

# The Warren Observer

Fact and Opinion about Warren, Connecticut, Population: 1300+

December, 2004

Highlights of: [www.warrenct.com](http://www.warrenct.com)

## The Warren Observer Meeting December 3

If you are interested in discussing the future of The Warren Observer newsletter, we're going to meet in the Warren Public Library to talk about it.

Friday, December 3rd, 10:00 am  
At the Warren Public Library

After the above announcement was listed on the website, the webmaster received the following comment and responded to it.

Comment on the Observer by "Hideaway":

Sorry I won't be around for your meeting, but I am hopeful that this will not be the swan song. Does it have enough coverage? How does anyone in town find out about this page?

Please keep me posted and informed. I think this is something the town needs. How about a school blog? Or sports blog by students?

Maybe there is a young person out there in Warren someplace that would like to be a writer or reporter. Has anyone placed an ad in either school?

We could encourage town people to submit photo's or news. I just think many people don't know how much information is on this page or could be if others were involved.

Response by Richard Wanderman:

I totally agree re: web site and weblogs.

But, before we start building new sites with new content management systems (blog engines) I think more people (kids included) ought to register here and post. This is a simple site, easy to use, and we've had it for a while now. It just is not being used like it should be.

We do the paper newsletter only for people who can't get easy access here so even if it stops, this site will go on.

However, the other issue is covering meetings and taking notes and getting them posted up here. We need more volunteers to do this.

So, at this meeting we'll talk about all of this and more, and we'll try to report back here on what took place.

## Warren Public Library Hours

by Martha Winkel

The year-round hours for the library are:

Tuesday 11 AM - 5 PM  
Thursday 11 AM - 5 PM  
Friday 10 AM - 4 PM  
Saturday 10 AM - 1 PM

The library is closed Monday and Wednesday.

The library will be closed Christmas Day, Saturday, December 25th.

The library will be closed New Year's Day, Saturday, January 1st, 2005.

## Town Hall Building Proposal

(excerpted from the written summary prepared by Clifford A. Cooper, A.I.A., Architecture)

"The Town Hall, conceived and designed as a multi-use facility over 50 years ago, has served the community well. However, in its current configuration it cannot adequately meet the needs of the community. Administrative offices are undersized, do not provide sufficient work areas for employees and do not provide sufficient areas for the visiting public.

Renovations to the Town Hall should consider the need for certain departments to be in close proximity to other departments. That is, where there is a functional relationship between departments, there are efficiencies to be gained by having them share offices or locate next to each other.

Virtually every office in the Town Hall is undersized.

Areas with the Town Hall for large public meetings are deficient, especially as regards acoustics.

The land use office meeting room is often too small to accommodate the public at various commission meetings.

A minimum of one conference room is needed.

Renovations need to address record storage as required by state regulations.

There are 12 positions currently in the Town Hall, all of which are part time. Interviews with current staff indicate that there is likely to be a need for additional 5 part time staff over the next 10 years to provide flexibility in office coverage.

Based upon a comparison with the recently constructed Colebrook Town Hall, a building with a minimum area of approximately 7,500 square feet is required to meet Warren's future space needs."

The report includes an "Inventor and Analysis" which expands on what is contained in the above summary and adds comments about the Library and the Park and Recreation Commission.

"The Library is deficient in private reading area, stack space, circulation desk area, work space for receiving, repairing and assessing books and the office space for staff." " Much of this deficiency can be addressed by expanding the Library into the Council of Governments space. The Council of Governments office could be relocated to the Library Basement.

"Park and Recreation Commission uses the town hall gym as multi-purpose recreation facility. Gym is less than ideal because of non-regulation size, presence of windows and design of radiators." "The Park and Recreation Commission believes that the gymnasium area in the Town Hall, even with its deficiencies, plays an important role in their programs. Ultimately, the Commission would prefer to have a new facility containing a full size basketball court with bleachers on one side. Additionally, the facility should have sufficient storage space and space for one office."

The report projects costs for the renovation of the town hall main building at approximately \$1,880,000. At the town meeting to discuss the proposal, the architect indicated that the cost of the separate recreational building might be as much as \$1.5 - \$2 million based on the recent construction of a private school field house. Estimates were not given for work on the Library.

## **Town Hall Building Discussion**

by Teresa Layman

At the Building Committee's informational meeting on November 17th, a plan was presented for "modest additions" to the town hall, which appropriate the existing gymnasium for much needed town offices and meeting spaces. While I believe the architect did a lovely job of retrofitting the 1950's era town hall to do a 2000 era job, I don't believe the town has been well served by being offered this single proposal to solve our present problems and in fact this proposal presents a rather large problem by eliminating the gym.

Since I attended the last meeting which addressed this issue, I was under the impression we were to expect two or three options for solving our public space/ building code issues.

When the question was raised at the November 17th meeting why there was only one option (which makes it not an option at all) one member of the town replied, "Your choice is yes or no" (which I'm sure was meant as a quip about the irony of it). It appears that this town member was right. But here's the thing of it, when the request for proposals was sent out it specifically stated:

"At least two recommendations for how to use the existing buildings to meet town needs. One must be a way to make the best use of existing buildings with modest additions. The second may include a substantial addition or even a separate building. The recommendations must include conceptual drawings of options, estimated costs to build and estimated operating costs."

One part of the proposal has been met, but the second option and perhaps a third option must be presented as well. One choice we do not have is to do nothing. The mandates have been set and we are 5 to 7 years behind schedule.

When the plan for a large addition was first shown to the building committee, everyone was sure it was far to "grand" to suit our modest sensibilities and most likely much too expensive. Now, in comparison to the presented "modest additions" to our existing space, it might not seem so "grand." In light of the 2.4 million dollars that would be spent to bring our existing space up to code and install the needed office space (and lose our gym to boot), perhaps a large all encompassing addition looks much more feasible. Or possibly our best choice may be to tear down and start over so we can indeed have the facilities we actually need and want to have in our town. This solution would bypass the restrictions of the walls as they now stand and avoid the can of worms that is inevitable in any remodeling project.

One fact we know for sure, the proposed "modest additions" cost \$216 per square foot to build (as presented in the package supplied by consultants).

To build a new public building (like a school or town hall) costs \$180 - 200 per square foot to build, according to an informal contact with a professional involved in such building projects.

After hearing loud and clear that our townspeople cannot do without a recreational gathering space for basketball, volleyball, aerobics and other activities, I believe this must rank high on our list of priorities to be included in the updating of our town facilities.

My purpose in writing this letter is not to berate anyone's efforts thus far in the large task we face, but rather to bring to the town's attention the fact that since we are required to do this job, shouldn't we do the best job we can for ourselves, our children and grandchildren and look at several solutions in order to find the one that will best serve our town for the next fifty years?

With these points in mind I believe we should be offered at least three options plus estimated costs to build and operate each:

1. The present "modest additions" option but with the new recreation facility included...if it's not included now it will be most likely gone for good (remember the tennis courts and tot lot?).
2. Bring the present gym and kitchen, etc. up to code and put a 60 X 60 foot, three to four story addition on the north end of the town hall. This option would preserve the recreational space, but separate it from the office space and is a good option for those of us who wax nostalgic about the part in the town's history the building has played.
3. Tear down the existing building and design a new structure to house the facilities we all feel are necessary to our town. This would be a good choice if we want the most building for our money. Four million dollars will buy a darn fine building.

I believe we will find that each of these options ends up to be in the 3-4 million dollar range. Yes, this is going to cost us. But as stated before, doing nothing is NOT one of our choices. The choices we have must include buildings that serve our needs in many ways and also put our best foot forward when others visit them; in short, buildings we can all be proud of. The sooner we are presented some good options, the sooner we can begin to enjoy our lovely new facilities before the cost goes even higher.

## **More Thoughts on the Warren Building Proposal**

by Ken Layman

First, we as residents at last have a publicly stated view of the financial cost of this project. As it was generally agreed, an updated Town Hall AND a new recreational space will easily go 3+ million dollars. That is A LOT of money for this town to spend by any measure. With that budget figure in mind, there must be other alternatives that need to be evaluated. Offering the current plan as the ONLY option is unrealistic. When I commented on the lack of alternative plans to consider, an anonymous resident observed that "you can vote yes or no, that's your choice". I have no idea who said it, and nor do I especially care. It does, however, serve as an example of the refusal of many to "think outside the box". Before I vote to spend 3+ MILLION dollars, (only half of which will directly affect the daily running of the business which is our town, and in my opinion takes top priority over a "regulation" gym space), I would like to know what other alternatives were offered by the consultants, why they were discarded, and alternative options others may have for our dilemma. Perhaps now is the time for the Committee to offer to the residents a questionnaire, with clear, concise questions, with multiple choice answers, in an easily tabulated form, to allow a prioritizing of needs and suggestions of all residents. To expend the time and funds that we have, and to have only one plan to consider borders on the unbelievable. I fully support the Selectmen and Committee in the view that we need more office space for our employees and boards; but I firmly believe that the very floor plan of the Town Hall was designed for a different social era, with different needs, 50 years ago, and trying to squeeze our needs of 2004 and beyond (and the stringent requirements of the State of Connecticut) into this outdated space are doomed to fail in the long run by the "inside the box" solution currently being offered.