

FROM: Interim Town Manager Robin Crosbie
SUBJECT: TASK FORCE
DATE: **Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) Task Force**

BACKGROUND:

In its February 1975 presentation to the Hamilton Board of Appeals in support of its application for special permit and related variances to construct married students dormitories/apartments, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary (“Seminary”), related through its representative a dedication “to become an integral part of the community family,” a commitment “to continue its cooperative relationship with the Town and its officials,” a proposal “that we make an annual gift in lieu of taxes,” and a commitment to “pay the non-resident tuition fee for each student living in the on-campus apartments who attends a public school in Hamilton.” These representations were considerations in the Board’s granting the Seminary the special permit with variances for the dormitories/apartments.

During the 43-year period following the grant of the special permit and the actual construction and occupancy of the dormitories/apartments, the Seminary continued to receive public safety, public works, and other services provided by the Town and has been regarded as part of our community; however, the Seminary’s representations regarding contribution of an annual gift in lieu of taxes and tuition payments remain unfulfilled. The Seminary’s annual contributions have averaged slightly over \$28,000, with 15 years of no payments, and a recent declining trend. Public school enrollment of the children of Seminary students appears to have fluctuated between the mid-40’s and the high 30’s. This history of annual contributions and the unreimbursed annual cost to the Town of such enrollment are inconsistent with the Seminary’s 1975 promises.

Over the years, Hamilton citizens have incurred increased tax burdens, and that trend foreseeably will continue, impacting young families who have purchased homes in the community, as well as senior citizens who have contributed much to the community and are now finding living here a material strain.

The Town acknowledges the important role the Seminary plays in education of young people and preparing them for service in communities, and the opportunities for employment the campus provides for area residents. The Town values and seeks to foster a continuing positive relationship with the Seminary, its staff and student body, and wishes to re-visit the 1975 promises. The Task Force will seek ways in which the town and the seminary can work together to the benefit of the town and its residents in a material, sustained manner and documented manner. Ample precedent exists regarding tax exempt institutions making significant contributions in lieu of property tax payments to Massachusetts municipalities.

THE CHARGE:

The Task Force will research and explore options for the Seminary to contribute to the well-being of the community and its residents. The scope will include the potential viability of physical, personnel, financial and educational assets as in-kind contributions to the community.

Specific tasks include:

1. Seek input from town departments, the school district and the community regarding potential areas of collaboration with the Seminary.
2. Research and identify potential Seminary assets that can address identified community needs and goals.
3. Establish a value for potential assets.
4. Prepare a written report to the Town Manager that includes findings, recommendations, actions to be taken and resources necessary to carry these actions forward (professional or technical assistance, for example). This report will be shared with the Board of Selectmen.
5. Provide progress reports in September and November to the Town Manager.
6. The projected completion date for submitting a report is December 31, 2018.

Members of the Task Force Team:

Citizens and Representatives of Town Boards and Committees, as selected by the Town Manager. Membership should be approximately five (5) to nine (9) individuals representing a broad range of interests and experience.

Other Details:

The Task Force will expire June 30, 2019, unless further extended by the Town Manager.

Guidelines for Task Force Teams

- All task force members are equal.
- Decisions are by consensus.
- Decisions inside the task team must also “fly” in the hierarchy of decision-making in the Town organization.
- A key role of team members is identifying and consulting with major “stakeholders” inside and outside of the organization.
- Members of the team must be committed to a shared vision and values for the organization and the community.
- A member’s worth is determined by his/her contribution to helping the team to reach the best outcome possible.
- While operating in the task team, all interactions must be based on trust.
- Members are expected to treat each other with respect.
- There will be no retribution for following these guidelines. Because a low threat, high trust climate is critical in getting candidness and promote creative problem-solving, no retribution for following these guidelines can be permitted; however, if members do not follow the guidelines, there must be consequences.
- Enforcing these guidelines is everyone’s responsibility – because everyone is equal inside the task team, everyone is responsible for making the process work.
- The task force should outline tasks, establish a schedule and make regular progress reports to the Town Manager.
- The task force will not extend beyond its allotted timeframe or task, except with the consent of the Town Manager.

Adopted August 14, 2018
Interim Town Manager