

Senior Center Building Committee FAQ's

Timing Issues, needs, functions and related questions

1. Why is this project being planned now?

This project has been in the planning stages for over four years. The process of defining building/space needs for any group in town (schools, fire stations, etc.) is a lengthy one requiring a lot of people's time and town input. Most of these projects take years of planning before they are completed. If we begin the detailed planning and professional design now, we can reasonably expect to complete the final product by 2015.

2. How many seniors currently live in town?

Approximately 3900, according to the latest Town census. The U.S. Census reported almost 3,700 seniors in town in 2010 so the senior population grew by 5% just in the last year.

3. What are the demographic projections for seniors?

The senior population, defined as >60 years old, has increased 18% in the last 5 years and with the baby boom generation currently reaching that age range, it is expected to increase by 87% over the next 23 years based on Federal and State census projections. Comparatively, the *total* town population grew at an annual rate of 0.7% between 2000 and 2010 while the senior population grew at an annual rate of 4.3%. By 2030, we expect the total senior population will exceed 6,000 in Acton and by 2035 that number is likely to reach 6,400 and will comprise over 25% of the town's total population.

4. What is the Senior Center?

The Senior Center is a building located on 50 Audubon Drive in South Acton. The Council on Aging uses the building to provide programs and services to Acton residents 60 and over as well as information and referrals for residents of any age with concerns about aging relatives, neighbors and friends.

5. Who uses the Senior Center?

Approximately 1/3 of Acton's seniors utilize the Senior Center or the services it provides. Usage is restricted by the inability to create simultaneous programming in the current building, parking limitations, lack of private meeting space, cooking and septic restrictions

6. Who will use the new Senior Center?

Removing the current space, parking and septic/cooking restrictions will result in an immediate increase in the number of people able to use the Senior Center. From discussions with other towns that have built new Senior Centers, we have found that there is typically a significant increase in usage once the new center is constructed. The predicted growth in the senior population will also increase the use of the Center. Additionally, the new building will include space specifically designed to be available to the community at large.

7. What's wrong with the current Senior Center?

The demand for services and programs has outstripped the building's capacity. The design of the current building limits the COA's ability to offer programs requested by existing seniors let alone expand programs to reach additional users. Seniors are being turned away from popular programs due to space restrictions. The lack of adequate parking limits the number of seniors who can participate in popular activities. There is a lack of private meeting space for consultations and clinics. These problems are getting steadily worse as the senior population grows.

Overall configuration – the program space at the Senior Center consists of one large room and a dining area. This makes scheduling multiple activities difficult and requires frequent reconfiguration of the space between programs.

Privacy - Wellness, flu, podiatry clinics and other programs take place in the dining area during

meal preparation.

Staff offices – the administrative space is located at the rear of the facility. When people enter the building there is nobody there to greet them or answer questions which can discourage people from returning.

Meal Prep. - Due to septic restrictions the Board of Health limits the number of meals that can be prepared on site to once a month.

Parking – Expanded two years ago. Currently 45 spaces, including 4 handicapped.

8. Why does the Senior Center need to be bigger?

The use of the Senior Center has increased regularly due to the steady growth Acton's senior population, greater need for assistance and increased interest in programs offered. The building was not well designed for its current purpose. The layout is poor, the staff are badly positioned within the center and the parking is inadequate. The office space is not easily found and needs to be accessed by going outside when the program space is occupied. There is a need for staff to provide private consultation for taxes, fuel assistance, legal issues, health insurance counseling and wellness clinics. There is extremely limited space for seniors to congregate before or after programs. These issues will only be exacerbated by the continued growth of the senior population in town.

9. Are we considering combining it with a Community Center?

The new Senior Center design will include the ability for the community at large to use designated space after hours. The Senior Center will also be designed in such a way that a Community Center wing can be added at a later date.

10. Have we thought about using one of the other existing Town buildings for the Senior Center (old high school, Merriam bldg., etc.)?

One of the major considerations for a Senior Center is adequate, safe parking and access. A sub-committee extensively explored other Town buildings as well as commercial space and concluded that none of these options would suffice.

11. Could some of the programs be held at other locations in town?

The sense of "community" the Senior Center fosters would be lost if the programs were scattered about town. The Senior Center should be a place people can congregate after an activity, stay for coffee, lunch, socialize or participate in another program. Many classes require more supervision than just the instructor, particularly in the case of medical emergency. Additional COA staff would be required to provide this coverage, while still having adequate coverage at the Senior Center. That would increase the operating budget as staff represents the highest percentage of town budget expense. There would also be an additional expense for maintenance, utilities, insurance, etc.

12. What programs are offered at the Senior Center?

The COA makes effective use of the limited space in the Senior Center as it provides health and wellness programs, exercise classes, consultations about health insurance, legal issues, fuel assistance and caregiver issues. The Council also organizes activities to help seniors stay intellectually engaged, such as life long learning programs, computer instruction, multi-cultural programs, and art classes. Special luncheons, bridge, billiards, book club and board games help seniors stay socially connected.

13. What programs is the Town currently financially supporting at the Senior Center?

The town funds personnel, building maintenance and one of the exercise programs. All other programs are funded by the "Friends of the C.O.A." or grants.

14. What input have we received from the seniors in town?

The seniors have been surveyed as to what they would like to see in a center. Groups have met to discuss the best means to address the needs of this underserved population and research has been done with medical and geriatric journals as to the types of programs that are most effective for healthy aging. Staff and Board Members of the COA as well as committee members have visited centers in the surrounding area to see how

other towns provide these needed services.

15. Why don't we regionalize with another town?

We have discussed regionalization with neighboring communities without success for several reasons such as lack of interest, the loss of a sense of the senior community, and the additional distance to travel to the Senior Center.

16. If the Senior Center moves, what happens to the existing building?

The Town currently has the building on a 99-year lease from Audubon Hill Association and the Town could use the building for other Town purposes if the Senior Center moves out.

17. How does this plan relate to the Acton 2020 Plan?

The Acton 2020 Committee discovered that Acton residents have a strong desire for a new facility that would be large enough to accommodate the senior center and a variety of community uses with a wider range of programming. However the 2020 Committee also discovered that Acton residents are hesitant about committing to the expenditures necessary to construct this building at this time. This plan would allow us to do the design now and commit to construction later as the economy improves

Finance

18. Who are the "Friends of the Acton C.O.A.?"

The "Friends" group is a private, non-profit organization that supports the senior population through its fund-raising programs. These funds are used to support classes and programs offered at the Center.

19. What impact will this have on my taxes?

It would be a capital project funded through a bond issuance including both a town meeting and a town-wide vote. The estimated cost for the entire project is approximately \$7.7 million. The annual debt service costs would be approximately \$480,000 per year over 20 years or about a \$70 per year increase on the average single family household in town.

20. Why don't we apply for grants or donations to fund this project?

Currently federal or state monies are not available. There is the possibility of a "Friends" group organizing a fund raising drive and seeking monies from private sources.

21. When are we planning on asking the town for money?

We will be requesting \$140,000 for conceptual and schematic designs for a new Senior Center at this year's Annual Town Meeting. This amount will also allow us to explore a Community Center option.

22. What was the Council on Aging's budget last year?

The total operating budget for the center last year was approximately \$310,000. Taxation contributes about 85% of that amount with grants and donations supplying the remainder. Building maintenance and maintenance personnel costs represent another \$55,000.

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