

Fairbank Community Center Task Force Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 20, 2016

7:30 PM - DPW Conference Room

In attendance: Patricia Brown – Selectman, Task Force Chair, Jim Kelly – Facilities Director, Jack Ryan - COA, John Beeler – COA, Sam Merra – At Large, Christopher Morely – At Large, Debra Galloway-Senior Center Director, Michael Ensley - Park and Recreation Commission, Jim Marotta- Park and Recreation Commission, Richard Tinsley- School Committee, Jose Garcia-Meitin- Finance Committee, Lisa Kouchakdjian-School Committee, Bryan Semple-Finance Committee

Absent: Kayla McNamara – Park and Recreation Director

Debra Galloway volunteered to record the minutes of this meeting.

Pat Brown asked members to think about Item #1 – what do we need to know that we don't know yet in order to move forward?

Concern about Operating Costs in Option 4

Pat indicated that Bryan Semple had brought a handout to share. The handout (attached) includes parts of a spreadsheet from consultants Ballard King and Associates¹ detailing the Operational budget of the proposed Option 4 conceptual design for a new Community Center. Bryan pointed out the estimated expenses and revenues for the existing facility (col. B) and the expenses and revenues for the “new” facility (col. A). He noted that it appears that the new facility would increase expenses to double what the existing facility is estimated to spend now – totaling \$3,288,322 for the entire new facility. The estimated new revenue would be \$1,688,000, with total revenue – more than double the current revenue of \$1,282,000. Bryan believes that this estimate of revenue is very optimistic. Some of the costs included in the expenses won't be spent if people don't sign up for classes, such as part-time instructor fees. However, there are other costs that will need to be expended, both capital and operating, whether participation is high or low. If participation at the facility is lower than expected there will not be as much revenue to offset the costs. This could leave the Park and Recreation (P and R) department in a difficult spot, with expenses that may not be covered by participation. It may be that participation will be high, but we need better information about the need and the competition in the area.

¹ The Fairbank Task Force hired BH+A Architects to do the Fairbank Community Center feasibility study. BH+A worked with consultants Ballard King and Assoc. to do the market study and operations analysis portion of the report.

It was acknowledged that the Senior Center is not expected to generate revenue, but it also generates much lower expenses- most programs pay for themselves through fees collected into revolving funds, so expenses are mainly for the small full-time staff.

Jack noted that the plan that is included in the operating budget on the spreadsheet Bryan is reviewing is for Option 4. Option 4 is pretty much off the table (at the last meeting several of the items in Option 4 were rejected). Option 4 includes items such as the expanded gym, the additional warm water pool, the indoor running track and about 9,000 sf of space for Sudbury Public Schools (SPS). Option 4 was also designed to minimize disruption to programs by shrinking the footprint of the building, adding a second floor and moving the building to the south side of the Atkinson pool (allowing Senior Center and P and R to remain open during construction). Option 4's additional items such as the expanded gym, track, and warm pool, were added to the design after consultants Ballard King were instructed to make the design include enough revenue to pay for expenses. This was not a request of the Fairbank Task Force, but the addition increased the space and cost. (Option 4 was estimated to cost \$25-30 million capital costs, for a total of about 69,000 sf.)

The former Task Force officially voted to recommend Option 3 which includes about 60,000 sf of space at an estimated \$22-24 million in capital costs. The former Task Force ran out of time and money to approve something between Option 3 and Option 4 – the former Task Force would have liked to build on the south side of the pool to minimize disruption, but would not necessarily have approved all of the additional potentially expensive pieces, such as the expanded gym, warm pool, track, fitness center, etc.

Bryan's point is that the Ballard King financial analysis is quite optimistic and puts a lot of pressure on the Park and Recreation department to use the space and fill programs or to possibly run at a large deficit.

The Park and Recreation Commission spoke out against Option 4 at the Board of Selectmen (BOS) meeting in the spring. They were concerned about the potential for increased expenses and not enough revenue in the proposed building design. Both the Park and Recreation Department and the Commission want to be on board with any plan. The P and R Director is specifically not on board with running a fitness center, or with the increase in space proposed in Option 4.

BK Financial Analysis – Part of Feasibility Study from BH+A

There was also a question about the accuracy of the Ballard King (BK) financial analysis (operations expense/revenue). The question arises because the Park and Recreation department was without a Director for several months and it has been difficult to reconstruct financial history covering earlier periods. Jose mentioned that he spoke with Melissa Rodrigues, Town Manager, about obtaining financial analysis of current Park and Recreation operations revenue/expenses, and Dennis Keohane, the Town's Finance Director, will review the financial

analysis and verify expenses and revenue. Jose will follow up and share this analysis with the Task Force.

Park and Recreation Financials

Is the P and R Department currently self-sustaining? They are to some degree self-sustaining - they collect fees into the Field and Pool Enterprise funds. Salaries for pool employees are paid for with revenues collected into the Pool Enterprise fund, but benefits are not. The Commission believes that only the pool really loses money. Other P and R programming either pays for itself or generates revenue. A bigger gym might help to pay for more summer camp slots.

Senior Center

It was noted that the Senior Center is not that expensive. Most programs pay for themselves. Senior Center programs are put through revolving accounts. Seniors pay a fee into the account, instructors are paid from the account. This keeps programs costs reasonable, but makes sure to cover instructor fees. Instructors are considered part-time employees of the town, but receive no town benefits.

Charter of Task Force

The charter of the previous Fairbank Task Force was to meet the “needs of the town”. This charter did not direct the Task Force to consider the “willingness to pay” of town residents. It is important to not only look at needs of the town, but also whether the needs are being met elsewhere, i.e. other facilities.

The Option 4 plan evolved from Option 3 as a result of the directive to make the new Community Center plan revenue neutral. This directive increased the square footage and added expensive space (and was not a request from the Task Force). The initial conceptual design – Option 3 was based on needs.

Survey

A question was raised as to whether a survey of the town will bring in much new information. It might be helpful if it asks about willingness to pay for a new community center. Also, a survey could help us to find out who currently uses the Community Center and what they use it for.

Maximum Budget?

The Task Force considered whether we should ask Board of Selectmen (BOS) for a maximum budget for the Community Center proposal and a dollar per household cost estimate or maximum? Should we figure out what residents are willing to pay? No. Rather, we believe that the Task Force is charged with researching the needs and costs and giving the BOS options. The BOS is looking for the Task Force to give recommendations. The Task Force at one point did vote to limit spending to \$500/household.

Option 0 – Status Quo

The option of not building a new Community Center but rather fixing the existing space to correct problems like the leaking roof is called Option 0. The cost estimate for this option as listed in the Fairbank Feasibility study is \$12 million, over 10 years. This may include upgrading the facility to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, according to Jim Kelly, Facilities Director. What specifically is included in Option 0? We need a more detailed estimate of what costs will be necessary to maintain the existing building if we aren't able to build a new Center and a better understanding of what the project entails.

The aging and leaking roof of the Fairbank Center prompted formation of the previous Task Force. Since then the locker rooms have further deteriorated, and also require replacement or upgrade. They are 30 years old, and the pool roof is now 30 years old. Just fixing the roof is not enough.

We will need to know more information about Option 0 costs when we go forward with a plan to share with residents. We need a realistic idea of Option 0, and what happens if we don't build a new facility. Are upgrades, maintenance, and upgrade to meeting building code included in the \$12 million estimate?

Jim Kelly will get more information about Option 0, aka "Status quo" and bring to the next Task Force meeting.

Keeping SPS, Senior Center and P and R Together?

Chris Morely proposed that SPS doesn't need to be in the Fairbank building. If they moved out, then their space could be used for Park and Recreation and for the Senior Center. Another member stated that keeping SPS in the Community Center may make the Community Center too big.

There is a difference in the space needed for the Senior Center and SPS and the space needed for P and R. The plan for the Senior Center is simpler than that of Park and Rec. Also, the School Department needs are simple, just a certain amount of office space (not a gym, pool or locker rooms).

Should we consider separating SPS and/or the Senior Center from the plan?

Some members believe the benefits of having the three entities together is not clear. The time frame for the P and R aspects of the facility is long, probably at least three years. If we separate the Senior Center and SPS from the plans, they could solve their needs sooner. SPS in particular does not seem to need to be included in a community center.

The Senior Center would benefit from consultation space such as private offices for consultations with Board of Health nurse, social worker, Information Specialist, Medicare counselors (SHINE), podiatrist, legal advice, tax return help, etc. The Senior Center also requires a “large room” space for fitness classes. It needs space for arts classes and a kitchen/lunch facility. At least some space should be designed with acoustics for those with hearing impairment.

However, it was noted by other members that the whole idea for the Community Center was to create a multigenerational facility, where all ages come together. The plan is also to share a lot of space between Senior Center and P and R. Both departments need fitness rooms for yoga, tai chi, dance, etc. as well as rooms for meetings and consultations/interviews.

The Task Force considered various proposals. Perhaps SPS should be separate and we should not be spending money on it. One consideration was to make a motion to separate SPS from the Park and Rec and Senior Center plan.

Could the Senior Center portion be built first and then later the Park and Rec attached to it?

There was a feeling that separating the entities would not save money but end up increasing costs.

SPS does not pay any building fees at current location in Fairbank Community Center. Going forward in a new location, SPS will be responsible for operational costs for the space they use. They should take that into consideration when planning whether to stay in the Community Center.

One Design

We will need to get behind one design and have a clear plan to recommend to the BOS and to the town. If we are to use the Ballard King spreadsheet as a foundation document, we will need to understand it and trust it.

We could go back to BH+A to get Option 3 adjusted to include the smaller footprint, two stories, SPS, building on the south side to minimize disruption to programs.

The Sudbury Council on Aging (COA) is comfortable with the assessment of needs and space for the Senior Center from the first Feasibility Study by BH+A. The COA voted to recommend to the Task Force that they keep the amount of Senior Center space in Option 3 in any other option that is considered. It is sufficient for existing needs. The COA will submit a statement in writing.

The COA also supports having SPS in the Community Center building. Should demographics of Sudbury's population shift either way; proportionally more children or more older adults in 20 years; this extra space will be needed and used.

(Marlborough Senior Center which was new last year, planned extra space for that type of flexibility; and they have already used it.)

Discussion of Park and Rec Needs, Information

Park and Recreation could use more space for summer camp. They are turning families away. However, is it clear how many more families would sign their children up if more spaces were available?

While understanding that Park and Rec doesn't support the fitness center facility in Option 4 and on Bryan's spreadsheet, anecdotally many residents would like access to a fitness center – there may be demand. Again anecdotally, there are many families with children who don't get into summer camp with their friends and would really like to. Summer camp runs for eight weeks each year. It is an important and worthwhile program, but it should not drive the building plan.

A new market study could help to clarify the needs, competitive pressures, and potential revenue of various Park and Recreation offerings. This will also help to identify if we can count on revenue, so expenses will not fall on the taxpayers.

Could we get the summer camp enrollment and waiting list numbers from Kayla? Can we get info on waiting list for each camp session? Families spend about \$450 a week on Park and Rec summer camp program.

Mike Ensley will work with Kayla to get information on summer camp waiting lists.

Another revenue source is birthday parties at the Center. People pay \$400 for a birthday party at a different location, and would pay the same at Fairbank if the facility was nicer.

SPS and Senior Center needs are pretty clear and not as complicated as Park and Rec. The Town Manager reserved some money for the Fairbank Center project last year. Funds this year are exceedingly tight.

There were also some reservations about spending money to perform a second Feasibility study. If the previous Feasibility Study's operations cost estimate is being questioned, couldn't Park and Rec use current costs to estimate the operations costs of a building the size in Option 3? The Ballard King spreadsheet does provide a cost estimate for the current building but this does not address unmet needs.

It was reported that the Park and Rec Commission believes that only the pool really loses money. Other Park and Rec programming either pays for itself or generates revenue. A bigger gym might generate more revenue from an expanded summer camp.

A new feasibility/market study will get experts to weigh in. They are 3rd party consultants and would have professional liability for their recommendations.

New Feasibility/Market Study

Motion

After much discussion a motion was made by Mike Ensley, and seconded by Bryan Semple.

For the Fairbank Task Force to ask Jim Kelly, Facilities Director, to work with the Town Manager and Town Counsel to draft a scope of work for a feasibility/market study. This will be brought back to the Task Force for approval.

(The scope of work will help us get an estimate of cost.)

How long would this study take? Jim Marotta estimated we probably won't get results until next June. It is important to recognize that this will most likely result in a delay in the original plan of the Task Force to bring a recommendation to the BOS at the October 2017 Town Meeting. If this will occur, Pat Brown needs to update the Selectmen as soon as possible.

7 in favor, 2 opposed

Motion passed.

Information from Park and Recreation

Motion

Pat Brown made a motion, seconded by Jack Ryan.

For the Task Force to ask P and R Commission and Director for a list of ranked priorities for the building, to optimize current space and if we need a fall back plan for the building. This listing to include cost estimates and revenues.

Motion passed.

John Beeler and Sam Merra were asked why they did not vote in favor of the new feasibility study.

John: He has been involved with feasibility studies before, most departments have a lot of historical data to draw from. This information should have been used for the study already done by BH+A. This data can help to make estimates of expenses and revenues. John has also already visited many Senior Centers. In many towns, P and R is separate entity. He is not sure we are going in the right direction by seeking a new feasibility study.

Sam: Sam feels that we need more information from residents about their interest level. We had talked about the survey of residents as a priority. We should not be doing a feasibility study before the survey, before getting a reading from the town's people. Sam shared an example of a question for the survey.

Survey

Pat asked if there are members willing to form a subcommittee to work on the survey. Pat reminded everyone that if a subcommittee meets and works on a project, it is considered a public body and must follow Open Meeting law guidelines.

Sam was asked and agreed to return a draft survey for the Task Force to consider as an individual (not a subcommittee).

Field Trips to Community Centers and Senior Centers?

Pat shared that cost of the annual membership at the L-SRHS Fitness Center is \$235 for seniors. This provides access from M-F from 6pm-8pm, and 9am-11am on Saturday during the academic year (summer hours are different). The facility is nice quality, but hours are very limited. Pat will find out about participation rates.

Others were encouraged to visit other Senior or Community Centers to learn more.

Debra will send Pat information on field trips to various Senior Centers that have been undertaken by the COA to share with the Task Force.

Is the Town Ready for a New Project?

The town just funded a new Police station. It took 7 years to pass. What is the probability that the town will approve a \$25 million facility next fall? Member Rich Tinsley guesses 25%. We have needs right now, and we need a realistic goal. If we don't have clear numbers, and answers to resident's questions, the probability of passing this is even lower than 25%.

Pat decided to table discussion of agenda item 3d, Business Plan until we have more numbers.

Minutes

Jack made a motion to approve the Minutes for the September 27 meeting, with a correction to the meeting start time from 7am to 6pm. Seconded by Jim Marotta.

Next meeting:

Thursday, November 3 at 6PM – location TBD

Pat will use a doodle poll to offer time/date for the following meeting.

Jack made a motion to adjourn at 10:00 PM; seconded by Mike Ensley.

Minutes submitted by Debra Galloway, October 21, 2016.