

## Selectmen delay historic sign-off to ensure location for train station

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Journal Inquirer

Published: Wednesday, September 2, 2009

WINDSOR LOCKS – The selectmen were in no hurry at Tuesday’s meeting to endorse the Windsor Locks Preservation Association’s effort to buy the historic Main Street train station from Amtrak.

Amtrak requires a letter from the selectmen approving the move, which would be the last major hurdle in the association’s five-year effort to preserve the dilapidated, boarded-up building.

But the selectmen were concerned that the letter would also have to acknowledge that the sale would prohibit future train service at the site, although the association has yet to specify – much less survey – the site’s exact dimensions and boundaries.

Currently, the association can define it only as a 0.97-acre site stretching north along the tracks several hundred feet to the abandoned building formerly housing Connie’s Auto Supply.

The problem is that the town may need the tip of that site for a new train station, a plan still in the study stage. Prohibiting train service there would scuttle the key to the town’s multiyear effort to revive the moribund downtown Main Street area: relocating the current working train station from the desolate south end of town back to its former Main Street site, where it was 35 years ago, just 600 or 700 feet north of the decrepit historic station.

The downtown could then reap the benefits of a proposed federally funded \$2 billion high-speed train/commuter-rail New Haven-to-Springfield line that could become reality by 2015.

“Those efforts will go for naught if we blindly go into this and sign away our rights,” First Selectman Steven Wawruck told association members. “We’re all in favor of preserving the historic train station and some of the surrounding land for parking and pedestrian needs, but if we bring the train station back, the sites could overlap, so we need a clear definition of ‘historic train site.’”

The association will now clarify the dimensions and boundaries. Meanwhile, a consultant is in the midst of a \$23,000 study of the feasibility of relocating the train station and will have preliminary findings in about 90 days. That’s when the selectmen said they’d know if a new train station would encroach on the historic site.

“I never expected to walk out with a letter,” association co-founder Barbara Schley said after the meeting. “We’re just hopeful that we don’t have to wait until all the studies are done, because that will take years, and we know the building won’t last that long. The longer it sits the more it’s at risk of vandalism and neglect.”

A compromise is likely, economic development consultant Patrick McMahon said, in which the board would approve sale of a parcel smaller than 0.97 acres, so a new train station, its platform, and parking could use land it needs from the northern tip of the historic site, as well as the former auto supply site and Amtrak’s maintenance yard.

“There’s a middle ground here,” McMahon said. “where they can start the planning and restoration work that’s necessary, while we protect our future interest on the relocated train station site.”

The association has a \$225,000 state grant for historic restoration and a \$24,000 state grant to buy the site, requiring matching funds, which have been raised. Its appraised value is \$45,000.

In other business, the board rejected sharing its assessor with the town of Suffield. Suffield First Selectman Scott Lingenfelter suggested it because Suffield’s assessor just retired. Suffield would need eight to 12 hours a week plus time for court proceedings.

The selectmen all said sharing Assessor Donna Murphy, her part-time assistant, and her clerk wouldn’t work to either town’s advantage.

“A full-time assessor is justified in Windsor Locks, simply because of our personal property,” Selectwoman Denise Balboni said. “We have thousands of rental cars, and we have Bradley Airport, which makes us unique.”

Also, she said, after having a part-timer years ago “it was completely necessary to have that office fully staffed.”