

York, Maine Town Hall Building Project

Preserve, Expand, Improve



The picture above is of York's historic Town Hall from 1906, and the artist's rendering below is of the proposed Town Hall as designed by Port City Architecture of Portland, Maine. The Town Hall Building Project calls for an addition attached behind the current Town Hall, along with a complete interior renovation of the 211-year-old existing building. A nine-member Municipal Building Committee comprised of residents and town officials has been working since July 2021 with Port City Architecture to review and address the many challenges facing York's Town Hall. The focus and priority for the project has been to meet the expanding needs of the staff, provide the best customer service experience for the town's residents, build in adequate document storage, provide access throughout the entire building, improve energy efficiency and safety, and create a healthy environment.



York's Town Hall has been situated on the Village Green for approximately 287 years. The current building located at 186 York Street was built in 1811 and became York's official Town Hall in 1830. Over the years, Town Hall has proudly served its residents as a community shelter, meeting hall, and now as office space where the business of the town is transacted each weekday.

"I have felt it was important to keep the Town Hall in the middle of the Village" commented Joel Lefever, Executive Director of Old York Historical Society, "It has been there for almost three hundred years, and it really has been the center for community life of the town."

Why build an addition and renovate Town Hall now? It has been known for several decades that the current Town Hall is inadequate in many respects. There have been several attempts made to build a new Town Hall, but they have always involved a new location in town because it was believed that the Town Hall was not on town property. The recent agreement between the Town and First Parish Church resolved this issue (deed filed in late 2020), so this is the first opportunity to preserve our historic Town Hall in the center of town, on town property.

"The First Parish Church is excited and pleased about the agreement between the Church and the Town of York making it to preserve and expand our historic Town Hall", declared the Reverend Eric Dupree, Senior Pastor of First Parish Church, We have enjoyed a wonderful relationship with the Town, we have been good neighbors on the Village Green for hundreds of years and we welcome a new design that will serve residents and visitors alike."

Why does the addition look a bit different than the current Town Hall? Our Town hall is in a National Historic District and in the York Historic District. Each requires that the addition complement the historic building but cannot duplicate its appearance. An observer must be able to readily recognize which is the historic building and which is the new building, hence the subtle differences between the two sections of the building.

Will the current Town Hall lose its historic character? No, very few external changes will be made to the current Town Hall. The fire escape will be removed, as the addition will have an elevator and a second set of stairs to the second floor. The external door to the Town Clerk office will also be removed. Windows from the rear of the building will be put back where the fire escape door is located and in place of the Town Clerk exit door, returning the building to its original design. External architectural details will be preserved. Windows will be removed and refurbished to improve their energy efficiency, then reinstalled.

Why does the Town Hall need to be expanded? When you walk through the Town Hall, it is obvious that employees work in overcrowded conditions, and important town documents are stored in all available spaces on both floors of the building. Many documents, including those dating to the 1700s, must be kept in paper form per state statute. Documents and records are currently stored throughout Town Hall, a garage in the Town Hall parking lot, in the basement of the York Water Department building and in two shipping containers at the Department of Public Works site. This situation does not serve the citizens of York well and makes it difficult to easily retrieve essential information when needed.

All of us have recently stopped by Town Hall for one purpose or another, such as vehicle registration, tax payments, licenses, code questions, assessment information and volunteer assignments, just to name a few. The busiest spot in Town Hall, the Town Clerk's office, is the most obvious example of why the time has come to reevaluate and rethink what York's Town Hall should be. Cramped into the rear of Town Hall, in a very crowded space, the staff works diligently to provide the best of service for all of our residents.

"The clerks have such pride in the work they do for the citizens," stated Lynn Osgood, York's Town Clerk and Tax Collector, "It would be nice to give a little back to them and have it so they had a nice space to work, one that they could be proud of and be more efficient."

For a space comparison, several members of the Town Hall Building Committee toured the new Arundel Town Hall. It is a 7,000 square foot facility with about 2,000 square feet dedicated for town meetings. In the remaining 5,000 square feet there are offices, meeting rooms and storage used by the town's nine employees. Our current Town Hall is about 5,600 square feet and houses twenty-five employees. The proposed addition will consist of a basement, two floors, and a connector to the current Town Hall, resulting in a combined total space (new and old building) of 14,570 square feet.

What improvements will be made to Town Hall? The bottom floor of the new addition will be the Town Clerk's office. There will be a new entrance, a lobby, and a queuing area so that customers will no longer have to line up in a hallway waiting their turn. People will still be able to enter the building through the existing front door and walk down a hallway to reach the Town Clerk's area. A Code counter and nearby conference room will enhance service for the land use departments. In addition to stairways, there will be an elevator to provide access to the second floor. The basement of the addition will provide much needed storage and easy access for staff. The basement will also have space for staff to do tick checks when they return from the field or to shower, along with a sink to wash off debris from boots and not store them in offices. In the front left corner of the existing Town Hall there will be public bathrooms that will be accessible from the inside when the Town Hall is open, and from the outside when there are events on the Town Green. On the Town Green side of the addition there will be a small stage for use during events or to be used by anyone as an area for relaxation. Lastly, there will be an employee break room and three different sized meeting rooms that will provide privacy and audio-visual capabilities.

There will also be some room for future growth. There is an office on the second floor, intended as a private space for use by town committee members or official visitors that can be easily converted to a staff office. There are also two extra cubicles on the second floor, each with a desk and workstation.

The Town Hall warrant article amount of \$7,298,000 is composed of a \$6,346,000 building cost estimate and a \$952,000 contingency amount. How were these numbers derived? The building cost estimate of \$6,346,000 was based on the expertise of previous construction management projects by Port City Architecture and Allied Cook Construction. Details of the estimate can be found at <https://www.yorkmaine.org/584/Town-Hall-Building-Committee>. If approved by voters, the building cost would be bond-funded over a 20-year term. The annual impact on property taxes for a typical home assessed at \$575,000 would be \$28.75..

A \$952,000 appropriation is included in the article is for any unexpected and unanticipated costs that may arise. Since the appropriation is proposed as a use of the Town Fund Balance, these are assets that are already included in the General Fund. Therefore, the proposed appropriation represents no additional new tax dollars, and it will not be part of the new bond funding. Building contingencies are a normal component of project financing. It is particularly relevant to incorporate contingencies for this project as it will include the renovation of a 211-year old building that has no construction drawings and is situated on a slab foundation of unknown quality. Also, this contingency would only be used in case of unexpected developments in the construction market during the course of the project. The Appropriation Contingency is structured such that the Building Committee cannot access the funds without first appearing before the Select Board, describing the unforeseen problem, its costs and requesting a specific dollar amount. It will be a publicly transparent process that allows a financial issue to be resolved without requesting additional voter-approved funding. The Town Hall Building Committee intends to make every effort possible to complete this project without requesting any of the Appropriation Contingency.

How have you worked to save money? The Building Committee chair and Port City Architecture interviewed each Department Head to understand staff workflow and storage needs to ensure that spaces were designed properly. The building was designed for efficient traffic flow in order to minimize square footage. Office sizes were designed to utilize modular office furniture, also reducing the square footage. Energy efficiency is a major focus for both the addition and renovation. Creating a Town Hall that serves York for another 211 years is our goal.

What is wrong with the present Town Hall? Other than obvious space and storage issues, the mechanical, electrical, plumbing, security, privacy, storm water management, insulation, and energy systems all require improvement. Much of the building is outdated and does not meet current codes. People with physical limitations do not have access to the second floor. There is only one bathroom on the first floor for both employees and visitors to use. On the second level, floors are sagging due to the weight of document storage, even after years of structural patchwork projects. Issues related to COVID over the past two years have highlighted the importance of providing a healthy environment for Town employees and visitors.



Actions to Date

- ★ Partnered with Port City Architecture (Lita Semrau with 20 years experience with municipal and historic buildings).
- ★ Reviewed and quantified space and storage needs from Department Heads and staff.
- ★ Engaged mechanical, electrical, structural engineers and a historic building preservationist to fully examine York's Town hall. The building received a good report.
- ★ Contracted to use ground penetrating radar in the area of the addition to mitigate any issues with a basement for the addition. No ledge or other impediments were identified.
- ★ Consulted with and completed a Town Hall building review with the York Police Department regarding safety and security considerations for preserving and expanding the building.
- ★ Presented the proposed building renovation and addition plans for preliminary review with York Historic District Commission. No changes were requested.
- ★ The Town Hall Building Committee has presented the project proposal and budget to the Select Board and the Town's Budget Committee. The Budget Committee complimented the Building Committee on the submittal and voted unanimously to approve it.