

Update on Proposed MMA Building Project

By Anne Swift-Kayatta, MMA President; Cape Elizabeth Town Councillor



Photo by Judy Holmes

The MMA Executive Committee would like to update you on our efforts to restore the capacity of the MMA building to function as a central hub for municipal officials throughout the state as well as an improved and efficient meeting, training, and operational center for our Association. We have enclosed an insert to provide a detailed overview of the proposed building project. The Executive Committee is scheduled at its December 18 meeting to

decide whether to proceed with the project in 2009. However, before a final decision is made, we need your input.

Executive Committee members are acutely aware of the pressures facing our communities during this period of upheaval in the global financial markets and uncertainty in the economy. Balancing these concerns with the needs of the Association will be difficult. Your input will help the Committee decide how to move forward to address the Association's pressing physical space needs.

Background

Over the past fourteen years, the MMA building has functioned well and has generally allowed our organization to meet the evolving needs of our members. During that time, however, the significant growth in participation in MMA group self-insurance programs has led to the conversion of meeting rooms to office space. This change has resulted in a severely reduced capacity for the MMA building to serve as the meeting center for Maine's municipal officials – from the 70 member MMA Legislative Policy Committee to the many committee meetings of MMA's 30 affiliate groups.

The lack of meeting room space and needed storage space for over 25 years of insurance and other records, which legally must be retained for long periods, results in costly off-site rental charges. More importantly, the lack of space impairs a central function of the Association, which is to be one place in the state where town and city officials can go, meet conveniently with their peers and MMA staff, obtain information necessary to do their jobs well, and provide staff with information and input so that the Association can best serve its members.

Based on an in-depth analysis of possible options (including leasing needed off-site space and providing flex-time or telecommuting options to MMA employees to free up office space), the Executive Committee concluded in 2007 that MMA's members would be best served by restoring the meeting room capacity of the MMA building and regaining the regular and valuable interaction between municipal officials

and MMA staff members. The Executive Committee also believes it is important to keep all of MMA's operations within one facility to maintain the efficiencies of central support systems and to facilitate interdepartmental coordination.

Earlier this year the Executive Committee appointed a Building Committee to develop a proposed project. The Building Committee is using a "Design/Build" approach to achieve cost savings and ensure a strong working relationship during the project with the selected builder, Hebert Construction of Lewiston, and its partner, Foreside Architects of Portland.

The design of the addition provides convenient access to the new meeting space, enabling the proposed new wing to function as a true Local Government Center for meetings and training sessions. The Building Committee is also pursuing energy efficiency and other cost saving approaches, including a geothermal mechanical system for the addition with an estimated 5 to 6 year payback at today's energy prices.

Is now the time to undertake a building project?

Clearly this is the key question before the Executive Committee. For this reason, the Executive Committee is making a concerted effort to provide information to our members and to obtain your views.

The Executive Committee appreciates the diligent work of the Building Committee to bring forward a conservative, well thought-out project. The direct result of their dedication is a quality design that meets the organization's current and anticipated future needs for the next 10 to 15 years. Benefits of proceeding with the building project include:

- Restored meeting room capacity to provide municipal officials with a convenient central location for their meetings and training sessions.
- Enhanced interaction between municipal officials and the MMA staff and strengthened ability for MMA to serve our members.
- Cost savings in energy, rental, storage and staff resources.
- Continuity in the Design/Build approach to maintain the relationship with the builder to achieve additional cost savings as the design details are more fully developed and competitive bids are issued.
- Investing in a needed project to take advantage of competitive pricing and provide work to Maine companies during an economic downturn.

MMA has been preparing for a potential building project for a number of years by creating and adding to a reserve fund to help absorb the project's costs. The current building mortgage will be paid off in 2014. This fact will help minimize the financial impact of the new project in coming years.

The Executive Committee recognizes the financial constraints facing MMA members and is committed to putting together a funding plan that would keep adjustments to membership dues and administrative fees for MMA-related programs as minimal and reasonable as possible. The insert in this issue contains contact information for members of the Executive Committee. Please let us know what you think of the proposed building project before our Dec. 18 meeting.