

Town of Essex
Memorial Hall Committee
Minutes
Tuesday, May 1, 2018
6:30 PM

Present: Jan Ellis-Clements (acting chair), Paul Dame, Liam McKone, Ione Minot, Irene Wrenner (recording secretary), Billie Hall (Essex Community Players), Dennis Lutz (Public Works Director).

Meeting began with introductions.

Dennis Lutz provided an overview of the committee and building history from memory.

MHC was formed to help devise and broker solutions to issues that arose with the two major users of this building: Essex Parks and Recreation Dept. and Essex Community Players (theater group), which has rented this building from the Town for fifty years.

Former Town Manager Pat Scheidel was instrumental in forming the MHC and was a member until he retired in February.

In the past, problems ranged from general draftiness and an inadequate heating system to unsafe access, storage issues, and decaying / antiquated fixtures.

Since about the year 2000, the interior was painted, floors refinished, seating replaced, curtains made and hung, bathrooms refurbished, second floor de-cluttered, third floor cordoned off after reworked heating system installed there.

Also, the house next door was demolished and its garage repurposed into a costume and prop shed for ECP.

More recently, an addition was put onto the back of the building for storage of Rec program materials. ECP bought and installed new lighting and replaced seats again.

MH remains very expensive to heat (using natural gas now, not oil) because warmed air rises toward the very high ceiling, but it's the only indoor space the Town owns for Recreation purposes.

The slate roof needs replacing soon at a cost of \$100,000. The Town is setting aside \$25,000 per year toward this expense.

Capital funds have been set aside to convert the green room to a kitchenette, which would be helpful for functions other than plays. *More conversation needs to happen with ECP and PWD before their already-tight changing quarters gets fitted up with appliances.*

Dennis reminded us that the area behind the garage is flat, grassy and ripe for event use.

Members thanked Dennis for finding time to attend – on his first day back to work from vacation – to bring us all up-to-speed.

We will postpone voting on a chair until all members are present.

There appears to be a vacant committee seat that's not yet being advertised and should be.

Our mission is listed on the Town website.

There's a perception that MH isn't very available for public use. We may want to publicize its link to reserve, reasonable price, etc. We could also do more to communicate its history and value to the public.

Getting grants would allow more upgrades for MH, but there's a limit to what can be done and still maintain the historic façade.

Speaking of which, Liam is interested in seeing MH, which is celebrating its 150th year since dedication, added to the National Register of Historic Places and is doing research accordingly. He'd welcome help.

At future meetings, we should have (non-voting) representation from ECP and EPR as frequent users of building, and PWD because they maintain it.

Next meeting date proposed is June 5 or 6 at Memorial Hall.