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Community / Senior Center Advisory Committee

Thursday, January 20, 2021 @ 6:00 PM

Board of Education Conference Room

Regular Meeting

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Audience of Citizens
4. Approval of Minutes, December 2, 2021
5. Discussion of site visit:
 - a. Windham Community Center
 - b. Rocky Hill Community/Senior Center
 - c. Meriden YMCA
6. Confirmation of future site visit:
 - a. Putnam YMCA
7. Discuss future meeting attendees and prepare questions
 - a. John Benigni, Meriden/New Britain/Berlin YMCA (February)
 - b. Tom Arcari, QA&M
8. Funding
 - a. Opportunities?
 - b. Consultant?
9. Public Outreach
10. Discuss timeline/strategy of committee
11. Open Discussion
12. Adjournment

Join Zoom Meeting

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Community / Senior Center Advisory Committee
Thursday, December 2, 2021 @ 6:00 PM
Board of Education Conference Room
Regular Meeting

1. Call to Order – Ms. Donna Bovee

Ms. Bovee called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Attendance:

Members Present: Donna Bovee, Dave Cyr, Barbara Gombatz, Tim Grady, Mike Urrunaga

Members Absent: Brenden Luddy

Staff Present: Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Jennifer Ochoa, Economic Development Coordinator James Mahoney.

Guests Present: Senator Rick Lopes, State Representative Cathy Abercrombie, State Representative Donna Veach

3. Audience of Citizens

Phyllis Norton, 36 Steepleview Dr., Berlin – Ms. Norton said there is a dire need to build this facility and would like to know what type of funding is available to the town.

Jim Norton, 36 Steepleview Dr., Berlin – Mr. Norton would also like to know if state funding or grants are available to offset the project cost.

Jim McNair, 147 Misty Mountain Rd., Berlin – Mr. McNair said the town is overdue for a new Community/Senior Center. The previous plans from years ago did not include a Senior Center. There had been a site selected, but school renovations took priority and the project did not happen.

4. Approval of Minutes, November 04, 2021

Ms. Gombatz moved to approve the November 4, 2021 Regular Meeting minutes.

Seconded by Mr. Grady

Those voting in favor: Ms. Bovee, Ms. Gombatz, Mr. Grady, Mr. Urrunaga

Mr. Cyr abstained as he was not at the November 4, 2021 meeting.

Vote being 4-0-1 (MOTION CARRIED).

5. Discussion on Grant and Funding Opportunities

- a. Jim Mahoney, Economic Development Coordinator
- b. State Representative Donna Veach
- c. State Representative Cathy Abercrombie
- d. Senator Rick Lopes

Ms. Bovee asked Economic Development Coordinator Mahoney how does the town looks for grants. Economic Development Coordinator Mahoney said the State and Federal Government issues requests for funding proposals as funding becomes available. The town monitors those requests and maintains relationships with various state agencies to get insight on potential funding for projects.

Ms. Bovee asked if anyone has been searching for available grants for this project. State Representative Veach stated that grants come out throughout the year, but what is available now, may not be available when we are ready to dig and break ground. State Representative Veach will find out if there is something available for the town to use. Currently, most of the money has been designated to Covid use, which the town could qualify for an air ventilation project in that situation. Legislative letters of support can be provided to the town, as done previously for other state and federal grants. There is money available, however the project needs to be further along before it is determined how much is available.

Ms. Bovee asked when is the appropriate time to apply for state funds as the project is currently in a conceptual design phase. The Committee is working for a November 2022 referendum and the referendum would be that the town supports the project. Sharing expected cost information with voters would be helpful; how much money is coming from State, Federal, profit foundations or non-profit entities.

State Representative Veach stated that the town can request funding or matching funding from the Majorie Moore Charitable Foundation, The Community Foundation of Greater New Britain and American Savings Foundation. It is worth asking.

State Representative Abercrombie said the project has to be shovel ready for bonding money. The town fills out a form and provides project details of how big, length of time and the contractor name. It must be shovel ready before a State Representative can attach their name to it and ask for bonding money. The Governor gave the House and Senate a certain amount of dollars to put in for projects and they are each limited to one ask. State Representative Abercrombie has already put in for a 911 dispatch center project in Meriden and won't be eligible to put in for the next round of bonding in February/March. This type of project does not qualify for grants since it is not a school project. The Meriden YMCA project received grants through local non-profits like the Lions Club, Cuno Foundation and the Liberty Foundation. It is a lot of work to get \$30 million dollars, but there are opportunities out there. The challenge is getting a few million here and there. Shovel ready stage is preferred so that money does not sit for 2 to 3 years.

Senator Lopes will add the project to the bonding priorities list and it might take a few cycles to be addressed. Also, Senator Lopes suggests breaking the project up because it makes it easier to get to shovel ready. For example, breaking the project into (3) \$10 million dollar pieces and getting (1) \$10 million dollar project to shovel ready with site acquisition, preparation and planning. That could get it in the works quickly with less wait time and brings it down to two years.

State Representative Abercrombie suggests bringing on a non-profit like the Y who is eligible for grants that the town isn't eligible for and go in on it together. The town also needs someone whose good at doing capital funding campaigns.

Economic Development Coordinator Mahoney said the Legislature has been supportive of the Town's grant applications and agrees this project is not eligible for many programs in terms of competitive grants. The project could potentially be eligible for the Community Development Block Grant Funding, for small cities it was \$6 million total. The Community Challenge Grant is a \$100 million dollar program rolled out in two grants of \$50 million dollars per round. The town is working on an application for the first round in January, but there are 50 % matching requirements and we are private sector match. We'd like to have other funding lined up for the bonding process, but for grants they want to know what money you've already committed. State Representative Abercrombie asked what agency the Community Challenge Grant money would be coming through. Economic Development Coordinator Mahoney said through the ECD. Its \$100 million dollars and 169 towns, most of the money would go to the cities and Berlin might be able to apply for 1 or 2 million dollars. The grant is for job creation, but broad enough for other eligibility. The town would be a low priority for funding this project, but we could also apply for the second round.

Private funding is another option and doing a feasibility study would identify who in the community might support the project. Naming rights and sponsors is attractive to donors. Ms. Bovee said Eversource has a big foundation. The town would likely hire an outside consultant to help and the town's Architect, Tom Arcari, confirmed that funding was not part of their scope at this point. The Committee does ask funding questions to the Community and Senior Centers they visit regarding how they funded their projects.

Mr. Cyr said he is concerned because the town needs a project planned and committed to before going out and applying for grants. Ms. Bovee added that if the Referendum is approved and the town receives approval to spend money, there are steps involved such as a detailed architecture plan and construction will start after that. It could be broken out into pieces, for example site ready and construction piece.

Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Ochoa asked if phasing in at certain levels might be more beneficial to the town. Economic Development Coordinator Mahoney said a phasing plan strategy would provide leverage for additional funding and the town could ask the architect for different phasing plans. State Representative Abercrombie said to think about using Comcast as a contributor and sit with them to find out if there is a portion they would pay. Eversource might be willing to supply some dollars to do plans and Comcast might give money to purchase the property. It is important to have a plan in place with dollars to show who the other funders are and how much the town actually needs. Also, some places will only support the project if they know you have community support and the Referendum passes.

Ms. Gombotz said funding grants is essential and its helpful to show people where the money is coming from. The Senior Center is not adequate which is why we need this building.

State Representative Veach asked how far along is the town on the needs assessment and if there is something that could be tweaked. Ms. Bovee said the Statement of Needs was presented last Fall. The tweaking of those needs might mean the town doesn't need as big of an office space for example. The conceptual design plan meets the Statement of Needs, and the town has an estimated price along with the design. The Committee has notes of things that may be changed in the design. Savings include not paying for the high school swim team to practice and compete at other facilities. The Committee plans to meet with the Architect and building commission and is looking at a November Referendum.

Ms. Gombotz added that parking for Senior's with mobility issues is not adequate and the new Senior Center would be a win for the Town of Berlin.

State Representative Abercrombie said not to start tweaking the plans yet. Leave as heavy-handed as the town wants it with the opportunity to tweak later. Also, State Representative Abercrombie offered to call Eversource and Comcast to find out if there are any grant possibilities through them and could speak to DECD Commerce about the Community Challenge Project to find out if Berlin is eligible for any funding. Follow-up details would be sent to Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Ochoa via email. Ms. Bovee said the Committee will get back to her on that offer. Mr. Urranaga asked if other corporations in the state are willing to give towards projects like this. Also, the new infrastructure bill may have something specific for funds for a community center.

Mr. Grady said he is interested in working with the Y and wants to take a good look at this option. State Representative Abercrombie added that the benefit of associating with a non-profit is they know how to do capital campaign, which is a lot of work. The town has to invest and get dollars from communities and businesses. The Y already knows how to do this and Meriden YMCA is the 3rd largest in the state. Other non-profits view working with the Y as a good thing and would be more apt to help. State Representative Veatch added that Travelers and Aetna have big foundations and its worth the ask as this project is health related.

Ms. Bovee provided some examples of what the state has given to some other towns in 2021. The Town of Berlin received \$6 million from the American Rescue Act to be used on Covid related projects and there are savings from not having to bond that money. Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Ochoa asked if the state delegates had put in for those town projects. State Representative Abercrombie said the delegation puts in for the bond request as a block and everyone is in favor for the project, but it has to be shovel ready. Senator Lopes confirmed those projects were shovel ready and put in 2 to 3 years ago on a priority list, they are receiving their money now.

Ms. Gombotz asked to confirm how the town gets to shovel ready. State Representative Abercrombie said a form needs to be filled out by the town and she will send it to Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Ochoa so the Committee can see what it looks like. The form is submitted with the bond request. Economic Development Coordinator Mahoney added that typically completed construction plans are needed.

Mr. Norton suggested the town look long term without cutting corners and do it right the first time. Otherwise it will cost more later.

Mr. Fazzino, 150 Summit Wood Dr., Berlin, asked about the Community Challenge grant and if the town would be less competitive if it also applies for a Kensington Village grant. Economic Development Coordinator Mahoney said it would be a consideration.

Ms. Gombotz said we should not scale back now on the project.

6. Discussion of site visit:

- a. Branford Community House – Site visit was held on 12/1 and attended by Ms. Bovee, Senior Center Director Doyle, Superintendent of Recreation Dennis and Chairman Luddy (see attached notes)

7. Discussion of future site visit:

- a. Windham Community Center – Site visit planned for 12/7. Attendees will include Mr. Cyr, Ms. Bovee, Chairman Luddy, Senior Center Director Doyle, Superintendent of Recreation Dennis and Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Ochoa
 - b. Others? - Newington has a new Community Center, Rocky Hill renovated their combined facility, Ridgefield is possibly still an option, a YMCA concept; either Plainville or Meriden.
Mr. Cyr added to find out if there are any newly built YMCA's in the state. The Committee could invite John Benigni, CEO, Meriden-New Britain-Berlin YMCA to discuss how the Y could fill the town's statement of needs. Jim O'Rourke CEO, Greater Waterbury YMCA was suggested by Mr. McNair. Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Ochoa will confirm if Rocky Hill Y is a combined community/senior center.
8. Discuss possible future meeting attendees:
- a. Public Building Commission
 - i. Discuss reasoning behind site chosen
 - b. Matt Ariniello, Newtown Community Center
 - i. Assist in process, pay as Consultant?
 - c. Parks and Recreation Commission, Commission on Aging
 - i. Discuss any changes to be made based on site visits
 - ii. Possible changes to Statement of Needs
 - d. Kevin Delaney, Finance Director
 - i. Financial details such as bonding, mil rate, etc.
 - e. John Benigni, Meriden, New Britain, Berlin YMCA
 - i. YMCA plan overview

Ms. Bovee suggested having a working session for the January meeting. Mr. Urrunaga agreed it would make better use of our guests time if the Committee plans ahead. Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Ochoa suggested dividing up the guest list into who we want to attend at which meeting and then creating a set list of questions to ask them. Mr. Cyr mentioned timeline and strategy is important for January. Mr. Urrunaga agrees on being strategic and ready to go when presenting to Town Council. Ms. Gombotz asked if any of the other places the Committee visited had designated Emergency Shelters, Ms. Bovee confirmed they did not. There was a brief discussion of how having a YMCA would attract people from other communities and the Seniors want it to be more for Berlin residents.

9. Adjournment

Ms. Gombotz moved to adjourn at 7:48 p.m.

Seconded by Mr. Cyr.

Those voting in favor: Ms. Bovee, Ms. Cyr, Ms. Gombotz, Mr. Grady, Mr. Urrunaga

Vote being 5-0. MOTION CARRIED

Submitted by,
Alina Brown

Brandford Community House and Canoe Brook Center

Visit – 12/1/21

Bovee notes

Background

- Population 28,000 and 8,000 seniors (28.5%) – Berlin 20,000 and 6,000 seniors (30%)
- Town has competitive pool at middle school which is open at times to public and Y (2 locations) has a pool.
- Original building 22K sq ft; addition 11k sq ft. – total 33k sq ft
- Addition completed in 2018 at a cost of \$12.125 million
- Downstairs is Community House (Parks & Rec) and upstairs is Canoe Brook Ctr (senior center)
- Gym downstairs and used by both – pickleball popular
- More of a separation of recreation and the senior center
- Follow up – Senior Ctr Director's office seems to be a good size (check sq footage for consideration of our offices) – NOTE : storage important so offices do not need to store

Positives

- Dance room for seniors – very popular – seniors like mirrors; floor has padding underneath for give
- Multipurpose rooms – one on 1st floor; one on 2nd floor – divides into 3
- Large monitors around with programs listed for day or upcoming; senior ctr has not installed them yet
- Security system connected to police dept
- Bottle fill stations
- Lower counter area at receptionist for wheelchair as well as higher counter (senior director said its required for ADA)
- Bathrooms and conference room for each staff office areas
- Fully stocked kitchen off senior multipurpose rooms
- Cabinets and sinks in most meeting rooms
- Furniture in senior ctr – very nice and local, washable chairs and Director indicated cheaper than other places (paid from endowment)
- Waverly Lounge – bar type set up with TV- allowed to serve beer and wine; provide transportation
- Senior Billard room – 2 pool tables with table top shuffleboard

Lessons learned

- Elevator in back entrance which goes up into a lounge area; cannot close off lounge area because elevator is there
- Make sure toilets are high ones! Installed lower ones and needed to replace
- Mens' urinals – do not locate near door opening!
- Automatic swipes for doors – they cut it due to budget reasons but to keep track of keys...
- No fitness area (fitness equipment) and seniors want, but no room

Branford Community House

Debbie Dennis

- Two scoreboards in the gym, on the wall, beneficial when the gym is split in half and two games are running at the same time. Just not sure about whistle and horn noises, if it is a distraction.
- I liked the electric dividers between the rooms upstairs. They folded up nicely, to the ceiling and the doorways folded towards the wall. They are sound proof and it gives the room lots of flexibility.
- I liked that many of the rooms had windows for outside views. It brightens things up and opens up the feel of the room.
- Lockdown area available in case of emergency

Branford Community Center

Tina Doyle Comments

- Front entrance for Senior Center section is not senior friendly. On a hill, with lots of stairs and long handicap ramps.
- Liked that both sets of offices P & R and Senior Center are behind receptionist/front desk.
- Liked that they had conference room
- Liked that they had a type of employee break room.
- I thought some of the space could of been better used in both sections. Seem like there was wasted space.
- Liked that they had at least one shower in rest rooms in P & R section
- Liked the cafe area in Senior Center section
- Liked that Kitchen was fully equipped with necessary appliances and equipment.
- Liked Divider in big room in Sr Ctr section and the way it folded up
- Liked the equipment (AV) in the multipurpose room for town meetings
- Thought it was very forward thinking to consider colors of floors/walls and lighting for seniors that might be visually impaired.
- Also liked that they had installed equipment for those hearing impaired.
- I liked that they had a separate exit for staff(both sections) in case they needed to get out quickly.
- Liked seating in sr center section that overlooked gym. Nice for grandparents to watch kids play without the noise. 😊
- They were not happy of placement of elevator and the heating system that was chosen.

Received on 12/9/2021
at 12:41:45 PM by Town Clerk
Kathryn J Wall

Thoughts on Rocky Hill Senior/Community Center

Debbie Dennis

I liked that all of the offices were together. The meeting rooms were nice and their multi-function room was nice. Note – the flooring they had scratched easily. Their fitness room, where the class was going on, was nice but could be a little bigger. The weight room, where the treadmills and other cardio equipment was, was too small. I like the front entrance and the coffee bar they had but I wouldn't recommend all the furniture, maybe just a few pieces, unless there was a separate entrance for the Community Center part. I liked that they had the televisions with the activities listed.

Jen Ochoa

- Loved the offices being together as your focal point as you entered – can help with directing people and even help with coverage
- Felt like lobby area was too large, would have liked to see some of that space added to rooms
- Liked the dividing of rooms
- Weight room, way too small and don't like how it is only open to seniors during the day
- Liked that it was connected to Town Hall and walkway to Library

Kevin Delaney

From: Jennifer Ochoa
Sent: Friday, December 10, 2021 8:35 AM
To: Kevin Delaney
Subject: Community Senior Center

Good morning Kevin –

The January Community Senior Center meeting they plan to talk about timeline and strategy. They are in agreement that they will not make the April referendum, however would like to try for the November one. Can you give me a breakdown like this with dates corresponding to the November referendum so I can put as part of the agenda package for the January 6th meeting? Thanks.

Suggested dates for Community / Senior Center Proposed Project

January 4, 2022 May 17	Town Council Meeting to set the Public Hearing and authorized the preparation of bond documents
January 18, 2022 June 7	Town Council Public Hearing – Can be continued to February 1 st (if need be)
February 1, 2022 June 21	Town Council adopts the ordinance
February 8, 2022 July 12	Board of Finance approves the ordinance
February 15, 2022 July 26	Town Council sends the ordinance to referendum and approves the question for the ballot
Town Council will also meet	March 1st and March 15th Sep. 6 Sep 20
Board of Finance will also meet	February 22nd and March 8th Aug 12 Sep 13 (meeting March 22 is too late no time for Council to send to referendum)

Jennifer Ochoa
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