

# Town Hall Survey Results

Nov 18, 2024

A Town Hall Survey was distributed by the Town Hall Revitalization Committee with the intention of gathering community feedback about Pomfret's historic Town Hall building - its value in the community, functionality, desired uses, and possible areas of improvement.

**Background:** The Pomfret Town Hall has been used historically as a meeting place for Town Meetings, community dinners, and other events. The building has had some upgrades, including a new roof and windows but needs significant improvements in energy efficiency as well as ADA compliance to make it accessible to all members of the town. The Town of Pomfret was awarded a Mini Grant in June 2023 as part of the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP) to perform a feasibility study regarding ADA compliance. The Town Hall Revitalization Committee was formed to gather community feedback for the assessment, which will consider the building's existing attributes and limitations while taking into account the community's interest in the future of the Town Hall.

**Methods:** Surveys were collected through an online form sent out on the Pomfret list serv and in person at the Town Hall on Election Day and during two Town Hall Coffee Chats hosted at Abracadabra Coffee Co. and Teago General Store. Surveys were also available at the Town Offices.

**Results:** 91 surveys were collected, both online and in person. The demographic of participants ranged from newer residents of Pomfret (2 year residency) to established members of the community (up to 82 years of residency). Residency was an important factor to consider given the Town Hall building's historic use for community and private functions and to make sure our results represented the interests of Pomfret's current diverse population.

75 participants had attended Town Hall events in the past, while 13 had not. Among those who had attended Town Hall events, most have attended **Community Suppers** like the Harvest Supper, Strawberry Supper, and Empty Bowls event and **Town Meeting**, along with **Private Events** - weddings, memorials, parties, gatherings, and reunions. Other responses include Abbott Library events (puppet show); yard sales; plays, performances, and concerts; school and school functions; meetings; dances; yoga; voting and ballot counting; Boy Scout ceremonies; and art shows.

75 participants were aware that the Town Hall building was available to rent, while 13 were not aware.

The survey asked how participants would like to see the Town Hall being used in the future. Many participants wanted to see a continuation of the traditional uses of the Town Hall. The majority of responses centered around **Community Events** and **Private Events**, mentioning community suppers and potlucks, parties, wedding receptions, music/concerts, entertainment/performances, dances, farmers markets, and fitness/movement classes. Also

mentioned were Town Meetings, educational classes or lectures, community meeting space, craft shows, movies, cooking classes, etc.

When asked what improvements participants would like to see at the Town Hall, 30 participants mentioned the **Kitchen**. Comments recommended renovation or updates, modifying to a catering kitchen, building a larger modern kitchen, and restoring along with a new foundation underneath. (The kitchen currently does not have an insulated foundation underneath, requiring water to be shut off every winter.) 30 participants mentioned **Bathrooms**, requesting handicap accessibility and a couple suggestions to move the bathrooms to the front of the building. 23 participants wrote **ADA Compliance** or **Accessibility**, citing a need for handicap access with ramps and general accessibility. 17 participants would like to see **Energy Efficiency** improvements, noting heating and weatherization upgrades and year-round heating. (The building can be heated in the winter but, again, without access to water or bathrooms.) Participants also recommended year round **Availability** and simply continued **General Maintenance**. **Parking** limitations were also a concern, along with **Safety** with limited sight lines from the parking lot. 3 surveys recommended **No Changes** to the Town Hall, commenting that it is fine the way it is or not worth the expense of updates. Other mentions include a sound system, balcony usage, better seating, signage, lighting, and more easily available rental information on the Town website.

Participants were asked about the importance of three key characteristics of the building: the stage, kitchen, and availability. These are important as we consider code compliance with bathroom expansion for accessibility, accessibility improvements to the front and rear exits, kitchen safety, and constraints within the existing footprint of the building, as well as desired functionality from the community. Out of 88 responses regarding the importance of the **Stage** with a rating from 1 (being the least important) to 5 (being the most important), the majority rated between 3 and 5 (5 being the top answer with 33 ratings), indicating a general desire to maintain the stage as it is. Out of 86 responses on the importance of the **Kitchen**, 48 participants rated the kitchen at 5 (the top response), indicating a strong desire to keep the functionality of the kitchen. Participants were then asked for their views on the **Availability** of the Town Hall, rating 1 for seasonal availability in the warmer months and 5 for year round availability. The results indicated a clear need for year round availability with 53 out of 85 survey responses rated at 5.

We then asked what other characteristics of the Town Hall might be important to participants. Comments were overwhelmingly in favor of maintaining the historic character and charm of the building. Also noted were the importance of community use and availability, parking, bathrooms, affordability (for rentals), and accessibility.

88 out of 89 survey participants would like to see the Town Hall continue to be available for public use. When asked how they could see themselves using the building, 69 indicated **Private Events**, including parties, gatherings, receptions, memorials, reunions, and family events. Yoga/fitness classes were mentioned 25 times; meetings - 19 times; also, craft fairs/clubs, music/concerts, dances, community events, fundraisers, markets (farmers markets, yard sales,

flea markets), entertainment (kids' shows, movie nights, open mic night), galleries, classes, women's retreats, or not at all (1 response).

**Summary:** Overall, the survey indicated strong interest within the community to utilize the Town Hall building for community and private events, often citing a need for community and fellowship with family, friends, and neighbors. Survey responses demonstrated a need for kitchen functionality, updated bathrooms, accessibility, and year round availability to support the desired use of the building. Importantly, participants also expressed the importance of maintaining the historic character of the building with the stage as a key feature of the building's traditional uses.

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To see detailed survey results, visit:

<https://pomfretvt.us/index.php/boar/sel/committees/town-hall-revitalization-committee/>

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### **Town Hall Revitalization Committee**

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