Town?"

responses were quite varied with 30% responding “Not Important”, 39% responding “Somewhat Important,” and 31% responding “Important.”

Responses to question 4 “How important is it that the old Town Hall retain its appearance and character as part of the downtown neighborhood?” results were similarly diverse. To this question, 25% responded “Not Important”, 37% responding “Somewhat Important,” and 38% responding “Important.”

Question 5 asked “If you feel that the old Town Hall should be preserved, which option do you prefer?” To this question results were more sharply split with 38% saying “Public ownership by the town,” 25% saying “Non-profit ownership,” and 37% saying “Profit making entity.” In other words opinions were nearly evenly split as to whether the old Town Hall should continue to be owned by the Town or sold to a profit-making private enterprise.

Question 6 asked “If the old Town Hall were sold to a private developer, how important would its future use be to you?” To this question, 29% responded “Not Important”, 41% responding “Somewhat Important,” and 30% responding “Important.”

As previously explained, the fourth section of the survey, on the back side of the form, asked for more detailed views on possible future uses of old Town Hall. This question asked people to place a check mark for every of 24 possible future uses they favored. Results were as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Response to Question about specific possible re-uses of old Town Hall

Checked private use only	187
Checked public only	266
Checked private and public	524
Commercial uses	
Restaurant	433
Seniors	398
Businesses	393
Apartments	269
Town uses	
Youth	540
Seniors	499
Community center	493
Meetings	433
Exercise	430
Art exhibits	422
Performing arts	396
Park	394
Exhibits	375
Private functions	368
Theatre	360
Children	339
Library events	330
Museum	320
Information	308
Rent business	287
Senior/town develop	287
Town meetings	286
Public dances	283
Rent legal	268
Commercial kitchen	220

As indicated in Table 2, a clear majority of respondents (524) checked both public and private re-uses of the old Town Hall. Roughly equal numbers of respondents indicated that they favored possible future commercial uses as being for a restaurant (433), as a residence for a special groups such as seniors (398), or for a private business (393).

Among possible uses favored if the old Town Hall were to remain publicly owned by the town, the most frequently checked options, all greater than 400 among respondents, were uses for Youth, Seniors, as a Community center, for Meetings, for an Exercise facility or for Art Exhibits.

As previously described, the final section of the survey form provided a blank space and simply asked “If you have any other suggestions or comments about the old Town Hall, please write them here.” A total of 220, or 20% of the 1150 respondents, provided written comments. These have been transcribed and are reproduced in appendix 1 of this report. Here we simply summarize four general patterns we perceive in these written responses. Fifty of the written responses suggest that the old Town Hall should be razed or demolished. Nearly as many written comments (43) dealt with the financial implications of the future of the building, commenting on things like they do not want town taxes to be raised or that the property should be turned into a revenue producing rather than a revenue consuming asset for the town. Smaller numbers of respondents raised issues about the need for more parking in the center of town generally or for the library (28) or the need for senior housing or for a senior center (17).

8. Conclusion

The eighth and final charge to our committee by the selectmen was to “report on reuse options and the pros and cons of each option.” Hence in conclusion we summarize what we view as the pros and cons of each general possible re-use of the old Town Hall.

Demolish. The possibility of demolishing the old Town Hall was not an option we set out to explore. However since this was a possibility raised by three households in Joe Serio’s interview survey and fifty respondents in written comments in responses to the town-wide survey, it is useful to summarize what we view as the pros and cons of this possibility.

Among the advantages of this option are the following. Razing the old Town Hall building and turning the property into a park and/or parking space would address the concerns of people who raised concerns about the lack of parking in the downtown area of Westminster. If the building were razed, after the costs of demolition, the expenses to the town for building maintenance would obviously be eliminated.

Among the disadvantages of this option are the following. First it would fly in the face of the vote at the May 2008 special Town meeting not to demolish the old Town Hall. Second, it would destroy one of the few town-owned historic buildings in town. Third, though it would eliminate future costs

for building maintenance, there would remain costs to the town for property maintenance. Fourth, retaining the property as town-owned and using it as a public park and/or for parking would keep the property off the tax rolls and hence would produce no revenue to the town coffers. Fifth and finally, it would appear to be somewhat foolish to simply destroy a building the town assessors office posts at a value of more than one-quarter million dollars.

Retain as town-owned. The pros of this option include the following. First and most obviously, it would retain an historic building in the center of town. Second, it would provide a venue which might serve a variety of desirable uses identified in both Joe Serio's neighborhood survey and the town-wide survey, such as serving as a community center, a coffee house, a space for exhibiting art, a meeting space, a senior center, a place for youth activities or an exercise facility. As previously noted, in responses to the town-wide survey more than 400 respondents indicated that they favored such possible future uses in a town-owned facility.

The cons of this option are as follows. First, renovating the building for some of these uses would involve substantial costs. In the 2002 feasibility study carried out by McGinley, Hart & associates, the estimated cost of rehabilitating the old Town Hall building, first and second floor, without making an additions to it, was approximately \$840,000 (pp. 31-32). Second

retaining the old Town Hall as town-owned would mean that even after renovation costs, there would be on-going expenses to the Town for building maintenance. Moreover, in addition to building maintenance costs, for some of these uses, such as a youth center, there would also be costs associated with staffing the facility.

Third, in keeping the property as town-owned, there would not only be costs to the town, but as a municipal property, it would remain off the tax rolls and not provide revenue to the town – though conceivably for some possible future uses, a small revenue stream might be generated from user fees.

In summarizing these issues about income and expenses to the town, we point out that in written comments to the town-wide survey, more than forty respondents expressed concerns about fiscal issues, such as preventing tax increases, and finding new sources of revenue for town coffers.

Finally in discussing the option of keeping the old Town Hall as town-owned, we mention one other possibility. Westminster's Community Block Development Grant application to build a senior center at 69 Main Street was recently rejected by the state. Town planner Steve Wallace has pointed out to us that if the application were to be revised and focus on creating a senior center in the old Town Hall at 3 Bacon Street, this would mean that the application would address another priority of the grant program, namely historic

preservation, and would thereby enhance the chances for the application to be funded.

Sell old Town Hall. It is clear that one possible future for the old Town Hall would be for the property to be sold to a private party for a variety of possible future uses. Among the advantages of this option are the following. First this would not only eliminate costs to the Town of building renovation, it would also eliminate future obligations to the Town for building maintenance (and for some possible future municipal uses, costs for staffing). Second, this option would not only minimize future costs to the Town, but also selling the property to a private party would in most circumstances bring it back on the tax rolls and would provide an ongoing stream of revenue to the Town.

Among the disadvantages, or at least limitations, of this option are the following. First, in selling the property, this option would obviously lessen the town's control over this historic structure – though in raising this issue, it should be mentioned that the possibility of placing a deed restriction on the property has previously been discussed and viewed as viable both by town officials and private parties who have expressed interest in the property.

A second disadvantage, or at least limitation, on this option is that in the current real estate environment, some possibilities for private future re-use of the old Town Hall, such as for private residences or commercial office space,

do not seem to be financially viable. One exception in this matter is that a private party has already several times expressed interest in purchasing old Town Hall for conversion into a retirement home.

A third issue regarding this option pertains to zoning. The old Town Hall resides in a portion of town zoned residential. This would not create a problems for future municipal re-uses, but if the property were sold to a private party for many possible future re-uses (such as for a retirement home or a restaurant), the issue of rezoning the property as commercial or at least mixed-use would certainly arise. In pointing out this issue, we note that the results of Joe Serio's interviews with neighbors and abutters to the old Town Hall property suggest that among abutters there would not be widespread opposition to the prospect of rezoning the old Town Hall property to other than residential use, as long as future re-use did not exacerbate problems regarding noise, traffic and parking

Respectfully submitted,

Walter Haney (Chair)
Barbara Friedman, (Sec.)
Beth D'Onfro
Betsy Hannula (Second Sec.)
Darlene Johnson
Joe Serio
Joe Flanagan, ex officio

Appendix: Transcription of Written Comments from Town-wide Survey

Compiled by W. Haney, Westminster, MA
(Compilation as of 9/10/11)

This appendix reproduces comments made by respondents to the Westminster Old Town Survey. The survey was distributed to all households in Westminster in January 2011. On the bottom of the second (back) page of the survey form, the following invitation was provided: "If you have other suggestions or comments about the old Town Hall please write them here." The compilation below provides a reproduction of all comments provided. For each instance in which written comments were given, we list the case number and exact comments, except in instances in which respondents provided their names and/or phone numbers. In such cases, this information has not been reproduced here in order to protect people's confidentiality.

- 2 No fast food restaurants. Make office space, doctor, dentist, etc..
- 10 RAZE IT!
- 15 Sell it. Give Dev. Time limit for finish. Maybe not tax 1st year. Then get it on the tax rolls.
- 17 Believe we really do need more senior housing. It is a perfect location for it.
- 18 Keep it town owned.
- 28 The kids in our town need some place to go where they will be safe and stay out of trouble.
- 34 Community groups meeting place and children's activities or young adult teen activities.
Thank you.
- 37 How would lack of parking be addressed?
- 38 Remove existing structure. Sell salvage items. Use land for other town use.
- 42 Community mental health center at low/no cost.
- 48 Overflow parking for library.
- 50 Building should be sold or torn down. Now its nothing more than a tax burden for people.
- 54 Should be made into a parking area for the library with a small park at one end.

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- 56 This property should make money for the town, not cost us money.
- 57 Don' change exterior. Keep wood stage floors where possible. Great location for senior center. I think not enough windows or parking for retail.
- 67 Should be taken down and a park put there.
- 73 Please do not use tax dollars to refurbish this building. Tax dollars could be put to better use elsewhere.
- 80 Make this asset pay us some taxes!
- 84 A community place to gather for different purposes would be great.
- 86 I think it should be demolished and the area become a park/green area.
- 87 I don't see how the town can afford to renovate and use effectively both the Upton Bldg. And the old town hall so I think as a public park – and parking lot – is the most practical solution.
- 88 The building should be used or sold. If it remains town owned it should support itself without adding to the budget.
- 90 NOT ENOUGH PARKING FOR ANY OF THE USES LISTED. TAKE DOWN AND MAKE ADDITIONAL PARKING FOR THE LIBRARY.
- 92 TEAR IT DOWN AND MAKE A COMMON THERE.
- 94 I have a beautiful organ to give to the town. It was my mothers.
- 99 IT'S TIME HAS COME. SHOULD BE DEMOLISHED!!!!
- 101 If sold to a provate entity, please deed restrict to maintain current exterior.
- 110 TOWN OWNED !!! Youth Programs!!
- 113 Sell it or demolish
- 120 Demolish it – make a small park.
- 122 Sell the property. Less for the town to maintain. Lower town costs. Selling it would increase tax revenue collected.

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- 126 Teen community ctr., w/ homework quiet room, w/ another floor for seniors. Seniors could interact with younger.
- 139 Sell it and forget it. Get taxes out of it.
- 141 I say we keep the town as it is is that the building is a very important and historical part of it. Use it for youth and seniors, have concerts and shows. Try having fund raisers for the money. You'll be surprised how many people will go for this idea.
- 147 It all takes money and at this point almost anything is better than letting it sit there and deteriorate.
- 151 BUILDING TORN DOWN, MAKE A PARK WITH SWINGS, SLIDE AND BENCHES ALONG WITH ADDITIONAL PARKING FOR LIBRARY.
- 155 TEAR IT DOWN
- 156 We should sell it since it would be too expensive to own.
- 157 In the summer/fall we have the farmers' market on Academy hill. Move that into the Town Hall yard. In the colder months you can (warmer months also) you have the exhibits, crafts, etc., all in one area. They don't allow crafts in the farmer's market. When can local artists/crafters display/sell their products (not just food).
- 159 Groups using Hall should pay a fee to cover costs.
- 163 We desperately need a playground that can be used during school hours. Families with young kids are going to Ashburnham. This would also bring business to our town in the form of restaurant, drink ice cream sales, etc.
- 171 Sell it to a developer who will break it into 4 separate condo units with stipulation that it has to retain its outside historical appearance ! (no vinyl siding!) Turn it into an inn or restaurant or meeting hall place.
- 172 Tear it down. Put benches and small park there.
- 175 Additional parking for library, Cong church, pharmacy.
- 190 Move the water department closer to the center of town.
- 195 A petition evolved for a public skate board park for the safety of our children and residents of the Town of Westminster – What happened with that – Nothing!

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- 198 Remove and have additional Library parking w/ park benches and possibly a memorial to all Vets.
- 207 Boys/girls club for middle school students who are too old for X-day – but need supervision.
- 209 Tear it down. Turn land into a green space. Or create more parking for pharmacy and library overflow. Get cars OFF of Main and Bacon streets.
- 211 Tear it down – if it was too bad to keep as town hall, it is still to keep – not worth it. This town sure knows how to spend money we don't have!!
- 212 Something that residents could use with their families and a playground on the grounds. Safe and close to all amenities. Thank you for asking!
- 215 Demolish the building!
- 217 I worked almost 10 years in the old town hall building and I would not want to see people put back in there. It was tested for extreme mold and we were told to keep the windows open at all times. I developed problems with my lungs and saw a specialist because of it. Tear it down and put in a beautiful Town park!!
- 220 How is it that the town hall was unfit for use. This was the reason the new town hall was built. Now the old town hall is structurally sound. A bunch of crap!
- 221 The “old Bell Tower” building in Whitinsville is filled with small businesses – management Co. is “WRT Management”. I am not involved in any of it, but have watched it run well for years.
- 223 I do not feel the Town Hall should be preserved. It should be torn down and make additional parking for the area.
- 227 The building should not cost the town anything. We have a new Town Hall. While the building does have some sentimental value, it is not longer needed.
- 237 Knock it down and use the space for parking for the library. Use some of the space for a park with a monument to all residents who served in WWI & II , Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 246 Can the town afford to maintain it? Will it be barely maintained like the Upton building? Why can't the old town hall be privately owned with restrictions on non-profit occupancy w/ access for public functions?
- 257 I don't think the town should keep it, if it doesn't have a need for it.

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263 The place gives me the creeps every time I walk by. Something should be done to make it less daunting and haunting.

276 Teen activities. Teen dances

287 TEAR IT DOWN

289 Pleasee consider my taxes with whatever its done with this building. I/we cannot afford to pay any more – at just under \$11,00, we are being taxed out of town. Please consider us!

295 Retail shops, entertainment – local musicians, café.

298 It would be great if at least part of the builings was revenue/tax \$ generating.

299 Not senior housing. No room for growth.

303 Take down (raze) building. Create a lovely park for all to enjoy in the center of town and to remain town owned, wi public rest rooms. There's no logic in creating more large taxes for our town. Enough is enough.

305 Please use it to generate revenue so our taxes can go down.

307 All historical artifacts should be displayed in as many floors as it takes to display all.

310 Do not waste any more money!! We spend enough on a beautiful up to date/technology/safe/clean new building. Acessible to down town. It would cost a fortune to bring that building up to date w/ code etc.

314 Have you thought about repairs, upkeep, security, handicap access, heat, lighting, parking?

316 Do what you need to do.

317 Sell to highest bidder at auction w/ no restriction on use of property.

320 Ash/West school dept, thus not pay at narrows road, thus more cash for teachers.

321 Open space

323 Thank you for asking the people of this Town thought and would like to do!!!

324 Senior Center.

336 The building should be self-supporting if town owns it. Taxpayer money should not be used to support building.

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- 341 Sell the building with full and all property rights, including demolition if that is what the new owners see as best.
- 342 Do not sell to developer. Keep for towns people and uses checked off above.
- 351 Not a good place for seniors/ Good for the youth of the town (youth center?)
- 350 Tear it down
- 353 How is it now safe, when it was not prior to building of the new town hall?
- 354 The activities listed under #6 above (town owned) are good but we need to defray the expenses to the taxpayers for maintenance.
- 367 Town owned – flea market/marketplace?
- 375 Senior center, youth center, professional offices, JD, CPA?
- 386 Just save it.
- 398 I really believe that this building is an eyesore and should be torn down.
- 420 This town should not put another cent in this building!
- 422 A town owned building that could services (sic) many of the ones checked above would be my first choice.
- 424 Tear it down. Waste of maintenance funds.
- 426 I'll never forget our Boy Scout meetings when I was young. However old buildings like that do not need to be preserved at Taxpayer expense.
- 434 Would be nice to have town owned and have community events to bring citizens together, i.e. movie nights, talent show, dances, etc.
- 435 Would not want anything done to cost taxpayers money – Should there be extra funds, please feed the needy.
- 452 Should have been fixed up instead of a new one. Made taxes go up more.
- 462 Demolish the building and create a park.
- 471 I believe the area would be a great parking area and pocket park. Remember Main St. has no parking now!

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475 Tear it down. Not worth putting our money into it.

485 Town band in winter months. Winter farmers' market or year-round farmers market.

488 Building is old. Not historic. Would cost more to re-hab than build new.

490 Youth drop-in center.

491 Saving the original character of the Town Hall is most important not matter what it is used for.

492 If there are so many useful things that can be done with it, why did we have to pay for a new one?

496 Should maintain appearance, profit making would be great, single family home good.

503 Sell building so someone else could pay taxes on it. Our taxes in this town are high enough!

505 If your (sic) not going to demolish it, then sell it and let the new owner do what they want.

507 Parking for the library or a nice playground for young families.

508 Farmers' Grange!!

520 Sell it and use the money to fix the roads

529 Sell it at auction and use proceeds for a property tax credit.

531 Comment: Our teenagers don't have a place to get together in town.

542 Architecture very important. Use, not important.

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543 Café where people can gather and meet in a patio setting

547 Many of the suggested Town owned uses are reasonable, but the question is does an existing facility serve the same purpose, more cost effectively.

562 Sell to a lumber recycle Co. and have it torn down or have town tear down.

567 The building would require too expensive remodeling to be suited for civic purposes and is not particularly distinguished. Sell it.

570 You have listed a lot of great ideas for Town-owned use!! I truly cannot pick from list.
My vote: Public asset belonging to the Town.

573 We think it should be used as a community center.

578 Tear it down.

579 Could also be used for local single parents meet and greet. Pretty much anything positive. Do not need an “AA” meeting hall or “drug rehab” place. Like to keep this town clean.

582 Sell it! We do not have the budget to support this building.

583 Remove building and create a town park Perhaps Veterans’ memorial benches, etc.

596 Just get rid of it. It’s an eyesore and a drain. Cut your losses. You never took care of it in the past, so let it go!!

597 There is insufficient parking at the library: public use of this facility and the library would benefit by additional parking on Pleasant St. now.

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618 I did not grow up in Westminster but have lived here 35 years. It would be a shame to loose this beautiful building.

636 Sell to private developer so town does not have to pay for upkeep maintenance.

639 Biggest concern is availability of parking.

644 Should be torn down and parking made for library.

645 Town has enough town owned buildings. Sell it or tear it down. Hold taxes down!

646 I think the building should be preserved but how that comes about should be dictated by economic common sense, not wished for or nice-to-have uses that create financial burdens for the town.

656 I do not think the building has true historical value or relevance. I prefer to: 1) get it on the tax roll; 2) find a self-funding purpose if retained as a public assess; or 3) tear it down and make a park.

662 Whatever seems appropriate to those working on the project.

669 Forum for televised political debates.

674 Community knowledge center – trade learning, computer learning

676 Take it down!

678 Demolish it, put in a park. You said it wasn't safe. What changed?

681 If the old one is still sound, why the hell did we build a new one?!!

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684 I would love to see the building preserved and used.

686 A community center for our youth would be ideal. They need more to do.

688 I'd like to see townspeople have use of the hall for their use. It is in keeping of the pride in our town.

689 Tear it down and make additional parking for the library.

691 My first choice is for the town to own the building. Having a variety of uses or functions for the town hall with a very small fee for town people. If it is not financially possible for the town then I would understand. 2nd choice would be to rent to a business of apartments.

695 Not familiar enough to make suggestions or comments.

699 Bed and breakfast. Day care center,

701 Very much rec. not for project Private ownership.

705 The town's expertise and purpose is not in being a landlord. That's not what the town's role should be.

718 We can't keep everything – Upton school or this!

721 The building is not architecturally pleasing or significant. Making a town park would enhance area. Stimulate use of in-town area.

724 I would suggest looking at the city of Burlington, VT and see how they have preserved the older buildings, but also allowed businesses to use the space.

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727 If sold I would suggest placing restrictions on historical characteristics to retain historical integrity of the building.

728 Affordable senior housing!!

729 Town should maintain exterior until re-use is feasible.

737 Tear down & create parking lot or sell for small business.

739 There should be a place for young people to go for exercise, entertainment and fun.

751 All of the suggestions above won't work because of not parking is available.
Town hall should be torn down and parking lot and little park built.

759 Sell it!!

764 I believe the old town hall should be demolished for parking. If it is not demolished it should be sold so it is no longer the public's expense.

771 Not to cost the people money. Taxes are bad now. Please don't make it worse!

776 Not important

778 Teen community center – function gathering place.

786 It should not be preserved. Tear it down for additional library parking.

794 Old Town Hall's proximity to center of town is ideal for redevelopment as senior center.
Vacant lot currently held for senior center is more marketable for private sector sale.

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- 795 Arts, crafts culture center. Bring back old town hall. Remake office space that was in the back of the building.
- 804 Sell it to a private developer and put it on tax roll or tear it down and sell the land.
- 812 The use of this building is extremely limited as there is no parking.
- 813 Tear down and make parking for the library.
- 814 All great ideas.
- 815 I think a community center.
- 820 Feel that town ownership ensures more control over appearance of town.
- 822 Hall to be torn down creating space for: 1) parking (library, pharmacy); 2) bus stop or perhaps garden /Fitchburg/ Leominster, etc.; 3) Larger sidewalks around property with enough room for buses to turn around and drop kids off for pick up – keeps the buses off the main road.
- 824e old town hall closed shortly after we moved here and all I saw was the central hall on the street level. Hope you will open it up for tours during the public review period. If the hall has a spring wood floor, I know it could become a popular venue for contra dance and other traditional dance events – a great way to celebrate the building and liven up some community spirit.
- 825I believe the top floor stage area is of historical value and ideally should be preserved. However like many we were just laid off so I understand the need for fiscal restraint.

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833 Tear it down for a public park and garden. Tear it down and build a 3 story brick office building. The cost to bring it up to code for full use would be too great.

835 Tear it down before it becomes an eye sore. It is a liability to the town.

836 The town is in desperate need of housing for the elderly as local housing has a 3-4 year waiting list. However I don't think the building would be appropriate.

845 Tear it down. It's a money pit.

850 Misc. business upstairs. Skating rink out door area winter wi café lower floor.

852 No parking near building. Whatever can be in the building that does not require it.

864 It was called structurally unsound when the new town hall was promoted.

874 There are no good uses for this building. It's time to move on.

885 The town is in desperate need of housing for the elderly as local housing has a 3-4 year waiting list. However I don't think the building would be appropriate.

893 Have building demolished – preferably by a company that would recycle materials and make a public park.

901 For town functions like dance, boy scouts,, girls scouts. No charge.

904 Demolish it.

924 Small local business. Not McDaonals etc.

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- 926 Sell the building to raise revenue from sale and future tax revenue. Residents can ill afford additional annual tax increases.
- 927 Put the property on the taxable property rolls. We have too many nonproductive public buildings already.
- 928 Public land should try to be located on parcel of land behind large apartment complex beside current historical society building on Main Street See page 20 of Westminster Images of America book of what was there and could possible be again. Would be a nice asset to town and center.
- 933 I think the foremost concern is the impact on the neighborhood and abutters. We would love to see the historic building preserved in some way, but it doesn't seem necessary for thr town to retain, unless there is some way profit or offset expenses.
- 935 Sell it or tear it down. Do not maintain as town asset.
- 936 I would support the most cost effective approach or support a non-profit/town use.
- 947 Sell it to a for-profit, tax-paying entity with the only limitation being that they conform and comply with existing town ordinances.
- 961 Antique auctions
- 962 Parking lot for library.
- 970 Weekend (public) flea markets.
- 990 Whatever goes in the old town hall should benefit the public, not just one faction.

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1019 Do something to increase our tax base.

1023 Tear it down. This should have been an option.

1030 If the building was not fit as a town hall, it should not be the town's problem. It should be demolished,

1042 It would be nice to see it used.

1045 If town hall is not sold it should be demolished.

1050 Make a display with historical artifacts from Westminster's strong history for people to see and learn about their town.

1058 Finnish meeting house historical building first.

1072 Important that the building not be used for a competing national chain e.g. CVS or Pizza Hut. Local business owners only. My fear about town use is that the town needs resources for schools and services.

1073 Parking is very minimal. Need more parking.

1086 Town hall restaurant with Westminster themed memorabilia.

1094 Tear it down and sell the property. There is not parking for it to be used as a public place.

1098 Indoor farmers' market. Classes – cooking, CPR etc. Indoor flea market.

1103 We shouldn't do anything that would add to the tax burden of the Town

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1105 I strongly feel this facility should be used for a place where kids can go, learn and keep out of trouble.

1106 Parking for library or rent fro profit.

1118 Sell building to be moved and then consider an accessible building to be built inn its place..

1121 Multi-purpose facility. Rent space for parties, meetings, classes, weddings. Rent by day or week. Or turn it into a bed & breakfast. It could be lodging for skier.

1123 Feel strongly that town should not take on greater financial responsibilities , but maintain an interest in historical aspect of the building.