



THE MILLER'S RUN

Wheelock Community Initiative <https://wheelockcmty.org/> **Email:** wheelockcmty@gmail
Phone: 802-626-3109 and leave a message

Wheelock Town Facts

Chartered: 1785

Founder: John Wheelock

Area: 39.8 sq. Miles

Highest point: 2782 ft.

Residents: 850 (2019 est.)

Median Household Income:
\$65,417

Employment Rate: 57.7%

Poverty Rate: 9.2%

Median Age: 47.9 years

High school & higher: 91.2%

Median House Value:
\$167,893

U.S. Census data; "median" is the middle value in a list of numbers, not the average

Town Hall Facts

Built: 1871/moved 1972

1st accessibility proposal: 2004

Planning Grant: 2015

Recent Defeated Proposals:
2018, 2019

Inaction is No Longer an Option

Wheelock's 2020 Town Meeting opened with Jason DiGiulio, chair of the Selectboard, sharing the urgent need for our community to come together to address the Town Hall's longstanding and well known handicap access issues.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) staff in Vermont received an accessibility complaint in the summer of 2019. They inspected the building, issued a report, and are **requiring our town to correct a list of violations.**

Jason made it clear that inaction on this issue is no longer an option. The building's historic character does not "grandfather" it from handicap access requirements.

The DoJ negotiated with the Selectboard to create a specific timeline to correct **all** violations. Not fully complying with it could result in a **law suit, court order, and costly legal fees—on top of compliance costs.** Several low or no-cost violations were corrected during the fall and winter; some will need ongoing attention to remain compliant.

The most serious violations relate to access issues for town office services, washrooms, and the meeting hall. To correct them will require significant planning and resources with our community united and committed to the task.

Note: *The Town Clerk has copies of the DoJ report and agreement.*

What's the History?

Beginning in 2004, many Selectboards, town clerks, and small volunteer committees proposed renovation plans to comply with the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). None received sufficient community support to proceed (all close votes). Votes against proposals generally reflected renovation

“Wheelock’s Future”

The Wheelock community came together in January and February to consider the town’s future with the help of Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) staff. During two evening meetings at Town Hall, residents shared a meal and with VDCR facilitating, discussed their ideas, concerns, and hopes.

The “**Wheelock’s Future**” report summarizes ways to improve town communications and facilities, **plus a plan for acting on them**, is at: <https://bit.ly/2XNqqdv>
Hard copies are at Town Hall.

Most of the participants joined one or both of the “**task forces**” committed to continue working on the issues. **More members are needed and welcome. To join contact the chairpersons:**

Communications: Paul Tomasi
kspud66@yahoo.com

Facilities: Ryan Hanrahan
rjhanrahan_24@hotmail.com

A note about grants...

Securing state, federal, and other grants will be crucial to reduce the cost—and tax burden—for any proposal. Voters must approve a proposal at the ballot box before funders will consider helping to fund it. Grant applications have strict deadlines and sometimes require a “match”, but they do not require repayment—only loans need to be repaid.

“sticker shock,” misinformation, or perceptions that “voices were not heard”. Some were just plain tired of talking about it. Decisions whether to renovate or to build new and/or to abandon the historic Town Hall remain unresolved.

Where do we go from here?

A new volunteer Facilities Task Force, chaired by Ryan Hanrahan, with the support of the Selectboard, is already working on a town facilities ‘action plan’ as outlined in the “*Wheelock’s Future*” report (see the sidebar information). This work **considers all the town’s facilities:** Town Hall and gazebo, town garage, fire and transfer stations, Hearse House, and the Sutton Road property. (See Wheelock’s Town Plan)

All our facilities need maintenance plans and resources to ensure regular and predictable costs and to reduce the need for expensive emergency repairs. Given the DoJ action and timeline, however, it is necessary to focus on our Town Hall’s ADA accessibility violations.

There has been plenty of time, attention, and resources spent on preparing detailed Town Hall proposals with budgets and drawings, so the Task Force will review/update them and ‘pull together key priorities’ for a new proposal by developing:

- A realistic **needs assessment** of all necessary town functions and the current conditions of each facility.
- A project budget that is **affordable** for the Wheelock community, including possible federal, state, and philanthropic grants (see the “*Wheelock’s Future*” list of possible funders).
- Ways for the Wheelock community to **provide feedback to ensure a proposal will be supported** at the ballot box.

How can you help? Have your voice heard?

- **Become a member of the Facilities Task Force.** Contact Ryan Hanrahan at rjhanrahan_24@hotmail.com
- **Be informed.** Read the “*Wheelock’s Future*” report. Come to information meetings about project proposals.
- **Be active.** Respond as soon as possible to any mailings, such as a survey, from the Facilities Task Force or Selectboard.