



Town of Wiscasset

Office of the Town Manager

May 27, 2021

Maine Community Foundation
245 Main St
Ellsworth, ME 04605-1613

I am writing in support of the Maine Art Gallery's application for the Belvedere Historic Preservation and Energy Efficiency Grant. The Town of Wiscasset and the Maine Art Gallery have a long and solid history together.

MAG occupies property owned by the Town known as the Academy Building or Red Brick Schoolhouse. This magnificent structure has stood the test of time for nearly 215 years. While exact dates are a little fuzzy, the Town has leased the building to MAG since sometime around 1957, 64 years in total. The terms of the lease has for a grand total of \$1.00 per year, with the understanding that MAG would be responsible for "routine" interior maintenance and normal operating expenses and the Town address major exterior repairs as budget allowed. We are now in discussions with the Select Board and Board of Trustees of the Gallery to enact a Memorandum of Understanding, which would provide the Gallery a lease in 20 year increments instead of the current 5 years and address including specific reserve funds in our annual budgets towards the buildings needs.

The building has served many purposes since its use as a school initially ended in 1923. For a time it was a "mini civic center" where community meetings were held. The Bradford-Sortwell Post 54 American Legion met there after World War I. It also served as a meeting hall for the Boys and Girls Scouts. In the 1940's it was turned briefly back into a school until 1955.

The Academy Building also holds a unique bond to the Town. The bricks it is made from were fired here in town along the shores of the Sheepscot River.

The Town of Wiscasset has several older buildings for which it is responsible. However, the Town also has a very small Public Works Department which at times struggles to keep up with all its obligations. As with most towns, we are forced to prioritize our spending to essential resources, such as the wastewater plant, roads and public safety. We devote the time and resources available to the Academy Building as we can, but it isn't always enough. In 2018 we replaced the Fire Escape at a cost of \$4,000. We perform the mowing and plowing (probable value of \$2,500 annually) and the in-kind value of the rent subsidy is approximately \$12,000 annually for a total ongoing annual value of \$15,000 of support from the town.

It will allow MAG to better focus its limited financial resources on its core mission - the preservation and advancement of the fine arts and the important educational programs that it provides to adults and children alike. This funding if granted will assist MAG to address some important exterior repairs in a timely fashion.

Thank you for your consideration

Dennis L. Simmons, MPA