

New Office Committee Meeting
March 7, 2024 – 6:30 pm
Remote Via Zoom
Minutes

1. Why Renovare?

The purpose of this meeting was for the committee to discuss the possible need to provide the Village Council and the public with additional information about why this committee and, ultimately, the Council chose a professional firm to help with how to proceed with a new Village Office.

The committee discussed the core rationale which required some background explanation:

Early in our discussion about various properties in Empire - those we own – which is not much in terms of land) and property that was appealing - we realized we needed someone with more expertise than we had to help us in thinking about property purchases and uses.

- A. What is possible at any of the sites? Is it just a Village Office (what is the actual square footage needed)? Do we want/does our public want us to offer additional “services” or community gathering spaces (ice rink, meeting rooms – indoor or out of doors, firepit gatherings, performance space)? Did we really want to become property developers?
- B. What options did each property offer?
- C. What properties might we not have considered that we should?
- D. What do we need to know about purchasing a property? Walkability factors, issues with the property (we learned later that is called site constraints).
- E. What is the potential impact – positive and negative – the Village as a whole.
- F. Who does site plans? Construction Plans? How do we “

We had a resident, who has experience in land development and use, bring forward a company (Renovare) uniquely positioned to help us. Originally, the concept was to use a Rotary Charities grant to offset the costs. However, the Seed grant from the Rotary was limited to property we had control over. Since some of the properties that we considered to be the most intriguing, were privately owned, that grant was not possible. However, the committee believed, Renovare, offered a unique set of services: 1. Knowledge and appreciation of the area, 2. Experienced in land acquisition and development, 3. Experienced in community development and revitalization, 4. Has an agreement with a planning and architect group in the Traverse City area related to site constraints and maps, 5. Experienced with real estate transactions, 6. Experienced in community engagement and input activities.

The committee did not reach a conclusion about if/how to talk or share with the public the return on investment from our contract with Renovare

2. NEW Item added to the agenda – Purchase of the Field Trip Building

The conversation moved to the concerns about how the Village Council moved so quickly to purchase the Field Trip Building. Comments from the audience included (this is not a full recitation of the concerns – just a summary. Letters to the Council on this topic are in the VC packet [March 14, 2024] that offer a more complete list of concerns).

- A. The Village Council held a Closed Session and came out of that session with no information, the next we hear is the Council is spending \$480,000 on a building!
- B. No public hearing. Why didn't the Village Council hold a public hearing about this – this is a lot of money?
- C. What are the reasons this new space is needed?
- D. How will this new building benefit the Village residents?
- E. The Village Council did not tell the story of how they got here very well – or at all.
- F. Why couldn't we add on to our current building? Or build something at Shalda Park?
- G. Such a small staff – what's wrong with just renovating where you are?
- H. People want to be engaged in government, but it's hard to know where and when questions can be asked. (It was clear there was some concern about the ability to ask question of the committee).

The committee offered the following comments.

- A. Renovare, our consultant on the new office project, will attend the March 26 meeting to provide the bigger picture of process and why they agree this was good choice for the Village.
- B. Members of the public were encouraged to look through the committee meeting minutes to get a sense the process.
- C. Committee members commented that a new village office has been on the Capital Improvement Plan since 2018. The Village has been putting money aside for a renovation or purchase of property.
- D. This is an investment. This building will now be an asset of the Village.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted

Maggie Bacon