



Town of Madison, CT  
Academy Ad Hoc Investigation Committee  
Interim Status Report  
A Discussion of Options and Opportunities

September 6, 2012





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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Academy Ad Hoc Investigation Committee has been working for approximately 8 months to document and understand the physical characteristics of the space, the land use issues, the potential economic benefits, and the historical importance to downtown Madison. During this time the committee has reviewed numerous third party studies of the building that have been completed. We received community input on the desired uses for the space, and have attempted to quantify, at a high level order of magnitude, the financial and programmatic issues of converting the space to other uses.

This report is designed to share the Committee's findings to date and to prepare residents for a public discussion that is scheduled for Tuesday, September 25, 2012 at 7:00pm at Memorial Town Hall. This meeting follows our Public Meeting last spring. This session will be focused on discussing the following question:

***“Should the Town retain or sell the Academy School Property?”***

## **HISTORY OF THE TOWN GREEN, MEMORIAL TOWN HALL AND ACADEMY SCHOOL**

The Committee has learned from the history of the Town Green, that for nearly 300 years, there has been a steady effort by individuals and government to expand and protect this area. From the early 1700's through the mid 1900's, the colonial concept of the “common” with a church, a school, and town hall present became reality. Therefore, we believe that in understanding the history of Town Green from a hilly swampy area to the current common space, Memorial Town Hall and Academy School should be incorporated and respected in planning the area's future.

In Madison, the Congregational Church became the cornerstone of Madison's Town Green. The current green area was very uneven, with sand hills in the south half and a patch of swamp on the north. “The church and school were in the southeast section and other small buildings of private ownership were scattered about, while cart paths meandered in all directions.”<sup>1</sup> ““Sabbath Day Houses” were allowed to be put up on the Green by individuals. These houses consisted of one or more rooms with a fireplace. By the mid 1880's, the sand hills were leveled and the swamp area filled. The private houses were removed. Lee Academy, originally built in 1821, was moved from its original site (Boston Post Road and Neck Road) in 1830 to the triangle west of the Green. In approximately 1840 the school was again moved this time to land northeast of the green.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Madison's Heritage, “Our Beautiful Common” by Hart Lee Scranton, August 1938, page 21

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 69 - 71



Town of  
**Madison, Connecticut**  
*Ad-Hoc Academy Investigation Committee*



So in the mid 1800's, the church and the green in its current profile were in place. From the Green heading east, the Lee Academy, P.P Coes General Store, another chapel and the Town Clerks Office were in place and the concept of church, school and government existed.

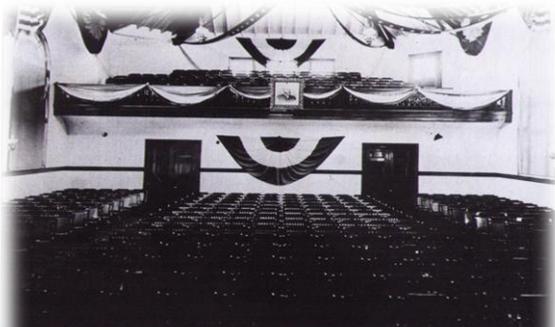
The next major expansion of the common area east was in 1884, when the Hand Consolidated School was completed. To make way for the building, the Lee Academy was moved to its current location. The building was built by Daniel Hand and presented to the town to serve as a school. In 1921 the building was demolished and rebuilt from the original bricks. In 1936 four classrooms and a gymnasium were added.<sup>3</sup>



Hand Academy, donated to the town by native son Daniel Hand in 1884, provided deserving young people with an education beyond the eight grades of the district schools. It stood on the present site of Academy Elementary School at the corner of School and Academy Streets.

In 1894, the plans for creation of Memorial Town Hall began. The site for the hall, after much discussion, was settled by James R. Meigs when he purchased the store of Philander Coe and moved it east on the Post Road (to the location currently opposite the fire station). The store was the "People's Store" until 1946 when it was raised to give place to Rocca's Colonial Restaurant.<sup>4</sup> To build the hall in its present location Lee Academy was again moved.

The design of Memorial Town Hall had a large lobby, to be the memorial room where flags, pictures and war relics could be arranged, while the main auditorium would be used for public gatherings, concerts, plays, etc."<sup>5</sup> The Memorial Town Hall was dedicated on May 31, 1897. The Town offices were in



In 1931, the balcony was removed from Memorial Hall. In 1935, the town voted not to spend \$2,500 for a heating system. In 1938, \$18,000 was appropriated to remodel Memorial Hall for use as town offices, and in 1939, the town clerk's office and probate records were moved into the newly remodeled building. They would remain until the completion of the Town Center.



These women in front of Memorial Hall are greeting visitors to the 1903 Madison Fair. Fairs had been held annually on the Green for many years—a practice that would continue throughout the century.

<sup>3</sup> Madison Three Hundred Years by the Sea, Lauralee Clayton, Warner P. Lord, 1976, page 53

<sup>4</sup> Madison's Heritage, "Memorial Hall" by Mary Scranton Evarts, 1950, page 39

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 41





buildings next to Memorial Town Hall. In 1939 with the growth in the town, Memorial Town Hall was renovated, the lobby and the main auditorium were removed, separate floors were added to accommodate rooms for selectmen, town clerk, probate judge and assessors. The basement was used for voting and a nurse’s office. The police were moved to the brick building next door.<sup>6</sup>

This historical perspective illustrates a consistent movement for nearly 300 years to protect and expand Madison’s Town Green. Over the years, the green has grown by the removal of the Sabbath Day Houses, the creation of a formal Green, donation of the Hand Consolidated School by Daniel Hand to the town, and the purchase and relocation of the People’s Store by James Meigs to build the Memorial Town Hall. This trend continued into the 1920’s to 1940 when the growth of the Town required more town office space and larger schools.

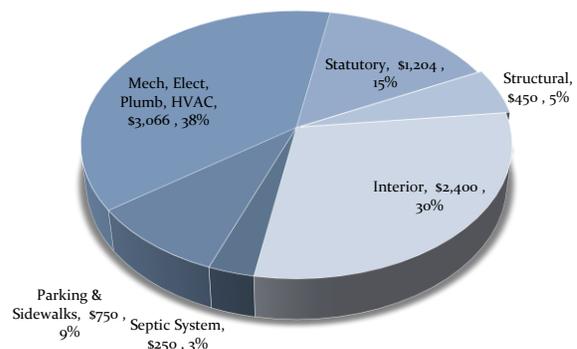
**OVERVIEW OF THE ACADEMY SCHOOL BUILDING**

The building is approximately 58 thousand gross square feet and has 53.5 thousand useable square feet of space as detailed in the following table:

| Description           | Gross Area   | Assignable Area |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| First Floor           | 22093        | 22093           |
| Enclosed Porch        | 98           | 0               |
| Utility Storage       | 140          | 0               |
| Upper Story, Finished | 14530        | 14530           |
| Finished Lower Level  | 21029        | 16823           |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>57890</b> | <b>53446</b>    |

Based upon the compilation of studies, it is estimated that approximately \$5.7 million is needed to repair the building systems in kind, and up to \$2.4 million is needed to repair the interior spaces. The Committee also received input from local developers that the capital investment for the existing building could be between \$5 million and \$6 million in total. The building and land was last appraised by Vision Appraisal at \$5.3 million – approximately \$900,000 for the land and \$4.4 million for the building. The Committee estimates that the sale

**Est. Repair / Renewal Costs Existing Academy School Facility**



<sup>6</sup> Ibid





of the building and land (excluding the two ball fields) is between \$600 thousand and \$1 million.

The current costs to keep the building closed over the last few years have ranged between \$8,000 and \$11,000 per year. Given the repair need and the current condition of the building, we suspect that \$15,000 to \$20,000 should be budgeted, and that it is likely that some larger capital needs to repair the roof and building structure will occur.

### **OPTIONS REVIEWED**

The committee reviewed several uses for the building. These included:

- Mid-Priced Senior Housing (15 to 20 units)
- Higher Priced Housing (15 to 20 units)
- Higher Priced Housing including development of ball fields (35 to 50 units)
- Town Offices
- Arts / Non Profit Use (Leasing to third party)
- Historic footprint (retain original 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of building only)
- Library
- Demolition

Each option was evaluated and there are details, assumptions, and evaluations for each. In summary though, the Committee found that the more viable options included:

- Leasing the space to non-profit / arts use
  - Agreement would be structured where the organization would pay for the building capital improvements. Additionally the town would receive annual lease revenue.
  - This option preserves the fields, retains Town ownership of the building and injects activity and economic stimulus to the area.
- Higher Price Housing
  - This option is for the sale of the current parcel to create higher priced housing (if the development of ball fields is included). This option appears to have a net positive economic benefit.
  - The downside is that the Town loses ownership of the property and should consider the impact to the Town Green.
- Town Use
  - This is a reasonable alternative with capital costs offset by development of current Town Campus (excluding the Police Station) for senior and higher priced housing. Depending upon the development of the Town Campus, this option may have the strongest economic benefit for the Town.
  - This would require a long-term plan to develop the Town Campus area. This is more complicated given the planning for multiple parcels.





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The Committee also felt that less viable options were:

- Library
  - The Committee met several times with representatives from the Library. Although the size of Academy was a positive, the costs of renovations appear higher than expansion of the existing historic facility that was designed as a library. Additionally, if the move occurred, we would still be faced with the same issue - what to do with the vacated Library building. We concluded that the feasibility for the Library to move to Academy appears not to make programmatic nor economic sense.
- Mid-Priced Housing
  - The use for mid-priced housing also appears difficult economically. It appears that the revenue from the sale of approximately 15 apartments at \$200-\$250 thousand is \$3.7 million, while the costs of repairs and renovations will be \$5 million +. Unless there is some form of subsidy to the capital costs, the Committee does not see the feasibility of this option.

What has struck the Committee though, is the true economic impact of these options. The Committee estimates that the potential tax revenue would range from approximately \$100 thousand to \$500 thousand (excluding the added value from development of the Town Campus). At the high end, the best economic option would only generate less than 0.7% (seven tenths of one percent) impact to the Town budget. In other words, the best option would create an offset of less than a penny to each budget dollar.

The economic analysis suggested that the fundamental question is not financial but rather Town ownership of the land. In other words, if there was a development of the Academy School site, the land would be lost forever. The Committee asks - ***is selling the property the right long term decision for the Town?*** The Committee felt compelled to ask this question to avoid the potential issue of selling the property and then reacquiring it in the future at a significantly higher cost.

### **ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE**

Given the historical review and significance of the Academy School site to the Madison Town Green, the Committee also assembled an alternative option that takes a long-term view of the Town needs, history, and vision of the downtown area. Madison will be celebrating its bicentennial in 2026. Over these next 14 years, there is the time to have a paced plan implemented that sets forth a vision of the future that honors the past for the Town Green's original design intents – “on the common was usually to be seen a church, a school, and a town hall.” It is also interesting to note that Col. Vincent M. Wilcox, who was a





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generous contributor to the Memorial Hall Fund, had “wished the memorial to be a monument, feeling, perhaps that a monument retains its identity while a building becomes in time, just another building.”<sup>7</sup>

The alternative would be to adopt a long-term plan to:

1. Bring Town government back to the Green in a renovated Academy Building. This would provide the additional town office space that is now needed. It would also bring an economic stimulus to the downtown business district.
2. Renovate the gymnasium for recreation, wellness and learning. This concept also ties in nicely with the recently completed senior center on Bradley Road. This renovation also limits the growth of government space to less than 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of the building
3. Restore Memorial Town Hall to its original grandeur, a monument to those who have served our country and a fitting memorial to 9/11, Iraq and Afghanistan
4. Develop the Town Campus for mixed housing for seniors, and higher priced housing. This site could also be evaluated for the commercial / clean industry value.

If the concept of moving the Town Campus to Academy and redeveloping the Town campus is considered, a feasibility study for the development of the Town Campus will need to be completed. We suspect that mixed middle and higher income housing would generate 120 to 150 units and tax revenues well over \$1 million. A clean industry impact is not known, but also should be evaluated. Additionally, the costs of renovating Memorial Town Hall would need to be estimated. The goal in the plan would be to have the revenue from the sale of the Town Campus and subsequent tax revenue exceed the costs of the move, renovation of Academy, and the renovation of Memorial Town Hall.

### **CORE DISCUSSION ISSUES**

The Academy Ad Hoc Investigation Committee will be conducting public hearings in September and October 2012 to collect community input as to the pros and cons of the most viable options under consideration. These discussions will provide guidance to the Committee in its deliberations and its charge of making a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen.

Given that the economics of any option are not sufficiently compelling to drive the decision. Therefore, the first key issue is: ***should the Town should retain ownership of the site?***

If the answer is yes, then the options for evaluation would include:

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<sup>7</sup> Madison’s Heritage, “Memorial Hall” by Mary Scranton Evarts, 1950, page 41



*Town of*  
**Madison, Connecticut**  
*Ad-Hoc Academy Investigation Committee*



1. The integration of government to the green, renovation of Memorial Town Hall and release of the Town Campus site for redevelopment.
2. Entering into an Extended Use Lease (EUL) of Academy for Arts or other uses. This would be completed by issuance of a Request for Proposal (RFP).
3. Demolition of the additions to Academy and retention of the original front third of the building for town meeting space.
4. Leave the building mothballed.
5. Demolish the Academy Building.

If the decision is to sell the property, then the discussion options would be to:

1. Define if the parcel should be redefined including or excluding the playing fields.
2. Issue an RFP for a Public / Private Partnership that defines a development plan and implementation strategy that provides incentives (and penalties) for the developer to implement the accepted plan in a timely fashion.

Please join the discussion by attending the community meeting on Tuesday, September 25, 2012 at 7:00pm at Memorial Town Hall.

Thank You





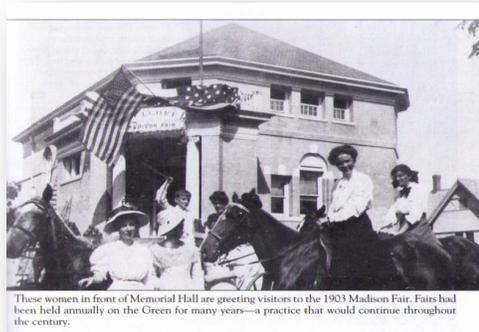
## Appendix – The Historical Perspective

To document the importance of Madison’s Town Green to the Town, we felt that a better understanding of the long-term history and use of the land from the Town Green to the downtown business district was required. Therefore, the Committee reviewed the history of the area and the Academy School as well. Our investigation involved information from the Historical Society and the books – **Madison’s Heritage**, edited by Philip Plat, Madison Historical Society, 1964, and **Madison Connecticut in the Twentieth Century**, Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives and Madison Historical Society, copyright 1998 by Warner P. Lord and Beverly J. Montgomery.

Understanding the historical evolution of the area from the Town Green to the current business district begins with the understanding of how the Green evolved. In the early 1700’s, all towns, including Madison, had a plot of land set apart as a community center or common. On this spot was usually to be seen a church, a school, and a town hall.<sup>8</sup> “The Madison Common stretched from Judd’s Hill to the road which later became the Durham Turnpike, and is now known as Academy Street. The present Square was very uneven, with sand hills and the south half and a patch of swamp on the north. The church and school were in the southeast section.”<sup>9</sup> ““Sabbath Day Houses” were allowed to be put up on the Green by individuals. These houses consisted of one or more rooms with a fireplace. Here the family would come on Sunday morning, build a fire in the fireplace, stable their horse in one room, leave their benches by the fire, fill their foot stoves with hot coals and at the beat of the drum go to the meeting houses for the 2 or more hour service. After shivering through these hours, they returned to their “Sabbath Day House,” ate their lunch, discussed the sermon, exchanged news with others, refilled their foot-stoves and went back to the Meeting House for a second sermon.”<sup>10</sup>

A vote by residents in 1842 authorized that the Sabbath Day houses be removed and that the swamp be filled in and that the Green leveled to create a public square and parade ground. Between 1842 and 1845, the houses were removed, trees were planted and a fence around the Green was erected.

The expansion of the common area of the town began in 1894 when the plans for creation of Memorial Town Hall began. Debates were between a monument and a hall. The majority favored a hall and \$5,000 was raised by subscription and \$8,000 was voted from the town



<sup>8</sup> Madison’s Heritage, “Our Beautiful Common” by Hart Lee Scranton, August 1938, page 21

<sup>9</sup> ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, page 21-22

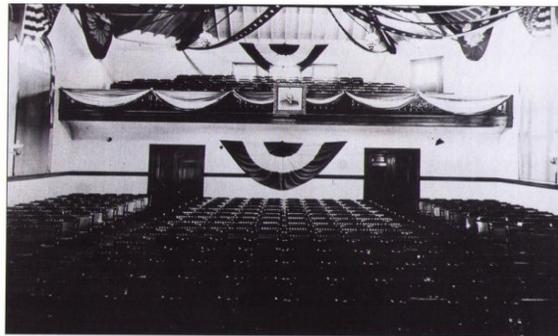


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*Ad-Hoc Academy Investigation Committee*



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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, page 41

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