

BY LIZZ D'ENTREMONT
Monadnock Ledger-Transcript Staff

NEW IPSWICH – With the new tax rate set at a 30 percent increase, the Select Board is weighing the option of having voters decide whether to restore or demolish the old, mold-infested police station located at the town office complex.

"I can't decide whether the building is an asset or a liability," said Selectman Bentti Hoiska, during Tuesday night's Select Board Meeting. "Flatten this building? Build another building like that out here? What would that cost?"

"I don't know, but I bet your gravestone in the front yard after the tax bill comes out," said Jim Schultz, a member of the building committee, as well as the building code enforcement officer for the town.

For some residents in town, including several that are on the building committee, the old police station, also known as Building #2, has a very special place in their hearts, because they constructed the building in the early '90's, using their own hands and their own money.

In 2006, Building #2, which also once housed SAU-63, became so contaminated with a lethal mold known as *Aspergillus Versicolor*, that the SAU moved out in August 2007, but not before having mold specialists come in and look at the building.

Since that time, the town of New Ipswich has had three environmental studies done on Building #2, including one done by Desmarais Environmental Consulting of Barrington, another by Household Environmental of Londonderry, and still another by Gordon Mycology Laboratory, Inc., of Littleton, Mass.

Although each environmental study recommended that the building be gutted down to its studs as a means of eliminating the toxic mold, no action was taken by the Select Board to move the police station, even though the police officers and their secretary were constantly complaining of ailments such as nausea and headaches.

In Sept 2008, the police department was finally given the green light to vacate the building. In fact, they were told to leave the building immediately. The police department now resides across the street from the town complex, at Town Hill.

In Aug 2008, the Select Board appointed a new building committee with the task of inspecting all of the old buildings and town properties. Special attention was to be given to the old police station.

On Tuesday night, the Building Committee presented their findings to the Select Board, but not after having a fourth environmental study done on Building #2. This environmental study contradicted all of the previous reports because it indicated the building can be saved through remediation.

"The limited cost of making the building whole again strongly recommends investing \$25,000 to return the building to a useful state," said building committee member George Slyman, who presented the committee's findings to the Select Board. "Not to mention a savings we would realize by returning the police department from a commercial building, a rented building, to its old location," he said.

The yearly rent for the police station to reside at Town Hill is \$18,000. The building committee estimates that it would cost the town about \$230,000 to \$250,000 to renovate the old police station once the mold is removed and another \$20,000 for a new telephone system, dumpster and disposal, and a security system.

"When the work is completed, the building will be up to code," said Schultz. "The police officers will be happy to work in this renovated building when it's completed."

Schultz told the Select Board that he even developed a floor plan for the renovated police station, but he did it without consulting anyone from the police department, including Police Chief Garrett Chamberlain.

"This committee should have been named the Building 2 Committee," said Chamberlain. "That was the reason why the people on it signed up. I actually take offense for the manner in which this was done. Nobody has any business laying out a floor plan for the police department."

"Bull!" said Schultz. "If you got a chip on your shoulder or you got an attitude, I don't need your permission to design a floor plan."

In a telephone interview with Schultz about the floor plan, he said, "[The design] is basically a reversed foot print of what the original one was. It moves [the secretary's] office closer to the booking area where the officers bring the prisoners. The main entrance was moved into the other end of the building. That was more of a concern that the police had."

During the meeting, Chamberlain was clearly perturbed over what he believes is the building committee overstepping its bounds. Chamberlain told the Select Board that the building committee forced the door open inside Building #2 that the police had secured because confidential files were still inside and they tore up rugs without permission.

Schultz took offense. "You don't know that," said Schultz. "Stick to the facts."

In a telephone interview with Chamberlain, he said, "The building committee blamed the maintenance guy but he said he didn't do it."

Dave Persons, another resident who attended the meeting, gave his opinion of the old police station. "That thing looks like hell," he said. "As a resident of this town, I don't appreciate what the police department looks like. It looks like a disgrace."

Selectman Coffey ended the meeting by suggesting everyone calm down. "I realize there is emotion and hard feelings here," he said. "Let's put those aside. We need to learn to do this a little more cooperatively. Let's put aside the negatives and go forward."

Coffey told everyone that the Select Board would make a decision next week as to whether a warrant article about what to do with the old police station would be on the ballot next March.