

Ilsley 100 Project Team  
Minutes of Meeting  
December 14, 2023

Voting members:

Joe McVeigh - Ilsley Library Board (Present)  
Amy Mincher - Ilsley Library Board (Present)  
Dan Brown - Middlebury Selectboard (Present)  
Farhad Khan - Middlebury Selectboard (Present via Zoom until 11:00)  
Jim Gish - Public Member (Present)  
Barbara Doyle-Wilch - Public Member (Present until 10:30)  
Ken Perine - Public Member (Present)  
Ruth Hardy – Alternate Public Member (Present)

Non-voting Members:

Dana Hart - Ilsley Library Director (Present)  
Judith Harris – Consultant/Town Liaison from Harris & Harris Consulting (Present via Zoom)  
Beth Dow – Town Liaison (Present)

Design Team present:

Chris Huston of ReArch  
Jim Gardner of ReArch (via Zoom)  
Michael Minadeo of Wiemann Lamphere (via Zoom)

Also present: Victoria DeWind

The meeting was called to order by Chair Joe McVeigh a little after 10:00 a.m. in the Ilsley Library Community Room, and the agenda and minutes of 11/30/23 were approved without changes.

Exterior Material Review and Budget Update

Huston explained the process of putting the cost estimate together and said today they'd be presenting the summary but will submit the 10-12 pages of details later. He said after all the design changes and after meeting with the people from Historic Preservation, there is an overall reduction of around 2,000 sq. ft. of program space. He said Gardner had used all the updated materials from engineers to arrive at the new estimate. He said we're still at a very early level of design, so there will be one more updated estimate in late January or early February.

Hart asked if this estimate included the geo-thermal heat system, and Hustin said it did, but at this point we aren't even sure the site can support geo-thermal. He said experts would need to be hired to determine if the site could support that type of system. He said any solar would be supplemental to the geo-thermal and this might need to be considered as an off-site option.

Huston said the question has been asked before of what would happen if the estimate came in over budget, so they have provided 11 alternatives that can be added or deducted. He said they feel the estimate is within reach and this estimate includes the geo-thermal system and the mass timber structure.

49 Gardner displayed the one-page budget summary and explained how he arrived at the estimate of  
50 \$16,355,647, which includes design fees and owner estimated costs. Huston said this is the conceptual  
51 design estimate and the next estimate will be on the schematic design.

52  
53 Gish asked what happens to the total at the schematic design level if it's this much now, and Huston said  
54 they've added a 10% contingency to this estimate to help soften any increase, but the hope is these  
55 costs stay flat if we don't make further changes to the design.

56  
57 Gardner went over the estimate and broke down the costs. Huston said because the geo-thermal system  
58 has such a high cost, the ARPA program will cover 30% of the cost, and there is a potential to get another  
59 10% from other sources which will bring the cost to where it's affordable and will provide for the Town  
60 well into the future years.

61  
62 Hardy asked if they had done a 20–30-year comparison to show how much geo-thermal would save over  
63 that time compared to fossil fuel systems. Huston said they hadn't done that yet, but they have for  
64 other projects, and it shows savings from day-one. Hardy thought it would be good to have that  
65 comparison when marketing the project.

66  
67 Doyle-Wilch left the meeting.

68  
69 Huston and Gardner reviewed some of the higher cost estimates and the list of alternatives. Gardner  
70 said there is talk of the interest rates and the market softening in the months ahead, so their hope is to  
71 see the market of earlier years, and we'll see the competition of subcontractors that they haven't seen in  
72 the last few years. Huston said one of the big drivers in this estimate is the mechanical systems that  
73 have increased at a shocking rate in the last 24 months.

74  
75 McVeigh said as he understands the estimate, they have included in their base number a 4.5% escalation  
76 of \$600,000 if construction begins in the Fall of 2024, and an add alternate to their base of \$400,000 if  
77 the project begins in the spring of 2025, and Gardner said that was correct.

78  
79 Gardner and Huston spoke about the use of mass timber for construction, which is low in carbon, and  
80 this would continue the theme of the sustainability of the project. Gardner went on to go over the list of  
81 alternates that can be added or deducted to the project.

82  
83 McVeigh said rather than wait until May for the bond vote, the idea of a bond vote at Town Meeting in  
84 March had been raised.

85  
86 Harris said there is a case to be made that by waiting until May the project may lose momentum, and the  
87 Town Manager has indicated it doesn't matter when the vote is held, so it comes down to fund raising  
88 and where we are in that process. She said it is looking more positive, especially if we can get a couple  
89 of large donations and a couple of large grants, so people will feel more comfortable with a \$16.3 million  
90 bond, but they will need a clear explanation so they understand.

91  
92 Hart said one advantage of moving the bond vote up is to save the additional \$400,000 by delaying it  
93 until spring of 2025. She said from the grants perspective, the time between March and May is  
94 immaterial, since we won't hear back on any grant application until May, so whenever we go for a bond  
95 vote we can say we've applied for \$2.5 million in grants. She said the big question is if we will have an  
96 institutional gift by then, and we may not know that by March, so the Selectboard will have to weigh the

97 cost benefit of moving the bond vote up to March vs. the security of knowing potential donations by  
98 waiting until May.

99  
100 Huston said it doesn't make any difference to them when the vote is, or whether the project starts in the  
101 fall or the spring. He said if the bond passes in March, they could begin in the fall, but a May vote would  
102 likely put the start date to the following spring.

103  
104 Dow said Town projects are often timed based on the best time to put out the bids to get the most  
105 responses, and asked if that would impact the decision on when to begin the project. Huston said the  
106 best time of year to go to bid is early in the year when sub-contractors are setting up their schedules for  
107 the year, and bidding for a fall project should be done some time in August or September.

108  
109 Hardy said a March vote is preferable to get the most voters and it will build trust with the voters, but  
110 that also may mean more people will vote against it. She said if this project is getting any State ARPA  
111 funds, it would be better to do the project early, since the money has to be committed by the end of  
112 2024.

113  
114 McVeigh said they will need the approval of the Selectboard by their January 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting in order for  
115 the vote to happen in March.

116  
117 Brown said there has to be a pretty solid guesstimate of how much can be raised by donations and  
118 grants before the Selectboard will agree to go for the bond. He said there are also a couple of other  
119 smaller bonds being voted on in March, but those will be covered by grants. He said it looked like the  
120 Wastewater Facility Upgrade Bond will be put off until November.

121  
122 Gish asked what happens if we have the vote in March and it fails, and Hart said she has enough money  
123 in the budget so if the vote fails, we can go back to the design team to come up with an interim plan and  
124 move forward with another bond at a later date. Gish said he was leaning towards the March bond vote  
125 from what he's heard today.

126  
127 The potential for ARPA money was discussed, and Hardy said it was possible to get ARPA funds for items  
128 embedded into the project, such as the mechanical systems and car charger stations, and she believes  
129 some of the grants we're applying for are ARPA funded, and they have to be committed by the end of  
130 2025 and spent before the end of 2026.

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132 Mincher said she's inclined to go for the March bond vote but felt it would depend on how the  
133 Selectboard responds. She said she would hate to see the project lose momentum if we wait until May.

134  
135 Brown said the primary responsibility as a Selectboard is to the taxpayers and not to raise their taxes,  
136 and the current Town budget has a 5.6% tax increase, and we also have the school tax rates that are  
137 going to have significant increases, so all of the Project Teams efforts should be with the Selectboard.

138  
139 Perine said the positive thing about a March vote is keeping the momentum and the cost savings, and  
140 you can look at momentum both ways, because the last time this project failed was because it was  
141 rushed, so he would be more in favor of a May vote for that reason. He said the other thing is the  
142 \$400,000 adjustment for a spring 2025 start date is an estimate, we don't know for sure it will be that  
143 much. He said ultimately, it's up to the Selectboard, and he doesn't blame the Board for hesitating if we  
144 can't say with confidence what we'll have for outside funds. He thinks it's shortsighted to move it to

145 March, and we may not even make it in May, because he thinks the project needs to be scaled way down  
146 to get it below \$15 million.

147  
148 Huston said even if this project went to vote in March, there may be other reasons that would prevent  
149 this project from starting in the fall, so he doesn't want them to make a decision based on thinking there  
150 would be a \$400,000 savings by starting in the fall. He said even if they break ground in late September,  
151 you must race to get things done by when the ground freezes, and then you have the added cost of  
152 constructing in the winter. He said if you wait until spring, you go out to bid at the first of the year, and  
153 break ground in the spring, and then the shell is enclosed by the falling winter.

154  
155 There was further discussion on when to have the vote, and the drawbacks and benefits of both March  
156 and May, and Hardy even suggested waiting until September.

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158 Brown said it ultimately comes down to what amount the Selectboard feels comfortable enough with to  
159 go for a bond vote. Hart said she's comfortable saying we'll have \$6.5 million in funding between grants  
160 and donations.

161  
162 The discussion continued with whether to have it in March or May, and it was left that Hart would  
163 discuss this with Selectboard members and report back to the Team.

164  
165 Moving back to the estimate, Gardner used some drawings to highlight the areas in the cost breakdown.

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167 Jim Gish left the meeting at this point.

168  
169 There were questions on the back elevation of the building, since it didn't appear as anticipated, but  
170 Michael Minadeo said to remember these sketches are still in the design phase and will look different  
171 later on. McVeigh asked if there were any decisions the design team needs from the Project Team at this  
172 point, and Huston said it really comes down to what the Selectboard says about the project scope or size  
173 or are we going to need to make some significant reductions in the plans, but at this point there are no  
174 more decisions needed from the Project Team.

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176 Fundraising Update

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178 Hart said she'd met with someone from Senator Welch's office earlier in the week about submitting our  
179 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressionally Direct request, and she's feeling really good about it since last year we got further  
180 than the 1<sup>st</sup> year. She said they're suggesting applying through a new avenue, the Save America's  
181 Treasures Program, that they think will have a better chance of coming out of appropriations, and it's for  
182 \$500,000, and according to them it's a more appropriate avenue to pursue. She said she thinks we can  
183 get an additional \$1 million in grant funds, which included \$500,000 Municipal Energy Resilience Fund,  
184 and \$500,000 from the Catalyst Northern Borders Regional Planning Commission. She goes on Monday  
185 to meet with the State Librarian and the Assistant State Librarian to go over the plans with them and let  
186 them know we're at a point in the planning that we really need to know how much we can plan on  
187 receiving from the Vermont State Libraries in hopes they'll give her an idea of when we'll hear.

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189 Community Engagement

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191 Hart thought the Open House went well and they had about 90 to 100 people come through, and she  
192 had a few other open houses for focus groups, and those were sparsely attended.

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At this point a few members had to leave and there was no longer a quorum, so the formal meeting ended, but there was some further discussion on donations.

Harris asked if cuts needed to be made to the project, that they don't go after quality, unless it's strictly aesthetics. Harris said we might look at a better way to utilize the rear space of the existing library, but she wasn't sure if renovating an existing building is less expensive than building new, and Gardener said he wasn't sure he could answer that. Huston said there were give and takes, and some might be only short-term gains. Gardner said doing a quick metric on how many square feet are needed to be removed based on cost per sq. ft, we're looking at cutting over 3,500 sq. ft. over the two floors, but you can't go by that since you have to take the mechanical system into the equation. He said you'd most likely be looking into making areas smaller or eliminating some. Huston at some time they talked about phasing, which is hard to do with efficiency or economy of scale, but it could be a done. Hart said she'd rather cut back on size of areas or give them up than to look at phasing.

Brown said he isn't sure if we should take it to the voters and if it fails look at cuts then or scale it back now. He said they could also just agree to bond for an amount and say build what you can with this amount and any money raised.

Following some further discussion on possibilities, the meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon.

The next meeting of the Ilsley 100 Project Team will be on December 28, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Dow