

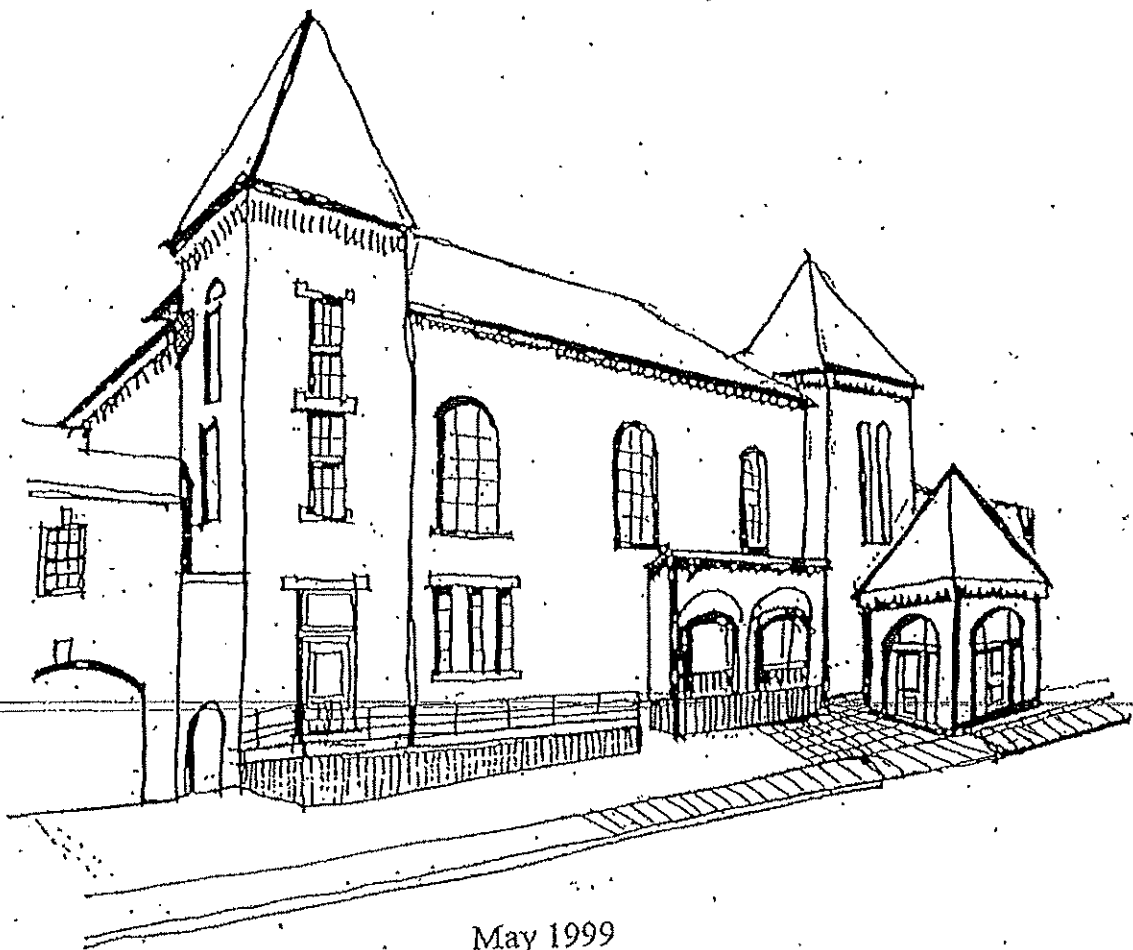
A Report On  
Town Hall Accessibility  
and Space Utilization

prepared for the  
Uxbridge Board of Selectmen

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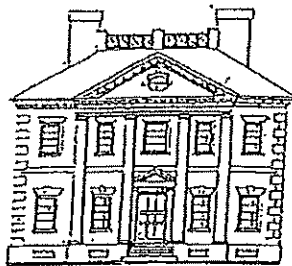
MAY 20 1999

BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
UXBRIDGE, MA



May 1999

prepared by:  
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THE  
PRESERVATION  
PARTNERSHIP

ARCHITECTURE  
PRESERVATION CONSULTING  
BUILDING CONSERVATION  
PRESERVATION PLANNING  
HISTORIC INTERIORS

MAXIMILIAN L. FERRO, FAIA

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### THE PRESERVATION PARTNERSHIP

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## A. Introduction

On September 28, 1998, the Uxbridge Board of Selectmen voted to retain The Preservation Partnership to study Town Hall Accessibility, and to also suggest ways in which current space utilization in the building can be maximized.

With the help of Administrative Assistant Raquel L. Jardin, who followed the process closely and whose assistance was of the greatest value, Mr. Ferro, our principal, studied the building carefully, and prepared as-is drawings for every floor, as none existed. Again with Ms. Jardin's help, he also spoke over many weeks to all current occupants, seeking to understand their frustrations and needs. Ideally, any work done on the structure should go beyond mandatory accessibility, preparing the building to serve the Town as well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it did throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While the building is large, and, should suffice to satisfy the Town's office needs in perpetuity, it is curiously inefficient, and difficult to make accessible because its north extension has a higher first floor level than the original building, and because the rather monumental open stairs at the center of the building effectively isolate the two halves of the second floor which are almost, but not quite at the same level.

While we believe that we have finally developed a good solution to our multiple design problems, we have found the Uxbridge Town Hall the most challenging of the three dozen town halls we have so far planned, which accounts for the long 7 ½ month period of our project. Briefly stated, our work involved relatively little field work, but a great deal of banging our collective heads against the wall.

Perhaps the greatest hurdle proved to be the great central stairway, which we were long determined to retain and restore. This enormous design element, currently occupying thousand of square feet on the three levels that it serves, was once even larger, going up in the center and then switching back on both sides, but the west switchback is now swallowed by the police chief's office. Retention of the stairs severely limited options for elevator locations to the boundary between the two first floor levels, forcing a very convoluted entrance pathway. While we solved this puzzle early in the design process by bringing a long access corridor in from the police side entrance, this "solution" was overly complex and never wholly satisfactory. The Board of Selectmen were shown slides illustrating the side entry option, but shared our misgivings.

Our current recommendation is, as we shall see below, far more direct, attractive and efficient.

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## B. Present Design Problems

### 1. First Floor

As presently configured, the Uxbridge Town Hall meets neither accessibility nor safety codes.

A long, new ramp gives access to the SE entrance on the first floor, but there is no elevator to access other floors. Present accessibility codes require a larger elevator in all multistory public buildings, and require accessibility of the Main entrance, which can now only be reached by a steep flight of eight stone steps, without the proper railings.

\* Inside, two accessible washrooms have recently been provided on the first floor, but these also no longer meet code. First, the Massachusetts Plumbing Code now requires two women's toilets for every man's (urinals count as half), and the Accessibility Code requires that doors on handicapped toilets open outward. To do this without the danger of seriously hurting passerby's requires recessed doorways.

The first floor of the building now houses the Executive and Financial offices, which is very efficient, but so much space is lost to meeting space and circulation (including the huge central stair) that current departments are shoe-horned into tiny spaces. The more important space allocations are as follows:

Town Clerk	300 sq. ft.
Treasurer/Collector	600 sq. ft.
Assessors	530 sq. ft.
Administrative Assistant and Secretary	320 sq. ft.

These small numbers are remarkable, since the first floor of Town Hall comprises over 7,500 square feet, most of them wasted. While the Assessor's Department did not complain, both Town Clerk and Treasurer/Collector were obviously in dire straits and even the once-magnificent Selectmen's Meeting Room has had to be carved up for computer space. The other large Meeting Room has been carved up to provide another room for the Police Department and a room for the copier, and also acts as a corridor to the new washrooms. When this room is in use, anyone going to the bathroom does so with a large audience. In the case of a handicapped person, whose door opening/entering process is long, use of these washrooms would be demeaning enough to justify legal action. Fortunately, it was immediately apparent that making a great hall on the second floor accessible would make this first floor Meeting Room redundant, allowing us to use the space more efficiently.

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## 2. Second Floor

On the Second Floor, 3,900 square feet are occupied by the inaccessible and unusable Great Hall, 1,000 more by the stair hall, and only 2,100 square feet are available for offices, including circulation. Since the second floor offers 7,000 square feet, offices, corridors and washrooms eat up another 600 square feet, efficiency is a truly incredible 21.4%!! Obviously, the key to major improvement is to put the Great Hall into gainful use, and thus free up the Meeting Room on the first floor to resolve the financial department crunch. The usable part of the second floor has no safe means of egress, and could be condemned at any time. On one side there is the huge open stairwell which would fill with smoke immediately, and the only alternative is an open door escape, no longer legal and usually treacherous in icy winter weather. The Great Hall has stairs on both sides, one the open one and the other enclosed. One of its north pairs of doors has disappeared when that section of the former foyer was hastily made into a document storage space.

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### 3. Third Floor

A balcony space of just under 1,000 square feet is presently not used, and has no proper egress. We briefly considered solutions that would extend elevator service to this level, as well as two new means of egress, but ultimately concluded that the extra elevator stop, needing a roof penetration, would not be cost effective. Even so, the space, which is between two bearing walls, could easily be adapted to house tons of files and drawings, all conveniently retrievable and viewable in a single, well-lighted document vault.

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#### 4. Basement

The basement currently houses the police department in utter discomfort, partially (least) due to recurrent flooding. We understand that the Town expects a new Pc Station to be built in the foreseeable future, and this will free the basement level comprehensive rehabilitation. Whether the police move out or not, the moisture problem must be fixed, to avoid mounting damage to the whole structure. This be done by trenching the whole outside perimeter of the building, down to just be footing level, and then laying a "drainage composite" material against the exterior foundation wall. Drainage composites are sandwich materials which combine waterproof layer up against the wall with a honeycomb beyond, allowing groundwater to plunge down to footing level and drainage without a chance to penetrate wall. A typical installation drawing follows (SK 1).

Once all moisture is cut off by the new drainage, it will take about two years for moisture to disappear from basement walls, and basement spaces can then permanently refinished for either police or other uses . . . perhaps phasing the work over some time. Eventually, the basement could be as useful and attractive as other floors except for low levels of natural light which can be offset by generous artificial lighting levels.

Not all of the basement's 7,500 square feet can be economically reclaimed, as the original cell block is about three feet above the rest of the basement floor. We expect that, in non-police use, this area would become dead storage to avoid issues of accessibility. Our new stairs come down into the present locker room, and the elevator comes down where a washroom is now located for Emergency 911 station. Both of these functions could be relocated allowing town offices to be rehabilitated even before the police department moves.

Once served by elevator and two new stair towers, and fully finished and well-lighted the basement would be almost as useful as other floors. Some spaces, including the boiler room, incinerator, vault and compressor room might be left unchanged, and department or two might be moved down (the Veterans' Agent comes to mind). Other free space can be allocated for long term document storage for various town departments, and these rooms can be 2-hour fire rated to safeguard records. The pursuit of full state "vault" status is too expensive to be cost effective.

Someone has built a shantytown beyond the west wall of Town Hall and I could find little information other than finger-pointing at the schools. In order to trench the building's perimeter and to build the required rear stair tower these disgraceful sheds will have to be razed . . . and good riddance. The results will include a notable increase of natural light to the west windows.

I have not drawn a proposed basement plan, since I do not know whether to show continued police use for now, or new town hall allocations, which have not been discussed as yet with the Board of Selectmen.

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## C. Solutions

### 1. First Floor

All floors of a public building must have two enclosed means of egress (i.e., stairs and corridors forming a safe way out of the building). The first floor does fulfil that need with its two exterior doors, but the second and third floors do not. In fact, neither has even one enclosed egress. The front tower (Town Clerk's office) is the obvious location for an enclosed stair tower in the old building, and a similar stair tower can be built at the rear as our second egress, eliminating the need for fire escapes.

In our Proposed First Floor Plan, attached, removal of one meeting room has resulted in the following increases in space allocations:

	<u>Now</u>	<u>Proposed</u>
Town Clerk	300	750 sq. ft.
Treasurer/Collector	600	900 sq. ft.
Assessors	530	700 sq. ft.
Administrative Assistant and Secretary	320	480 sq. ft.

These increases are from a third more space (for the relatively content Assessors, to 50% more for the Treasurer/Collector, Administrative Assistant and Secretary, and 150% more space for the Town Clerk whose present need is the most urgent).

\* In addition, the Selectmen's Meeting Room is restored to its uncluttered former self. ~~Washrooms are altered to meet code~~, and counters are provided for all financial departments. These open directly onto the hallways, giving the building an open and friendlier character, and further increasing departmental space by "borrowing" waiting space in hallways. All such counter openings can be sealed in a moment by fireproof and intrusion-proof electric shutters, operating automatically in case of fire. Work stations at the counters themselves, which are 34" high as required by ADA, will save a huge amount of staff time, as clerks will no longer have to rise to address questions from the public. In Needham, where we first designed such counters, we were told that an 80% savings of staff time in the Treasurer/Collector's office was soon measured.

While a new entry door at street level could be designed to access the central stair tower and elevator, such an entry would be off-axis, and would cast a jarring note on Town Hall's wonderful East face. Our solution (already used in Sterling, where it was very successful) is to build a small entrance pavilion just off the sidewalk, with a central information kiosk, telephone, water fountains (ADA mandatory) and perhaps some outdoor benches outside its three entrances. This would not only give us an elegant lobby for Town Hall, but would surely become the meeting place in town. This pavilion will look like the top of the central tower, with a high, pyramid roof.

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## 2. Second Floor

To bring full accessibility to the Great Hall on the second floor, a number of design concerns must be addressed:

- a. The stage, if retained, must be ramped to be accessible. We recommend this, since we expect that there will be a demand for theatrical use once the Hall is accessible.
- b. The old Foyer must be fully reopened to accommodate break-out crowds during intermissions, and accessible washrooms (one toilet for men, two for women) should open directly from the Foyer. Such an arrangement permits use of the theatre after hours, when offices are locked.
- c. Two new, enclosed means of egress (stair towers) must . . . and have been provided.

The offices on the second floor are all related, belonging to DPW, Building, Conservation, Planning and the Board of Health. Our Proposed Second Floor Plan shows them sharing a general office, with counter opening onto the larger foyer, and the remaining four offices would be allocated as they are today. To provide more space, the Building Department/Conservation Commission could be assigned basement space once this level has been drained and refinished.

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### 3. Third Floor

Our best bid to alleviate second floor office crowding is the provision of a very large document archive occupying the whole former balcony of the Great Hall, direct over its Foyer. The drawing depicts a center island of back-to-back file cabinets, with a foot x 36 foot laminate top for drawing viewing, flanked by 4'-0" tall plan files on either side. With good lighting, such an archive could provide not only storage, but pleasant and even cheerful space for working with examining and discussing documents. While current documents are still better kept on the second floor, the third floor archive should greatly reduce storage requirements below, making the second floor offices more efficient and uncluttered. It should also compensate for the removal of present document storage space in the former Foyer.

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## D. Cost Estimates

Cost estimates for the work reflected on our proposed plans will vary tremendously with the way the project is structured. At one end of the scale would be a full rehabilitation of the entire building, with all-new engineering systems (HVAC, plumbing, electrical, lighting, computer wiring, fire detection and fire suppression). At the other end would be a pared-down project, aimed at meeting code at minimum possible cost.

If we begin with the full rehabilitation, its minimum cost would be as follows:

<u>Rehabilitation</u>	
Intensive, 11,400 @ \$100.00	\$1,140,000
Less Intensive, 11,800 @ \$75.00	885,000
Entrance Pavilion	100,000
Elevator	100,000
	<u>\$2,225,000</u>
10% Contingency	225,000
	<u>\$2,450,000</u>
Architect and Engineering Fees	245,000
Project Cost (no furnishings)	<u>\$2,695,000</u>

Clearly this is no small sum, but we are still under \$2.7 million for a project that would fully prepare Town Hall for the new century. Knowing something of Uxbridge budgets, however, we know that this may be simply unachievable, and the alternative might be a less ambitious series of projects as follows:

Entrance Pavilion	\$100,000
Elevator (with shaft)	150,000
New rear stair tower	75,000
New front stairs	50,000
Washroom modifications	50,000
First floor rehabilitation and department changes	100,000
Trenching and waterproofing	50,000
Second floor rehabilitation	75,000
	<u>\$650,000</u>
10% Contingency	65,000
	<u>\$715,000</u>
Architect and Engineering Fees	75,000
Project Cost (no furniture or equipment)	<u>\$790,000</u>

At first glance, the two alternatives produce much the same results in terms of code compliance and space allocation, but the huge budget difference of \$1.9 million is attributable to the comprehensive nature of full rehabilitation, versus doing only the bare minimum. Between \$790,000 and \$2,695,000 the budget can be almost any number, reflecting changing scope of work. A final budget can only be prepared after the Design Development stage, which would include all the decisions needed to

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pinpoint final scope. My estimate is that the project can be creditably completed for just under a million, reflecting a minimum scope with a few bells and whistles (carpet and new flooring in important areas, refinishing of public spaces, new historic lighting in historic spaces . . . etc.) where they give the biggest bang for the buck.

We are prepared to develop budgets further after direction from the Board of Selectmen.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Maximilian L. Ferro*

Maximilian L. Ferro, FAIA  
Principal

MLF/kfp

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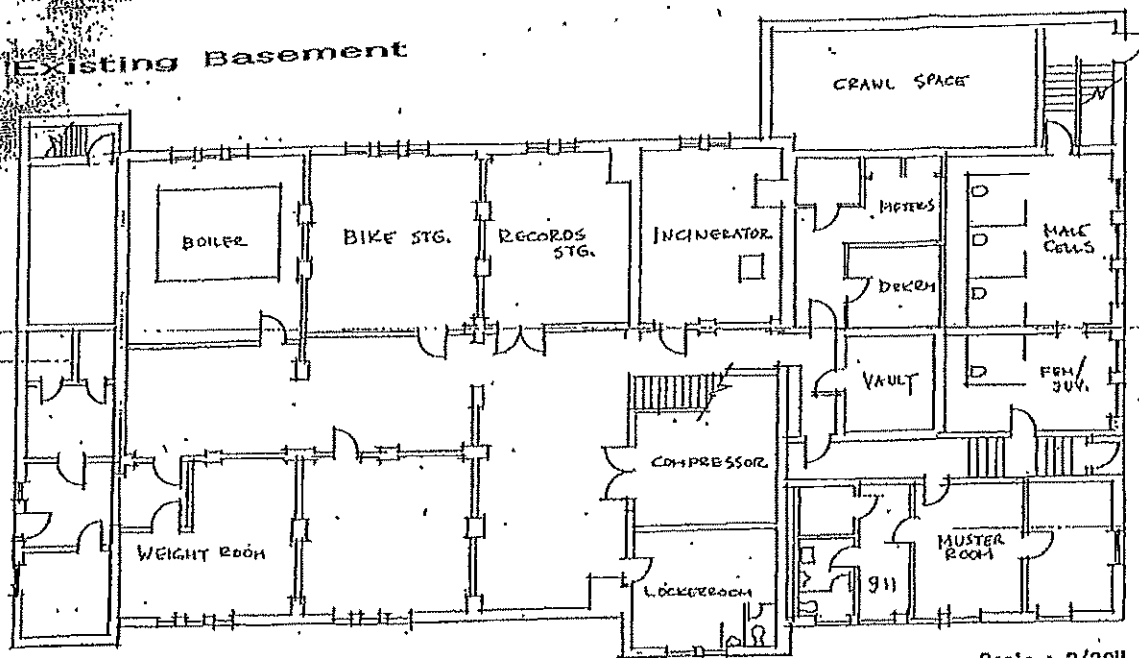
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Floor Plans -

Existing

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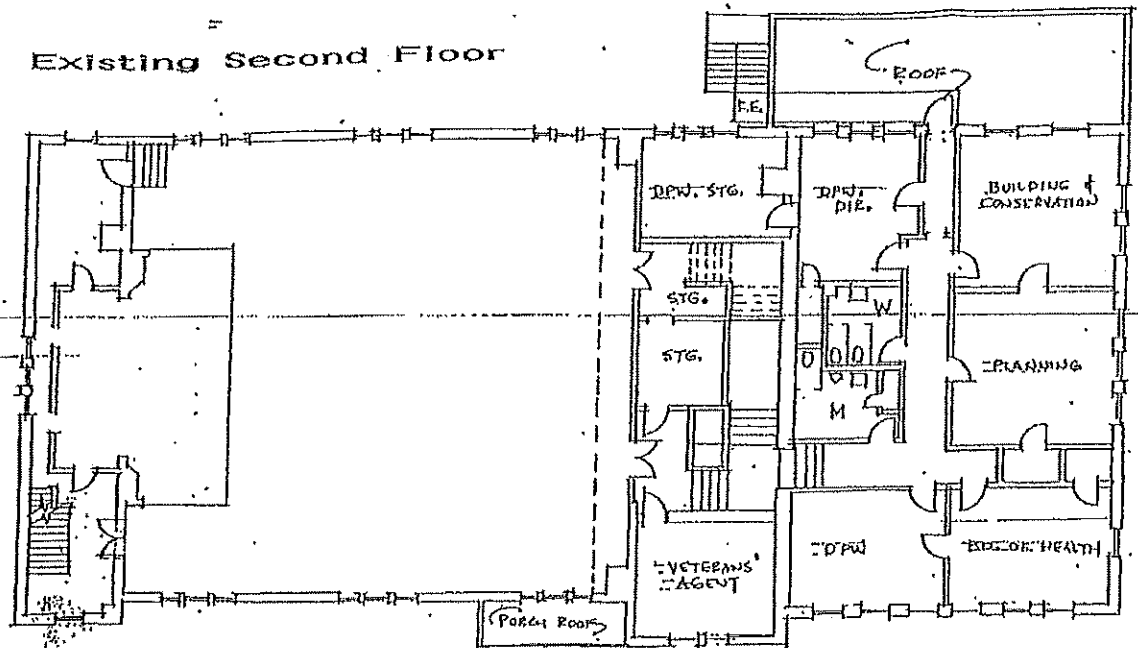
Existing Basement



Scale : 3/32"

N →

Existing Second Floor

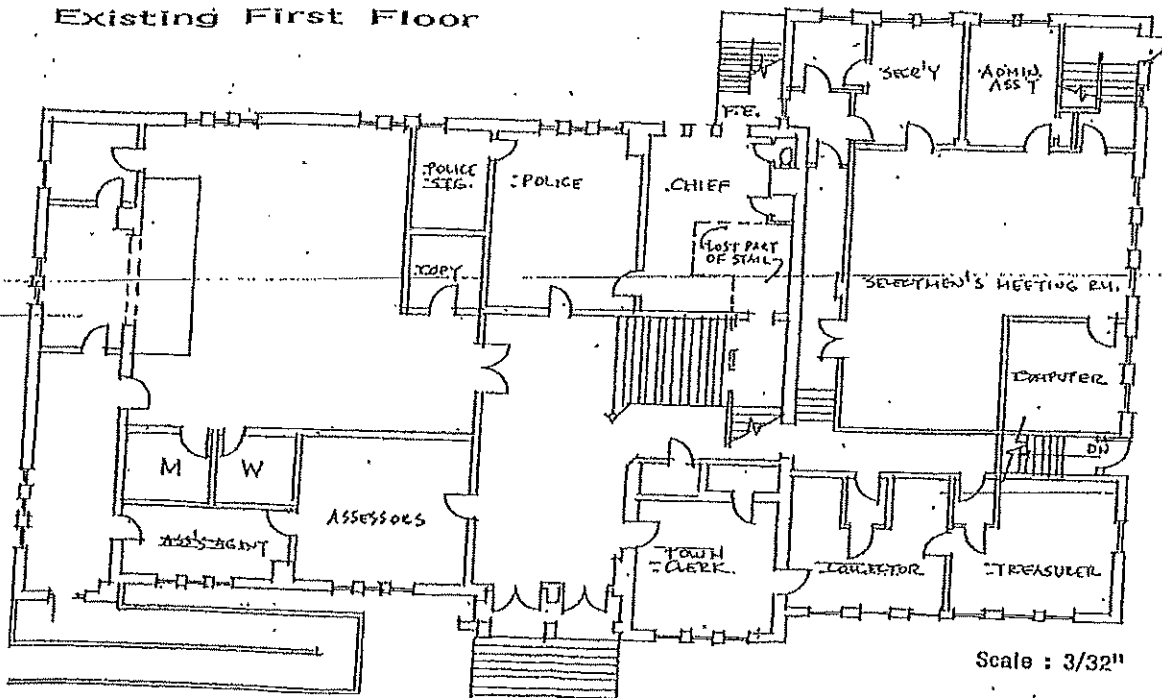


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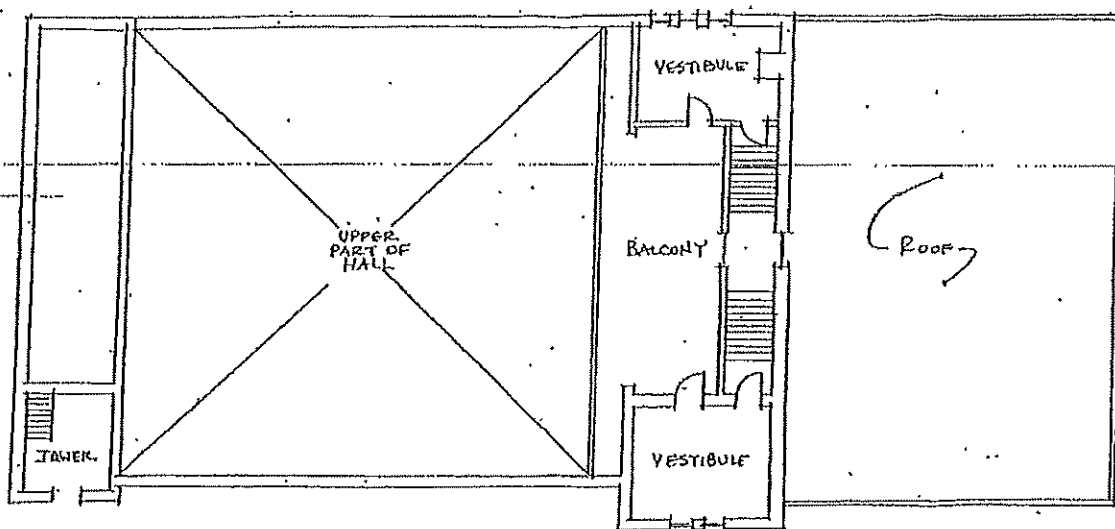
Existing First Floor



Scale : 3/32"

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Existing Third Floor



Scale : 3/32"

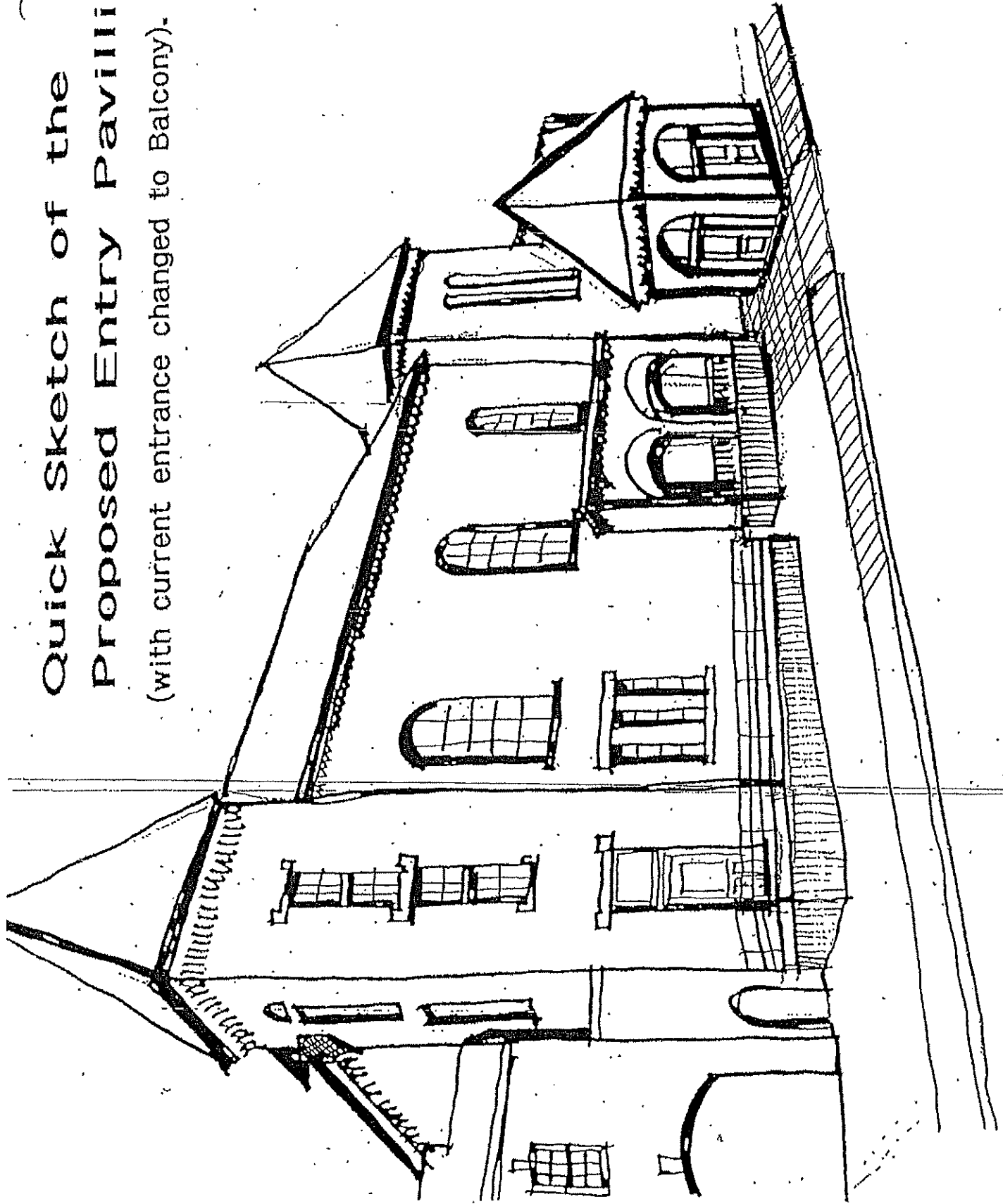
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Floor Plans -  
Proposed

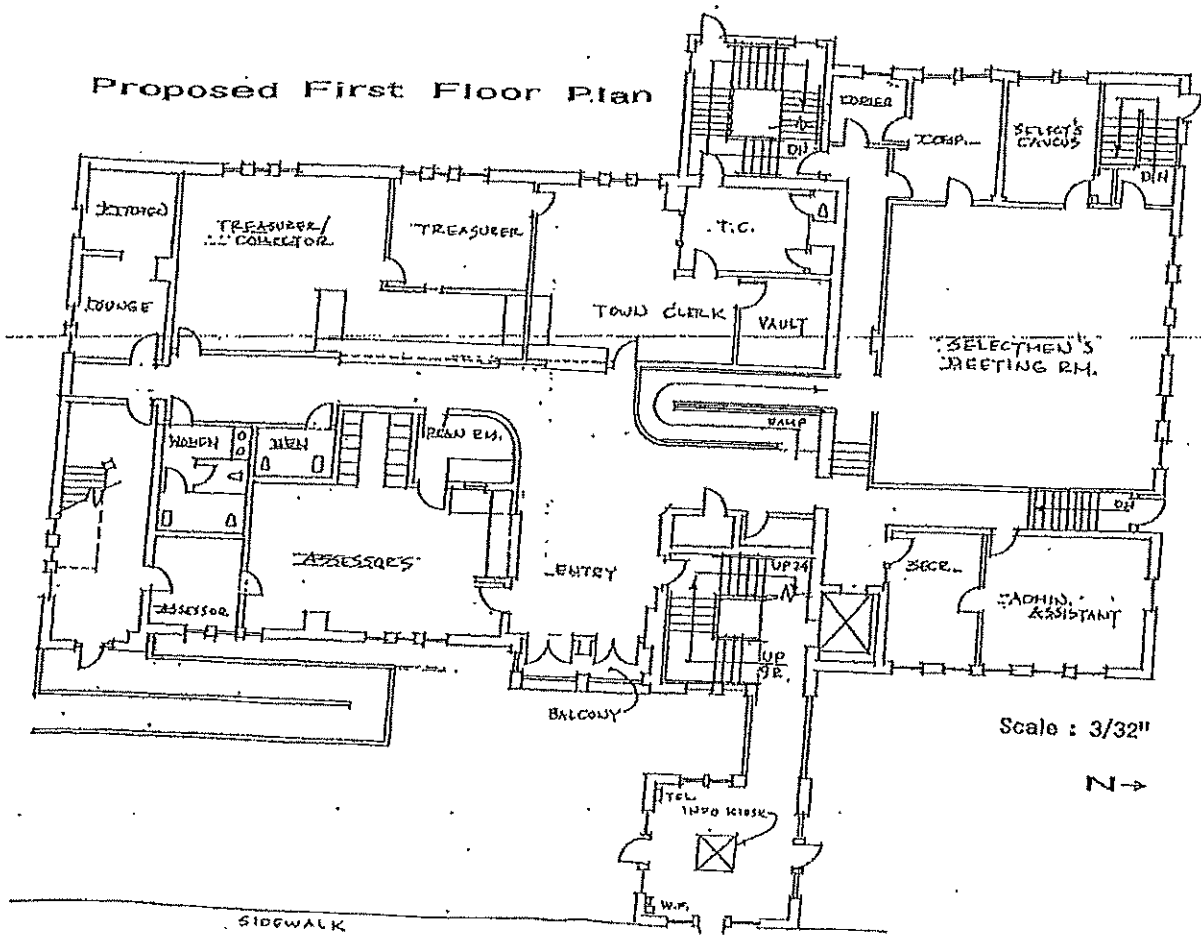
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# Quick Sketch of the Proposed Entry Pavillion,

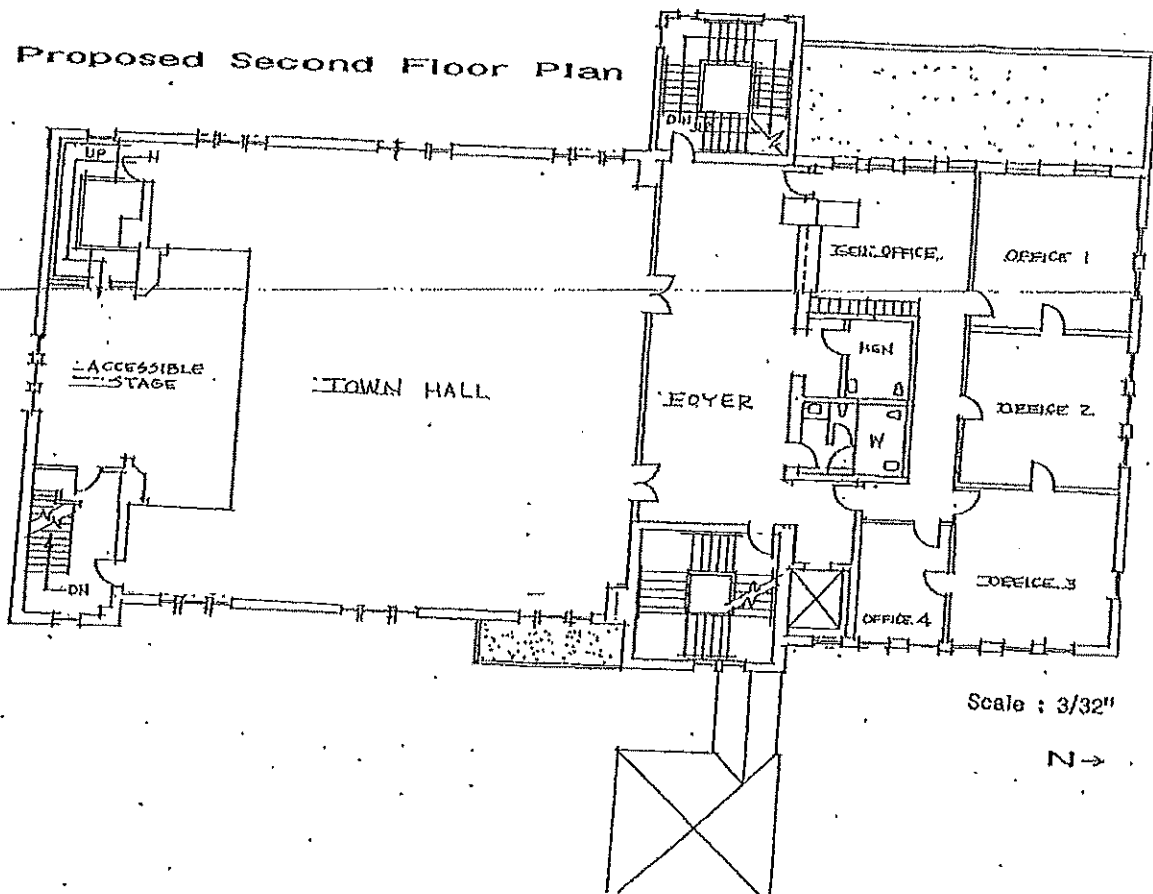
(with current entrance changed to Balcony).



# Proposed First Floor Plan



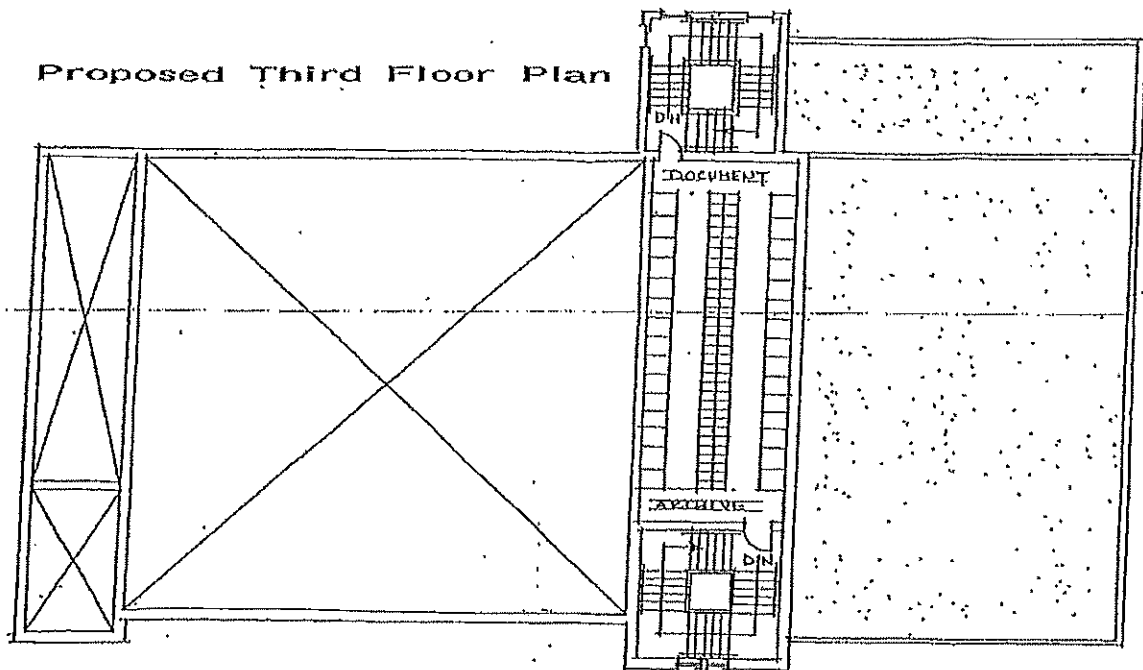
Proposed Second Floor Plan



Scale : 3/32"

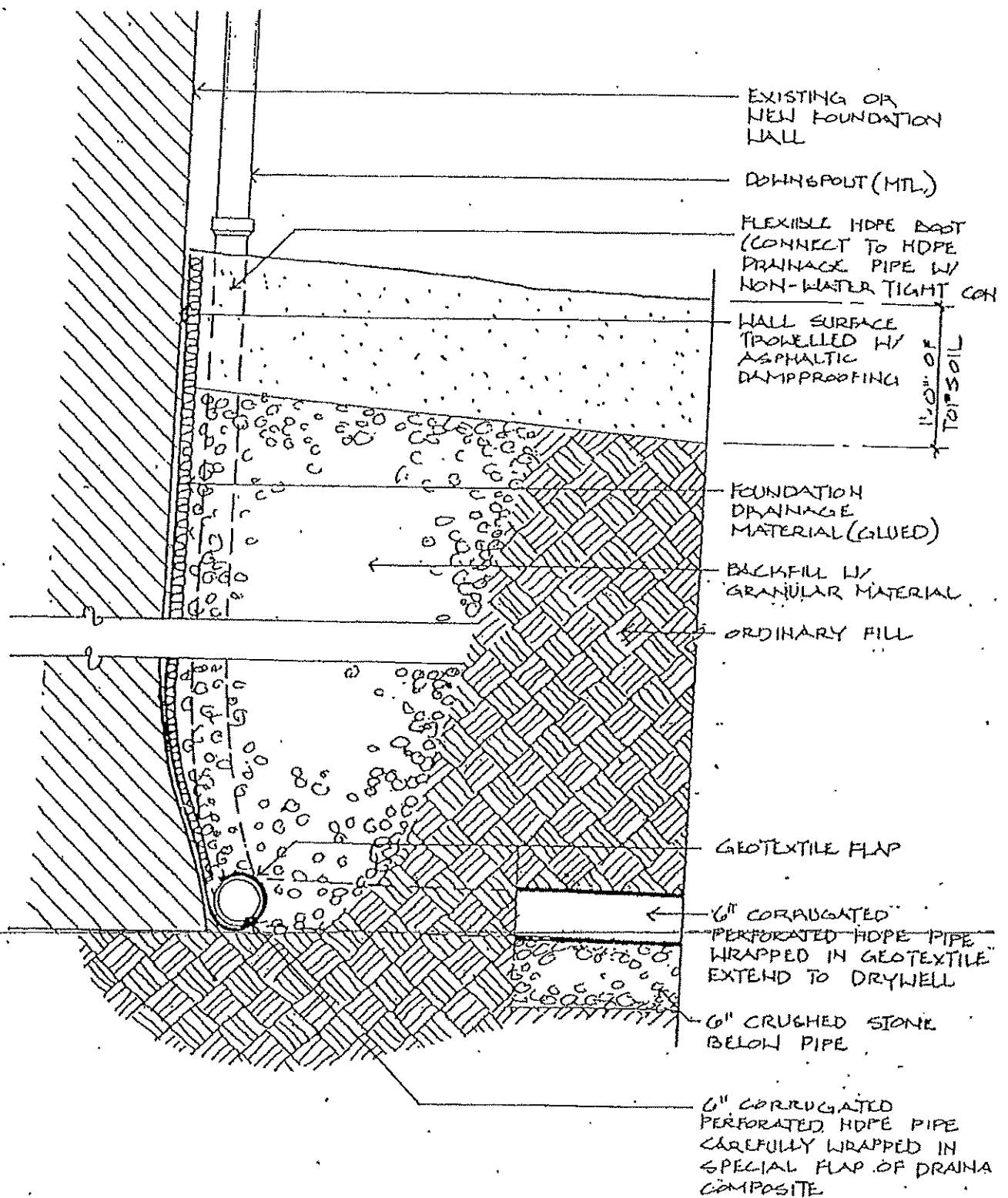
N →

Proposed Third Floor Plan



Scale : 3/32''

N →



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DATE:

SCALE: 1" = 1'-0"

FOUNDATION DRAINAGE

SK 1