

Vision Committee Executive Summary - January 21, 2024

The Townsend Historical Society is at an exciting juncture. With the offer from Gary Shepherd, we have a unique opportunity to consider how the organization will grow, but more importantly, how we will survive and thrive in the 21st century.

In the 1980's, the Society emerged from a "warehousing" institution to one which reached out to the local community by offering educational programs: arts & crafts fairs, talks, and demonstrations, to list a few. Unfortunately, even though these efforts have had strong community support, they have not provided a sustainable future. As custodians of antique buildings, we are continually chasing one rotten board after another with never enough funds to get ahead. This gift allows us a grace period to think of the future rather than the continual repairing of our buildings.

In early January 2023 a Vision Committee was formed to discuss various ideas for what the Society could become. The synthesis of these discussions is distilled into the following Vision Statement:

Through our collections, we can tell a story about life and industry in a typical New England Village. We are fortunate that we have the original buildings on their original story, and this makes us unique. Their history mirrors the region as a whole, and through them, we can tell many tales of days gone by. These buildings represent the history of industry, community, and family.

For the first time, we want to create a unified campus through landscape, hardscape, paths, signage, lighting, and plantings. This would start at the Meeting House and end at the Spaulding Grist Mill. We can increase our visibility by utilizing the Rail/Trail to draw new people to our campus. With the help of technology and smartphones, we can provide walking tours even when our buildings are closed.

Imagine having the Spaulding Grist Mill back in operation to the delight of all ages. The Cooperage exhibiting its past histories with displays of Fulling Machinery and its Coopering trade. The Copeland Cooper Shop displaying our barrel and tool collection, and telling how farmers might supplement their winter income while their fields lay fallow. The Reed Homestead telling the story of one family living and working in Townsend Harbor for generations while recounting their joys and tragedies. These buildings all inter-relate, and together tell the story of family, work, and social life in early New England.

The Harbor Meeting House (Church) was a focal point for Townsend Harbor as a place to meet, socialize and briefly worship. This building offers enormous possibilities and potential as it has no preservation restrictions. It is with this building that we can bring together commercial and historical interests. Upgrading this building to current standards, it can serve as a place to encourage repeat visits from the surrounding area.

We can improve existing parking as well by adding a new parking area to the west of the Meeting House. Plans are in the works to expand the existing lot to the south by joining with Squannacook Greenways. The existing parking situation severely restricts our current capacity for events, and this will be a welcomed addition.

And finally, the time has come to address the storage and care of our Archival documents and Collections. Currently, these collections spill out to half of the second floor and attic of the Reed Homestead, as well as the vault in the office addition. The ideal method would be in a new building that could house them with proper climate control and be large enough to care for future collecting. Instead of packing away our collections sight unseen, it would be refreshing and a draw to visitors

to present them as a “walkthrough” exhibit. A new facility will also free up space in the Reed Homestead, allowing it to become a dedicated museum and learning laboratory. Currently, some of our collection is scattered throughout our buildings. It will allow everything to be gathered safely under one roof.

Then add to this vision a campaign with a goal of adding an additional 2 million dollars to our endowment. Such an endowment would support full-time site administrator who would have time to offer regular tours not just tours to schoolchildren, but also to the public. These tours could be heavily advertised in such places as Groton Hills, pulling in visitors from all over the area. These tours could include a suggested donation, adding to the revenue stream.

This is a new and bold direction for the Society. It will take courage to take this first step, but a step into the future we must take.

If the Directors and Membership vote to agree to this vision, there are things we must begin to do now. This is a partial list:

- Use this vision to create a 10-year strategic plan that lays out short- and long-term goals
- Form an endowment committee with the goal of reaching a \$2,000,000 endowment
- Apply for appropriate grants
- Determine administration and collection storage needs
- Form relationships with other museums and historical societies
- Build membership and volunteers by publicizing this exciting transformation
- Expand our educational programs - Identify regional needs by meeting with district schools, the home school community and area private schools
- Source craftsmen to restore the grist mill equipment
- Re-evaluate the hydroelectric project for the grist mill and possibly the cooperage
- Investigate sources to borrow or buy fulling machinery and coopering equipment for the Cooperage Display
- And more.....