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Office of Planning & Property Management**

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**INTERVIEW NOTES:**

**To:** Jennifer Fitch PE, Commissioner

**From:** Stephen Frey AIA, IFMA, Senior Facility Architect & Planner – Planning and Property Management (PPM)

**CC:** Erik Filkhorn, Principal Assistant, Eric Pembroke, Director – PPM, Joe Aja, Director, and Teigh Southworth, Engineer – Design and Construction

**Re:** Legislative Advisory Committee – 2022 Legislative Session Planning Project

**Subject:** Interviews with Committee stakeholders

**Facility Location:** 115 State Street, Montpelier, VT

**Date:** 7/3/2021

**OVERVIEW:**

BGS Planning interviewed key committee stakeholders on June 24-25. We did this to support the work of the committee to who is charged with developing reopening recommendations in a report for the 2022 Session of the Vermont Statehouse located at 115 State Street in Montpelier. This report is due on 8/15/21 to the Joint Legislative Operations Committee. We elicited feedback from them on four or more planning options shared by the Sargent at Arms at a meeting on 6/22/21. They include: (paraphrased below):

1. Returning to the Statehouse but using not all committee room spaces at their prior occupancy levels as directed by a recent BGS airflow study. <sup>1 & 2</sup>
2. Number 2 above, but also temporarily using meeting space at 109 State Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.
3. Number 3 above, but also temporarily using meeting space at 133 State Street, basement.
4. Returning to the Statehouse the way things were before COVID-19.

**INTERVIEW SUMMARIES:**

Butch Shaw, Representative

- We are out of time (before the next session) for any major renovations involving moving walls, renovating ceilings, and doing extensive HVAC improvements. (He is an electrical contractor by trade, owning his own company)
- Get people out of rooms 26,32, 33, 44, 47 if possible. They are tiny. Move these committees elsewhere.
- Could go to Room 11, Coat Room, Ethan Allen Room & Lounge, 9,10 and 11 as committee room.
- Copy Room becomes new Coat Room. Copy Room goes to Room 26
- Go to 109 State Street 2<sup>nd</sup> floor for joint hearings, larger meetings but has security check-in and oversight challenges.

Karen Mittelman, Executive Director – Vermont Arts Council

- As a frequent witness and advocate group perspective, it is critical to align and grade the Planning options from the viewpoint of risk factors to immunocompromised persons from a health and wellbeing, public-safety standpoint.

- Can we get clear evidence driven public-health reopening metrics to assist us in accurately assessing the Return to Statehouse Planning options we have and will be discussing?
- The Pandemic response with moving to online meetings, livestreaming, and other techniques, increased access, and enhanced equity to and for Vermonters in new ways. What positives can we retain in 2022 and beyond?

Victoria Hughes, VT History Museum, Museum and Education Director

- Explained the number of students and adults visiting the Museum averages 5,000-6,000 yearly. Sometimes they also tour the Statehouse and the Supreme Court. There are also separate numbers for those from others.
- They support options that safely can bring Kids and their Adults back into the buildings during the school year and other times. But the Committee and Legislature needs to figure out more regarding vaccinations and health risks to immunocompromised users of the buildings with any plan.
- During the Pandemic they innovated with online Virtual 360-degree tours of the History Museum, and she also mentioned the Statehouse had done this too. Between Sept-Dec of 2020 they had 1,000 visitors to their online tour.

Anthony Pollina, Senator

- Do as little as possible with return to normal knowing what we know. Bring the magic and people back and the sense of the people's house welcoming all to participate in the Legislature.
- Likes number option 4, but 2 is second choice of using 109 State Street for overflow space as needed.
- 133 State Street basement option is not attractive from his viewpoint and not in keeping with decorum of the Statehouse.

Alice Emmons, Representative and Committee Chair

- There is something special about the small spaces of the Statehouse, their sometimes forced intimacy. This intimacy also naturally encourages Legislators to leave at the end of the session, not extend the session, and overly professionalize the legislature.
- Recognizes making renovations before the start of the session is not possible due to being in the middle of summer, scarcity of available contractors, and lack of time to get work done.
- What can we do that is possible in the time left that is most impactful and helps us safely reopen?
- Urges caution on any permanent long-term operational and space changes beyond what the Legislature requires to safely reopen in 2022.
- Setup policies to sunset any temporary uses at the end of the 2022 session, or TBD as decided, after careful review of ongoing health risks at that time.
- The more space we provide, the more advocates, lobbyists, visiting public, and more professional staff will fill it up in the years to come. What is the right balance of public access as compared to space for governing for a part-time legislature serving a small state like Vermont? Maybe if we manage our space a little differently it will be less crowded? What could that mean to us?
- Check on the legal issues around vaccination and state public health guidance relating to the options we may recommend in our report.

Ruth Hardy, Senator

- While the Statehouse is a historic landmark and special monument, it is also a workplace for legislators, staff, advocates, lobbyists, and others. The building has health and safety issues, small, tight, and stuffy room, and lacks privacy. The intimacy can be a positive and also a negative.
- Consider equity and access to democracy more clearly in any temporary and long-term plans, including for accessibility to the work and ADA. This could be a guiding principle or goal.
- What about using 2/4 Aiken for offices for Leg Staff in the Statehouse to free up space ~~there~~ in the State House for committee rooms, legislative lounge, and support spaces like a coat room? The current coat room, legislative lounge, Ethan Allen Room could all become committee rooms. By

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relocating there, it could be easier to make temporary changes with needed spaces in the Statehouse that will help in reopening.

- Using 109 and 133 State Street for overflow spaces and hearing spaces preferred used in that order.
- Let us figure out the security challenges for use of 109 State Street particularly and make it work. The pandemic proved that we know how to overcome challenges that seem daunting.
- This short-term planning work will help inform more longer-term planning to follow, and plans, space uses. Let us not shy away from embracing change. We must see this moment as an opportunity to improve the less than adequate space in the State House.

Angelica Caterino, Legislative Operations and David Schutz, BGS Curator

- Angelica schedules visits to the statehouse by school groups as well as for the Vermont History Museum. She works for the Legislative Operations. David heads the Office of the Curator at Buildings and General Services (BGS).
- The Statehouse is the People's House. It is also a living museum, and a workplace.
- Recognize the reality in 2021 and into 2022 that elementary and middle school age kids have not been vaccinated yet and may not necessarily be so until later this year or next. This places limitations on levels of uses by school groups. However, Statehouse visits are still planned, but a reduced level.
- Favors setting up a separate landing space and coat rooms *in the* Statehouse for three groups; School groups, public visitors, and a private space for legislators.
- Locating such as a landing space and coat room for school groups in 2/4 Aiken or 133 State a non-starter. This is due to concerns for traffic safety walking large groups of 30-50 kids and adults from the building crossing Aiken Avenue and parking lot.
- Also, walking kids in cold or rainy weather from 2/4 Aiken to the Statehouse and back without coats and boots with lunches is an undue health risk to themselves and those using the Statehouse, and their families at home.

Janet Miller, Sargent at Arms, Legislative Branch

- Her organization runs the operations of the Legislature and Statehouse. They provide bill drafting, legal services, copy/print, Capital Police, coordinate space management and scheduling, IT and audio-visual services, and more.
- Favors the option with everyone back at the statehouse using space with ASHRAE standards<sup>1</sup> or enhanced airflow, using 2/4 Aiken as a staging ground TBD for visiting groups and other uses.
- Use of ASHRAE option naturally leads to lower density space use as compared to the Return back to the way it was option. This will lead to temporary operational changes for the 2022 session which needs discussion and planning around.
- Use of the 133 State Street and 109 State Street Spaces is complicated operationally. We may not need this space in the 2022 session especially if 2/4 Aiken is used to free up space in the Statehouse.
- Drafting operations may be able to continue working via Zoom with members during the 2022 session. Or they could move to 2/4 Aiken or do a hybrid. Reservable hotel or drop-in workstations could be then set up for legislators and staff to use to ensure service continuity during the session. Could be worth a discussion.
- Explore supplying a private coat room for members and a separate one for the visiting public and school groups. The public also includes working press, lobbyists, and advocates from non-profits.
- It would help to continue to use the cafeteria for events such as breakfasts, sidebars, and receptions aligned with the ASHRAE standards.<sup>2</sup>

Alison Clarkson, Senator

- We work in a living museum. *Work*, *living*, and *museum* all mean something particularly important and do not necessarily work well together.

- Do not put a good crisis to waste. Seize the moment to accelerate needed change in operations and space use, sharing of resources, both in the short and long-term.
- Favors setting up a separate landing space and coat rooms *in the* Statehouse for two to three groups; School groups, public visitors, and a private space for legislators.
- Locating such as a space and coat room for school groups in 2/4 Aiken or 133 State is a non-starter. Crossing 30-50 kids and adults back and forth from the Statehouse is a safety issue. Also, not good in super cold, rainy, or snowy weather with leaving coats and boots behind.
- Sharing committee space in the short-term could be okay if it helps accelerates needed action on the long-term building project solution. Especially if more private dedicated or shared workspace is created by moving Leg Counsel to 2/4 Aiken.
- Each biennium 1/3 of the elected legislature turns over. Due to this natural turnover, time is of the essence to do the long-term project. If too much time passes, the legislature may lose their pandemic driven energy supporting it due to this turnover effect.

Janet Ancel, Representative

- I think every standing committee should have space in the State House. The space at 109 State St. and elsewhere may work well for special committees, joint committees, etc, but I do not believe any standing House or Senate Committee should meet on a regular basis outside the State House.
- The Statehouse belongs to everyone in Vermont with the Constitution requiring the doors remain open to the public whether in person or more recently on Zoom and YouTube.
- It is workplace for Vermonters including State Leg operations staff spanning multiple departments, Legislators, and others who earn their living at the Statehouse such as lobbyists, non-profit advocates, state employees testifying at hearings.
- It is too early to tell how successful mixed hybrid committee meetings will be with some in-person others participating live online. The camera and audio technology is far from perfect and still being developed. Much easier to do an all-online committee meeting than mixed setting. But,
- In-person committee meetings is strongly preferred, perhaps with the option for online live witness testimony remaining. Face to face non-verbal cues and interactions, note passing found in in person meeting much preferred over the more limited options of meeting online.
- Top option is not 4, nor is sharing committee rooms on a short or long-term basis. Her committee room got people sick during the winter months due to its small size and airflow levels. Returning to the way it once was will not work unless we can get the airflows fixed. The enhanced airflow option<sup>2</sup> with 109 State Street option is a top choice.
- She encourages the Committee to get similar interview input from members of Legislative Operations on the options. Or gather it another way.

Joe Benning, Senator

- It is an honor and privilege to work, live, and be a trustee of the Statehouse facility and to help preserve tradition as well as safeguard the physical plant for the next generation.
- For the next session, a guiding principle to him is to keep the Statehouse accessible and open, and to keep people as comfortable and safe as possible. Keep it simple.
- If Covid-19 breaks out in the Statehouse we know our only solution is to close and move back online temporarily until it is safe once again.
- Number 4 is my top option but sharing committee space with the House a non-starter. That is because as a committee head I work all day in my committee room with the assistant I have. I do not have dedicated private workspace elsewhere. So, the assistant and I need to use this room for our work, private meetings, and keeping scheduling updated and other activities. Sharing with others won't work due to this. Jamming another Chair and their assistant into a committee room would diminish work product and outcomes.

- Big picture, solve HVAC system over-rides in the House committee rooms would allow every committee room to be used at or close to full capacity. I think every standing committee should have space in the State House. Need to get project information in the early Fall from BGS and their design team studying this from a cost, schedule, and impact standpoint.
- The space at 109 and elsewhere may work well for special committees, joint committees, etc., but I do not believe any standing House or Senate Committee should meet on a regular basis outside the State House.
- Leg Council will have to move over to 2/4 Aiken on a short-term basis to allow the new Summer Boiler to be relocated into the former Drafting department area. Long-term would be for them to be back in the Statehouse, but elsewhere to be determined.

Mike Ferrant, Director – Office of Legislative Operations

- The Statehouse is the people's house. It is the central spot in the State for Vermont's government.
- It is a wonderful, crazy, dynamic and at times frenzied place at times.
- It is also a workplace but used that way well by Legislative staff, Legislators, and the public for whom it is also a workplace.
- In any future building changes, he would like to preserve the collaborative sense of the building while providing more effective workspace for staff and others.
- Number four (4) is the top option because it is too complicated with not enough time to make any desired changes. It was not his original choice, but after learning more about the others this seemed best.
- With any of the options reducing occupancy levels due to HVAC airflow recommendations, there are too many unanswerable questions on how, who, and what policy would those levels be managed by. Too many risks and difficult Sophies' choices about how to that.
- Hybrid work options causes too many challenges with oversight and room control.

Matthew Romei, Chief of the Capitol Police Department

- Recommends the committee address the security and logistical issues at every process step. Can not wait to do this until the very end, not enough time.
- With any of the options with reduced capacity and spreading between one or additional buildings his staff will be spread thin to provide appropriate security, access, and crowd control coverage. To do these options, the Department needs additional staff and resources.
- Going back to how it was before the Pandemic is a missed opportunity. The other options provide ways forward helping mitigate and address space shortages and other shortcomings known about for decades at the Statehouse.
- Hold off on giving up buffer or overflow space at least for a year at 109 State Street, if not also the 133 State Street Basement.
- 2/4 Aiken should be looked by this planning effort to see if it can help satisfy Legislative Operations space needs.
- He asked the Committee to address the desired levels of Safety and Security coverage in the report and well before the 2022 Legislative Session starts. This way the Department has time to adjust staffing and needed resources. Therefore, please advise on coverage expectations for the following:
  - Statehouse, 115 State Street
  - 109 State Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor link space.
  - Roving patrol officer coverage
  - 1 Baldwin Street
  - 9 Baldwin Street
  - 2 and 4 Aiken Avenue
  - Continued practice of informal escorts of Legislators to parking lots.

**NOTES:**

1. ASHRAE refers to the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE /'æf'reɪ/ *ASH-ray*). It is an American professional association seeking to advance heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVAC&R) systems design and construction. ASHRAE has more than 57,000 members in more than 132 countries worldwide. Its members are composed of building services engineers, architects, mechanical contractors, building owners, equipment manufacturers' employees, and others concerned with the design and construction of HVAC&R systems in buildings.
2. The reduced airflow options refer to the ASHRAE Standard 62.1 that a BGS mechanical engineer used to develop recommendations on reduced room occupancy numbers to align with this Standard. The inhouse engineer calculated the recommended number of occupants in each room by using the latest HVAC balancing report, indicating the amount of air flow into each room, and the amount of air flow required per person and square feet of the room, in accordance with ASHRAE standards.

**[End of Interviews]**