

Town of Franklin

355 East Central Street
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OFFICE OF THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

June 25, 2024

Franklin Town Council
355 East Central Street
Franklin, MA 02038

Re: Recommendation from the Davis-Thayer Building Reuse Advisory Committee

Dear Franklin Town Council:

On behalf of the Committee, I am writing to submit our formal recommendation on the future use of the Davis-Thayer building and parcel of land.

The Davis-Thayer Reuse Committee is composed of nine members, which was governed by a committee charge approved by the Town Council. I want to thank all nine members of the committee for their service. Including myself, the nine members are Town Councilor Patrick Sheridam Vice-Chair; Town Councilor Theodore D Cormier-Leger, Clerk; Planning Board Chair, Gregory Rondeau; Christopher Stickney, Roberta Debaggis-Trahan; Megan M McCarthy; Gwyneth Morss; and Sam Williams. The committee sunsets on June 30, 2024. The contents of this draft and associated exhibits will comprise the full report back to the Town Council.

The Committee was charged with tasks, which are:

1. Conduct an assessment of current conditions and possible uses;
2. Conduct a market appraisal of the property;
3. Engage community stakeholders and citizen input through a public listening series; and
4. Evaluate potential future uses and make a final report to the Town Council by June 30, 2024.

All four tasks were accomplished. All materials are located on the town website for this project.

The committee conducted six meetings and two open house listening sessions over the past year. It was great to see such a large attendance at the open houses of so many generations of Franklinites returning to take a look at their former school. We reviewed an Existing Conditions Report from Kaestle Boos and conducted a baseline appraisal of the parcel, which listed a value of \$3.2 million for the building and land in fee simple. The appraisal showed that the underlying land value exclusive of the building was \$1.4

million. It is worth noting that the assessed value from the Board of Assessors is listed as \$4,761,200 on the official town property card. They have the building value at \$2.76 million and the land at \$1.97 million. The appraisal is based on current zoning for the parcel which is Single-Family IV. The committee sees this as generally restrictive to both future desirable development and the ability to maximize the value of the town's asset. A zoning change or special permit is likely certain.

The committee navigated numerous meetings regarding the structural integrity and condition of the building. Several reports have been completed by the town over the past decade and can be found on the website. In short, the building needs significant capital improvements in the tens of millions, including ADA accessibility, structural improvements, a roof and all new mechanicals, in addition to many other realities of a 100-year old building.

At the recommendation of the committee, the Town Council authorized an Expression of Interest to gauge market interest and do fact finding. The Committee received four serious proposals (which led to two of the parties combining a proposal) and had public discussions about their concepts. This material should give the Council many options and ideas to think about. As part of the Expression of Interest process, an additional two open houses were held to allow prospective applicants to view the building.

We offer the Town Council the following recommendations to consider as the community continues to decide the future of the building and parcel:

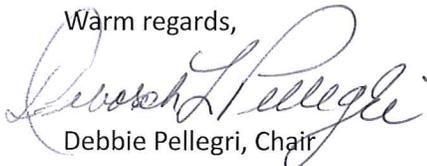
- The Committee wishes the Town maintain ownership of the 3.5 acre land parcel;
- The Committee wishes the Town maintain ownership of the building and to prioritize protection of the facade, if possible;
- The committee recommends a Request for Proposals (RFP) once a priority use is determined;
- Based on the four Expressions of Interest and the brief presentations, the committee recommends that the Town Council prioritize a mixed use development where small commercial or retail business may also thrive with a mixed use of housing types (eg - senior housing or artist lofts). The Committee recommends that development may not also be limited to the current structure and we are open to using other areas of the parcel for these uses.
- The Committee recommends a potential long term leasing option to an entity that can improve the capital investment needed in the property over a period of time, while maintaining ownership of the parcel and relieving the expense to the taxpayer to maintain and revitalize the current building.
- The Committee also believes these priorities should not limit the Town Council from other options as they may become available, such as an Arts Center or other concepts that contribute to the Town's economic development, such as artist gallery spaces. The Committee is dedicated to ensuring a balance is reached between maximizing the financial value of the public asset with

the desire to develop the former Davis-Thayer School parcel into an accessible and inviting community space.

Please see the Davis-Thayer Building Reuse Advisory Committee website for all background materials:
<https://www.franklinma.gov/davis-thayer-building-reuse-advisory-committee>

The Davis-Thayer Building turns 100 years old this year! We hope this report can serve as a catalyst for further engagement and discussion within the community to realize a project that will unify the community and positively position the Town for another 100 years!

Warm regards,



Debbie Pellegri, Chair

Davis-Thayer Building Reuse Advisory Committee

Cc: Davis-Thayer Building Reuse Advisory Committee
Planning Board
Master Plan Committee
Town Clerk

Exhibits: See [Town Website](#)