

Dover Community Center Building Committee
Alternative Sites Subcommittee
Progress Report and Recommendation
March 25, 2008

Introduction

In June 2007, the Board of Selectmen created the Alternative Sites Subcommittee of the Dover Community Center Building Committee with the following charge:

To explore the feasibility of meeting some or all of the needs identified by the CSFCS & DCCBC at sites other than the Caryl School site, including a residential conversion & other Town-owned property, including Whiting Road, the Town House, Library, and schools. (Weld, Lisbon, and Heinlein 4)

The subcommittee met on September 6, 2007, and, based on the charge, determined these goals:

1. Ascertain the current (and as appropriate, projected) usage of these spaces, to determine whether and to what extent they are and will be available for ongoing and episodic use by employees, committees, boards, and other groups as well as informally, by individuals and ad hoc groups of Dover townspeople.
2. Consider alternative uses of existing Town buildings and spaces within these buildings.

During the fall and winter of 2007, members of the subcommittee toured and/or compiled usage information for the period of September 2006 – August 2007 for the following town buildings:

- Town House
- Whiting Road
- Town Garage
- Caryl School
- Chickering School
- Regional Schools
- Library
- American Legion Hall

On October 17, 2007 and November 5, 2007 the subcommittee discussed current and potential alternative usage of these spaces by the following groups, for the noted purposes:

- Municipal employees, other than those noted below
- Municipal records storage
- Elected and appointed boards
- Council on Aging staff
- Council on Aging programs
- Parks and Recreation employees
- Parks and Recreation programs
- Parks and Recreation storage – parks equipment & recreation materials
- Highway employees
- Cemetery Superintendent

- Town Engineer
- Community Education programs
- American Legion
- Library staff
- Library programs

Based on these discussions, the subcommittee generated ten scenarios, several with one or more variations, that incorporate building size and location information as well as actual usage data. These scenarios consider both reuse of the Caryl School site as well as the potential for creating a Community Center, on that or other sites. These scenarios are not, however, solely focused on these two, arguably important topics; they also project various possible uses of town-owned buildings, with either minor or major renovations of existing buildings and/or new building projects. The subcommittee evaluated these scenarios on both December 5, 2007 and January 10, 2008, and at the latter meeting selected two scenarios, as amended by discussion of the subcommittee, to consider in greater depth. On March 6, 2008, the subcommittee discussed the pros and cons of these two scenarios and voted to recommend the following scenario to the Dover Community Center Building Committee and the Board of Selectmen.

Recommended Scenario

Caryl School would be reused or demolished; the building or site would be available for revenue-generating public/private uses. The Library site would be the location of a Community Center/Library, through an addition to and renovation of the existing Library building.

- Town House:
 - Offices: most municipal employees & some town boards
 - Fireside room and COA office: additional offices and/or meeting room
 - Great Hall (modified and/or expanded): no dedicated uses; used for large events, with priority to town groups, but also rentals to outside groups as space is available (may require sound/acoustic upgrades and renovation of the kitchen)
 - Meeting rooms (Selectmen's meeting room & lower conference room): prioritized for town boards/employees, but also used by other town groups, as space is available
 - Closets, as well as spaces in Great Hall balcony/stage area: Municipal records storage
- Whiting Road: rented or sold
- Town Garage:
 - Highway employees
 - Cemetery Superintendent
 - Town Engineer
 - Loft: Municipal records storage
 - Parks and Recreation storage – parks equipment (in garage) and recreation materials (in shed)
- American Legion:
 - American Legion post
 - on-going & episodic uses by town groups and rentals by individuals and outside groups, as space is available
- Schools (i.e., Chickering and the regional schools):
 - school-related personnel & uses
 - some Community Ed. programs
 - Gyms:
 - some Parks and Recreation programs
 - ongoing & episodic uses by town groups and rentals by individuals and outside groups, as space is available (with priority to school groups)
- Caryl School: available for revenue-generating public/private uses or demolished
- Library becomes site of a Community Center/Library (via an addition to and renovation of the Library building):
 - Library-related programs, services, and offices
 - Council on Aging -- director office and program space
 - Parks and Recreation employees' office
 - some Parks and Recreation programs, but not including those that require a gym
 - some Community Education programs, but not including a preschool
 - multi-purpose room(s): no dedicated uses; instead, ongoing and episodic uses by

town groups and rentals by individuals and outside groups, as space is available

Discussion of recommended scenario

As the subcommittee considered the pros and cons, both immediate and long-term, of this scenario, the discussion focused on four areas, which are distinct although interconnected: location, costs, town-wide space planning, and the impact of collaboration on services and programming. Please note that some of these points refer specifically to this scenario and others would be relevant to other scenarios. Again, please recall that the charge of the Alternative Sites subcommittee is not merely to focus on the building of a Community Center and/or the disposition of the Caryl School site, but to address and propose a comprehensive plan for town buildings and services.

Location

Placing the Community Center at the Library site affords an in-town, convenient location. As is evident in the concept site plans (Appendix A) the site is adequate to accommodate an addition of more than 18,000 square feet, as well as another building, such as a gym, with a footprint of approximately 7,800 square feet. Please note that these are concept site plans, which identify possible locations, not possible buildings. Plan B shows an addition to the library in the area that currently serves as the circular driving access to the lower level of the Library. This area is conducive to building, due to previous excavation and site preparation during the 1996 addition and renovation of the Library. The subcommittee also believes that this site affords the potential for less of an impact on traffic and easier parking than other sites, including the Caryl School site, although it is important to note that any scenario would require thorough traffic and parking studies.

Costs

The subcommittee agrees that although there is a logical efficiency in addressing the coexisting goals of building a Community Center and determining the future use of the Caryl School site with one project, there appear to be cost benefits of separating these goals. An addition at the Library site offers the opportunity for public/private partnership use of the Caryl School site, which could possibly offset costs of the Community Center addition and Library renovation. Although either site could potentially allow for a combined Community Center/Library, the subcommittee believes that the Caryl School site would be of greater interest to developers than the Library site.

Further, there are potential operational savings, in that only one facility will be open (v. both a Community Center and a Library), resulting in potential energy and custodial savings. Any such savings is premised upon building and renovating fewer, more fully utilized meeting and activity spaces than in a two building plan, as well as greater use of the Great Hall and various storage spaces in town, as are delineated in this scenario. A Community Center/Library building project may also be eligible for state grant money that is available for library building projects, whereas a stand-alone Community Center is much less likely to receive grant funding. Similarly, private fundraising and the raising of municipal funds may be facilitated by the inclusion of a library-focused constituency, with an existing history of and structure for raising funds. Also, germane, although not specific to this scenario, is the consequent availability of Whiting Road for sale or rent, which potentially will generate some funding to offset costs of a Community Center/Library building project. Finally, as can be seen in the concept site plans, this scenario allows for phased

construction, most likely of a gym, over years or even decades.

Town-wide space planning

As noted previously, the Alternative Sites Subcommittee has taken a long-term town-wide space planning approach to this process. The recommended scenario provides for the long-term materials housing and dynamic programming space needs of the Library. It also affords room for future expansion of municipal offices in the Town House space currently used by the Council on Aging. Finally, as noted above, it allows the town to make a determination about the disposition of the Whiting Road property, including the back garages.

Impact of collaboration on services and programming

A combined Community Center/Library would afford Dover townspeople the benefit of services and programming that are enhanced and expanded by collocation and active collaboration by professionals, volunteers, and individuals. Building at the Library site would create a clustering of the town's outreach services, separate and distinct from municipal functions. The Library staff, the Council on Aging director, and the Parks and Recreation staff would be housed in adjacent offices and therefore would be able to collaborate both formally and spontaneously, and facilitate shared resources and programs, while avoiding conflicting and/or redundant events. Similarly, elected and appointed boards could periodically meet jointly to plan programming and services that support both individual department missions as well as broader goals. Clearly, this scenario requires that professionals, board members, and other supporters be willing to move beyond rigid, limited definitions of mission, target population, and services, to see the value to the townspeople of collaboration and sharing of resources (cf. Schull; *Local Government Managers*). Finally, this scenario encourages serendipitous meetings of individuals and groups in common spaces that adjoin the distinct spaces allotted to the various departments.

Just imagine a commons area, through which anyone using one or more of the outreach services in the building would pass – if empty and either small or cavernous, it would be a lobby, just a waiting area. If, however, this commons were arranged with tables, comfortable chairs, newspapers, board games, a coat room, and even coffee and snacks, possibly provided by a contracted vendor, it would become a gathering space, both for those for whom one of the participating services was a destination and for those who were drawn to the space by the prospect of seeing and interacting with others. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg has written about such spaces, calling them "third places", which he distinguishes from the first and second places of home and work. He identifies third places as neutral, public places where people can gather and interact, putting aside their concerns while enjoying the company and conversation around them. In his 1999 book, *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg argues that third places are the heart of a community, in that they encourage not only social interaction, but also grassroots democracy and mutual emotional support for individuals and groups (*Ray Oldenburg*).

Third places have long been an important part of American culture, beginning with the New England inns that were part of colonial society and essential to the prelude to the Revolution. Later, village greens, soda fountains, drugstores, diners, and churches became the gathering places of small towns and of neighborhoods in bigger towns and cities. As these centers of community life have been eroded by suburban sprawl, shopping malls, and more recently the Internet, the local public library has become, for many townspeople a third place as well as a

destination for those seeking materials and/or attending programs (Harris). Moving toward a combined Community Center/Library is a logical next step. As noted by the International City/County Management Association, ICMA, “the credibility that libraries have with residents provides a strong platform for their expanded roles” (*Local Government Managers*).

The Dover Town Library is currently a destination for many townspeople each day; many of these are senior citizens who currently do not use Council on Aging services. If the Council on Aging is collocated with the library, then many seniors who do not currently use their services or participate in any or many of their programs would be likely to encounter these offerings in and around the Library areas, particularly if familiar Library staff are involved in the planning and presenting of such services and programs. Similarly, although the director of the Council on Aging currently works with some children of senior parents, collocation and collaboration with the Library will increase awareness of and use of these services by townspeople who currently do not come in to the Council on Aging offices but do use the Library. Working together, planning in advance, Library and Council on Aging staff could plan separate programs held at the same time for disparate groups – imagine a program for seniors run in one room by Council on Aging staff and a parent/child program, run by Library and/or Parks and Recreation staff in another room.

Beyond such parallel programming, important though it is for an increasing number of people, often called the “sandwich generation”, who are caring for both young children and aging parents, is the increased opportunity for innovative, intergenerational, collaborative programming. With support from the Council on Aging the Library recently made a request for a grant to fund intergenerational programming, for seniors and teens and ‘tweens, including creation of oral histories, technology support, and video gaming. Even with grant funding, such programs can only happen in a very limited way at present, due to the lack of appropriate space and the difficulties of collaborating when in different locations. Imagine, however, regular Wii tournaments, co-sponsored by the Library, Parks and Recreation, and Council on Aging staff and volunteers – townspeople of all ages, in the Community Center -- golfing, playing tennis, even bowling (virtually of course!) Or a senior and a teen, who have gotten to know each other through such a program, meeting, by appointment or by coincidence, in the common area, sitting down in a comfortable spot, to play a game of chess or checkers, over a cup of hot chocolate, while other family members browse the Library or run an errand nearby. Due to the collaboration of three distinct yet connected outreach service departments, the Community Center/Library can be more than the sum of its parts, a third place for all townspeople, truly the heart of Dover.

Respectfully submitted,
March 25, 2008

Alternative Sites Subcommittee

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Appendix A Concept Site Plans

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Amended 21 June 2007.