

Town ownership of buildings on school property

The Ludlow and Black River High School Districts are proposing to renovate and add to their aging buildings to bring them up to date so the towns of Ludlow and Mount Holly can give their students the same educational opportunity as other kids in the state. This is guaranteed to them under the Brigham decision which became Act 60, and 68. The boards have looked at all options including closing the high school and tuitioning to area high schools, or privatizing. The school boards felt, for various financial, educational, and communal reasons that it was in the best long term interests of Mount Holly and Ludlow to keep the school open.

The boards' Building and Grounds Committee is working closely with an architectural firm to design a site and building plan that will meet the needs of our children well into the future and make us an attractive school of choice. The boards have a fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers of Mount Holly and Ludlow to undertake this project at the least cost to the taxpayers.

One of the ways we are looking to do this, is to have the Towns of Ludlow and Mount Holly share in the cost of building the community spaces. We consider these spaces to be the Auditorium, Cafeteria/kitchen, Atrium, and the mechanical/electrical items associated with them. The towns would own the buildings and bill the school for the operating costs of those buildings based on the amount the schools use them. This arrangement is legal and is being studied in consultation with the Vermont Department of Education. It is already being done in some schools around the state. One example is the Burlington City Library which is located within the Burlington High School. It is owned by the city, and used by the school during the day. The school boards believe that with the towns owning these structures it will create a great focal point for the communities to hold art, drama and music festivals and events. It will also give area businesses a venue for conferences and conventions when school is not in session.

Another creative idea that the school boards are studying is the viability of developing work force housing on excess school property. This would provide housing that working families with children in Ludlow can afford.

In short, the school boards, the town boards, and the communities of Ludlow and Mount Holly are working together to come up with innovative ideas to retain their pride and identity as vital, prosperous, diverse and living rural Vermont communities. There will be many informational meetings in the future before a final design is brought to the voters of Ludlow and Mount Holly. In the meantime, if anyone has any questions, you may direct them to the superintendent's office at 228-2541. We will be happy to meet with you and your neighbors to talk about this project.

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