

Initial Needs Assessment for an Intergenerational Community Center

Produced by the Community Center Committee, February 2018

Introduction and Background

Currently, the West Newbury Senior Center is overflowing to accommodate the needs and demands of its growing population of elders. By 2035, the number of people in West Newbury aged 60 years and older is projected to nearly double, from 830 to 1512, and the number of individuals aged 19 or less will halve, from 1217 to 686.¹ The inadequate space and facilities are preventing the Senior Center from maximizing its potential for the town's aging residents and their immediate/extended families. Additionally, there are a number of other age groups and organizations in town that need a place to meet. As a result, in January 2016, the West Newbury Board of Selectmen approved that an intergenerational Community Center Committee (CCC) be formed.

The mission of the Community Center Committee is to study the feasibility and potential sites of an intergenerational community center for the Town of West Newbury, Mass., develop plans for such a facility, and come before Town Meeting with a request to fund this venture. What follows is an initial needs assessment of the town and Senior Center that the CCC will use to inform its mission and the town.

Methods

Data Collection

The CCC used a mixed methods approach to this initial needs assessment:

Focus Group. The CCC convened a Focus Group over two 90 minute public meetings in September and November 2016. The focus group was conducted by Mary Behrle, Independent Library Consultant, Beverly Public Library Trustee, and former Assistant Director of the Northeast Massachusetts Regional Library System. In the first session, Ms. Behrle conducted a S.O.A.R. (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) analysis. S.O.A.R. is a evidence-based brainstorming exercise that brings stakeholders together to recognize the potential of an organization (West Newbury) and create a shared vision for the future (intergenerational community center). In the second session, Ms. Behrle conducted a group discussion using The World Cafe. The World Cafe is a collaborative meeting strategy that encourages everyone's contribution, connects diverse perspectives, and shares collective discoveries.

The Focus Group comprised members of the CCC: Marge Peterson, Mary Harada, Dick Cushing, Joel Grossman, Vanessa Graham, Jill Eichorst, Susan Babb, Theresa Woodbury, Noah Elias-Gray, and Nick Murphy. Also in attendance were: Gail DiNaro, Lisa Holmes, Erin Antonopoulos, Tom Flaherty, Geraldine Vanderhoff, Lucile Waehling, Carol Toleos (Admin), and Jen Solis (*The Daily News*).

¹ <http://pep.donahue-institute.org/>

En totale, attendees represented: Council on Aging, Friends of the Council on Aging, G.A.R. Memorial Library, youth, youth sports, Parks & Recreation Committee, PTO, Girl/Boy Scouts, Youth League, Pentucket Arts Foundation, Garden Club and law enforcement.

Secondary Data Analysis. The CCC conducted two secondary data analyses:

1. The Open Space Committee shared the data from its 2016 Survey of 322 individuals that live in West Newbury. The CCC pulled those questions that may be relevant to the our work.
2. In addition, the Senior Center shared its data from its FY16 Annual Report.

Interview. The CCC interviewed Theresa I. Woodbury, Council on Aging Director, annually from 2016 - 2018 (three times), for supplementary information about the needs and demands of the Senior Center.

Town Property of Interest Inventory. The CCC inventoried the unused/underutilized properties with input from the Open Space Committee, the Open Space 2016 Survey, and the Parks & Recreation Committee. We looked at: The Annex at the Town Offices, St. John's Hall, Town Hall (across from Library) and the barn at Page School. We also looked at the following land: Mullen, Dunn, Main Street near Page school, and The Grange.

Strengths and Limitations.

This initial needs assessment benefited from using data from multiple sources. The Focus Group included many community stakeholders who represented a variety of groups and their respective interests. The secondary data analysis from the Open Space Committee 2016 Survey allowed us to increase the number of people and groups from which we heard, as well as hear preliminary thoughts about recreational and fitness facilities. The Senior Center secondary data analysis provided insight into the many services that the Commonwealth asks the Council on Aging to report annually. While this data was informative, in no way does it represent the hours and resources that are devoted to services that the Council on Aging is not asked to report (not that there are resources to collect such data). To further buttress the Senior Center data, the CCC interviewed the Council on Aging Director.

This initial needs assessment lays the foundation for a town-wide survey that the CCC looks forward to completing. We believe that will provide us with the additional information and insights that will further the success of the CCC's mission.

Key Findings

There were several key findings from the CCC's needs assessment that are detailed below.

1. *Senior Center Programming.* The Council on Aging operates the Senior Center and serves half ($n = 400$) of the town's 65+ population. There are a large number of weekly, semiweekly, monthly,

quarterly and annual activities that the Council offers, and which the Senior Center physically cannot accommodate for varying reasons:

- a. Weekly/Semiweekly:
 - Tai-Chi. 15 people served weekly. Conflicts with Meals on Wheels, which takes up most of the space presently allocated to the Senior Center
 - Zumba. 12 people served weekly. Conflicts with Meals on Wheels, which takes up most of the space presently allocated to the Senior Center
 - Meditation. 10 people served weekly. Conflicts with Meals on Wheels, which takes up most of the space presently allocated to the Senior Center
 - Yoga. 20 people served semiweekly. Conflicts with Meals on Wheels, which takes up most of the space presently allocated to the Senior Center.
 - Bocce. 12 people served weekly.
 - Art Class. 10 people served weekly. Conflicts with Meals on Wheels, which takes up most of the space presently allocated to the Senior Center
 - Pedicures. Up to seven people served weekly. Conflicts with Lunches and Meals on Wheels, which takes up most of the space presently allocated to the Senior Center
 - Lunches/Meals on Wheels. 20 people served weekly. Delivery to Groveland increases burden. These take up most of the Senior Center
 - b. Monthly:
 - Birthday Lunch. 10 people served monthly. Conflicts with Art Class
 - Birthday Series, 10 people served monthly. Conflicts with pedicures
 - c. Quarterly and Annually:
 - Early Bird Suppers. 15 people served quarterly.
 - Progressive Lunch. 40 people served quarterly.
 - Health Fair. 75 people served annually.
2. *Senior Center Building Needs.* The Senior Center does not have enough space to accommodate its current needs or its growing needs. The Council on Aging has been told it can no longer use certain rooms in the Town Offices building at 381 Main Street. As a result, Council on Aging activities are increasingly squeezed into the Senior Center, which serves as its official office, dining room, kitchen (for meal preparations), hygiene facility, craft room, and meeting space (including closed door support groups). When asked, the Council on Aging Director identified the following building needs for the Senior Center:
- One large meeting room (with capacity to host Town Meeting)
 - Full size kitchen
 - Exercise/movement space
 - Game/media room
 - Two small meeting rooms (capacity TBD)

- Bathrooms
- Support functions (i.e., computer stations)

These building needs are subject to a structural engineer assessment survey and acoustical engineer assessment.

3. *Focus Group Findings.* Two sessions with a Focus Group of community stakeholders resulted in many strategic planning ideas, which will be incorporated into a strategic plan that will be released in FY19.

The results of the S.O.A.R. (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) brainstorming exercise yielded the following:

STRENGTHS. (What is it about West Newbury that makes the community center project possible?)

- West Newbury has strong support for children at the grade school and high school levels
 - Proposals have the support of the community
 - It's smoother going in West Newbury than in some of the other communities
- The G.A.R. Memorial Library is high on the list of things that we want to take care of
- The newly-formed Friends of the Council on Aging
 - An active group
 - Raises funds
 - Recently hosted a very successful community-wide open house, "A Party with Friends," that drew all ages from across the community
- West Newbury is a very active community
- High school sports and youth sports
- West Newbury Music School
- There is a wealth of artistic, musical, and theatrical talent in West Newbury
- Community Bandstand Series
- Size of the town is an asset (active 55+ population)
- The new folks in town and those who have been here many years create a microcosm
- The G.A.R. Memorial Library is a microcosm
 - Programs
 - Art exhibit
 - Meetings
- West Newbury has an educated population
 - Residents are interested in world affairs
 - People can debate issues and still be respectful
 - They can talk about all that is going on and tackle tough subjects and come to consensus
- West Newbury has lots of outdoor recreational opportunities
 - Hiking
 - Open space
 - Greenbelt
 - Cross-country ski trails
 - 15 trails in town

- o Horse Trails & Clubs
- There is an openness to people wanting to change, but they also want to keep the quaintness of the town
- A community center gives everyone the ability to get together
- The CCC is much needed; all the groups mentioned in the resources list need a place to meet
- Community orientated
- The older adult population in the community is growing
- People care about the community and are committed to volunteerism
- Interested participants wanted to be on the CCC and some had to be turned away

OPPORTUNITIES *(Where are there potential resources and collaborators?)*

- Get the Haverhill Bank on board with us; make friends with the bank
- Make sure we get as many groups on board with us as we can
- The Pentucket Arts Foundation
- A piece of land / a central site (area behind the American Legion?)
- Making sure that we have good, positive press
 - o Open meetings
 - o Handle things properly
- Are there grants (rural grants)?
- Use the Newburyport Community Center as an example
- Gather advocates together
- Collaborate programming with the Library, the Council on Aging
- Make sure there is good communication among groups
- All ages are equal stakeholders in the community; all are part of West Newbury
- There is an overlap of needs; so many groups will benefit
- A place for high school events
 - o Jazz café
 - o Dances
- Steve Hoffman's Auto School
- Educate the community about what the CCC is doing
 - o Newspaper
 - o West Newbury website/social media/newsletter/mailing
- Use the CCC survey to inform people

ASPIRATIONS *(What would you like to see at the end of this project?)*

- A place
- Stage
- Music
- Continuing education
- Pool
- Good kitchen
 - o Teach cooking
 - o Snack bar
- Plenty of accessible parking
- Place to tutor
- Area for exhibits
- Space for events like family reunions

- Moveable walls
- Wi-fi / technology
- Retractable screen to show movies
- Welcoming to all ages
- Gym-type room for winter activities, exercise, sports
- Health component
- Private rooms
- Indoor track
- Outdoor bocce
- Pickleball
- Meeting space big enough for Town Meeting where everyone can hear
- Kennebunk has outdoor space that can be a Farmers' Market in summer and an ice skating rink in the winter

RESULTS *(How will you measure your success?)*

- People won't leave
- At the groundbreaking
- Use benchmarks to measure the project
- People are using the space
- People are supporting it financially
- There is a full parking lot
- It's always busy
- It is well staffed and there is a plan to expand staff as needed
- Build in room for expansion
- It is sustainable
- It is self-funded with not many fees
- There is a plan in place for changing demographics

When discussing a town-wide survey, the general questions that were identified include:

- Who do you live with (i.e., children, elders)?
- What are your interests?
- What space is needed? How can it be used for multiple functions?
- Are you interested in adult education (i.e., cooking classes)?
- What would you like to see in a community center?
- What activities would you travel to the community center for? How often? Time of day?
- Is the location of the community center important to you?
- Are you comfortable sharing space with people in other ages groups?
- Would you support a community center via a modest tax increase?
- Are indoor vs. outdoor facilities important to you?

The Focus Group was asked to list existing resources/potential partners in the community that could help make an intergenerational community center possible. As the list grew, participants realized that all these groups need meeting/activity space and can be important advocates for the community center project.

- Garden Club
- Scouts
- Riding and Driving Club
- Youth Sports
- West Newbury Youth League
- Pentucket Youth Sports
- Cultural Council
- Pentucket Arts Foundation
- G.A.R. Memorial Library
- West Newbury PTO
- Friends of the Council on Aging
- Council on Aging
- Home schoolers
- West Newbury School of Music
- West Newbury Sister City (Dalaba, Guinea)
- The Grange
- Children's Castle
- Newburyport Mothers' Club
- Pentucket Area Early Intervention Program
- Police Department
- Fire Department
- Haverhill Bank (new to West Newbury)

4. *Open Space and Recreation Findings.* The CCC is grateful to the Open Space Committee for sharing the data from its 2016 Survey ($n = 322$). Listed below are the findings that the CCC found most relevant to our work:

- When asked to identify the recreational activities in which they or their family participate, the highest ranked activities by respondents were nature programs, followed by art/music programs and playgrounds.
- When asked how satisfied they are with recreational places for different age groups, respondents ranked that they were most satisfied with places for adults (26-64 years), followed by lower and upper elementary grades. Senior citizens (65+ years) was ranked fifth. Young adults and handicapped were ranked lowest in terms of respondent satisfaction.

Open ended questions provided additional insight. The following are quoted directly from the surveys:

- An obstacle course with various challenges (pull-ups, etc.).
- We should design and construct body weight exercise stations at appropriate places and Pipestave/HS/Riverbend etc. Low cost/low maintenance/promote healthy activities.

- Pickleball is becoming a very popular activity for seniors. Many communities are simply "relining" their tennis courts for multi-use - tennis and pickleball. Since our Pentucket tennis courts are gone, we don't even have that option.
 - There is an interest in bocce. A couple of bocce courts would be nice.
 - We need at least one more field (all-purpose) and an upper elem (GR 3-6) playground, picnic areas, tennis courts, indoor swimming pool.
 - Would like a town pool for residents. Would like an indoor sports complex (i.e. basketball court) for town. Not just use in school gym.
5. *Town Property of Interest Inventory.* The CCC inventoried the unused/underutilized properties with input from Open Space Committee, the Open Space 2016 Survey, and the Parks & Recreation Committee. We looked at: The Annex at the Town Offices, St. John's Hall, Town Hall (across from Library) and the barn at Page School. We also looked at the following land: Mullen, Dunn, Main Street near Page school, and The Grange. The building sites (land) would create too much of a financial strain with the forthcoming tear-down and renovation of the high school. Ultimately, the CCC determined that the repurposing of The Annex at the Town Offices, 381 Main Street is the most viable option for the following reasons:
- It can be repurposed so that it is still a usable space for its current activities
 - It can be repurposed so that it provides space for groups that currently needs space to meet/convene
 - It is vastly more affordable than a new construction project
 - It is central to the community
 - It has ample parking
 - It will not disrupt the current landscape of the town

Discussion

Findings from the CCC's initial needs assessment for an intergenerational community center indicates that the Senior Center is struggling to meet the current demands of the population it serves. More space is required and will continue to be required with the town's projected population trends. There is interest among people in town to increase our recreational facilities in general, enjoy more cultural activities (i.e., the arts), as well as a desire to include as many stakeholder voices as possible throughout the various stages of the planning process. Going forward, the CCC will conduct a town-wide survey when funds are available.