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Tarbell Study Committee

I. Age/Physical condition of the facility.

Tarbell school was built in 1914 as an elementary school. It is owned by the Town of Groton and leased to the School District. The main level of the building consists of 10 rooms, along with an open lobby area and small kitchen area. The basement level has restrooms, a kitchen, two offices, and several small rooms for storage/copy.

The heating system for the building is an oil fired steam burner, with the fuel currently stored in an underground oil tank. The building has a septic system. The building has lead paint and asbestos. The windows are single pane wood with storm windows. Employees use electric space heaters for supplemental heat.

Some of the interior hallways are bulging and will need repair. The roof will need to be replaced in the near future. The underground fuel storage tank will need to be removed.

Approximately one-third of the basement is prone to flooding during periods of heavy rain. The septic system gets similarly overwhelmed by heavy rain, requiring immediate pumping in some cases. Some of the foundation walls are in need of repair.

A current blueprint of the facility is provided at the end of this report.

II. Adequacy of site, location.

The address of the site is 73 Pepperell Road, located in a prominent section of West Groton. The lot size is approximately 1.44 acres, and the building is 8300 sq. ft. There is a playground in the back of the property, although the equipment is rather old. Originally the main level of the building housed approximately 100 students in 5 classrooms. The building ceased to house students in 1991, and was repurposed to house the district administrative staff in 1994. The building is not handicapped accessible. The property is zoned "Public Use District."

The building is only marginally adequate for its existing purpose of administrative offices. Several office areas are shared and over-crowded. The storage requirements of the Central Office have significantly surpassed the storage space available at Tarbell, with overflow storage already being utilized at the Prescott school.

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Parking is also marginally adequate for the current use of the building as an administrative facility. There are approximately 12 parking spaces in the front of the building, and 5 spaces in the rear.

- III. **Reassignment of children.** No children would need to be reassigned.
- IV. **Transportation factors.** There is no busing issue associated with this closure.
- V. **Alternative uses of the building.** The district has no direct requirement / use for this building. Based on the discussion between Tarbell study committee members, the following uses that may deserve additional study include:
 - 1. **Town Government:** The Board of Selectmen, along with Town Manager, are discussing possible uses for the building related to town government / committee needs.
 - 2. **Alternative Education:** Superintendent Genovese has approached Merrimack Education Collaborative to investigate any potential interest in this site. At this time, they do not believe they are in a position to pursue the use of Tarbell for their services.
 - 3. **Commercial Office space:** No study has been undertaken to evaluate the viability of this use.
 - 4. **Affordable Housing:** The Tarbell school property is on a list of properties under consideration for affordable housing, but is not a priority site.
 - 5. **Senior Center:** There are no current ideas for using this property in conjunction with the existing Senior Center.
 - 6. **West Groton Community Center:** It is unclear whether or not this property would be preferable as a community center.

Note: according to the Groton Building Commissioner, if the building were to change from an educational use or if the building were to remain closed for a period of time in excess of two years the building would need to meet all current codes in effect before it could be returned to educational use.

- VI. **Cost/Savings.**
 - 1. **Personnel:** The movement of administrative staff from Tarbell to Prescott will not add or decrease to the overall size of personnel.
 - 2. **Plant Operation.** The approximate cost of utilities in FY08 was \$31,000.
 - 3. **Transportation.** There would be minimal transportation cost savings, as the administration will be physically closer to the schools (some personnel

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receive mileage reimbursement for required travel between their office and the school buildings).

4. **Capital Investment.** Capital improvements, such as the roof repair or removal of the oil tank will be deferred until the buildings future use is better understood.
5. **Alternative Use.** Since there is no definitive alternative use at this time, there are no known cost/savings. The school district expects to realize some savings from reduced utility costs, but Tarbell will remain heated with electrical service.

- VII. **Continuity of instructional and community programs.** There are no current instructional or community programs being held at the Tarbell school.
- VIII. **Public Hearing Input:** A community-based public hearing was held on November 15th. Input from that hearing centered on concerns/desires that residents in West Groton expressed about the property, and ideas about alternative uses for the Tarbell school property.

Core Beliefs / Concerns

Maintain integrity of property / building: There was strong input to try and keep the architectural integrity of the building intact, rather than significantly change or expand the building for a new use.

Maintain the playground facility: West Groton is a relatively dense development area, and the playground provides a common area for children to play.

Traffic Concern: The residents expressed concern about the possible increase in traffic through West Groton, and asked that any traffic impact be carefully studied when considering how to use the facility.

Revenue Neutral Impact: several comments were made that expressed a desire to keep the building useful without requiring significant capital expenditure from the town. Suggestions were made about using existing CPA funds to conduct a study or perhaps aid in implementing a plan for the property.

Possible Community Septic System: One suggestion was made to investigate the possibility of expanding the septic system at Tarbell to allow community use, which may alleviate some septic issues in the community.

Alternative Use Ideas

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Affordable Housing: this suggestion came with the stipulation that the affordable housing not impinge upon the architectural integrity of the building. Maintaining the current footprint of the building is preferred.

Continuing Education: Several ideas around using the building for continuing education opportunities were discussed, including

- Academic classes, either through a private company (e.g. Sylvan Learning Center) or through a collaborative effort amongst public schools, perhaps creating a satellite AP or College level course offerings for GD, North Middlesex, and other High School students.
- Hands-on Art courses
- Music Studio
- Cooking
- Wood Working
- Sports Clinics

Town Use: a number of suggestions were made surrounding the use of the building by town officials, departments, or committees. These suggestions included:

- Additional Town offices (if needed)
- Meeting space for committees
- Annex for Library
- Town Museum / Historical Committee use
- Give and Take shop
- Teen Center
- Senior Center Annex
- Community Theater
- Other social service...?

Commercial Use: the following ideas were raised with regard to other private businesses using the facility:

- Shared office space: Offering small businesses the opportunity to lease one or two rooms of the building, with shared office support staff.
- Artisan studio (see additional information below)
- Day Care facility
- “Gymboree” play center
- Mini-Conference Center, similar to BU Conference facility
- Bakery

Church Location: the possibility of selling this site to a church was also suggested. Related to this idea is the notion that several churches could use this facility for religious education opportunities or meeting space.

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Artisan Studio: Additional research has been conducted to investigate the possibility of using Tarbell for a studio. Several surrounding communities have successful examples of using a building in this manner. This use deserves additional attention, especially considering that the building is named after the Tarbell family and Edmund Tarbell, a famous impressionist artist, was born in West Groton. Special thanks to Julie Platt and Janice Hurst for their ongoing effort to explore this possibility.

Summary: Although the committee did not uncover a school or education-related use for the Tarbell building sufficient to warrant further study, the committee would like to encourage town officials and community members to investigate ways to utilize this facility. Given the lack of educational purpose, however, it seems practical to formally retire the building from school district use, terminate the existing lease and return the building to the town of Groton for this purpose.