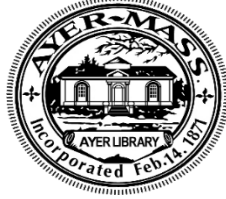


Town of Ayer



Senior Center Site Selection Working Group **Recommendation and Study Report for** **The Ayer Select Board**

March 27, 2023

Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager
Carly M. Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager
Katie Petrossi, PhD., COA/Senior Center Director
Dennis Curran, COA, President
Janine Nichipor, COA, Clerk (Resigned)
Jeff Thomas, Parks Director
Jason Mayo, Chair, Ayer Parks Commission
Dan Van Schalkwyk, P.E., DPW Director
Ken Diskin, Planning Board

Alan Manoian, Director of Community and Economic Development
Alicia Hersey, Program Manager, Community and Economic Development

Professional Consultant Services from Abacus Architects and Planners

Overview of the Goal of the Site Selection Working Group:

At the Special Fall Town Meeting on October 26, 2020, the recommendation of the “Ayer Senior Center Feasibility Study” culminating in Article 4: Acquisition of West Main Street Property for a New Senior Center which would have authorized the Town to acquire the West Main Street Property and borrow up to \$750,000 for the purposes of purchasing the land at a cost of \$670,000 with an additional \$80,000 for unseen site contingencies.

After an extensive debate, Article 4 was tabled by Town Meeting citing historic environmental concerns of the site property; cost concerns; and questions about a combined community center project or a regional project with other communities.

In an effort to keep the project moving forward, the Town Manager in consultation with the Select Board formed a Senior Center Site Selection Working Group tasked with finding a viable site recommendation for consideration by the Select Board and ultimately Town Meeting for the construction of a new Senior Center.

Composition of the Senior Center Site Selection Working Group:

The Senior Center Site Selection Working Group consisted of the following individuals:

- Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager
- Carly M. Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager
- Katie Petrossi, PhD., COA/Senior Center Director
- Dennis Curran, COA, President
- Janine Nichipor, COA, Clerk (Resigned)
- Jeff Thomas, Parks Director
- Jason Mayo, Chair, Ayer Parks Department
- Dan Van Schalkwyk, P.E., DPW Director
- Ken Diskin, Planning Board
- Alan Manoian, Director of Community and Economic Development
- Alicia Hersey, Program Manager, Community and Economic Development

Additional professional consultant services were provided by Abacus Architects and Planners, the original consultant hired for the October 2020 feasibility study.

Inherent Challenges and Obstacles for Site Selection:

- As discovered as part of the original 2020 Feasibility Study, the Town of Ayer is at an inherent disadvantage in terms of finding a viable site for a new Senior Center Project. These fundamental challenges are as follows:
- The Town is only 9 ½ square miles of which land is at a premium.
- The project requires a minimum of 1.5 to 2.0 acres of land.
- The Town does not currently own any viable municipal land for this project nor does the Town currently own any vacant municipal buildings for said project.

- Potential environmental (21 E) issues exist almost universally.
- Wetlands, ledge and other site-specific restrictions.
- Private land that may be available is costly and assumes that owners are interested and willing to sell.

Methodology of Working Group:

The Site Selection Working Group began its study with a comprehensive review of all the sites in the original 2020 Feasibility Study Report presented to Town meeting including the recommended West Main Street Site.

211 West Main Street (Recommended site to Town Meeting):

Upon further analysis of the recommended West Main Street Site there was consensus that the environmental challenges and unknowns of the site posed significant cost concerns as well as public perception concerns rendered the site problematic. The Working Group did conduct an initial Phase 1, 21 E of the site which did indicate that additional phases of the environmental analysis would be warranted but that the site could be remediated. However, costs involved to determine this as well as potential costs to remediate the site were of concern. Additionally, further environmental testing of the site would assume permission for such by the private property owner.

The West Main Street Site was not pursued further by the Working Group.

99 Fitchburg Road (Site in original Feasibility Study):

The other site extensively revisited from the original Feasibility Report was 99 Fitchburg Road (the parcel of land across the street from “Tiny’s Restaurant”). Originally one of the sites studied in the report, the site’s major challenges were encroachment of wetlands on the site as well as traffic concerns on Fitchburg Road.

The Working Group and Abacus consultants reconfigured the potential project footprint on the site as well as conducting a fair market appraisal of the property since the private property owner expressed interest in potentially selling the property. The Working Group also looked at potential ways to mitigate traffic concerns to this location.

Ultimately, the private property owner’s asking price for the land far exceeded the Town’s fair market appraisal and the private property owner indicated that they had another offer for the land. No further analysis of this location was conducted.

Various Potential Sites Located on Devens:

Given the constraints in Ayer of viable land sites, the Working Group considered looking at potential sites located on Devens. On face value, Devens does appear to have available land that would meet the projects needs without many of the spatial constraints posed by sites in Ayer. The two initial criteria for such sites were: sites in Devens that are adjacent to Ayer and sites that are easily accessible from Ayer.

Fundamental concerns raised regarding Devens sites were: 1.) Jurisdictional issues since the project would be outside of Ayer; 2.) Costs since acquisition of land would not be free; 3.) Procedural and bureaucratic matters of working with MassDevelopment; 4.) Public and psychological perceptions of the concept of travelling to Devens; 5.) Separation of the Senior Center from the rest of the Town; and 6.) Fundamental political and public concerns regarding asking Ayer taxpayers to spend millions of dollars on a project not in Ayer.

Various Devens sites looked at included:

- Grant Road, Devens
- Parcels of land off Sculley Road in Devens (behind Woo Jung Restaurant)
- Buena Vista Street (old building by Parker Charter School)
- Vicksburg Square
- Jackson Road
- Antietam Street
- Parcel of land behind United Native American Cultural Council Building

Working Group Issues Site Requests for Proposals (RFP):

The Working Group issued an RFP for potential sites on May 9, 2022. The RFP was advertised broadly on the local and state level. It was advertised on the Town's website; social media; posted on the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Compbuys site; distributed to commercial and industrial site owners by the Ayer Office of Community and Economic Development and advertised in the newspaper.

The RFP received only one formal response for a building located at 29 Buena Vista Street which was the former Learning Express Building. The building is in the portion of Devens which was historically the Town of Harvard. The building would need extensive retrofitting and was not pursued by the Working Group.

Additional Sites Considered:

- ▶ Current Senior Center Location: 18 Pond Street **TOO SMALL**
- ▶ 99 Fitchburg Road **SOLD**
- ▶ 106 Park Street **TRAFFIC CONCERNS**
- ▶ 0 Brook Street **PARCEL TOO SMALL**
- ▶ 6 Groton Road **OWNER NOT SELLING**
- ▶ 115 Washington Street **NOT AVAILABLE FOR YEARS**
- ▶ 211 West Main Street **ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**
- ▶ Federated Church Site **CHURCH/STATE; LOT SIZE; PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES**
- ▶ 0 Park Street **TRAFFIC; WETLANDS; ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**
- ▶ Bishop Road Site **TOO SMALL**
- ▶ 0 Sandy Pond Rd **OWNER NOT SELLING**
- ▶ 59 Sandy Pond Rd **SIZE; SPLIT BY WETLANDS**
- ▶ Grant Rd, Devens **PROCEDURAL AND LOCATION CONCERNS**
- ▶ McPherson Road, DPW Land **POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES CLOSE TO MOORE AIRFIELD AND REMOTE FROM CENTER OF TOWN**



The advantages to this unique location and opportunity for the Seniors, Parks Department, and Town of Ayer are as follows:

- Site affords the appropriate size for the project including parking.
- Site is Town-owned and therefore no project costs for purchasing the site.
- Site is adjacent to existing Senior Center and Senior Housing at 18 Pond Street.
- Site is accessible with a high level of walkability for Seniors and the adjacent neighborhoods.
- Site is centrally located in the Town of Ayer.
- Site provides the opportunity to further develop unique recreation programs for Seniors and the Parks Department (i.e., perimeter path; fields, playground; etc.)
- Site provides the opportunity for an indoor gym which has multipurpose use for both parks and recreation programs; as well as Senior programs. Both constituencies would be using the gym facility at alternating times with minimal scheduling issues.

The recommended location was vetted and formally approved by the Parks Commission on February 15, 2023 (unanimously) and was formally approved by the COA Board of Directors (3-1) on February 24, 2023.

Next Steps:

It is respectfully requested that the Ayer Select Board vote to endorse the further development of the Pirone Park site for the development of a "Center for Active Living".

It is respectfully requested that the Ayer Select Board vote to form an official Building Committee for the "Center for Active Living" which shall be charged with the following:

- Oversee the conceptual plan development to include extensive public outreach and participation in the conceptual design.
- Identify and secure funding for the design of the project.
- Oversee the final design of the project.
- Identify and secure funding for the construction of the project.
- Oversee the construction of the project.
- Conduct all meetings in accordance with the provisions of the Open Meeting Law (publicly posted meetings) and in accordance with the provisions of the Public Records Law (maintain and issue meeting minutes).
- Provide periodic public updates to the Select Board (and other Boards and Committees as necessary) regarding the progress of the project.
- The Building Committee shall be provided appropriate professional and administrative support from the Town Manager's Office; Town Departments; and professional consultants as warranted.

Documents Referenced:

- 2020 Senior Center Feasibility Site Study
- Site Selection Working Group RFP

Available upon request