



Town of Ayer
Senior Center/Community Center Building Committee
Ayer Town Hall - 1 Main Street
Ayer, MA
First Floor Meeting Room

Wednesday, July 26, 2023, 4:15pm In-Person and Zoom Meeting
Open Session Meeting Minutes

Committee Present: Katie Petrossi, COA Director, Chair; Ken Diskin, Vice Chair; Dan Van Schalkwyk, DPW Director; Kevin Malantic, Parks and Recreation Representative; Dennis Curran, COA Representative, Clerk; Ellen FitzPatrick; Marge Withee

Absent: Christine Logan; Carly Antonellis; Jeff Thomas

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 4:15pm by K. Petrossi who read the remote participation statement into the record

Motion: A motion was made by M. Withee and seconded by D. Curran to approve the meeting agenda.

Motion Passed 7-0

Public Input:

Nancy Jacovony (Resident at 18 Pond Street) asked when the meetings will be on television as she just happened to turn on Channel 8 and saw it but there was no schedule on television.

Cindy Knox (I.T. Director) stated that she will talk with APAC and find out.

Nancy Jacovony asked what about the Article 97 process for the project?

K. Petrossi stated that we have not officially filed for the process at this time as we are waiting to hear back from the State on their initial assessment.

N. Jacovony asked if all alternatives to Pirone Park were explored.

K. Petrossi stated that over two years have been spent looking at 14 different sites and we will get you a copy of the Site Selection Report which is also on the Town's website.

N. Jacovony stated that she feels that the project would destroy park land and is against the expressed wishes of those who originally donated the land. It is to be used for park land and we should honor the wishes of those who gave us the land. She also asked about the \$150,000 given for the project.

D. Curran stated that to be clear we were not given \$150,000 in ARPA Funds. The funds were requested and set aside for the due diligence and design for this project to bring to Town Meeting. We may not use all the funds.

N. Jacovony suggested that a survey be put out to every registered voter and not everyone has computers and that the proposed survey is too long at four pages and is counterproductive.

K. Petrossi stated the survey is intended to go out to the entire community and is designed to determine what the community's priorities are for the center.

N. Jacovony suggested that there should be an open house to discuss this, and you could use the Fire Station Sign to promote it. She also stated that we need to be looking at hiking trails, conservation trails, and the rail trail and parking facility are being underutilized. She thanked the Committee for the time to address them.

Fred Meschner (Resident) asked for clarification on the ARPA Funds purpose and if the money has not been spent yet than what is the rush?

K. Petrossi stated that the \$150,000 in ARPA funds is for the purposes of the initial design and due diligence for the proposed project at Pirone Park which will result in a detailed presentation before Town Meeting in order for Town Meeting to make an informed decision and vote.

Sara Withee (Resident) asked about the proposed timeline for this project/process.

K. Petrossi stated that the timeline has yet to be fully defined but conceptually this Committee would complete the initial design and due diligence for the project which would include public information and public outreach and then it would need to be presented to Town Meeting for their review and ultimately a vote by Town Meeting.

Cynthia LeFave (Resident) stated that looking at the proposed survey she gets the feeling it is a done deal. You should poll the people about the site. I am against building on open space and the field. The Committee needs to listen to us and our concerns. I am for the project just not the location.

Lindsey McGloughlin (Resident) asked for clarification on the Article 97 process. What if the project is shot down by the Article 97 Process.

Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager) explained that Article 97 is a process in which there are many steps and potential options depending on the specific project; its location; and other variables. It is not a simple "up or down vote". The Town is waiting for an initial assessment from the State regarding the Article 97 process for this project. Frustratingly we do not have any specifics to date.

Lindsey McGloughlin asked then why spend any money at all until Article 97 is resolved?

K. Petrossi we need to do our due diligence for which some of that includes work and preparation for Article 97 which will require the use of funds.

Lindsey McGloughlin stated that in her opinion it seems like the cart is being put before the horse.

Beth Suedmeyer (Resident) stated that she is against the use of Article 97 land for this project. We already have a lack of land and open space in Town. This project does not fit in at Pirone Park and through Article 97 we will have to acquire other land and/or pay funds. We will be losing the continuity of our park land. There is a lot of opposition to this location and the potential loss of open space and park land.

Jamie Gibbons (Resident) stated that he is a long-time resident, and he is totally not for this. He is a baseball coach and has tried to use Field 6 in the past and has been turned down. The field is used and can be used more. I am not a fan of this location for this project.

Shawn Merritt (Resident) stated that he had to pull over in his car because of the time of this meeting. He asked if the next meeting could be scheduled for later in the day. He is against building on Pirone Park. Open space benefits everyone. What is the rush to do this project?

K. Petrossi gave an overview of the timeline of the project to date which started in 2018. This has been an ongoing process since 2018 and is not being rushed. Baby Boomers are at an age where they need these services and this project and cannot wait. We are about five years behind other Towns in terms of a Senior Center and these services.

Shawn Merritt (Resident) asked for clarification that the project needed 1.5 to 2 acres of land?

K. Petrossi stated yes and that is part of the reason we need an architect. She further stated that we issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) last year and only received one response.

Shawn Merritt (Resident) stated that he knew of two potential land locations and would send to K. Petrossi.

Laurie Sabol (Resident) asked that in the discussion of other sites have we considered partnering with the Town of Shirley?

K. Petrossi stated that there is no precedent for regionalizing Senior Centers. Each Town has its own COA and Senior Center. There are significant transportation and access issues in terms of regionalizing a Senior Center.

D. Curran stated that he gave regionalization some thought. His civic responsibility is to support the Ayer COA and Ayer Seniors. We have various relationships with Shirley that have been problematic, especially in terms of funding from them. Ayer needs to provide for Ayer residents and Ayer Seniors. Shirley shot down the high school field for over three years and held Ayer hostage. The same will happen with this.

Jeanne DiSanto (Resident) stated that she had not heard about this project until last week. She is in support of the project but concerned about it being located at Pirone Park. Who will ultimately decide?

K. Petrossi stated that the Committee is charged with the initial design and due diligence for the project at Pirone Park. When that due diligence is completed, it will need to go to Town Meeting who must decide. Additionally, Town Meeting would need to authorize the funding for the project as well. The decision rests with Town Meeting.

Jeanne DiSanto (Resident) asked about whether the COA would set aside money for transportation and reconfigure the current Senior Center.

K. Petrossi stated that the current Senior Center is in two rooms on the ground floor of the Housing Authority for which we are a tenant. The current space is not conducive for expansion as well as parking concerns.

Pauline Conley (Resident) referred to the June 15 meeting minutes of the Committee and had a small change in the comments that was not added on page 4. The comments she made on page 4 were comments made at the meeting by Committee Members, it should clarify that. She stated that there should be more discussion on the project timeline. She also asked if the Committee was aware that the Regional School District is sending a letter of intent for a new elementary school. When that is constructed, Page Hilltop Elementary will be empty and the Town will have additional gyms.

D. Curran stated that he was aware of the School District's intent to build a new elementary school as he was at the Select Board when it was discussed. It is his understanding that it will be at least 7 years from now before the State would approve the elementary school project.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from June 15, 2023 and July 12, 2023:

Motion: A motion was made by D. Curran and seconded by K. Diskin to approve the June 15, 2023 meeting minutes with the amendment on Page 4 to reflect that the comments were made by Committee Members. **Motion Passed (7-0).**

Motion: A motion was made by K. Diskin and seconded by D. Curran to approve the July 12, 2023 meeting minutes. **Motion Passed (7-0).**

Update and Plan for Project Funding:

K. Petrossi advised that the Select Board has authorized up to \$150,000 in ARPA funds for the purposes of initial design and due diligence. We have solicited Catlin Architects for a proposal. They are a leading firm in the design of Senior/Community Centers. Do we want to solicit others?

E. FitzPatrick stated that we should meet with Catlin but we should solicit at least two more firms.

K. Malantic stated that he agreed.

K. Diskin stated that there are some issues with the scope of what we are looking for. The scope needs to have more detail. I could work with D. Van Schalkwyk on this so that we should have at least one more.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that he reached out to Caitlin as they had been the second choice when we did the feasibility study.

D. Curran asked if these plans would be buildable.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that enough work would be done so that we would know exactly where the building could go.

D. Curran stated that it would be best if we had more than one option. Orient the building differently so that the public can see what it looks like as well as the different options. We really should have more than one deliverable plan.

K. Diskin stated that it is important that we get the scope correct.

Update of the Article 97 Process for the Pirone Park Stie Location:

K. Petrossi stated that we are still waiting to hear back from the State on their initial guidance with respect to the Article 97 process for this project.

E. FitzPatrick stated that she will help make some calls to get an answer as she used to work with many of the individuals involved with Article 97 at the State.

E. FitzPatrick further stated that we would want potential firms to know that people are very concerned about open space; the Article 97 process; and what the building will look like.

Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager) stated that there are three fundamental issues that need to be resolved: 1.) Article 97; 2.) The use of Field 6; and 3.) The scope of the project. We are obviously waiting for more guidance on Article 97 from the State. With respect to Field 6, there is a lot of public concern about using it. Perhaps there is a way to shift the project off Field 6 and look to the west of the site to the area near the current Parks Building? The development of a defined scope for the purposes of the architect/consultant is in everyone's best interests.

E. FitzPatrick stated that additional information and resolution regarding the issues of Shirley's fields and Shirley baseball would also be helpful in terms of Field 6.

D. Curran stated that in terms of Field 6, it was suggested by the Parks Commission as a viable location as it is the least used field. People need to keep an open mind. I have heard about losing the field and the costs, but it is important for the broader community to consider the broader implications for Seniors and Children in our town. We are currently squeezing up to 24 Seniors in a basement in terms of the Senior Center. There are serious costs and implications to this. There are also serious costs and implications if the Town does not move forward.

K. Diskin stated that if we move off Field 6 and to the west of the site where the Parks Building is, Article 97 will still apply. We could look at other areas of Pirone Park? Stay off Field 6? There is no way for any of us to possibly locate this building without the completion of professional due diligence. Perhaps there is a solution not to tear up Field 6, but we need the professionals to look at this.

K. Petrossi stated that we are not limited to just Field 6. Need due diligence to determine if there was a way to build this west of Field 6 and off the field.

D. Van Schalkwyk and K. Diskin volunteered to work on the scope for the RFQ and to issue it to other firms in addition to Catlin giving the deadline of August 18 for firms to respond.

Pauline Conley (Resident) stated that she would withhold her comments/questions on Caitlin since the Committee will not be voting on that today. She stated that this Committee has several members on it who were on the Site Selection Committee who recommended Field 6 and now it appears that you did not?

K. Petrossi stated that the Parks Commission approached the COA with the idea of a Senior/Community Center that could be built on Pirone Park that would consist of an indoor facility which is something they have wanted. The Parks Commission suggested Field 6 as it was the least used field.

D. Curran stated that Jeff Thomas, Parks Director, is where the Field 6 idea came from.

K. Petrossi stated that D. Van Schalkwyk and K. Diskin will refine the scope and solicit proposals which will be due by August 18 and report back at our next meeting. She asked if Alan Manoian, Director of Community and Economic Development had any update on the grant submitted for the project.

Alan Manoian stated not at this time, which is actually good news. We expect to hear something by September/early October on the status of the grant.

Discussion and Approval of Survey/FAQ Document for Public Outreach:

K. Petrossi provided an overview of the survey and the FAQ document.

K. Malantic stated that they look good. K. Diskin and E. FitzPatrick concurred.

K. Malantic asked that the final version be put up on the Town's website.

Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager) stated that in addition to the Town's website we will have hard copies available at Town Hall; the Senior Center; and perhaps the Library.

Motion: A motion was made by K. Malantic and seconded by E. FitzPatrick to approve FAQ Document for Public Outreach. **Motion Passed (7-0).**

K. Malantic stated that the FAQ should hopefully help people.

K. Petrossi asked what the Committee's thoughts on the survey are.

E. FitzPatrick stated that it is four pages in length and is it possible to condense it. We also do not need the sources on the survey and J. Thomas needs to look at the Ayer recreation issues.

K. Petrossi stated that she will remove the sources and will reach out to J. Thomas.

E. FitzPatrick asked if we should add a question about the project being at Pirone Park and how do people feel about that?

D. Curran stated that our charge is to look at Pirone Park. That is the responsibility we have been given so I do not think that question is needed.

K. Petrossi stated that she is hesitant to ask that question on the survey because the respondent will not have enough information yet to answer.

E. FitzPatrick asked what about stating "do you object to Pirone Park as the location?"

K. Malantic stated that asking that question you will get a resounding "no" as they do not have the specific information.

E. FitzPatrick stated that she is raising the issue because people have brought it up.

K. Petrossi stated that the survey would be distributed in paper form and online. We could distribute it to 21 locations in Town which is where we distribute our newsletter. How is it best to reach the Parks and Recreation families?

K. Malantic stated that he will discuss that with the Parks Commission at their next meeting.

E. FitzPatrick stated that she spoke with the former Groton COA Director, and they did a survey, and got 750 responses. It was sent out or a link was sent out with the Census.

K. Petrossi asked if there is anything missing on the survey.

D. Curran stated that it is a great survey and clear.

Motion: A motion was made by D. Curran and seconded by M. Withee to approve the Survey. **Motion Passed (7-0).**

Discussion on the Public Information Session:

K. Petrossi suggested that until we have an initial design and further information we should hold off on this item. It is very important, but we need the initial design and the information first.

The Committee concurred.

K. Malantic stated that he will investigate the issue of the Shirley fields and alternatives.

Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager) stated that he will contact the Superintendent of Schools and the Shirley Town Administrator regarding this issue as well.

Scheduling of Next Meeting:

The Committee scheduled the next meeting for Wednesday, August 23, 2023 at 4:15pm.

Adjournment:

Motion: A motion was made by D. Curran and seconded by K. Malantic to adjourn the meeting at 6:07pm. **Motion Passed (7-0).**

The meeting adjourned at 6:07pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager

Signature Indicating Approval: _____

Date Approved by Committee: _____