

# WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE UNION BUILDING?

## Survey Results Workshop Summary

The “What is the Future of the Union Building” Survey Results Workshop took place at Dunstable Town Hall at 6:00 pm, February 8, 2024 with an additional Hybrid Zoom option. The meeting was advertised via Nextdoor, Dunstable’s Facebook page, and the Neighbor to Neighbor newsletter. It was also promoted by the Dunstable Union Building Rehabilitation Committee. Attendees included facilitators, committee members, and members of the public attending in-person or via Zoom. There were approximately 30 in-person attendees and an additional ten via Zoom.

**~40 Attendees**

February 8, 2024

### Presentations

Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) reviewed the project’s timeline, survey results and possible uses. The purpose of this workshop was to continue the discussion of use options by sharing the results of the survey and beginning development of a list of interested parties to explore the feasibility of each use. Then, Spencer Preservation Group (SPG) presented floor plans showing the entrances and layout of both stories of the building. Accessible toilet rooms, an accessible side entry, and a Limited Use Limited Application (LULA) lift are proposed to be added for basic code compliance. Updated cost estimates were as follows:

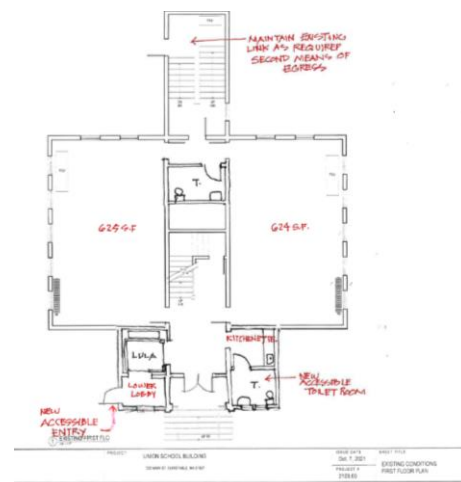
Table 1: Cost Estimates Reviewed at Workshop

Category	Cost Estimate
Exterior Preservation	\$985,000
‘Basic’ Interior Renovation	\$400,000
15% Contingency	\$200,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,585,000</b>

Based on the results of the first public workshop and the survey, five first-floor use options were proposed to be discussed, which would be paired with an art studio or office use on the second floor:

- Fitness or Dance Studios
- Youth-focused space for after-school activities and enrichment
- Performing arts-focused space for children and adults
- Multipurpose area for private rentals
- Restaurant
- Museum or Historical Recreation

Figure 1: Detail of Proposed First Floor ‘Basic’ Renovation









## Group Discussion

NMCOG and SPG staff facilitated three in-person breakout groups and one Zoom group to discuss the following questions:



- What do you like or what are the benefits you see from each option?
- What concerns or challenges do you see about each option?
- What questions do you have about each option?
- How might you use each option?
- Where have you seen successful operation of any of the proposed uses nearby?
- Are there any community members who may be interested in running/facilitating any of the potential uses?
- Do you know of community organizations that might run/facilitate the potential uses?

After group discussion, each group reported out the results of their discussion. Some groups discussed additional uses beyond the five identified. The results of all four groups are combined in the following summary. Observations are coded as follows:

-  Benefit
-  Concern or challenge
-  Possible user of space
-  Precedent that may also expand or program space
-  Idea for Use
-  Question








### Fitness Space

A space for regular fitness programming

-  Participant would use this if offered
-  Concern about structural stability of building for this use


### Rentable Event or Meeting Space

A space for rental for fundraisers, receptions, or other similar functions

-  Could utilize bandstand and greenspace nearby
-  Functions take place when school is not in session, utilizing school lot for parking
-  Youth group fundraisers
-  AA
-  Knitting club
-  Tyngsborough Old Town hall rental space
-  Lawrence Library Pepperell Art Shows






### Performance Space

A space for rental of performing arts uses, either practice or exhibition, including dance, music, etc.



-  Duplicative of Town Hall spaces

### Youth Space

A space for regular children's after school activities



- Identified need (kids to work on projects and get together with friends)
- Youth groups already pay for space in churches, schools, so revenue is possible
-  Cub Scouts
-  Girl Scouts
-  4H
-  Peter Twomey Youth Center, Groton
-  Daycare is possible additional use, but may require security/access changes

### Historical Recreation or Museum Space

- Artifacts currently stored that participants would like to be displayed
- Duplicative of exhibit space in Town Hall
- Duplicative of Little Red Schoolhouse
-  Could have display cases (although need to protect artifacts if other uses occurring)
-  Could have rotating exhibits



### Commercial Kitchen

A space that could be used by caterers with major costs including three sinks or dishwasher, hood, and grease trap

-  Caterer (Participant)
-  Three additional Caterers (Participant knows)
- Cost for Woburn space is \$810/month for 20 hours, providing basis for business plan
- Kitchen could also be used for event space, i.e., pancake fundraisers, etc.

### Maker Space

A space that could have memberships for light “making” activities.

-  Craft Teacher (Participant)
-  Photographer (Participant knows)
- Members provide additional revenue
- Power and loading demands
- Possible noise impacts



### Restaurant

A grab-and-go or coffee-style café


- Busiest at times school is letting in/letting out
- Desire a use with alcohol options, not appropriate for this area

### Remote Work Space

A space that could have memberships for working remotely

- These types of spaces are reportedly in demand
-  IHub Innovation space
-  Could include shared services

### General Comments on All Options

-  Install dividers to break up space for multiple uses



Approach property management companies for costs on marketing and managing various uses – a property manager will cost more, though this might be offset by the income generated from the private space.



Is there enough parking space for a fire truck?



For the sake of comparison, how much would demolition of the building cost?



How much would it cost to relocate the building?



Are there any concerns about floor loading?



Are there any estimates on how much the space would rent for as an office or art studio?



Are there any business and/or management plans for any of the options?

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the survey and the feedback collected at this meeting, a space that is flexible and cost-effective to use is ideal for the Union Building. While there is considerable interest in locating a full-size commercial restaurant in Town Center, the size of the space and the parking available cannot easily support such a use. In addition, costs of rehabilitating and refitting the space for a new use are a major concern.

Several examples of regional community spaces and events were referenced as examples to look at when determining programming to activate the space. Local artists and event planners have also expressed interest in using the space as a venue for workshops, photography, or catering. However, many residents expressed interest in business and management plans for the different use options to determine what will be the most cost-effective. Possible operators of survey options that were very popular (fitness/dance and youth center) were not able to be identified at the meeting, making it more difficult to pursue those options. Possible next steps include:

- Cost estimation of a commercial kitchen that could be combined with event space
- Reach out to Twomey Center and various youth groups to determine interest in regular programming of space and possible revenue from rental
- Reach out to Tyngsborough and Lawrence Library to determine their operating costs and revenue from rental of their historic spaces
- Determine costs and ability for property management companies to market and manage the space for various uses
- Determine revenue and market viability of upstairs art studio use, office use, and shared workspace use
- Depending on results of above steps, create basic operation revenue estimations for one or more of the following downstairs uses:
  - **Commercial kitchen and event space:** With caterers renting the commercial kitchen and possible additional use of kitchen for events
  - **Membership-based space:** For crafters, photographers, etc, that would not occupy art studios full-time but may need shared storage, etc.
  - **Rental-based space:** Flexible use for meetings or events
  - **Daycare or after-school youth center:** If interested operator could be identified, rent paid from a regular after-school or daycare program