

To: Denise Raap, First Selectwoman, Town of Litchfield

From: Sam Olmstead, Chair, Town Facilities Review Committee

Cc: Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance, Town Facilities Review Committee Members

Re: Final Report – Town Facilities Review Committee

Introduction

The Town Facilities Review Committee (TFRC or “the Committee”) was formed by a resolution of the Board of Selectmen in March of 2020 to have nine members, including liaisons to the Board of Selectmen (Jeff Zullo), Board of Education (John Morosani), and Board of Finance (Richard Quay, succeeded by Matt Blasavage). Nine members were appointed. At large members are from Bantam (Anne-Monique Haas), Litchfield (Chris Casiello, Bill Deacon), and Northfield (David Carroll, Marc Moura, Sam Olmstead). Alternates are from Litchfield (Burke Gibney) and East Litchfield (Barbara Putnam). Ann-Monique Haas moved away from Litchfield in late 2021. Barbara Putnam was appointed as a regular member to succeed her, and Carol Powers of Bantam was appointed as an alternate member.

The Committee was charged by the Selectmen with the following:

“The mission of the Town Facilities Review Committee shall be to review and evaluate future town facility needs and to recommend the most efficient use of the current Town Hall Annex, the Litchfield Intermediate School and any other underutilized Town-owned property that could be repurposed within Litchfield and Bantam Borough Planning and Zoning regulations. The Committee shall consider municipal needs and shall work...through completion of the project mission as determined by the Town Facilities Review Committee. Upon completion the Committee shall deliver its recommendation to the Board of Selectmen.”

The initial meetings of the Committee were delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the first meeting occurring in May 2020. The Committee has met regularly on a twice-monthly basis since then, via Zoom or in person. Regular meetings were held on the first and third Thursday of the month.

Initial Activity

The initial activity of the Committee centered on information gathering with respect to existing facilities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the space requirements of the Litchfield school system increased significantly, and access to school buildings was very limited. As a result, the Committee focused primarily on the Town Hall and Bantam Annex.

In June 2020: Town Engineer and Public works director Raz Alexe gave a detailed report on the condition and operating expenses associated with the Bantam Town Hall Annex and the Town Hall. Members of the committee toured the Town Hall and Bantam Annex, including the roofs, basements, mechanical areas, etc. The Committee also reviewed prior plans and studies pertaining to renovation and capital maintenance of the Town Hall and Bantam Annex, as well as prior plans for construction of a new Town Hall.

In August 2020, Marc Moura arranged for a presentation about the development of the new East Hampton Town Hall project. The presentation was given by both the design architect for the project and the former East Hampton town manager. They described both the process of building community

support for the project as well as the challenges in delivering a modern municipal building while respecting the town's character.

Community Survey

In Fall 2020 and Winter 2020-2021, the Committee developed a survey to gauge public sentiment with respect to the town's current facilities as well as any desired areas of future development and investment. A copy of the survey is included as an attachment to this memo. The Committee felt strongly that prior Town facilities initiatives had not gained public acceptance due to minimal public engagement up front. The survey was intended to initiate the process of obtaining up-front community engagement with the Committee's work.

Survey Approach

The survey was distributed in Spring of 2021 to all 4,517 residential mailing addresses in Litchfield. A total of 958 responses were received. The total cost of the survey was \$6,100 for printing and mailing. All data entry and analysis were performed by members of the committee or student volunteers from Litchfield and Wamogo high schools at no additional cost to the Town.

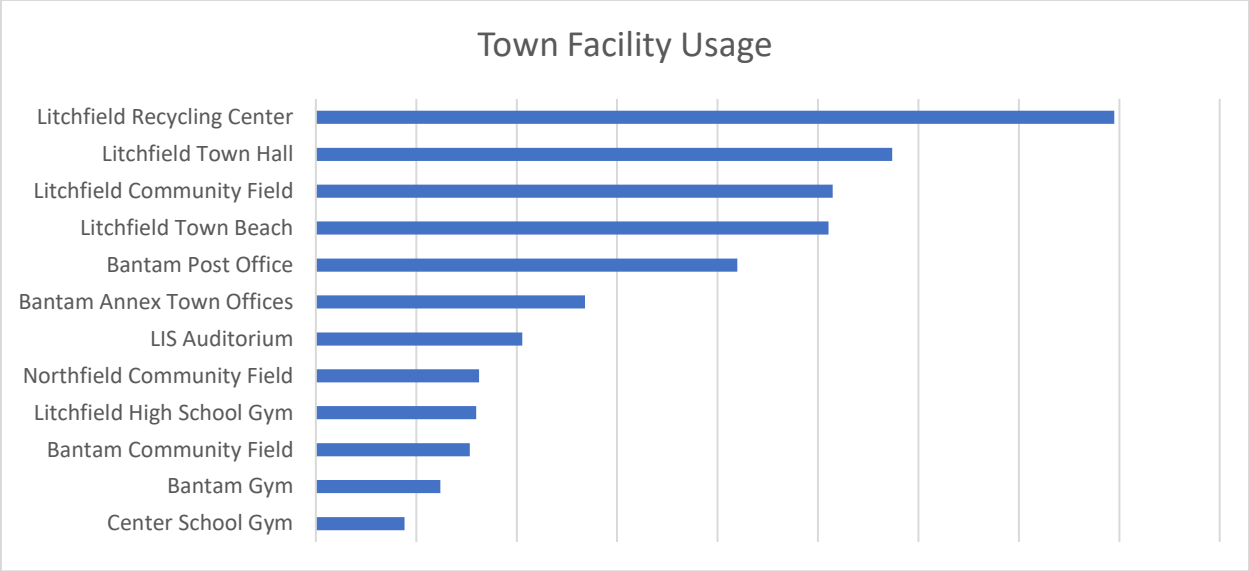
The survey questions broadly addressed four important topics:

- Frequency of use and overall satisfaction with existing facilities
- Potential new/enhanced facilities
- Specific questions with respect to the Town Hall
- Specific questions with respect to the Bantam Annex

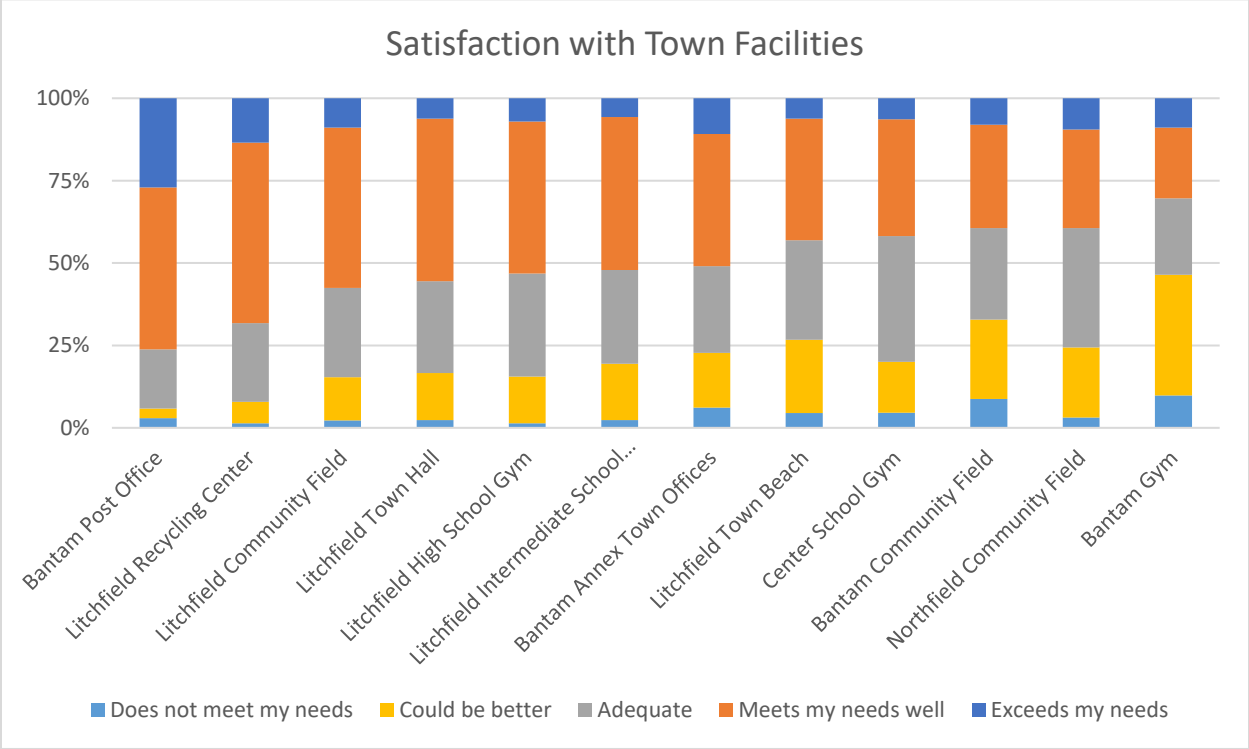
Survey Results

The results of the survey were shared with the public at three meetings in June 2021. A copy of the presentation given at these meetings is included as an attachment to this memo. Key findings are presented herein.

Respondents indicated that pre-COVID, the most frequently used town facility is the Recycling Center, followed by Town Hall, Litchfield Community Field, and the Town Beach. The least frequently used facilities were the Bantam Community Field as well as the Bantam and Center School gymnasiums. The complete results are show on the following chart:



When asked about satisfaction with current town facilities, respondents indicated the highest level of satisfaction with the Bantam Post Office, Recycling Center and Litchfield Community Field, with the Town Hall also having greater than 50% of respondents indicating that the facility met or exceeded their needs. The three facilities with the lowest levels of satisfaction were the Bantam Community Field, Northfield Community Field and the Bantam Gym, with the Gym ranking worst overall with by far the highest level of dissatisfaction. The complete results are shown on the following chart.



Two survey questions pertained to potential new and/or improved facilities. The questions were staged such that one prompted respondents to identify new or improved facilities from a list of options, with

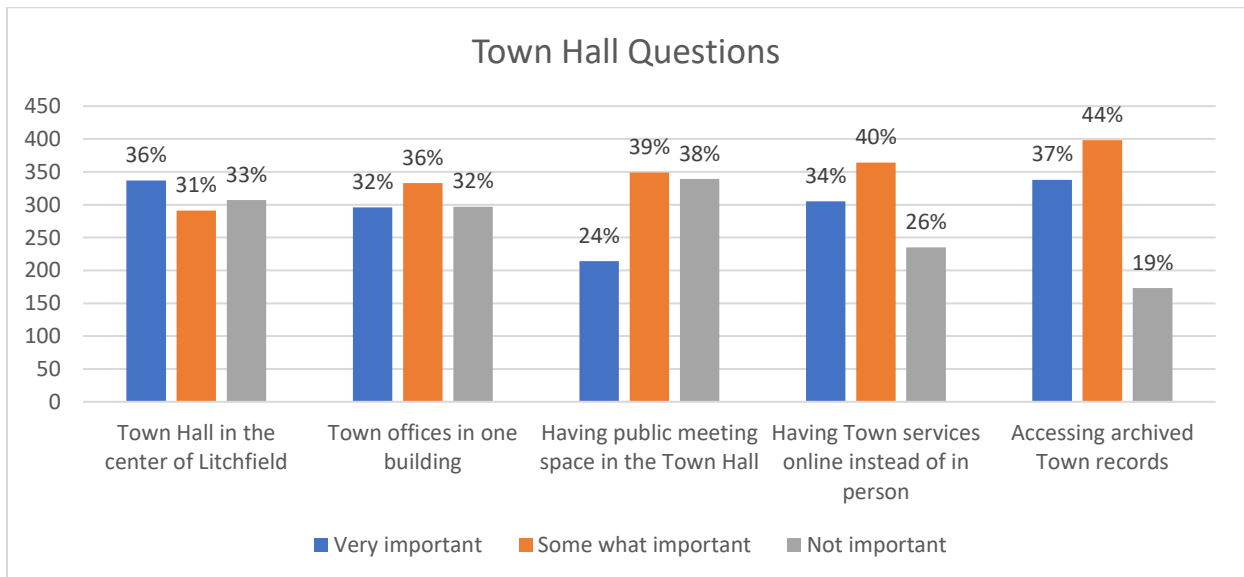
no limitation on responses. The second asked respondents to specifically identify facilities for which they would be willing to potentially pay higher property taxes. With respect to new or improved facilities, the top five responses were:

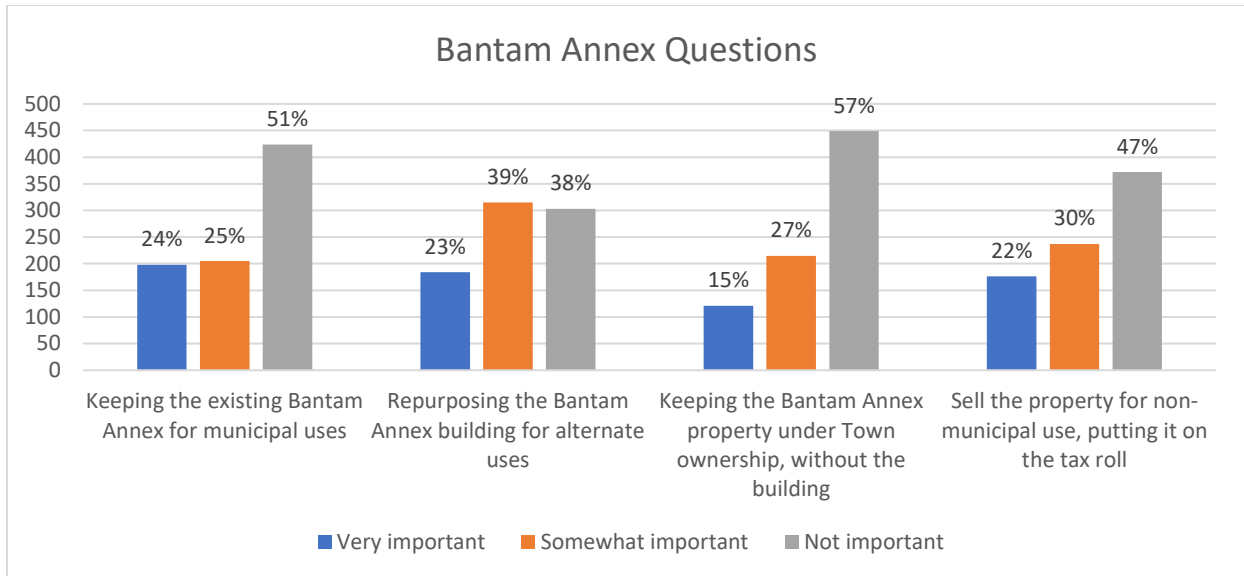
- Municipal Broadband
- Community Pool
- Starter Housing
- Senior Housing
- Dog Park

With respect to facilities for which respondents were potentially willing to pay higher property taxes, the top five responses were:

- Community Pool
- Town Hall
- Sports Complex
- Municipal Broadband
- Town Beach

Lastly, two series of questions were posed to respondents specifically with respect to the Town Hall and the Bantam Annex. Responses to these questions are shown on the two following charts:





Committee Conclusions

While survey responses varied significantly from respondent to respondent, the Committee was able to draw some broad conclusions with respect to how Litchfield residents view Town Facilities:

1. Overall satisfaction with town facilities is fairly high, with nearly all facilities having 75% or more of respondents rating them at least adequate.
2. The Bantam Gym was clearly identified as the facility with which respondents had the lowest level of satisfaction.
3. Future investments for which residents may be willing to support increased taxes fit broadly into two categories – recreational facilities (pool, sports complex, town beach) and core infrastructure (Town Hall, potential municipal broadband).
4. There is a desire for the Town Hall to remain in the center of Litchfield and a similar level of support for housing all town offices in one location.
5. There is significant interest in migrating town services online.
6. There is no clear majority opinion on the high-level disposition of the Bantam Annex – roughly half of respondents appear to favor keeping the building, while slightly fewer were at least somewhat in favor of selling the property.
7. The most popular response was to repurpose the Bantam Annex, with nearly 2/3 of respondents indicating that this was somewhat or very important to them.

Stakeholder Input

In Fall 2021, the Committee met with several stakeholders in the future of the Bantam Annex, including Colleen Kinkade, Director of Parks & Recreation, Michael Lyn Cappello, Social Service Coordinator, and a citizens’ group from Bantam who worked with an outside architect to conceptualize the future role of the Bantam Annex.

A complete list of identified space needs and potential future expansion of programs provided by Ms. Kinkade and Ms. Cappello is included as an attachment to this report. It is clear to the Committee that these departments are currently limited in programs they can offer due to a lack of suitable space.

Specific identified needs are areas for classes/meetings, kitchen space and equipment, media, spaces suitable for young children and the elderly, and storage for program equipment not in use.

A citizens' group from Bantam worked with architect Andrew Ferentinos to develop a plan conceptualizing future uses of the Bantam Annex. Mr. Ferentinos and resident Peter Elliott delivered a presentation to the committee. A copy of this presentation is included as an attachment to this memo. The presentation focuses on the flexibility of the Bantam Annex floor plan with respect to future program uses, and envisions the building being incorporated more fully into the community fabric. The plans seek to enhance the Bantam Annex for community use while embracing the architectural heritage of the building.

Findings and Recommendations

School Buildings

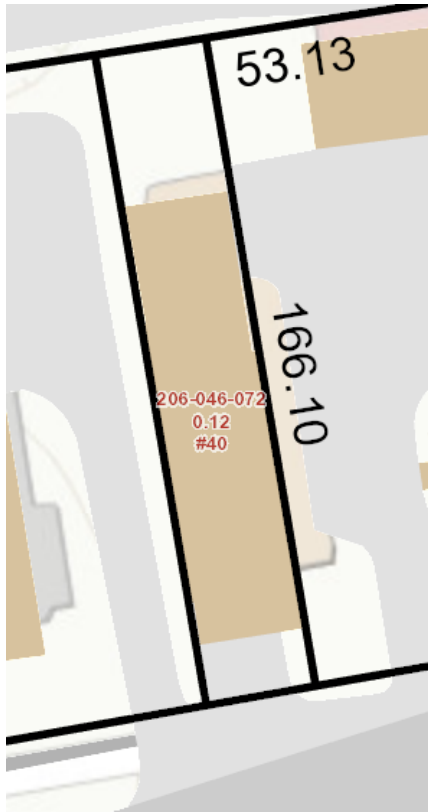
As discussed above, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the need for school space, and limited committee access to these buildings. Subsequently, the Region 20 regionalization plan identified the full use of all current Litchfield school buildings in their facilities needs. As such, the committee makes no formal recommendation with respect to school buildings.

The committee does note that while Litchfield Intermediate School has been discussed in the past as a potential consolidated town hall site, the building is significantly larger than required for a town hall.

Town Hall

While well-maintained, the existing Town Hall is well into its life-cycle and will require ongoing capital investment to remain in a functional state. Further, the construction of the building does not lend itself to economical comprehensive renovation. Of particular concern is that the existing vault does not meet modern archival storage standards, imperiling the integrity of town records.

During the course of the committee's work, Union Savings Bank indicated to the Town that their Wealth Management division offices at 40 West Street may be available for purchase. This 8,000 gross square foot (gsf) building has been fully renovated as Class A office space and is well suited for use as Town offices, and could likely be acquired for lower cost than new construction or comprehensive renovation of Town Hall. The building almost fully occupies its lot as shown below:



In order to utilize the building as a Town Hall, it is likely a modest addition to house the Town Clerk's office and accommodate a new vault would be required. In addition, some portion of the existing Town Hall site would be required for parking. Such a scheme would likely require some level of easement and/or subdivision of existing abutting Town and Union Savings Bank properties, as well as likely zoning variances.

The Committee recommends further investigation of the acquisition of the 40 West Street property and the development of an approach to obtain easements or subdivisions as required to facilitate a small addition and connectivity to parking. The expertise required to implement this recommendation is in the domains of real estate and property law and is as such beyond the capabilities of the Committee. It is further recommended that a new committee, possessing such expertise, be empaneled by the Board of Selectmen to further investigate this possibility.

Bantam Annex

The bulk of the Committee's time was spent on review of the Bantam Annex, as both the public and Town leadership expressed a great deal of interest in the future disposition of the property. The Committee's recommendation is based on the following key facts:

- The Bantam Annex, having been designed by Marcel Breuer, and having been the elementary school for many town residents, is a notable part of Litchfield history.
- Approximately 50% of the Bantam Annex is currently occupied by Town Office and Recreation Space, with a small portion leased to the United States Post Office. The Post Office lease generates \$63,000 of revenue per year.

- The Chair conducted a cursory review of available commercial properties for lease in Litchfield finding very limited inventory at pricing of \$15 - \$20/gsf-year.
- If suitable space could be located, leasing 6,000 – 10,000 gsf of space at the above rates would cost the town \$90,000 - \$200,000/year plus triple-net lease costs (utilities, insurance, taxes), resulting in overall cost to the town comparable to the \$175,000/year operating cost of the Annex.
- There is no clear replacement for the gym space at the Annex utilized by the Park & Recreation Department.
- The Annex mechanical/electrical systems and envelope are at or near end-of-useful-life condition.
- Town administrative staff have identified space needs that could be well-served by the Annex.
- Borough of Bantam Zoning limits prospective use of the site to municipal or residential purposes, limiting third-party redevelopment opportunities.

It is the Committee's recommendation that the Bantam Annex be comprehensively renovated for future Town use. The Committee believes this recommendation offers the following benefits:

- Renovation and continued use of this Breuer-designed building is consistent with Litchfield's long-established tradition of architectural preservation.
- Renovation will both preserve the existing Town use of the building and allow for future enhancement of Park and Recreation, Social Services and Arts programming.
- Renovation plans can be coordinated with the recommendation with respect to Town Hall to provide additional Town office space as needed.
- The Annex site is suitable for development of outdoor activity space in the future.

The Committee further recommends the engagement of an Architect/Engineer team to execute a planning/programming study and concept design of the renovation of the Annex. A draft Request for Qualification/Request for Proposal (RFP), suitable for completion and bidding by the Town Public Works Department is included as an attachment to this memo. The RFP outlines a complete scope of services for the A/E team to provide a complete study, including the following:

- Evaluation of current and future programs (e.g., office, recreational, community gathering, etc.) and their attendant space needs. This process will include both meetings with town employees and elected officials, as well as community meetings to gather public feedback on desired use of the building.
- Development of space plans suitable for implementing current and future programs identified through the process described above.
- Concept narratives and sketches for upgrades to mechanical/electrical/plumbing systems, building envelope, structure, and site utilities sufficient to convey scope and intent to a professional cost estimator.
- Proposed phasing plans for the implementation of interior and exterior renovations so as to allow the Town to manage future buildout and expense to match space needs and funding capacity.

Future of the Committee

Lastly, some members of the Committee are no longer able to continue their service to the community. The final recommendation of the Committee is that a new or reworked committee be empaneled by the Board of Selectmen to implement the next phase of work with respect to the Bantam Annex. The current Committee members will support this new Committee with respect to the RFQ/RFP process and consultant selection, and it is anticipated that some members of the current Committee are able to serve on the new Committee at the discretion of the Board of Selectmen.

Financial Impact

The draft RFQ/RFP presents a target project cost (design, construction, owner costs) of \$10 million, or approximately \$350/gsf. This is an aggressive target based on the Committee members' experience with similar projects and with the cost of construction in Connecticut more generally. It should be noted that the construction industry broadly is experiencing significant labor and material cost inflation which may impact this target at the time of construction.

Based on recent Town bond issues, it is estimated that the annual debt service on a \$10 million bond would average \$680,000/year in the first five years and \$605,000/year over the 20-year term. This estimate is based on a series bond issue with a par value of \$10 million and a 2% coupon.

The Town bonds outstanding for the renovation of Litchfield Intermediate and High Schools have an average payment outstanding of approximately \$1.1 million/year. These bonds will either be completely paid off in the 2024/2025 fiscal year or will be rolled into consolidated debt of the proposed Region 20 at a cost to the Town of approximately \$52,000/year for the first five years of the term. This payment estimate is based on a 20-year series bond issue with a par value of \$1.4 million at a 2% coupon. Based on the budgetary estimates for a future Region 20, Litchfield taxpayers will be responsible for 55% of the bond payments.

Given that bonds issued to support renovation of the annex would likely enter repayment at the same time that the current bond issue for LIS/LHS is either paid off or refinanced at a substantially lower annual cost to the Town, there will exist debt capacity in the town budget to support the Annex renovation without requiring an increase in taxes.

Acknowledgements

The Committee's work would have been impossible without the assistance and support of many individuals. The Committee would like to acknowledge and thank the following people: Raz Alexe and Mitch Bodnar for their time in bringing us up to speed on the current town facilities; Ann Combs and Lisa Losee for their patience and assistance to the committee in navigating changing notice requirements, Zoom meetings, and the occasional disorganization of the Chair; Amaechi Obi, Fran Carpentier, and Erich Marriott for their assistance with financial analysis and understanding Town bonding; Jim Migliorisi of Dave Jones Realty for his assistance in pricing commercial leases in Litchfield; Colleen Kinkade and Michael Lyn Cappello for their thoughtful feedback and endless energy about what is possible at the Bantam Annex; Peter Elliott, Andrew Ferentinos and the Bantam residents who worked with them to develop a compelling vision for the future of Town facilities; the many members of the community who attended meetings and provided public comment; every Litchfield resident who took the time to

complete the Facilities Survey; and, most of all, the Board of Selectmen for conceiving of the Committee and providing ongoing support and direction.

Attachments