

Position Paper: The Case for Restoring and Repurposing the Winslow School Building

Introduction

The Winslow School building, a historic structure situated at the heart of our town, stands as a symbol of our shared heritage. Despite its current state, the building has been well-maintained over the years and remains structurally sound. As our community considers the future of this important landmark, it is essential to address concerns and emphasize the benefits of restoring and repurposing the building, in line with the town's green initiatives and master plan.

Addressing Criticism and Misconceptions

Parking Concerns - Some community members have raised concerns about the potential impact of additional parking on the town's green space. However, the need for more parking is not pressing, as there is already sufficient parking available around the library, school, and a newly constructed lot near the church, all of which are within close proximity to the Winslow School. Moreover, any future parking solutions will be carefully considered to preserve the town's open spaces.

Condos and Retail Space - The idea of introducing condos or retail spaces has sparked opposition, with fears that such developments could ruin the character of the area. We acknowledge these concerns and assure the community that any commercial use of the Winslow School will be highly selective. The focus will be on creating a multipurpose space that serves both private and public needs, rather than introducing mixed-use commercial ventures that do not align with the town's values.

Concerns About the Building's Hill - Another concern is the grade of the hill on which the Winslow School sits, with some believing it to be too steep for development. In reality, the hill is not as significant as perceived. The slight prominence around the flagpole can be easily addressed through thoughtful landscaping, ensuring that the building's surroundings complement its historic character.

Upkeep Costs - The issue of upkeep costs has been raised, with worries about the financial burden on the town. However, these costs can be offset by revenue generated from rental spaces within the building. Potential tenants include a coffee shop, office spaces, and other community-oriented businesses that will contribute to the building's maintenance while enhancing its utility.

Issues with the Current Plan - The current plan to partially demolish the building and move it down the hill was initially made with an appropriation of \$1.5 million. However, the project has encountered several unforeseen challenges, making it financially untenable.

Key Arguments for Restoration

Cost-Effective Restoration - The cost of moving the Winslow School building is not justified, especially given that recent tree removal has made the building more visible and accessible. Adhering to the master plan allows for more responsible spending, ensuring that funds are allocated toward restoring the building in its current location, where it serves as a central and historical anchor for the town.

Preservation of Historical Integrity - The Winslow School is listed on both the state and national registries of historical buildings, making it a significant piece of our town's heritage. It is the last building in town to be restored, with its initial construction directly financed by the Tyng family, an integral part of our local history. Restoring the building will not only preserve its historical integrity but also enhance the town's historical narrative.

Multipurpose Use and Community Benefit - The Winslow School building's design, featuring large windows for ample natural light and separate school rooms with interior and exterior access, lends itself to a variety of multipurpose uses. These spaces can accommodate community events, educational programs, and small businesses, creating a vibrant hub for the town. Additionally, the existing field behind the school provides ample room for outdoor events, such as concerts or town gatherings.

Alignment with Green Initiatives - Restoring the Winslow School aligns with the town's commitment to environmental sustainability. Repurposing the existing structure rather than demolishing it is an ecologically responsible choice that minimizes waste. Furthermore, incorporating the building into the town's green initiatives could include the creation of a walking path that connects key locations, such as Kendall, Bryant, and Flint Pond, ending with a visit to a coffee shop at the Winslow School.

Funding and Grants - The restoration project is eligible for Community Preservation Funds, which can be used without affecting local taxes. Additionally, the town meets the criteria for various grants that could further offset restoration costs. As our community continues to grow, with new homes and families contributing to the town's revenue, these funds can be effectively utilized to support the restoration and repurposing of the Winslow School.

Conclusion

Restoring and repurposing the Winslow School building is not just a practical decision; it is a commitment to preserving our town's history, enhancing community life, and promoting sustainable development. By addressing the concerns of our community and highlighting the benefits of this project, we can move forward with a plan that honors our past while looking to the future. The Winslow School building deserves to be preserved as a vital part of our town's identity, serving both current and future generations.