

**The League of Women Voters of Needham  
Study of the Stephen Palmer Building and Site  
Consensus Report**

**The Consensus Meetings dates and attendance:**

- April 15, 2009, 9:30 am to 11:00 am at the home of Debbie Winnick: attended by 23 members of the League, 9 of whom were members of the Stephen Palmer Study Committee
- April 16, 2009, 7:30 pm to 10:30 pm at the home of Maureen McCaffrey: attended by 18 members of the League and one non-member, 7 of whom were Stephen Palmer Study Committee members

**Consensus Question 1:** The Town owns the land and Stephen Palmer Associates own the building. Should the town maintain the current status of the Stephen Palmer building and/or site or consider options?

Participants expressed consensus that options for ending the lease before 2027 should be considered while weighing the costs of options against the needs of the Town.

- The Town should explore whether Crowninshield is interested in terminating the lease prior to 2027.
- Ending the lease can be a lengthy and costly procedure, and the private nature of the business relationship between the Town and Stephen Palmer Associates must be recognized.
- Strong concern was raised that, given the current status of the building, attention needs to be paid to outstanding maintenance issues, the question of taxes and the enforcement of the lease.
- Concern was also expressed that, among other needs of the building, without significant improvements in its energy efficiency the building will not be habitable in 18 years.

**Consensus Question 2:** What options should the Town consider for the Stephen Palmer building and/or site?

Participants expressed consensus that there continues to be a need for rental housing in Needham that is affordable for seniors and others of moderate income, but that other public use options could be considered such as a school, community center, town offices, a senior center, or alternative mixed use.

- Participants assumed that the town will retain ownership of the land.
- If the site is used for housing in the future, they agreed that a private company should be the developer.
- The building itself could be retained and modernized or it could be torn down and another building constructed to make better use of the available land. Such a new building might be eligible to count toward the town's quota of affordable housing. On the other hand, saving the shell might gain "historic" building credits for a developer.
- Whatever options are considered, the welfare of the current tenants must be a priority.
- Open communication between the town government and residents is necessary during the planning process for the Stephen Palmer building and site, as well as any other town property. Needham citizens should be educated about the Stephen Palmer building and involved early in planning for its future use.

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**Concerns:**

- Need for transparency in the annual reporting required by the lease
- Maintenance of Stephen Palmer has been sub par
- Need for more affordable housing in Needham
- Needs of current tenants
- Need for more town revenue from the Stephen Palmer property
- Need for more space for town services and programs
- Need for careful analysis and monitoring in future negotiations with private developers knowing that laws and Town priorities change over time
- Need for the development of a set of principles to guide decision making including priority for maintaining Town ownership of the land, open communication in planning, careful analysis of public/private partnership, pros and cons of renovation vs. new construction, community vs. commercial use of the property, and specific standards for maintenance

**Unanswered questions:**

Should Crowninshield pay taxes to the Town on the land as well as on the building?

**Possible actions:**

- Advocate that the annual meeting between Crowninshield and the Board of Selectmen, required by the lease, be open to the public.
- Advocate that the annual financial report be made available to the public.
- Advocate that the Town Meeting approve options in the lease that give preference to Needham residents 55+ but allow other Needham residents and finally allows residents of other towns to apply.
- Advocate for public input in planning for the future use of the building and site.
- Advocate for continued careful monitoring of the lease.
- Advocate that the tenants form a tenants' association so that they have a forum for expressing concerns.
- Advocate that records from public hearings and committees be retained and be easily accessible.

**Board-approved positions to add to yearbook**

Stephen Palmer Building and Site

- Support options for ending the lease before 2027, weighing the costs of the options with the needs of the Town.
- Support the use of the Stephen Palmer building and/or site for purposes such as rental housing that is affordable for seniors and others of moderate income, school, community center, town offices, senior center, or alternative mixed use.