

City Hall is in need of renovation to improve City services, handicapped accessibility, code compliance, and heating and cooling efficiency. As an important public building in the downtown area, its renovation is especially important in symbolizing a new spirit of confidence in a revitalized downtown.

Downtown Revitalization Study, 1981

It's been 33 years since we first learned of the need to renovate City Hall. A lot has changed in St. Albans during that time, but the need to renovate this important public building has only grown stronger. This Election Day, voters will consider approval of a \$2.3 million City Hall renovation bond. In the run up to the vote, this space will be used to answer some of the frequently asked questions about the project.

What are the major components of the project?

There are three major components of the project. First is handicapped accessibility. The project adds two elevators. A primary elevator will be located off the south side and provide access to the two primary floors of City Hall. A secondary elevator will be located in the rear and provide access from the parking lot into the auditorium and first floor.

The second component is vault space. The City Clerk's vault preserves vital records such as birth certificates and marriage licenses and land records such as property deeds. The City vault is out of space and needs to be expanded in order to continue to accept and preserve these records. The City Hall Renovation Plan creates four times the amount of shelf space and positions the office for the next fifty years.

The third component is improving the acoustics and functionality of the auditorium. Acoustic engineers have developed a plan to improve the sound quality so that performances and events can be more successful in the space. The renovation plan preserves the existing location of the stage but adds bathrooms, retracting basketball backboards, and replaces the plywood windows with real windows. The windows will be able to withstand the occasional wayward basketball and may have an additional protective covering.

Why is now the right time to do this project?

With an aging population, the accessibility issues are becoming more and more acute. Many feel it is no longer acceptable to force those with accessibility issues to use a substandard access in an alleyway and to be limited to the first floor once in the building. In addition, the City vault is just plain out of space and needs to be expanded.

The accessibility and vault issues can best be addressed within the context of a larger renovation. For example, the best location for an elevator is on the South side. This allows a Main Street entrance and preserves the existing façade of the building. It allows access to both the first and second floors and has the least impact on the remainder of the building. But it requires the relocation of the clerk's office to the opposite side of the building in order to realize the gains in vault space which are equally important.

Finally, the condition of City Hall is an important symbol of civic pride and economic vitality. Recent years have seen the rebirth of the St. Albans House; transformation of the public space on Main Street; and construction of a large Grade A office building and parking garage. With plywood windows, missing

exterior trim, and substandard accessibility, City Hall is increasingly out of step with a revitalizing downtown.

City Hall does not belong to those who currently occupy its offices and meeting rooms; it belongs to the people of the City. As such, it should reflect the sense of optimism and opportunity that has taken root in our community. How can we expect others to invest in our community if we are not willing to invest in ourselves?

How would you pay for this project?

The annual debt service on a \$2.3 million bond is between \$150,000 and \$160,000 per year depending on the term and rates for the bond. The City has about \$200,000 in available capacity, largely resulting from the retirement of other debts and conversion of capital programs like City Hall window replacement into debt service. This allows us to cover this cost from existing revenue streams.

If one applies this dynamic to the FY 15 budget and assumes no other changes in the budget, without the renovation taxes would drop three percent and with the renovation taxes would drop one percent. This dynamic can be summarized in the following chart as applied to a \$200,000 home.

	FY 15	No Renovation	City Hall Renovation
Tax Rate	.8557	.8284	.8468
Taxes on 200k home	\$1,711	\$1,657	\$1,694
Annual Savings	n/a	\$54	\$18
Percentage Decrease	n/a	3 %	1%

What are the alternatives?

We have examined whether there would be cost savings in consolidating all operations in one large municipal building. There aren't. It would take a building approaching the size of the new State Office Building to do so, which would require land acquisition and likely new construction, which would drive costs up substantially. And it would still leave the question of what to do with this building.

From elections to community events like the Festival of Trees; from safe storage of public records to managing the daily functions of the City like streets, sidewalks, parks, water, and wastewater, City Hall is a critical piece of infrastructure. Beyond operations, it has always been a public building and holds a distinguished place in our history.

Continuing with the status quo really isn't an option. The space issues in the vault, the accessibility issues throughout the building, the inefficiencies for heating and cooling, and the overall state of repair require timely action. In fact, dealing with these issues in a piece meal fashion year by year would cost more and have a larger impact on the tax rate than financing the improvements over the useful life of the project as currently proposed.

Where can I learn more?

All of the presentation materials are available on the City website (www.stalbansvt.com). A public hearing has been scheduled for Monday, October 27, 2014 at 7:00 pm. You can reach me at d.cloud@stalbanst.com or 524 – 1500, 254.