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David Atherton
Chair, Brandon Select Board
Brandon Town Offices
Brandon, VT 05733

Re: Brandon Town Office Building. CDBG-DR.

Dear Dave:

This letter will provide you and the Select Board with final comments regarding the proposed project to rehabilitate the historic Brandon Town Office Building.

According to the terms of the Programmatic Agreement for HUD/CDBG funded projects, I have reviewed the above-referenced undertaking in accordance with the standards set forth in 36 CFR 800.4, regulations established by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to implement Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Project review consists of evaluating the project's potential impacts to historic buildings and structures, historic districts, historic landscapes and settings, and known or potential archeological resources.

The building that housed the Brandon town offices, at 49 Center Street in Brandon, dates from 1828, and is considered part of the Federal Period. Standing two stories and constructed of common-bond brick, it spans the Neshobe River, a unique setting for a building during that period in Vermont. Being 55' by 36', it was designed and built by John Conant, an entrepreneur and early town father, as an office for his enterprises. The office occupied the east side of the building and the space on the west was lease. This longitudinal division remained over the years even as the building's occupants changed. The Conants (father and two sons) sold much of their enterprise, including this building, in 1852 to John Howe, Jr., the founder of the Howe Scale Company (established in 1857, the company moved to Rutland in 1877). As did the Conants, Howe used the eastern side of the building as an office for his Brandon Iron and Car Wheel Company, the parent and precursor to the scale company, leasing the western side to M Briggs & Co. In 1864, the building was purchased by the First National Bank of Brandon, which later in 1921, took over occupancy of both floors and renovated the building. The renovation included installing new windows throughout, primarily enlarging the windows of the first floor, and building a new entrance. It is this work that gave the building the appearance seen today. On the interior a new vault was built and new maple trim surrounded the new windows and doors. This new trim, or fascia, on the first floor remains with its natural varnish finish, while that on the second floor has been painted. In 1955 the town acquired the building and leased out the second floor. It was during this period that additional walls were added to this floor, using sheetrock and nominal 2x4s. Eventually, the Brandon police department took over the second floor and made additional security changes to the doors around the north entrance.

Exterior

The south elevation, or front, facing Center Street has three large Thermopane windows, installed in about 1990, which replaced earlier windows of a similar size that were part of the 1921 renovations, and similar to the western elevation's large windows, dating from the same period. These western windows have sash that contain 1/4 inch plate glass, and it is assumed the other large windows are the same. The rear, or northern elevation, has a porch that extends partway across the facade from the western end, and a vault at the eastern end. The porch, which has severe deterioration to its roof, is part of the 1921 renovations and the vault appears to date from later, possibly after WWII. The river bank is high on the north side of the river so the first floor at the north end of the building is below grade, with the entrance on this facade at the second floor level. The entry door is original to the building and has an original fanlight over the doorway. In the center, at the bottom of the fanlight, is a lunette with the date 1828 in the glass.

The underside of the building can be seen from the river using waders. Two arches support the north end of the building to midstream, and two huge stone lintels carry the second span to the southern bank. The reason for lintels, instead of arches, is that the southern portion of the building had a basement level, and the bottom of the floor framing was level with the bottom of the lintel. Not much of this basement level remains since it was abandoned during the 1921 renovation. However, window openings, now filled with cement, show in pre-1921 photographs, indicating the space was in use until the bank renovations, and newspapers used as fill around the concrete window patches are dated 1921, indicating the period when the space was abandoned.

Interior

The interior of the first floor still retains much of the 1921 bank finish, including the terrazzo floor from the public area and a relocated portion of the old bank counter. Later ceilings have covered the old, 1921, plaster ceiling but the faux beams from the 1921 renovations remained. Those renovation removed any trace of the longitudinal wall separating the two sides of the first and second floors. In the short side hall leading to the boiler room is an old restroom, the walls of which will remain for use as a janitor's closet. In this short hall there is an area of where the brick has powdered and collapsed owing to the entrance of water-borne salts that have crystallized when the water evaporated due to heat from a pipe that ran in this location. Except for the Thermopane windows on the south elevation, and the partitions added when it became a town office, the building remains much as it was in 1921.

On the second floor the walls from 1921 remain with the addition of later walls, added some time after WWII when the building was under town ownership and this floor was leased. It may have been at this time that the vault, built outside the northeast corner, was added. As with the first floor, all of the existing plaster, on expanded-metal lath, is from the 1921 bank renovations, with the exception of the later sheetrock walls. (The interior finish of the original 1828 wall surfaces probably was unfinished brick.) The second floor was last used by the Brandon Police who widened the entrance doors at the north end, installing new metal doors for security.

In the attic are two wood trusses installed during the bank renovations that run longitudinally, about two-thirds the building's length from south to north. It is from these trusses that the second floor is hung by 1 inch iron tie rods. Also, on knee walls running longitudinally outside the trusses, is wallpaper with several alternating patterns. The area closed in by the wallpapered knee walls has the underside of the roof sheathing, and exposed rafters, whitewashed. Obviously, prior to 1921, this

Brandon Town Office Building

space was living quarters and, judging from a break in the ridge and an old photo, this space was heated, thus used as living quarters. Three chimneys provided means of using wood stoves for heating on the other floors. After the renovations of 1921, with the trusses in the attic, the occupancy of the attic was abandoned and a new gravity, hot-water, heating system was installed in the building, eliminating the need for wood stoves.

Setting

The town office building is built directly on the sidewalk edge and in line with the other building to its east, as was specified in the 1828 deed acquiring the land. This earliest part of this other building had been built about 1810 and is the oldest remaining structure in the downtown. At the time John Conant built his office building there was a three-story brick tannery and leather working shop between the new building and the ca.1810 structure. By 1860, this three-story building was gone and the ca.1810 building was extended to within 8 feet of the, now, town office building. In a photograph taken ca.1869, both the Conant office building and extension to the earlier building are seen with the Town Hall in the background. A staircase can be seen in the space between the two buildings coming down from the second floor of what is the ironworks office building. By the late 19th century, the access to this space between the buildings was closed off with a narrow, one-story, space, having a passageway to the west for access to the stair. Later, by 1948, this space between the buildings was closed with a separate structure in which a staircase was locate, providing a second-floor entrance to both buildings. This is the existing condition today.

In front of, and adjacent to, the town office building is the historic, 1867, stone bridge. It is the oldest twin-arched stone bridge in Vermont according to Vtrans records. Across, and up, Center Street is the three-story Smith Block built in 1889, and is the first building in town to be fully electrified-- electric generation was introduce in town in that year. Upriver from the town office building is the old, ca.1800, mill dam that supplied water for some of Brandon's early industries. Across from the dam is the, now, Watershed Tavern, built in ca.1885, originally for housing the telegraph and early telephone exchange for Brandon. The town office building is then an integral part of the historic core of the town.

Historic Significance

In 1976, this building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as number 164 in the Brandon Village Historic District. As the second oldest building in Brandon's downtown it has seen many changes and has spanned the Neshobe River for nearly 200 years. It is an example of an early-19th century village store/office. Although the existing windows and many of the fenestration openings were changed and enlarged in 1921, there remain the fanlights in the gable ends, and over the north entrance door, which are part of the original structure and reflect the early character of the windows. Much of the structural beams and joists remain from the original structure as do the floors that lie under the later, 1921, floors. The current slate roof, which lies over the early, maybe original, wood shingles, is from the mid-19th century.

During its life the building has served Brandon in many capacities: first as the office for the Conant's ironworks locate in the center of town just below the second falls, and then as the office for Howe's Brandon Iron & Car Wheel Company. It is this manufacturing firm that is one of two industries located in Vermont worthy of mention in Bishop's *History of American Manufactures*, 3rd ed., 1868. After Howe began his scale manufacture, it was this business that soon surpassed the manufacturing

of railroad car wheels to become a world leader in the sales of all types of scales. When the scale business moved to Rutland the use of the furnace and foundry in the town's center was continued by the Brandon Manufacturing Company, which occupied the space in this building, now owned by the bank, for about another decade. Gradually, the space on the east side that had been used by the Conants, John Howe, Jr., and the Brandon Manufacturing Company, was leased to a grocery, and later an insurance firm, while the 2nd floor continued to be leased as tenements, until the bank finally occupied both floors in the building in 1921. Overall, the building retains much of its historic character and integrity, and will continue to do so as Brandon's revitalized town office building.

Proposed Rehabilitation

After the impact of Tropical Storm Irene in September of 2011, the town office building was not reoccupied by the staff and the building sat unused for months before the town began looking at what needed to be done so that the staff could move back in to the building. Over the next two years plans were prepared for the building's occupancy. Just prior to the impact of Irene the police, who had occupied the second floor, vacated that space so the town staff could now occupy the whole building and plans were developed on this basis.

A first need in rehabilitating the building was replacing the antiquated and inefficient heating system. This system, installed in 1921, is a gravity, down-feed, hot-water heating system that uses the differential in specific gravity of the hot feed, and return cold, water to circulate the hot water through radiators on both floors. In order to meet modern-heating codes in Vermont it is intended to install a new heating system use a modern, high-efficiency, boiler to circulate hot water through Runtal-type units mounted just above the baseboards. This will allow these units to be above the floor in case of any future flooding and be visually unobtrusive. In addition, heat pumps will be used for heating during times when the outside temperatures are above 30 degrees Fahrenheit, thus saving on heating oil during part of the year. The heat pumps also will serve for air conditioning during warmer months. As part of the updated heating, and to meet the new codes, 2-inch panels will be installed on the walls of the second floor using polyisocyanurate rigid insulation. Boxing will be built around the windows to accommodate the increase in wall thickness. The walls of the first floor, because of the extent of window glass, will not need insulation except for the short corridor on the west side which will be treated the same as the walls of the second floor.

On the first floor a new ADA restroom will be installed in a space that served as a closet. Because of the ADA requirements this space will need to be enlarged a bit and will need the addition of a 36-inch wide ADA door. A new counter and sink will be installed behind the new restroom in a space now occupied by a restroom. A small restroom, previously mentioned, in a corridor on the west side will become a janitor's closet by removing the toilet and installing a janitor's sink. With the majority of the small staff moving to the second floor, more space will be available on the first floor for public access to the vault and for the clerk/treasurer's needs. Anticipating this need, partitions previously installed to meet the town office requirements in 1955, when all the staff was on the first floor, have been removed by volunteers so that a more open office can be achieved. A new counter with handicapped access will be installed along the interior lines of the 1921 terrazzo flooring. In this way the terrazzo can delineate the area of public space as it previously did when the space was used as a bank. In addition, this area is set off with marble wainscot, installed as part of the 1921 bank renovations, bordering the terrazzo flooring, and what is left of the marble panels on the old counter will be incorporated into the new counter giving a finished appearance to the space. Also, in the short

corridor on the western side, an area of brick deterioration exists. As mentioned previously, this deterioration is caused by the crystallization of soluble salts, causing powdering of the brick. This deteriorated brick, no more than a square yard, will have the bricks replaced using a rich-lime mortar (2-3 parts lime, 1 part white Portland cement, 9-12 parts sand).

The second floor has sagged causing more than a 3-inch deflection in the first floor ceiling. The cause of this sagging is deflection in the trusses and cross beams in the attic, from which the second floor framing is hung by iron rods. To correct this structural condition it has been decided to install new steel beams (one W26x76 and five W10x26) under the old wood beams in the second floor, lifting the second floor as much as possible during the process. Portions of the tie rods will be left in the beams so a record of their use will not be lost, and the truss support system in the attic will be remain as well as the wallpapered wall testifying to the attic occupancy. The faux wood beams which were in place where the steel beams will be located, will be replaced by new faux wood beams of similar detail but much deeper to accommodate the new beams. An alternative approach to the steel beams was considered that would have added new wood trusses in the attic across the width of the building and additional tie rods holding up the second floor. This approach, however, would have necessitated the removal of the current trusses and the knee walls with the wallpaper. It is felt that the preferred solution has less impact on the historic fabric, and history, of the building.

Also on the second floor are sheetrock partitions (probably from the 1960s) which have been removed by volunteers to provide more open space for the staff. An earlier, 1921, wall had been removed at the time these newer walls were constructed. (There are no plans to rebuild the 1921 wall since this is not a restoration.) As part of the 1921 renovations, two restrooms were built on the second floor. These are distinguished by being the only doorways with transoms (one of these rooms still is used as a restroom). Since neither room is large enough to accommodate ADA code requirements, it is planned to widen one room and make it ADA accessible, while making the other, reduced in size, a janitor's closet for the second floor. In doing this a 36 inch door will need to be installed for the restroom, so it is planned to retain the frame and widen it, keeping the transom, and building new headers. This way both transoms will be preserved.

Throughout both floors the windows will be repaired, re-glazed where needed, new sash cords (chains) will be installed and the sash generally tightened. All windows will have new wood storm sash installed, replacing aluminum storm windows, except where wood storm windows already exist. These existing storm windows will be rehabilitated as needed. Also, throughout both floors, new hung ceilings will be installed that will replace non-code-compliant acoustical tile, and will incorporate new LED lighting. New wiring and receptacles for power and data will be installed throughout both floors and will be hidden in walls and cabinetry.

In order to accommodate the new handicapped entrance and lift, it is planned to use the adjoining space between the two buildings described earlier. It is felt this area is the least significant portion of this block of buildings. The connection, as this area is called, now provides access to the second floor of both the town office building and the adjoining Leary's building, or Conant Block. Since the Leary's own the connection, an agreement has been signed between the town and the Learys to the effect that the town will make all accommodations to install an ADA lift, which the town will own and maintain. An easement exists that allows use of a staircase for access to the town office building second floor, which this new agreement recognizes. To accommodate a lift, the staircase in the

connection must be removed, including a Colonial Revival balustrade at the second floor level. A portion of this balustrade will be incorporated into the new design. Entrance to the town offices will be through the connection, leaving the existing entrance intact and usable. Upon entering the connection one will then enter an airlock, from which one will be able to enter the lift, or into the town offices through a new opening in the east wall. Since the door at the opening into the offices will need to be kept open during the day the airlock will keep the cold air out. On the side of the airlock, a new staircase will reach a point on the second floor where the top of the lift will be located, as well as a new entrance to the second floor town offices. Since the earlier 1960s entrance will fall in front of the lift, it will be closed off. New steel beams will be built into floor of the connection to support the lift and airlock walls.

Finding of Effect

Having been involved with this project from the very beginning, and having worked closely with the architect of record in developing the design, I have had input on issues concerning the best approach to preserving the significant historical aspects of the building, and in maintaining the character-defining features of this old and interesting historic structure. From my perspective I feel the proposed project meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and, therefore, will have no adverse effect on this historic building. No further review is necessary unless substantial changes are made to the current proposed plans.

In summary, the building is an excellent example of an early-19th century small-town store/office with the unusual circumstance of being built over a river. It clearly retains features of its original appearance, as well as from the period of its greatest change, the 1921 bank renovation. The proposed changes as part of this rehabilitation do not detract from the historical character, or authenticity, of the historic structure, and will continue to meet the needs of the town as a building to house its offices. The project will preserve the visual record of the history of the building while adding a sense of continuity and meaning to the town historic district.

Sincerely,



E. Blaine Cliver
Historic Preservation Consultant
cc: Yvonne Basque, VDHP
Robert Black, Architect
Robin Bennett, Brandon Town Manager

NO ADVERSE EFFECT
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

State Historic Preservation Office