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TOWN SURVEY RESULTS

In May of 2013 the Town mailed out surveys to 3200 mailing addresses in the Town of Hampden. The Town prepared the survey and sent it out as a bulk mailing with a Postal Patron delivery address. In order to do this, the town divided the surveys up into individual letter carrier trays for each of the mailing routes in Hampden. The Post Office provided us with the number needed for each route. Once they were prepared and separated, they were taken to the Post Office for delivery. The town received 362 survey responses from those sent, which is a response rate of 11.3%.

I have totaled responses so far for the questions pertaining to issues that the Town Council are presently dealing with – or have recently been discussing. I should have all questions totaled by the beginning of August. This report includes the following information:

1. Questions related to proposed charter changes including elimination of voting districts and whether or not councilors should also be able to serve in a State or County elected office.
2. Questions related to use of The Bus and the use of property tax dollars for funding of Outside Agencies.
3. Questions related to use of the library and the use of property tax dollars for funding the library.
4. Questions related to use of the pool and the use of property tax dollars for funding the pool.
5. Questions related to the use of the Skehan Center for Recreation and a community center and the use of tax dollars for its support.
6. Questions related to the use of the Old Hampden Academy site and comments related to the property.

Questions related to proposed charter changes including elimination of voting districts and whether or not councilors should also be able to serve in a State or County elected office.

Section 5 of the survey asked two questions, the first was whether residents thought that the charter should be changed to eliminate voting Districts. This question was asked based on discussions that the Finance & Administration Committee had as a result of the Goals & Objectives session of 2012 in which concern was raised about how to insure that future elections involving Districts did not create the confusion that the last one did. One option discussed was to eliminate Districts and have all Councilors at large. Another option was to change Councilor terms so that all four districts were not elected in the same election, thereby reducing the opportunity for confusion or errors. The Committee did not support the elimination of districts at a meeting held to discuss the charter, but the question was included on the survey to see how residents felt about it. The results of this question were that 171 residents of the 362 responding supported the elimination of voting districts, or 47%. Moreover, a number of residents took the time to write comments in regard to this proposal and were adamant that the Town should not take this step. The results of the survey appear to support the Committee decision to keep Council Districts intact. This will result in the need to do redistricting, since according to the most recent census the districts are no longer equal in population. Redistricting is a legal requirement following a census in order to insure that voting districts have as equal population as possible. This process would be done in 2014. Additional discussions about whether to keep District voting as it is or to change and allow all residents to vote for all Districts will be scheduled for the August 5th Finance & Administration Committee meeting. Based on survey results, I would advise the Council not to propose a charter change at referendum for elimination of voting districts.

The second question of Section 5 asked if the Town should change its charter to no longer allow Town Councilors to serve in other elected Federal, State, or County positions. 155 residents of the 362 responding felt that such service should be limited, or 43%. This response shows that the majority of respondents do not want this change made to the charter. Although the number of responses is not as high as we might have hoped, I do think that the respondent population represents a pretty good cross section and would advise the Council not to consider proposing a Charter change at referendum on this item.

Questions related to use of The Bus and the use of property tax dollars for funding of Outside Agencies.

Section 1, Question 8 related to the use of the Bus. A good deal of discussion occurred at the time we did the budget this year. Ridership numbers show an increase due to a change from a number of years ago that added a middle of the day round trip, as well as the more recent addition of Saturday service. Using annual ridership numbers for 2012 of 44,247 and the amount budgeted for the coming year of \$89,380, the Town subsidizes each ridership 'trip' in the amount of \$2.02 after the application of fares and Federal/state subsidies received by the Bangor Bus system for our routes. The survey question asked if people used the Bus, and why or why not. 24 of the 362 residents who responded indicated that they used the bus, which is 6.6%.

Section 1, Question 9 related to whether or not property tax monies should be used to support local area service agencies (the Outside Agencies that we consider in our budget). This question has created a lot of discussion at budget time over the past several years and when developing subjects for survey questions, this was one that the Council was extremely interested in. 103 of the 362 respondents, or 28% responded that the Town should use property tax dollars for this purpose. 51 of the 362 respondents indicated that they were not sure if the Town should do so or not, and 13 of the 362 respondents indicated that the Town should support only the local ones such as the Historical Society and the Garden Club. A number of respondents took the time to write comments in regard to this subject, many of which were very opposed to the idea of the use of tax dollars for this purpose. Although these agencies provide services to local residents, the survey would indicate that the majority of residents do not see this as a proper use of property tax dollars.

Questions related to use of the library and the use of property tax dollars for funding the library.

The survey contained a number of questions related to the ownership, use, programming and financing of the Library. Section 6 question 1 asked residents if the library were a town owned building. The purpose of the question was to determine for the library and the pool whether residents understood the relationship of these entities to the Town of Hampden. 93 of the 362 respondents were not sure if the town owned the library, or 26%. An additional 27 of 362 or 7.4% indicated that the Town does not own the library. It is significant that a third of the respondents were either unsure or misinformed about library ownership. Clearly the Town needs to do a better job communicating with the residents as to what it owns, and what departments are Town departments and not operated by another organization.

Question 2 of Section 6 asked residents if they used the library. 261 of the 362 respondents indicated that they use the library or 72%. There were also a number of residents who took the time to write comments in regard to the library. While there were some that suggested that the Town did not need a library, the majority of comments were extremely supportive of the facility and its staff. All comments will be listed in the final survey compilation which will be available on August 5th.

Question 5 of Section 6 asked if property tax dollars should be used to support the library. 268 of the 362 respondents, or 74%, responded that tax dollars should be used to support the library. It is interesting that even some people who apparently do not use the library believe that the use of property tax dollars to support it is appropriate.

Questions related to use of the pool and the use of property tax dollars for funding the pool.

Section 3 contained several questions related to the ownership, use and funding of the pool. Question 1 of Section 3 asked whether the pool was town-owned. 118 of the 362 respondents indicated that they were not sure if the pool was town-owned (32.5%), and an additional 23 of 362 indicated that the pool was not town-owned. Like in the case of the Library, the fact that 38.9% of respondents did not know that the Town owns the pool indicates that the Town needs to do a better job of communicating with its residents about what properties and departments of the Town are town owned.

Question 2 of Section 3 asked if the resident or their family used the pool. 128 of the 362 residents responding indicated that they or they family used the pool, or 35%.

Question 5 of Section 3 asked if the town should use property tax dollars to support the pool. 204 of the 362 respondents indicated that the town should use tax dollars for the support of the pool. This response is significant since although only 35% of the respondents indicated that they use the facility – 56% indicated that it was an appropriate use of tax dollars. The Council has taken steps to establish a different funding mechanism for the pool by creating an enterprise account for the operational and capital needs of the pool apart from staffing, but it is still a work in progress as far as finalizing what the breakdown of tax dollars/fees should be.

Questions related to the use of the Skehan Center for Recreation and a community center and the use of tax dollars for its support.

The survey contained two questions related to the use of the Skehan Center at the Old Hampden Academy and an additional two related to the use of property tax dollars to fund those uses. Question 1, Section 1 asked whether the Town should continue to utilize the Skehan Center at the Old Hampden Academy for Recreation Department programming. 242 of the 362 respondents indicated that this should continue, or 67%.

The second half of question 1 asked if residents believed that tax dollars should be used for the support of the facility. 142 of the 362 respondents indicated that the Town should use tax dollars to support the facility, or 39%.

Question 2 of Section 1 asked if the town should use the Skehan Center as a broader use community center type of facility. 228 of the 362 respondents, or 63% supported that idea. The second half of question 2 asked if residents supported the use of tax dollars for that use. 139 of 362, or 38% indicated that tax dollars should be used.

When the Town took over the Old Hampden Academy property in 2012, the Town Council approved the use of the Skehan Center on a trial basis for recreation programming to see if the center could be self-sustaining financially. Based on cost and programming estimates it appeared that it would be possible to pay ongoing operating expenses from recreation programming income. After a full winter in the facility, it is clear that the oversized boiler has resulted in fuel usage well beyond estimates. We have also been pro-rating the electrical cost of the building because it is currently entwined with the electrical billing for the remainder of the academy building and the accuracy of the estimate will not be known until the electrical system is separated. Concerns about the condition of the roof have also been stated, although the town has not yet obtained an inspection of the roof to see what the actual condition is. Retention of the facility under the current ownership model will result in the necessity of using tax dollars to support it. Program fees will not cover a boiler replacement or roof repair or the separation of utilities or any other future capital repair needed for the structure. Although the response rate of the survey overall was only 11.3%, I am concerned that a majority of even this representative sample do not indicate a willingness to devote tax dollars to this. The Town would need to borrow to accommodate the resolution of these capital costs, and a town referendum at the ballot box is a component of that. Were we to go that route and not gain the voter support necessary to borrow, we would have a very serious situation on our hands.

Questions related to the use of the Old Hampden Academy site and comments related to the property.

Under Section 4 of the survey, question 3 asked what type of development people would like to see at the site of the Old Hampden Academy. They were given seven options along with an Other option in which they could write in additional responses. Question 4 of Section 4 which was a question asking for other comments regarding Economic Development directly followed question 3 and many respondents used it to make additional comments on the use of the academy.

The following categories were the seven presented, and the tabulations that follow show the number/percent of the 362 residents who returned the survey who checked those off as uses they supported for the Old Hampden Academy property. Listed under these seven categories are all of the responses that were given under the Other category.

Category	Number	Percent
Retail	135/362	37.3%
Industrial	18/362	5%
Housing	129/362	35.6%
Professional	200/362	55%
Accommodations	75/362	20.7%
Commercial	23/362	6.4%
Village Green	143/362	39.5%

Other:

- Community gardening site
- Something quaint like the Old Port in Portland
- Expand rec facilities
- Condos
- Facility rental for public use
- Indoor flea market, regular community-wide yard sale
- Independent restaurants
- Continued Rec. dept. and community center
- Community meeting space
- Something that would preserve the building and maintain the character of the area
- Something that does not cost the town tax dollars
- Income producing business
- Senior housing
- Village green area would rock
- Community center
- Congregate housing for elderly
- Recreation center
- Expand recreation/physical fitness

Other (continued)

- Community sponsored activities, adult ed through UMaine
- Low income housing for elderly
- Farmer's market
- Continuing ed, adult ed, alternative ed and tech training day programs, sheltered workshops
- Restaurant (6 surveys)
- ABA school for Autism
- Small business mall
- A Reny's department store would be wonderful
- Pub-type restaurant
- The WBC proposal is a good one
- Entertainment area, outdoor amphitheater, recreation space
- Skehan Center
- Sporting facility
- Local merchants no big box
- None
- Church
- Cafes, art studios, movie theater, culturel, yoga studio, local and healthy food, indoor year round farmer's market
- Art/local craftsmen
- School related, arts, music, Starbucks (higher end stuff) not more bric a brac shops
- Restaurant – maybe a pub for Route 1A corridor near Bangor. Surprised this area doesn't grow similar to Route 1 in Scarborough south of Portland
- Any service business, school/college educational use
- Recreation
- Continue use for recreation
- Community service programs
- Mini shops, co-op
- Rec dept. use

Comments related to the Old Hampden Academy were as follows:

- Anything as long as the town gets rid of it
- Please sell the old school so we don't need to pay taxes to heat or repair it
- Use the building for housing and develop the grounds for recreation
- We shouldn't put a business there. There is so many already. We should make it a nice dog park.
- Community meeting space does not mean renting it to a church

(Comments related to the Old Hampden Academy property continued)

- Village green/mixed retail and professional space would go a long way to increase sense of community. Implement architectural plan that was developed a few years ago including trails by the river
- Actually would like to see it sold at fair market value. It would bring in needed taxes
- Turn it into taxable property
- Destroy all buildings except old academy and new gym. Please do not develop. Just make a park. Its land that you can't get back once developed. I live on Western Avenue and am not happy with short-sited development
- Senior Housing
- How about some affordable housing as Hampden desperately needs it. Working folks cannot always afford \$1000+ rent. We have never replaced what has been removed (Crestwood should have closed but nothing else was offered)
- Sell the academy
- Some type of tax-producing development
- I couldn't make an educated answer – sell it to a developer
- Should be privately owned to be determined by owner (2)
- Private business
- It should be privately owned and developed – absolutely NOT public housing, section 8, etc.
- Private
- All bulldozed
- Let business decide (2)
- Any private business that will not rely on taxpayer funding
- Sell it
- No free lunch like Bangor Hydro
- Private development that capitalized on the river view, meets market demand, and convert to a taxpaying entity that reaches the lands highest and best use
- Not sure Council knows what is involved or has knowledge or experience. Economic development committee provide a much better option
- No chains please!
- Public access to river if possible
- Don't hang on and keep paying for heat and electricity
- Needs downtown village center to draw attention and interest to the area
- A trade/vocational school which also teaches truthful American history – not gay rights and diversity and prochoice and that the bill of rights was written to limit government – yes limit – read them

(Comments related to the Old Hampden Academy Property continued)

- Senior housing
- Keep only historic building and Skehan Center
- Town should sell old HA facilities ASAP where is the need for town ownership of the old school
- We need our 'town center' and the old HA property is our best and only opportunity to create it
- Anything not supported by taxes