

Senior Center Study Committee Final Report

April 2016

August 5, 2013 - The Board of Selectmen (BOS) vote to disband the Senior Center Building Committee and discuss the formation of a new committee with a new charge and skill set.

September 9, 2013 – Board of Selectmen develop the charge for a new committee.

October 6, 2014 –The Board of Selectmen receive a letter from the COA Board to take action on the Senior Center Study Committee (SCSC).

November 17, 2014 – Board of Selectmen vote to move forward on creating the Senior Center Study Committee which will consist of 10 members; 2 members of the COA Board, 1 member of the Board of Selectmen, the COA Director, Municipal Property Director and 5 members at Large.

January 12, February 5, and February 25 2015 – Appointments are made by the Board of Selectmen to the Senior Center Study Committee.

The charge to the SCSC from the BOS was:

“The Board of Selectmen does hereby establish a Senior Center Study Committee to evaluate options for the relocation or renovation of the Senior Center. The Committee shall determine future programmatic needs of the Senior Center and the corresponding space needs and evaluate the feasibility of renovation the current center, leasing a facility, or building a new building on Town or privately owned land”

March 11, 2015 – The SCSC has its first meeting.

Original members of the Committee; Peter Ashton, Dean Charter, Mimi Flanary, Chris Hamilton, Michelle Holmberg, Marion Maxwell, Sharon Mercurio, Franny Osman, Robert Skillen and Barbara Willson.

Michelle Holmberg resigned from the Committee. Dean Charter retired as Municipal Properties Director and was appointed as an At Large Member to replace Michelle Homberg. Andrea Ristine was appointed as the Municipal Properties Superintendent, and joined the SCSC. In late summer 2015, Chris Hamilton resigned as chairman due to work conflicts (travel) and was replaced by Dean Charter as Chair; Chris

Hamilton remained a member of the committee. In early 2016, Robert Skillen resigned from the SCSC for personal reasons. In March, 2016, Peter Ashton resigned from the SCSC because he was running for Town Moderator and wanted to avoid any possible appearance of conflict of interest.

The Committee explored regionalizing with Maynard and Boxborough but after discussion the SCSC voted unanimously to remain focused on a Senior Center located in Acton to serve Acton residents with the possibility of including other Acton human service departments.

Several sub committees and work groups met. The full committee met 17 times, presented to the Board of Selectmen 3 times, presented to the Finance Committee 2 times, and conducted 4 public forums and numerous outreach sessions.

A survey was explored extensively but later decided against.

Demographics and financial implications were updated.

The Program and Space needs groups met to evaluate needs and desires of a new space. The Town Manager would like the new building to house Human Service Departments; Nursing Services, the Veteran's Service Officer and the Community Resource Coordinator. Members met frequently with LLB architects and a preliminary design was presented.

Fundraising was explored and Senator Jamie Eldridge presented on a bill (S. 354) he has proposed which would provide 50% of the funding for Senior Center construction and expansions. It was decided that other fundraising efforts will be explored during the next phase, prior to construction.

A Site review group visited various sites including NARA, Arlington St., Mass. Ave., and Main Street.

Property on Mass Ave. owned by the Nicholsons was explored. The Nicholsons presented an option of constructing a new building which could then be leased to the Town for apx. \$20 per square foot. The Committee considered this option but felt they would rather pursue new construction on Town property. Any type of leased property would need to be done through a Request for Proposal (RFP), meaning the Nicholson's property was not guaranteed and the property plans which were shown at the time of our meeting were quite outdated.

The group felt the NARA site was a beautiful location with potential of crossover with the other recreational facilities available at NARA Park. Concerns were that this location was objected by some last time because it was felt to be on the "outskirts" and was smaller in size than last time which would leave

no room for any type of future expansion. After consulting with the Town Engineer however, the property was eliminated due to its now smaller size (appx. 2.5 acres).

The Town purchased land located on Main Street by Route 2. This parcel was also considered as a possible site. Committee members liked the location but felt the traffic issues were too much of a concern. The parcel is shaped in two lobes which was also a concern as parking would need to be further away from the building. This parcel was ruled out by the Committee for those reasons along with the fact the Selectmen plan to appoint a committee to determine the best use of the property. A similar sized building had hoped to build on that site but was turned down due to similar concerns.

The Arlington St. property is more centrally located and consists of 25 acres of Town owned property. The Town Engineer and Natural Resources Director were consulted and felt that apx. 5 acres of buildable land existed on the site. The Committee felt this would be an excellent site for a new Senior Center.

A few residents were vocal about changing the Senior Center to a community center. The Committee felt strongly that seniors should have a place of their own. Fear that the seniors' needs would be pushed aside for a population already well served in Town was mentioned. This issue seems to arise each time the Senior Center moves forward yet there has been no formal movement to define what a community center is, who would run it, what type of facilities it would have and or how it would be funded. The Committee felt clarification from the Board of Selectmen was necessary at this time. On September 28, 2015 the Board of Selectmen voted that the charge of the Committee remain the same (Senior Center only).

On January 4, 2016 the SCSC presented the preliminary drawings and plans to construct a Senior Center/ Human Services Center on Town owned property located on Arlington St. to the BOS who voted to move ahead with this project. A more detailed design for the building and site on Arlington Street was developed, and the architect was instructed to develop a detailed cost estimate. The estimate was delivered in late March, showing a full project cost of approximately 14 Million Dollars. However, by the time the estimate was delivered, the SCSC and the BOS had already decided to abandon the proposal for new construction on Arlington Street due to opposition from abutters and from environmental groups and residents in general and focus on leasing.

The Committee received support from the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee and a positive vote at April 2016 Annual Town Meeting :

Move that the Town authorize the Town Manager, with the approval of the Board of Selectmen and in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 30B, Section 16, to enter into a lease of property or a portion thereof, on such terms and conditions as they may determine, for use as a Senior Center and office space for various Town departments.

At this point the consensus of the Senior Center Study Committee is that we have fulfilled the charge from the Board of Selectmen. We have extensively investigated all options, and have successfully brought a proposal to Town Meeting that provides a way forward to develop a new and improved Senior Center. The outcome is probably not as anyone on the committee would have predicted at the beginning of the process, but it shows that this was an open process and the committee kept an open mind. As noted above, the membership is somewhat depleted, and although there is still more work to do, some different skill sets are needed. We feel that the present committee should be disbanded, and that the Selectmen should set up some sort of a successor committee to assist staff and provide public outreach and support for an eventual vote at a Special Town Meeting for lease funding. Some of the members of the present SCSC might be interested in this follow up process.

Approved by the Senior Center Study Committee April 28, 2016

Respectfully submitted, Dean A. Charter, Chair, Senior Center Study Committee