

One way to save that old store

I passed by the old store on Skyline in Middlefield Center this morning. This 210-year-old relic waits patiently for the wrecker's ball and another piece of our history (and our town's soul) will disappear along with it.

I was on the committee years ago tasked with writing the store's death warrant. We were warned that we must be careful on our final store visit — as the place might collapse around us. The structure was so far gone that nothing could save it.

Yet there it beckons me today. Still proudly guarding the brow of Town Hill against our incessant wind and the 100-year-long death rattle of our ancient domain.

The Selectboard says \$120,000 is needed to take it down. There are no grants for destroying historic old buildings.

Our present museum is on the second floor of the old town hall. The stairs are long, very steep and not welcoming to elderly visitors. Perhaps 10 people a year visit on the few open weekends. The Finance Committee says \$350,000 should be budgeted to provide access to our second-floor museum.

This tired old engineer thinks a few beams and posts could be replaced and bowed walls straightened at the store for a lot less than a half a million bucks. No modernization would need be done to have our museum displays on the ground floor at the main crossroad in the most historic building in town. The rougher the interior, the more authentic it would be.

The present second-floor COA museum would now be extra storage for rotating displays at the new store museum. No public access is needed, nor additional dollars need be spent there.

All the arguments I've heard against saving the store always maximize every possible expense required to turn it into a modern, public, 365-day-a-year building. I want to know what is the minimum dollars required to preserve our heritage for the future.

The expensive pollution abatement is completed. We own the store. A fresh coat of exterior paint, a very basic electrical service, a new sign and our town center is rejuvenated for the next 50 years — and our historic volunteers have a place to play with a new canvas. Middlefield is now alive and fresh and not falling down. Symbols matter.

This would give a unique present to our descendants from both us and all the ancient people who have traveled these Middlefield trails. The gift is continuity. It would buy the time to adapt the store to the town's future unknown needs. There are grants for preserving historic buildings.

Question to the town: Does it cost less to keep the store than to tear it down?

Never a dull moment up here on the Skyline channeling George Olds and my recently departed aunt Phyllis Turner — last keeper of the store at Middlefield.

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