

County Advisory Committee & Dukes County Commission (DCC)
Joint
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 5, 2025
3:00 PM
Hybrid Meeting- Admin Building Conference room & Zoom

In Person:

Dukes County Commissioners: Christine Todd, Doug Ruskin, Juli Vanderhoop, Peter Wharton

CAB Members: Thomas Murphy, Art Smadbeck, John Cahill, Skipper Manter, Jeffrey Maida

County staff: Martina Thornton, Paulo DeOliveira, Norm Wertwein, Juliet Mulinare

On Zoom: Randy Milch(DCC), Tristan Israel(DCC), Don Leopold(DCC), Michael Holcomb, Alysa Demary

Christine called the meeting to order at 3:00pm.

Dukes County Courthouse – Facility Condition Assessment Report (on file) – discussion on near-term and long-term plans followed. There was an in-depth discussion on the needs of the town, the Island, and the community. The options come down to selling the building or keeping it with changes to the lease.

Action points: Martina and Randy will review the questions we need to ask the state and review them under Mass Law.

Art brought the last charter study of the Courthouse, 20 years prior. It reviews many of the same issues we have currently. John believes there was never any option given on how to correct the issues other than getting rid of the building, which was voiced from the beginning by Skipper.

CAB believes the only option on the table is to sell the building.

Christine wants everyone to understand the full ramification of selling the building.

Including housing of the ROD, if the State has the right of first refusal, the parameters the State will have to follow for the preservation of the building

Martina mentioned the State is having issues finding the funds to fix the Courthouses they own let alone fix up leased locations. There is zero assurance that if the State takes over the building the issues on the report will be addressed.

Tristan does not oppose selling the courthouse, but he is not in favor of selling it. He believes we need to keep our foot on the gas and look at all the options, talk to the state about the options and talk to our community about the options and come up with what is best for the Island.

Tristan also brought up that the registry of deeds would like to stay in the building.

He agrees that what we have now is not working.

Art states that the building can be sold with the subject to lease to the ROD. Art agrees that the group needs to look at options but states that currently we only have the one option over the last 16 years and that is to sell the building.

Tristan's additional option is to look at the financial agreement the County currently has with the state.

Randy is in favor of the meeting with the state to make clear the money to fix the building is just not there. That would also be the moment to be told no to amending the current arrangements of the lease. He would like to look into starting the process of selling of the building as a forcing mechanism. He does not feel there is any benefit in studying this issue any longer.

Paulo feels the first step is finding a place for the ROD before offering the building the State.

Tom went to tour the Courthouse. His main concern is the State might not want the building or they move out the courts out of the building once they have taken over.

Skipper feels that Liza Williams mentioned that in MGL it states there must be a court in every county.

John feels like it is a very iconic building and it has great meaning to the Island.

Any state-owned building does not need to adhere to the local historical commission. Art feels that it is on the state register.

Tristan feels the language of the courts needing to be here to ambiguous, and he has concerns they will move the courts off the island. While the building is in downtown Edgartown, it is a regional service.

Doug believes there are only 2 options: to get rid of the building or 2 renegotiate with the state if they are willing to do so.

Martina did try years ago to renegotiate the deal with the state, and they refused. They did not want the burden if they did not need to.

Doug questioned if it was not a financial burden would the county want to keep the building.

Art stated that it is a financial burden so in his opinion he would not want to retain it. Art also mentioned that the state pays full market value for several other assets in Edgartown.

Art stated the only way we should keep the building is with a triple net lease. There would need to be \$5 million up front in an escrow account and from there the repairs can be started.

Randy could not find in MGL and the constitution that there needs to be a courthouse in each county. Martina also could not find anything on that subject. Martina will ask Liza what the law is.

Doug questioned what happened when the Sherriff office took that building without compensation to the county. Art explained yes, they did but they took all the financial burden with it. Tristan mentioned that there was a financial hit from loosing the alarm fees. Art believes there was a financial benefit for the county in the end.

Tristan feels like the County must request funds each year to run the programs/services offered to our community. Art feels like it is the towns happily giving money to the County to run those programs/services for them. Martina mentioned that there is an inter-municipal agreement that we are waiting for 9 months now for the towns to sign.

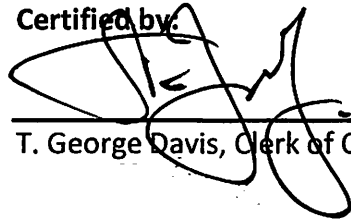
Christine brought the meeting back on topic and asked what step the room wanted to take as an action plan to put in place.

Skipper wants to get rid of the courthouse. He feels that we only work in crisis so there is no point keeping it. He brought up the handicap accessibility is deplorable. He questioned the assessment about replacing the windows and the prices given are low, not accounting for the Vineyard \$\$\$ factor. He would like to push for the State to take over the ROD. He thinks first step is getting an appraisal. (Randy- you must get an appraisal under state law)

Doug feels Skipper has no sentiment of the community benefit of an Island owned property. John does not feel that, he just wants to know what the options are.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:57.

Certified by:



T. George Davis, Clerk of Courts