

Southampton preservation proposals break \$1 million mark

BY CATHERINE BAUM STAFF WRITER

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SOUTHAMPTON - The Community Preservation Committee will spend more money on projects this year than in all of its past years combined.

The committee, which began its work in Southampton in 2002, has a budget of \$999,171. Its members presented about 13 project proposals totaling costs of more than \$1 million to the public at an open hearing Monday.

"We will obviously have to do some juggling," said Virginia Ahart, chairwoman of the committee. "Look at your needs and look carefully not to necessarily spend money because you have it, because down the road you may want it for a large project."

About 50 people attended the hearing, many to let the committee know where they stood on the need for certain proposals, which were later discussed at Wednesday's Community Preservation Committee meeting at the Town Hall.

"I think we're ready on some of them," said Ahart. The committee is expected to vote to bring some projects to Town Meeting, where town voters will have the final say.

"We cannot spend a nickel without their approval," said Douglas Blanchard, a member of the Community Preservation Committee. "They control us 100 percent because it's actually their money." The committee may request a special Town Meeting if projects are ready before the annual Town Meeting in June, Ahart said.

Projects under consideration include a \$250,000 engineering design for the Larrabee building and a \$25,000 Town Hall feasibility study. The Larrabee building could be used for town offices, professional offices and rent for small businesses like boutiques, according to the building's 2007 feasibility study.

"People really want to see that develop into something good because a lot of people in town went to school there 20 to 30 years ago and it means a lot to them," Blanchard said. "It's part of our history."

The Town Hall feasibility study would seek to outline various possible uses for that building.

Edward R. Rubner, of Belanger Road, supported the renovation plan for the two buildings because he said there is a lack of space, privacy and handicap accessibility in Town Hall. Rubner, who is on the Board of Assessors, said the large counter in the assessors office does not protect an assessor's privacy while working.

Another project of interest is purchasing 18 acres of property for fields for ball games and other activities on Strong Road. Selectmen and James and Eugene Labrie are negotiating costs and

terms for the property, which was originally proposed to the committee for \$800,000, according to Ahart.

"For the kids in this town I hope the town purchases it," said Eugene Labrie, a soccer and basketball coach for 12 years. He noted that if the town does not buy the property it will be developed into a road. Julie Parks, a self-described "soccer mom" and resident of Rattle Hill Road, said that 80 families drive to Chesterfield two to three times a week for soccer practices and games because Southampton does not have a ball field.

Additional projects being considered include a Greenway feasibility study for the former two-mile railroad corridor from Coleman Road to Route 10, which could be used for outdoor activities; updated grave markers for Civil and Revolutionary war veterans; and preservation of 18th century records in the Congregational Church and Town Hall.

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