

TO: Board of Selectmen

FROM: Terri Ackerman, Town Administrator

RE: Options for Senior Center

November 20, 2008

On October 28, 2008, the COA Board was invited to a Department Head Meeting to discuss a possible new senior center.

The first discussion was over whether the building should be a Senior Center or a Community Center. Discussion points included:

- Currently, only about 13 out of 290 communities have built a Community Center versus a Senior Center (according to the EOEA).
- Upon speaking to at least one Senior Center with this model, the 2 problems were lack of room for expansion and sharing the space with kids.
- The 1835 Town Hall is currently designated as the Community Center.
- Most liked the example of the Holden Senior Center. It is a Senior Center but other town departments and other entities on off times use it. It is also a polling place.
- COA members who were present agreed that the building should be available to Town Departments on off hours.
- A Community Center might call for more staffing, scheduling and oversight.

Altogether, the consensus was that a Senior Center made more sense.

The second discussion was on whether the Senior Center should be tied to affordable housing. There are not many of these options in the state either, but the main problem has been that people who live in the affordable housing feel that the space is theirs and are not welcoming to other people in the community.

COA Director Karen Phillips presented a historical overview, of which sites have been considered so far (Please see attached). Next, pros and cons of several sites were discussed:

- Twin Oaks - Discussed in Detail-see chart on next page
- Sterling Inn - Discussed in Detail-see chart on next page
- Land behind Butterick Building - Discussed in Detail-see chart on next page
- 4 Acres Restaurant site - Discussed in Detail-see chart on next page
- Land at corner of Route 12 and Chocksett Road - After discussion, this option was eliminated
- Area behind Police Department - After discussion, this option was eliminated
- Hebert Building - After discussion, this option was eliminated

Historical Overview of Work Performed to Date on New Senior Center

Presented by Karen Phillips, COA Director

October 28, 2008

The feasibility study was started in 2003.

\$20,000 was appropriated at the annual town meeting May 16, 2005. (The COA asked for \$40,000 but was cut to \$20,000)

The town entered into an agreement with MRPC for the completion of a senior center feasibility study.

In the fall of 2005, a questionnaire was sent to all Sterling residents over 60 years old. We never received the written results of this survey.

MRPC attended Selectmen's meeting March 2006 because 3 sites were needed and none were being offered. At the meeting, Twin Oaks, the railroad bed off 62, and the land behind Clinton Savings Bank were discussed. MRPC, along with myself and Clare Fisher drove around looking at these sites. MRPC dismissed Twin Oaks, as they stated the building would have to be torn down and rebuilt, which they felt was cost prohibitive. The railroad bed looked good, but after further investigation it was revealed that someone else owned some of the property. The land behind Clinton Savings Bank was found to be less land than previously thought and too small to build anything.

Then Tim Bragan approached us about the Old Church. This appeared to be a win-win situation, as the building is an eye sore and would look better if owned by the town.

Since no other sites were available, MRPC put out a bid for architects to look at the Old Church and to draw a free standing site. There was not a lot of money for the architects.

The architects looked at the Old Church. While this was happening, the Sterling Inn went on the market (January 2007). It was decided to look at the Sterling Inn for a center. At the annual town meeting in May 2007, an extra \$4,000 was appropriated for the architects to look at the Inn. The contract was amended for the Inn rather than a free standing site.

In June 2007, the architects turned in the study to the town. They did a beautiful job and felt that both sites, the Old Church and the Inn, would both be feasible for a new center.

In July 2007, the architects were asked to come to a Selectmen's meeting to talk about the study. They did a good job explaining the pros and cons of the 2 sites. The selectmen did not like the idea of the Old Church, mostly due to parking issues and septic concerns. The Inn was discussed at length. The major issues surrounded the cost of maintaining the building, as well as some people wanting the building to remain as an Inn. At the meeting, Ms. Peeso offered her property on School Street to sell to the town for a senior center. After a preliminary look, there were 3 potential problems: 1) the building would be close to wetlands; 2) there was no way to accommodate enough parking; 3) there were major septic issues.

In January 2008, Ron Picchieri approached the COA about building a senior center on his property on Worcester Road. He was going to build and rent some space to the senior center. After several discussions, the COA voted in February 2008 not to go further with this site.

The COA board did ask the Selectmen about the land behind the tennis courts. We never received an answer.

BNUC approached the board in May of 2008, suggesting renting the Hope Chapel. When called by the COA, the church knew nothing of this suggestion and stated that the building is in use all of the time.