

The Senior and Community Center Building Meeting Notes

May 21, 2024

Phil called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

The minutes from May 13,2024 were reviewed and approved.

In attendance: Phil Cieply, David Kurczy, Amy Wilson-Kent, Mike Goddard, Peg Nogueira, Karen Slattery-Meade, Mark Bucchino, Alejna Brugos , Tom Fichtner, Lawney Tinio , Diane Howell and John Vandersluis.

The Committee reviewed the results of the Town Election of Tuesday, May 14 which yielded very close numbers. Although the proposed center passed at the Town Meeting, it was defeated at the Town Election by 52 votes (577-629).

A quick poll was taken by Chairman Phil Cieply to see where the committee wanted to go from here. The members present favored continuing the committee and will approach the Selectboard on June 5, to seek approval to continue.

Vice-Chair Dave Kurczy stated that we should go back to the voters a second time, since the margin was so close. He asked all the members to provide input as to what they had heard were the reasons for voting against it.

Karen, who manages the Mendon MA Bulletin Page on Facebook, mentioned that she was told some voters thought, because it was passed at the Town Meeting, that it was a “done deal”.

Tom F. mentioned 3 reasons he had heard: cost, location and project size. People not really understanding what efforts went into the location selection; some voters had other projects prioritized, such as sports fields, and some people, including seniors not using the senior center for activities, feeling it wasn't needed. Also the fact that due to money restrictions, we had eliminated the solar portion (although it would have been solar ready) left some voters thinking it wasn't “green enough”. He agreed that we need to find out why they didn't vote for it (about 50%, of the people didn't want it) and provide information to turn that vote around.

Phil C. heard that it was the tax burden, the fact that schools need money, the kids need sports fields and the assumption that seniors don't vote for schools funding, so why should the senior center be funded?

Alejna B. suggested a survey be done asking what the objections to the project were. Be sure to focus the questions on the lowering of the tax burden, the fact that the **NEED** hasn't gone away, and to explore scaling back the project which would show willingness to compromise. She also suggested we inform people of tax relief options available in town.

Mike G. said that in collecting the data, we remind the people that the NEED is still there and revisit the cost. Stress that **this is the time** to accomplish this project and maybe make it smaller (less expensive) at the proposed site.

John V. suggested that the voters didn't trust the revised tax impact numbers as they were so much lower than what was originally in the newspapers. He suggested we get more information out to the people. He also suggested we look at the Visiting Nurses Building which will be vacant soon.

Lawney T. and Mark B. want to see it go back before the voters again. Some members suggested the November general election; others favored a special election, as the Town Meeting authorization is only good until September 15.

Peg is still in favor of the Hopedale St. location but admits the conservation restrictions are a huge barrier. She also thanked her committee (Karen and Tom) for their work in getting the message out to the community and stated that, should this project continue, the Communications Committee needs to be expanded to include more members spreading the word.

Diane H. still favors converting the Miscoe School.

Others suggested finding an alternate site for the food pantry, giving up the Emergency Shelter function, holding off completing the whole bottom level of the proposed building and finishing it later, using non-prevailing wages. Inclusion of the center in the Planning Board's master plan was deemed important.

Phil C. asked: "could the Selectboard have done more to support the Committee?" Most felt that the Selectboard's united acknowledgment of the need and the much

appreciated assistance by Alejna B. and Mike G. (2 current Selectboard members) was indicative of their support. Phil would like to see this project be their first priority. If so, we should be able to request some additional funds and move forward.

Phil thanked the Committee for all their hard work and dedication. He reminded the group that the grant funding that was applied for will not be awarded to the town if there is no project. Mike G. mentioned bi-partisan infrastructure and to bring solar more to the forefront.

No future meeting date was planned, as it is hoped that many will attend the Selectboard meeting June 5, 2024.

Meeting adjourned 8:06 pm

Peg Nogueira

Acting Secretary