TMMA Warrant Information Report

Corrections to Write-up on Article 8 (b) – Visitors Center – Design Phase

$59,332 (plus $161,266 from the tax levy)

**Comment Paragraph:**

*Delete and replace with*: The design funding is a request of the Public Facilities Department, working in conjunction with the Tourism Committee. It is the Public Facilities Department that will manage this project.

**TMMA Questions:**

*Delete all answers and replace with the following:*

**Question #1:** Is there consensus on programmatic issues?

**Answer #1:** Over the last three years, the Tourism Committee has engaged a variety of stakeholders in a public process to develop consensus around the future of the Visitors Center. General public meetings were held, as well as a meeting with the business community. In addition, there have been multiple meetings between various representatives of the Tourism Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Historical Society in an attempt to bring consensus. All parties, including the Tourism Committee, agree that the primary purpose of the Visitors Center is to orient visitors regarding all that Lexington has to offer. On October 18, 2013 the Chamber of Commerce and the Tourism Committee presented the Selectmen with a joint letter (copy attached) endorsing the Revised Programmatic Report dated 6.4.2013 (<http://www.lexingtonma.gov/committees/tourism/Revised%20Visitors%20Center%20Report%206_4_2013.pdf>)

**Question #2:** What are the major conflicts?

**Answer #2:** There is a philosophical difference of opinion regarding the presence of educational or informational material within the Visitors Center, and whether an orientation room that would house the Diorama of the Battle should be created. As stewards of the Battle Green and the “Birthplace of American Liberty” the Town has an obligation to provide some level of information for visitors who cannot afford to, or who choose not to, pay an admission fee to learn our role in the formation of the country. Additionally, being in New England, enhancing our ability to provide information during inclement weather from April – October is a key reason to provide space. The fact that we have visitation year-round also means that during the cold, snow and ice, a welcoming center will provide an opportunity to orient visitors to our shops, restaurants, and cultural offerings. Goal #3 in the report referenced above addresses this point: “Promoting economic opportunities to generate income for the Town, attractions, local businesses and organizations, thereby benefitting Lexington taxpayers.”

**Question #3:** What is the impact of the Liberty Ride?

**Answer #3** -- This question has little bearing on whether or not the Visitors Center project should be completed. When the National Heritage Museum limited their open hours and re-focused their exhibits towards Freemasonry and away from American history, the Liberty Ride moved their base of operations from the Museum to the Visitors Center as a convenience to our visitors who are often in need of "facilities" after a long ride to Lexington. Although the Visitors Center has always been a well-utilized stop for the Liberty Ride, this move has had the added benefit of more riders beginning and ending their tour in Lexington Center and increasing their ease of accessing the historic homes, restaurants and shops before and after the tour.

To correct misstatements previously made in response to this question concerning visitation to Concord, a strategic decision to expand the Liberty Ride tour to include Concord was made years ago when it became clear that our visitors see Lexington and Concord as one entity and want the full story and experience of the events of April 1775. Passengers do disembark at the North Bridge in Concord but no tourism dollars are spent in Concord as a direct result of the Liberty Ride. Instead, passengers are returned to Lexington where evidence has shown that they do spend their money. There are stops at each our Lexington’s historic houses. Last year when the Liberty Ride ticket included admission to Lexington's historic houses over half of the riders visited the houses and the Liberty Ride paid $8,221 to the Lexington Historical Society for those admissions. Significant business was also generated for local restaurants with the meals tax paid to the Town of Lexington, and overnights generated additional hotel tax revenue for the Town operating budget.

**Question #4:** What is the path forward?

**Answer #4:** If Town Meeting approves the funding, a public design process would commence utilizing consulting professionals who are skilled in design for the public realm. This is similar to the process for every other construction project which the community has approved in the last 20 years including the Center Streetscape, Battle Green Master Plan, Estabrook School, the Hadley Public Facilities building, and the Community Center. Changes to the programmatic recommendations would be made as appropriate during this design phase and prior to returning to Town Meeting for construction funding.