



August 30, 2021

***Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall
381 Main Street
West Newbury, Massachusetts***

This is a brief report on the bidding status for Soldier & Sailors Memorial Hall (otherwise known as the Carr Post) and summarizes the presentation to the Board of Selectmen on August 30. The challenges demonstrated by the recent bidding process for the comprehensive rehabilitation of the Solders & Sailors Memorial are real. Hard to believe that this relatively small building, 2400 sf on two floors, could come in with just two bids for \$2,109,600 and \$2,251,800.

It is useful to note that the cost estimates prepared in 2019 were derived from two sources: a respected general contractor who provided estimates based on outline plans and specifications, and estimates for infrastructure based on comparable public projects in 2019. We have had good experience with this approach and were reasonably confident in the cost estimates provided to the Town in 2019. Sadly, the complications of the past two years have had serious effects.

We see this as a combination of factors: COVID related expenses, tariffs affecting imported materials and equipment, labor shortages, over-stretched and super-heated construction market, and the complicating features of Chapter 149 public procurement for the Commonwealth of Mass. This requires what is known as filed sub-bidding in several categories in advance of the general bids, with the presumptions that the general bidder will pick up the lowest qualified price in the sub-bid category, oftentimes being engaged with a subcontractor unknown to the general contractor, and as often adding more costs of administration and management by the general contractor. In the case of this project – masonry, roofing, painting, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing were all estimated at above the threshold of \$25,000, triggering the requirement to secure filed sub-bids. Only two general bidders submitted, which suggests a concern about the size and type of this project: a small building with many moving parts when it comes to the construction.

The question is what are the alternatives to seeking another budget appropriation from the Town Meeting. Understanding that the bonding terms constrain investing public monies in a building that could then be sold or leased with preservation restrictions, what follows are other concepts to consider for preservation of this historic building. It is good to be reminded that the 2019 special town meeting was about a 'fish or cut bait' scenario. The town had already invested in structural and envelope stabilization in 2015 to buy time.

A question: what is the role of the Town in its future? Bottom line: preserving this historic building, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is a critical element in the cultural landscape of West Newbury. It is building that began its life a memorial to the Civil War, served various civic and community functions, and deserves to be preserved for another hundred years.

1. Mothball for now and bid in the future:

- a. Invest limited funds in building envelope and any necessary structural work now.
- b. Bid at a future date when the economy is more stable.

Complicating factors:

- Uncertain economy, a gamble in a what is now a volatile construction market.

- Unclear about the use of the S & S Memorial by the Town.

2. **Building envelope and structural work now:**

Based on our analysis of the bids, we estimate an investment of \$850,000 for the following:

- Rebuilding the turret and repointing the building.
- Roof for the turret and rear entry canopy.
- Window, doors, trim preservation repairs.
- Exterior painting.
- Installing the flowable fill in the basement and rebuilding the first-floor framing and turret framing.
- Modest amount of landscaping beyond the Cottage Advisors agreement.
- General conditions and requirements, overhead and profit, bond and insurance costs.
- Redesign fee for construction documents and bidding. Construction administration is already in SSV agreement.
- Install fire alarm to protect the building

The agreement for site work by Cottage Advisors should be implemented: parking lot, walks, additional plantings.

Complicating factors:

- Need to fund by means other than borrowing.
- More town administration on an already burdened team.

3. **Vote to sell as is – without any more preservation work – with a tightly drafted and enforceable preservation restriction/rehabilitation plan** held by an experienced organization like Historic New England through its Easement Program.

www.historicnewengland.org/for-homeowners-communities

Complicating factors:

- Participation of experienced entity to draft the preservation restriction/rehabilitation plan and then enforce its through construction.
- Town Meeting approval to sell the building and administration of a public offering per municipal requirements.
- Willing and competent buyer.
- Private use of the property for anything other than residential would likely require a zoning change.

4. **Long term lease of the building in its current condition with preservation restriction/rehabilitation plan.** See examples of DCR's Historic Curator Program. This program has been in effect for over 30 years – substantial success and lessons learned. The Town would continue to own the building with the lease terms being negotiated by the value of what is invested and the value of the occupancy.

www.mass.gov/info-details/historic-curatorship-program

Complicating factors:

- Participation of experienced entity to draft the preservation restriction/rehabilitation plan and then enforce it through construction.
- Town approval to lease to the buyer and administration of a public offering per municipal requirements.
- Willing and competent lessee.

- Costs of rehabilitation may not factor readily with the value of the lease term. On other words, some up-front investment in preservation repairs may enhance the viability of the lease.
- More town administration on an already burdened team.

Prepare by Lynne Spencer, Principal, Historic Preservation