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# Cohasset Town Hall Building Committee

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Thursday, March 2, 2023

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## Cohasset Town Hall Building Committee Shares Information Regarding Building's History



*Cohasset's Town Hall has played a major role throughout the history of Cohasset and is home to town offices and the town's famous theater. (Photo courtesy Cohasset Town Hall Building Committee)*

COHASSET — The Cohasset Town Hall Building Committee would like to share information about the history of the Cohasset Town Hall ahead of the upcoming vote on the project at the Annual Town Meeting.

"Cohasset's Town Hall has been a pillar of our community for the past 166 years and has been host to numerous integral events in our town's history," said Phil Lehr, chair of the Town Hall Building Committee. "However, like most old buildings, it's outdated and no longer meets the needs that are required of a 21st-century town hall. We hope our efforts help to revitalize and reinvigorate our Town Hall for all to enjoy for years to come."

## **History of the Town Hall Building**

Cohasset's Town Hall has played a major role throughout the history of Cohasset and is home to town offices and the town's famous theater. The original part of the building was first built in 1857 and housed the town's assembly hall and a community stage on the second floor, with town offices and a high school on the first floor.

The first renovation made on the building was in 1879 when local architect and builder E.A.P Newcomb added a front porch level. Later, a back porch level was added to the building in the mid-1880s. Then, in 1898, the Cohasset Board of Selectmen voted to construct a system of vertically piled vaults that still exist today in the northwest corner of the building on all three floors.

In 1928, the first major renovation to the original Town Hall building began. The town committee held an architectural contest and invited six architects to compete to determine who would work on the building. The winner of the contest was Charles M. Baker who was also the original architect, however, after debating over Baker's plans for the renovation, the town decided to go with architect and Cohasset resident Edward Nichols.

Nichols and his builders made many changes to the exterior of the building including new roofing and windows, as well as the interior with new flooring and a rearrangement of the town offices. At this time, the assembly hall was also moved from the second

floor to the first floor.

In the 1980s, the Board of Selectmen decided to renovate the building once again to add an addition. This addition was meant to accommodate more town offices because the original building had run out of room and many offices were located outside of the Town Hall on Elm Street. The addition cost \$1,096,450 and transformed the building into what it is today with the Town Hall Annex.

## **The Theater**

Since 1928, when the town theater was moved to the first floor of the town hall, it has been used by numerous groups, acts and performances. Two of the most famous groups who have performed in the theater include the South Shore Players and the Cohasset Drama Club.

The South Shore Players were founded in 1932 by Raymond Moore. Moore found the theater while looking for a new site and brought his shows that were also performed in Cape Cod up to the South Shore. The following year, Alexander Dean assumed management of the group and led the group to its success.

The South Shore Players put on numerous live performances in the theater featuring local writers and actors such as Humphrey Bogart, Edward Everett Horton, Arthur Treacher, Sylvia Sydney, Thornton Wilder and Sinclair Lewis.

In 1949, the Players had attracted an audience that outgrew the Town Hall, and they went on to establish a performing arts center, which eventually became the South Shore Music Circus.

The Cohasset Drama Club was founded in 1921 and is one of the oldest continuing community theaters in the country. It is popular for producing more challenging dramas along with the usual comedies and mysteries.

The Cohasset Dramatic Club continues to provide acclaimed adult performances and wonderful children's shows every year in the Cohasset Town Hall auditorium.

## **Current State of the Town Hall**

In recent years, community members have expressed concerns regarding the outdated building's safety and ability to effectively host and serve different aspects of town

government.

In order to address these complaints, the town created a committee to conduct feasibility surveys to quantify concerns about the building. Studies were conducted in 2008, 2014 and 2018 to address the lack of adequate space in the building and repair serious concerns. Some repairs were made after these studies, but the overall issues remain.

At the Annual Town Meeting (ATM) in spring 2018, residents recognized the need to address the deteriorating condition of the building and the lack of adequate office and meeting space. Approximately 75% of ATM attendees voted in favor of the building committee's plan for a restoration of the old town hall and the construction of a new annex. However, that plan depended on financing with "excluded" debt, that is, debt whose cost would be outside the operating budget for purposes of Proposition 2-1/2. In order to issue excluded debt, the town required a separate positive vote at the ballot box two weeks later. That article failed by about 30 votes, so the town started again with this committee.

Since 2018, the town has worked diligently to address the concerns at Town Hall. The Cohasset Town Hall Building Committee was reestablished in 2019 and has drafted new plans for renovations. The committee plans to propose these renovations as part of the Town Meeting Warrant at the Annual Town Meeting on May 1.

Additional details regarding the project will be shared in the weeks leading up to Annual Town Meeting. To learn more about the Cohasset Town Hall Building Committee, click [here](#).

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*(Photo courtesy Cohasset Town Hall Building Committee)*



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