

**Former Becker Advisory Committee  
FBAC**

**Minutes  
October 6, 2022**

The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. in the Town Hall Selectboard Meeting Room. Those present were John Bujak, Peter Cusolito, Donna McCance, Jim Reinke, Rick Antanavica, David Genereux, and Chris Vitale.

Borger Building

At the last meeting, there was a discussion about the sprinkler system being put up in Borger (which will hold the 9th and 10th grades) and there was a question about the School Department having a wall put up (to divide a classroom into two) which would affect that.

Dr. Kustigian had a discussion with David, Donna, and Ted Zawada, and there is one room that has the potential to be split, but decided it was best not to mess with the structure as having a larger classroom is preferable to having a smaller one. Also, the requirement of two exits would pose a problem because there's a lot of brick in that building. He is looking forward to getting in there as soon as possible and doesn't want to do anything to slow down the opening of Borger for next fall.

Knight Hall Reuse Options

Rick: The bottom floor is being used, but the top floor needs to be gutted and renovated.

Dr. Kustigian: The teams are using the locker rooms in the bottom floor and he would like to keep that for athletic purposes. He does not see an immediate need for the first floor, but if the Chapter 74 programs come to fruition we would need the space to be reconfigured.

Peter: Recommend we get a feasibility study done to know what needs to be done in Knight Hall.

Brett: He has been talking about MSBA with David. The MSBA Statement of Interest comes out in January and at that time they discussed putting in an SOI (Statement of Interest) for the roof at Borger. At that time if we want to do a feasibility study for any of the other buildings, he is sure with his previous conversations with MSBA they would be interested in that.

Peter: Brett needs to narrow down what exactly it is that we want. Would it be a remodel, an accelerated repair program, we just need to fine tune and January is going to come up very quickly. That way we've been talking, we're probably going to only get one crack at it. We can either piece meal, do the roof at Borger first, quick, it's an easy project that can be done over the summer or next summer. If you want to discuss a feasibility study and discuss larger projects that is something you can do at the same time. It's something we would collectively decide, but his priorities should be clear. We have the Campus Center, Borger is on target, we would love to have the Vet Clinic which we talked about last time, Swan, the Gym, and potentially Knight.

Jim questioned how the detailed plans are for the buildings. There's only one architect for Borger, nothing else in play. Come up with a master plan on what you want to see, then price it out because that gives you the direction you want to go. Like with the chapter 74 programs, we already have a direction, tease out the programs you want to see and do a special study that will help delineate or identify stuff that needs to be accomplished.

Peter: a study will help them to determine how to tailor the space for specific programs once those programs are identified.

Rick: The first thing we have to do is put an elevator in there. Then the basement, where the locker room, laundry and storage is located - reconfigure to make a girls locker room down there. There's an excess of bathrooms on the first floor. Have the engineer take a look at it for sure because it looks like all trusses. Jim: check out load capability,

John to Brett: We need to know the school's plans. We know you're moving one program at a time and that's a lot, but we need to see a master plan. Right now we're using it as storage and locker rooms, which is eventually going to cost the town.

John asked Brett what his thoughts are about the master plan and vision for the schools and Brett said he has been talking to the Department of Education and has a liaison because anytime you apply for chapter 74 you get a liaison from the Department of Education. The next step is for the liaison to come out with a group of people to assess the buildings to give some advice on how to proceed. Brett asked for some time to get the people here. One of the people who came with them was Dave Edmunds who has been with the department a long time. He is a guru on safety and will point out safety. Brett said he will put together a full blown plan for school use.

Brett: You're going to need funds up front to create the program but down the road, 5-10-15 years you'll have something that is phenomenal where you won't have to worry

about state funding. He talked about how Baypath did a 75 million dollar upgrade to their campus, with a waiting list of students, their chapter 70 and 74 funding is through the roof, whereas other surrounding schools are struggling with their finances every year.

Brett's point is if Leicester can get to the point of having a strong vocational program, there's an expense up front and a strong academic program which he believes is in the cards. You're going to attract students, you're going to have a school that's desirable, you're going to bring people into town, and that will generate revenue. Chapter 70 will not be an issue because you'll have the technical programs.

Brett: We're going to have a CNA, and fire science program next year that will lay the groundwork and we've talked about how we can better our application for chapter 74. If they don't approve this year, we'll build something that they won't have a choice but to approve them next year.

John: Probably go through the MSBA cycle which will be another process for the following year which gives us plenty of time to have a plan and determine the costs of what the long term projections are for our town and for the schools, funding, and look at other options like adult education while the school is building its application.

Peter: There are other fundings sources besides MSBA, so we can make say a five year plan documenting what we know needs to be done.

Brett: Other sources, the Capital Skills Grant, Department of Education sponsors it. It sponsors programs that are already established in terms of vo tech and we're competing with the best. However our programs will be looked upon favorably if they're the right educational pathways

Ted: We are looking into an Innovation Discovery Pathway and he and Richard Lind wrote a competitive grant with St. Cobain to get money to help fund the STEM Innovation Center. That's partnered with us adding Computer Integrated Manufacturing, so we currently partner with Fexcon with our Internship Program and hope to use Flexcon as a corporate partner. Flexcon is interested in having students train prior to arrival and having some sort of certification. The easiest for us is Computer Integrated Manufacturing as we already have a teacher on board to do that, Project Lead The Way to get that teacher trained, Swan library is a perfect STEM workspace with classrooms downstairs. With the grant they hope to get the furnishings, etc that they need.

Ted: We're writing grants to get as much funding as we can, building out programs and working with Project Lead The Way, partnering with Flexcon, trying to partner with St. Cobain, and local people who are invested in our community

Brett: Two visitors from French River are interested in looking at some of the other properties.

Brett's plan - Have the DOE come out, get their opinion on things, with a pacing guide just to get an idea of what we need to do. Roof for Borger, through Accelerated Repair which is different than the total makeover, put in for a makeover for Knight, and depending on where we're at and the resources in the town, put Swan in there too. Berkshire and Hitchcock - Early Childhood Education center, there's a waiting list for preschool, and Chapter 74 Hotel and Restaurant Management (you basically have a hotel right there), so if you could get a partner, a major chain or whatnot, it could serve as a training ground for Marriott or something like that.

Timeline, let DOE come out

January put forth the MSBA

Put out several statement of interests

And in the meantime hit the Chapter 74 programs hard The reason he is so big on Chapter 74 as opposed to Innovation Pathway is chapter 74 brings in state funds, Innovation pathway you have to fight for the funds

Peter: There are still things we need to look at (ADA compliance, HVAC, electrical, plumbing, roof) and things we need to figure out before the schools can even modify the buildings. What has to be done to make Borger a usable building for occupancy with an eye toward education because we need to meet the higher code. Peter talked about the current electrical problems in Knight Hall

Jim: We need to get into the buildings, see what they would need code wise, and engineering and have a feasibility study.

David - the cost for a feasibility study for Fuller was about \$8K.

David: The architect is going to be voted on Tuesday night. They did that particular study for Borger and we can see other projects to figure out the other buildings, what do we need for each building in order to figure out what is needed for educational or other uses so there's a larger discussion we can have about that.

Peter: We need to look at every building that's not being sold, Knight, Swan, the Clinic, the brick dorms, and the gym.

David: We need to talk about improvements. We've got \$2 mil ARPA plus \$1.5 mil, we've got \$3.5 mil if we do it that way, we won't have any money to do Knight, so you have to find funding for that and additional operating costs and no one wants to talk about the override possibility but when you look at it all, and maybe with all the additional money coming in, it might balance it out, but the more we do, the more the operating budget hurts so it's two avenues

Peter: If we had done this study a while ago, we would have had one big picture and you save money in the end by not piece mailing the projects. It's going to cost money to have someone come in and look at all these buildings and assess them. A lot of this we can do ourselves as long as we have the right people with code knowledge. He would rather have a company come in and do it holistically. We're going to spend more money doing it building by building than if we had one assessment for all the buildings.

John agrees with Jim and Peter - we don't know what we're dealing with.

Jim: Is it possible to get a ballpark estimate from a feasibility study so we know what we're in for.

Rick: Knight Hall would be a full gut; Swan needs handicap bathrooms up and down.

Rick doesn't think Hampshire and Berkshire can be used for Early Childhood Education because they don't want small spaces. They want wide open spaces. Everything must be visual, no spaces to hide.

There was a discussion about a declining market in Early Childhood Education.

Brett - The reason why we chose the programs we chose is because there is a need, staff enthusiasm, infrastructure to support the programs, and student interest. That's why we're targeting the programs we're starting with

Jim: Any thoughts on bringing back collaborative as we're spending a lot of kids out of the district through collaborative.

Brett: Pam Smith, our Director of Student Services, has been talking about that and keeping our kids in our district to educate them locally and it saves valuable resources. Special education could be another use of the buildings (least restrictive environment

locally) In addition, SWEC (Southern Worcester County Educational Collaborative ) are looking for space too. He hasn't invited them out just yet because he wants to see how French River goes. Regarding the LLC program - students with severe needs are flourishing and we were recognized by the DOE. The students run the coffee bar, learning how to use life skills. Pam Smith built all that in the past year so it's definitely on our radar screen.

Pam is going to give an update at the School Committee meeting on Tuesday, with good news from the Office of Special Education that we did really well on an assessment they did on all school districts.

Brett talked about the PAC (Professional Advisory Councils), and thanked Jim for volunteering to be on it. We have people in different areas serving on it and when the state sees that interest from the community, it makes a difference in their decisions.

Peter asked Brett for a plan with all his ideas, and Brett stated that he, Ted, Richard Lind, and Neille meet two times a week establishing a timeline and it will be part of his goals to be presented at Tuesday's School Committee meeting.

Peter: We're talking about a lot of space we're not planning on having ready.

Brett Priorities for next year: Borger (LHS, grades 9 and 10), Vet Clinic, gymnasium which will be ready in a couple of weeks, and Swan, which has issues. Peter said it has issues and if something isn't done about the issues, it's going to get worse. There's a tree that's leaning on the roof and the outside structure and it needs to go, soon before we have severe weather.

David: We don't need to vote on it. He will check into an external or internal removal.

## MAY HOUSE

Donna has an idea of turning the May House into a museum for historical purposes, with a tribute to Becker as well. There's memorabilia everywhere that she would like to consolidate and hold for future discussions. Give the alumni a sense of still having a place where they can go, get donations (they had a lot of significant donors), and use the funds to restore the structure.

John: The Historical Commission has their hands full with Swan. They have a Becker Room at Swan with memorabilia with historical value from Becker and Leicester Academy. Swan people are concerned about how they can take another building on.

Donna and Brett are meeting with the Alumni Director of Becker to go on a tour, just talk and see where we can go from there, and get some contacts

Rick: There was a grant for it before the purchase, but it got turned back to Becker because they didn't do what they were supposed to do. There are underground railroad grants as well.

### Other Buildings

John - get survey of properties, condition, feasibility

Rick reiterated regarding putting in the wall, now is the time to get it done before they put in the sprinkler system

David has the schematic but he can't get it because he has to wait for the architect to finish, ADA stuff, waiting for stamped plans to look into the room that may be split, and

Peter hadn't heard about the Borger roof needing to be replaced before. He knew it needed repair, but this is the first time he heard they needed to redo the whole roof. David - that's because the Accelerated Repair Program is geared to very specific items: roof, windows, doors, boilers. It has been repaired a number of times. It's not in the best of condition but if you're going to get Accelerated Repair you get 60 percent of it funded by MSBA and it makes more sense to do that.

Jim: There's a \$500,000 threshold through ADA. It has to hit a monetary threshold vs percentage.

Peter: The windows need to be replaced as well, they should be included in an accelerated repair request.

John: Questioned the different quotes on getting the HVAC done - it went from \$600K to \$1.52 million.

We need a project plan, list of things we're doing there and the timelines because the schools are obviously expecting to occupy it come August of next year.

John to David - your timeline last week was August of next year and that's with just a few of the things we need to do and it's a real question mark about how much we can get done and how much money we have.

Peter - do we have an estimate for the HVAC

David - not one that we're using

Peter - \$600 vs. \$2 mil

David -The \$600 came from a group that does a lot of work with National Grid

They're doing the heat pump at the Senior Center

David - Back of the envelope, \$100 k for electrical, \$500 k for system upgrades , then it came back to \$1.5 to \$2.5. In the meantime we have been doing repairs on the fresh air intakes around the building - Becker wasn't using them, they were using the baseboard heat and weren't bringing in fresh air into the building. You need to have fresh air getting into the building so we're getting those done currently, inexpensively, and waiting to get a plan from our HVAC installer who basically says he thinks he can do it for under \$100K with Samsung heat pumps - one of the newer units will serve 8 classrooms, leave the existing system in there if it gets too cold for the pumps, you've got a backup, It's very similar to what we're doing in the Town Hall, giving extra heat when needed.

#### FBAC Community Member At Large Position

Community member Linda Colby questioned the development and purpose of this committee and John explained how all the working groups were consolidated into one. We have one position for an "at large member of the community."

David - The appointment depends on the recommendation of the committee, and we have one position and two applicants.

Chris - It was posted on the Becker Project page.

David asked the committee if they would like to defer on this since there wasn't a lot of time, so we can push it off so we can have more time and the other applicant was not there because he was on vacation.

John agreed with David to push it off so there is adequate time for everyone to come and meet with the committee.

Rick made a motion to table the appointment of a Community Member At Large discussion, Agenda Item Number 5, to another meeting, seconded by Donna, passed 5-0 Chris will be sure it is posted where it needs to be and will make adjustments as needed.

#### Former Becker Colonial Houses and Zoning for the Upcoming Sale of the Properties

John: The concern for the colonial houses is the current zoning and the limitations around them and the reuse recommendations to amend t the Adaptive Reuse Overlay District section of the town Zoning Bylaw. It has not been brought forward yet by the Planning Boardor to the Town Hall Floor for a vote so we are going to discuss this week what our options are because we're finding it urgent to get rid of those properties because of what will be skyrocketing in costs this winter.



Two options discussed last week, one was a special town meeting, the other was we're going to be sitting on them until the Annual Town Meeting in May of next year.

Rick third option, sell them now and let the people go in for the zoning

Peter: The reason we wanted to change the zoning bylaw was because we wanted to control what the buildings were used for and to allow them to be converted to multi-unit. If we don't change the Zoning Bylaw then we don't have any control over what somebody puts in there. Russell is in a business zone, so they can do anything business.

The whole idea was to keep control of the buildings on the Town Common and it drops the value if you have to go file for your own zoning changes.

It's more palatable based on the real estate agents we spoke with

As this is the package, it's already been modified, these are the ten uses you're allowed to do here, these are the priorities that the town would like to see it used for prospective developers.

Peter said we may lean toward a special town meeting - get the zoning straightened out now. While Peter isn't a fan of special town meetings, from a financial perspective it will cost us more both from the revenue we can bring in from the homes and sustaining the homes all the way to the spring meeting.

Peter - get the zoning into the process, with an eye toward a special town meeting sometime before the end of the year so that we can get the houses on the market by the beginning of next year

Someone will have a development project in spring of next year

David - with an eye at looking at what the board originally wanted as well as the concerns of the committee about changing the zoning we have mapped a way to do both, not easy.

David - we have a "redone" bylaw in the can ready to go and if there's no concern with the planning board with what's presented and the Selectboard is up to having essentially back to back meetings. We believe we could have the Planning Board done at its second meeting in October which is the 26 and we could have a Special Town Meeting by November 15, basically a sole purpose town meeting.

David:

We bring it up to the board on Monday

Planning Board is meeting on Tuesday

Planning Board public hearing would convene within that two week period, which would bring you to October 26

The Selectboard will have to meet sometime in the middle there

His recommendation would be next Thursday

Just to set a close date for Town Meeting, the latest which would be November 1 and at that particular point, you've got two weeks until November 15 and you can act on it on November 15 and put the zoning in, and still have a two week period before the sale to basically state what is going on and what the possibilities are.

Peter - what is the Selectboard voting on

David - to have a town meeting - to put the option of having a town meeting

So the selectboard would vote to have a special town meeting with a close day for the warrant and have Advisory and the board act on the article prior to November 1 which is the two week period needed for advertising

For town meeting, and you're in.

So Planning board on the 26 assuming they agree with the final dialogue

A close date would be on the 27 and then at that particular point youve got until November - you've got your two weeks going into November 15

Peter: The Bylaw Amendment was voted by the Selectboard in April; we have the amendment already written

David - The Planning Board has to recommend it and it has to go to Town Meeting

Peter - we had it in April, it should have been submitted to the planning board April 12

David - I believe the Planning Board is taking it up Tuesday night

Peter - Still wants a discussion about the possibility of an auction vs a sale and the buildings need to be cleaned out - don't understand the benefit of the auction, think it will cost the town money

Jim, lost revenue. Peter - and we lose control

Peter - we need to have some more discussion about the disposal of those buildings

John is in favor of David trying to push forward in getting the zoning passed because that's one big hindrance to selling these properties

John: Empty buildings, discuss pathway of how they will be sold, engagement with a broker, but the reality is that the one big roadblock that we have is the zoning as far as the sales value

Peter - zoning and deed - we have to redo the deeds

David said counsel said the sale is made pursuant to the recorded plan and the deed comes off the recorded plan. We don't break it up into deeds and redeem it, we sell it based on the new recorded plan and deeds come from the plan

Peter - which new recorded plan?

David: the bylaws that were voted on by the Planning Board, the subdivision, which were in alignment with the Reuse Committee recommendations

In favor of the SB opening up the warrant and starting the process

David: targeted sale just on the contents of those properties  
Have a sale one weekend on everything that is left in the buildings and the rest is hauled out, everything needs to be gone by the sale date

Peter - looking at number six on there - project management  
Identify dependencies, one of the dependencies is the furniture and making sure we are switching out good furniture between buildings. So before we just have a sale, the committee needs to be discussing the need to sell this stuff, but what do we need to do prior to selling it. We have to stop with this one off approach to things. It's got to be done through an organized fashion.

John to David - put on the agenda for the Selectboard. David said it can fall under the agenda item sale of the houses

**JOHN - MOVE FORWARD WITH THE DISCUSSION TUESDAY NIGHT WITH THE SELECTBOARD** in terms of opening the town meeting

John - Our next session will be a working group session to build a plan for disposing of the contents of the building, the sales process, and what it all looks like, timeline it out, make sure it works and get the resources we need to do it.

Get the network stuff out. Empty the contents, an auction house or something else

Jim- do we need to bid out the demo of the cable

David - no it can be handled internally

Peter, we just pull the connection at Swan

Peter - Russell is the only server that might have stored information in it. There are documents in Russell that we're going to have to take care of. There might be computers in there that might have information on them too.

Jim, add to our agenda what we need to do, furniture, sensitive documents, servers, and anything else that may be a hindrance to selling the properties.

John - To David's discussion about working with the Zekos group and others who have experience working with sales of properties (Lexington Concord), we would like to hear from them as a group.

John, The idea is to get as most value out of the properties with the best use that fits our common and retain its historic value

Discussion about auction vs. controlled sales process

Peter - what was presented to determine you have to go through an auction

David you have three options according to MGL

Request for proposals, future development (once you sell it you can't control it),

Sealed bid process

Auction process

David: It is allowed through MGL as long as the broker has been properly secured .

Zekos is through CMPRC, they market it, did the old fire station on water street

Est value of \$50K, we got \$130K

It opens it up more to the most general market, not doing ads in the legal sections, you're doing a general advertisement

David and Peter got into a discussion about hiring a realtor. David: You can hire a realtor to market them but you cannot set a price, unless you have a minimum reserve, we are required to do public bidding.

Peter - Chapter 30 B says that you can hire a realtor. You can do a RFP which gives you most control over the final disposition and they tell you to engage real estate agents. When he spoke to the Inspector General's office, they said auction is the least

desirable way because you lose all control over the final disposition of the property - you're getting the highest bid. This was brought to the board in April.

You can use a real estate agent. If the realtor makes over a certain dollar you have to do a solicitation for the real estate agent through Chapter 30 B.

John, reach out to Zekos group and Landvest and ask them to come and present their process. The Selectboard has already voted to move forward with the Zekos group. John - We've been charged with moving forward with their votes, but we can come back with an advisory recommendation.

John: Before we advise the Selectboard to go a different path, we need to hear from these groups. Peter - the Selectboard voted to sell Barrett Hall and we just spent money to turn it into a shelter. The vote to auction the houses was done in executive session and those minutes have not been released yet. It was listed as a Strategy Session for the Disposal of Houses. Once the strategy is decided on, those minutes should have been public

John can dig up the landvest proposal and David will circulate the Zekos Agreement.

Peter will link the Chapter 30 B Guidebook to everyone on the Committee.

### PROJECT LISTS AND TASKS

John - Passed over since we are having a working session at the next meeting.

Jim asked for clarification on the decision about the hand rail in the high school and David said he would check with Mike Silva on it. It can remain with the approval of the building official. His main job is to protect the town from potential lawsuits. If there's any uncertainty in the code, he is going to be on the conservative side.

John to David - can we get further clarification from the building inspector about the railing. David - The building inspector was firm in his decision, but will ask him to expound on it. John - It's for the town's people. It's our money, a good explanation is warranted, we're not questioning him.

Peter - How are we using the first floor in Knight Hall when it doesn't meet fire code. David - because it's used so infrequently and it's not a classroom. The fire Department would be in their rights to force it, but they're choosing not to at this point. It's used infrequently and for short periods of time by just a security guard and locksmith.

John is open to doing walkthroughs to the buildings for anyone who hasn't seen them.  
John will send out an email about when our next meeting will be.

Peter motioned to adjourn, seconded by Rick, motion carried 5-0. Meeting adjourned at  
9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna McCance, M.Ed.  
Secretary



