

Groton Council on Aging
Feasibility Oversight Committee Q & A's

Dear Groton Residents,

At the October Fall Town Meeting, the COA Feasibility Study Committee [FSC] assured the voters that it would increase its efforts to provide the public with more opportunities to learn about the Groton Senior Citizen's Center initiative. Many valid questions were raised including additional review of the Prescott School.

To that end, the Feasibility Study Committee, starting with this Q & A insert, will embark on a 4-pronged public outreach effort to ensure that all voters are more extensively informed about the need and validity of this initiative. We are committed to ensure the public that it will be apprised of the Committee's progress in a timely manner in preparation for the 2017 Spring Town Meeting.

Specifically, our outreach plans will include:

- Q & A Informational Sheet,
- Town-wide informational sessions to be held at the Senior Center: Wednesday, January 11 (snow date 1/18) @6:30 pm; Thursday, January 12 (snow date 1/20) @ 10 am; Saturday, January 14 (snow date 1/21) @ 10 am, Tuesday, January 17 (snow date 1/19) @ 1:00 pm,
- An ongoing Cable Cast outreach informational presentation—times t/b/a,
- A Charrette to be hosted in February 2017—time, t/b/a

Additionally, the Town Manager, Mark Haddad, has been tasked with forming an advisory sub-committee comprised of 4 members of the FSC and 3 members of the Prescott Reuse Committee to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the Prescott School to ascertain its potential viability as a site for the proposed Center.

We invite you to visit the following the town website to learn more about the work of the various committees and to review the architect's Senior Citizen's Feasibility report:
townofgroton.org

Thank you for your continued support.

Respectfully,

Chairperson
Mihran Keoseian

Members:
Peter Cunningham
Gary Green
Michelle Collette
John Amaral
George Faircloth
Beverly Smith

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1. What is the Council on Aging (COA)?

The Groton COA represents an important entry point into the aging system and into the continuum of Long Term Care. In a continuum of care that ranges from the least intensive to the most intensive. Senior Centers are often the first support service sought by an individual, his/her family or friends. The effect and role of the Senior Center is to reverse or delay the need for more intensive services. The Groton COA is preventive social service in action. It works with a wide variety of organizations and through these linkages provides users with access to a wide variety of services.

During FY2016, the Groton COA served approximately 1193 seniors over 17,000 times. More than 90 programs and services were offered which included, but were not limited to, information and referral, homebound outreach, transportation, meals, health screening, Medicare health insurance information benefits and counseling (SHINE), fitness, recreation, computer access and education and life-long learning opportunities. The COA is also the link to and support for elders and others in case of local emergencies. Council on Aging centers are authorized by MGL, Chapter 40, Section 8B.

2. What is the Feasibility Oversight Committee?

The Council on Aging appointed a Planning sub-committee and requested that it develop a long-range vision of the Council. This led to a request by the Council on Aging to the Board of Selectmen to insert an article for the 2016 Spring Town Meeting requesting funding to hire an architect/engineer to assist the Town in planning a Senior Center on existing Town owned land. The Town Meeting appropriated \$40,000 for this purpose. In conjunction with this appropriation, the Council on Aging appointed the Senior Center Feasibility Oversight Committee to hire the architect, oversee the process of researching the pros and cons of the three proposed sites, and ultimately make a recommendation to the BOS. The Committee is made up of Mihran Keoseian, Chairperson, Peter Cunningham, George Faircloth, Beverly Smith, Michelle Collette, Gary Green and John Amaral. Kathy Shelp, COA Director and Mark Haddad, Town Manager, serve as advisors.

3. How have the dynamics of services and programs for Groton's elderly population evolved since the town acquired the current senior center facility in 1996?

The Town acquired the current senior center, a former Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall, in 1996. At that time, there were fewer than 800 seniors in Groton. Currently, Groton has approximately 2,400 seniors. Programmatically, senior centers have undergone major changes since their inception in the 1960's. Due to the high level of poverty among senior citizens at that time, they were first instituted as nutritional sites. In the 1970's there was a huge growth in federal support of senior centers across the country resulting in increased services such as meals, social services and social programs such as cards, bingo, knitting/crocheting. During the past 20 years, program offerings have increased to include education, creative arts, exercise, health education, health screenings, travel, and volunteer opportunities.

4. What are the programming needs of a 21st century senior center? How did the committee decide how much space the senior center would need?

Much time has been spent researching the needs of a 21st century senior center. The COA Strategic Planning Committee began its work gathering information in the fall of 2014. It included: a COA Utilization survey, a town-wide needs assessment survey (700 responses), 6 focus groups, site visits to 6 senior centers, research and analysis of 21st Century Senior Center programming trends, current senior center participation data, and review of Massachusetts Office of Elder Affairs guidelines. We also collected data from other town surveys to inform our work and plans. Our space projections and planning were, in large part, determined based on the research results. For example, we found in the GPL survey and in our current event attendance records, there was a need for space to seat 150 or more people, which we do not currently have. Hence, we are considering a dedicated dividable space which, when opened completely, would seat 150-180 people and which could also serve as classroom space when needed. In turn, this space could also serve the greater community needs as well. In the COA focus groups more than half suggested the need for a dedicated exercise room. This request was supported by our research and our site visits as a valuable asset for a senior center. This recommendation is also supported by the research done by the guidelines of the Massachusetts Office of Elder Affairs and National Council on Aging.

For a more in depth understanding of the space and program needs of a senior center please join us at the Senior Center at one of the following dates to learn more about this important town-wide initiative:

Wednesday, January 11 (snow date 1/18)	6:30pm
Thursday, January 12 (snow date 1/20)	10:00 am
Saturday, January 14 (snow date 1/21)	10:00 am
Tuesday, January 17 (snow date 1/19)	1 pm

5. Will the proposed senior center be viewed as a multi-use center as well?

Models of senior centers as part of a multi-use community center are just beginning to take form nationally. When interviewing communities that have gone to this model, we learned there are many things to consider including: building management, scheduling of space, space priorities, and definition of multi-use programming/space. It is an option for Groton to consider, however, the Council on Aging's primary mission is to advocate for the needs of the seniors. Our expanded vision is for an adult center for community use and we will proceed accordingly.

6. How was the criteria developed for rating the three sites?

The architect used a 7 point criteria grid for evaluating all locations from both a site and facility perspective. The 7 categories were: Location; Land; Zoning and Related Regulations; Environmental; Utilities; Building-Architectural; and Building—

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Mechanical/ Electrical/ Plumbing/Etc. A 3 point rating scale (0) to (3), 0 being the lowest rating was applied to each subsection within each category. The relative importance of any one criterion, in some instances depended on the expertise of the architect. It should be noted, that the architect also stated that the relative importance of one criterion over another was subjective and should be further vetted by the Feasibility Committee. Once the assessments were concluded, the weighted scores were added together for all categories to arrive at a cumulative score and ultimately a recommendation for phase 1 of the project was established. The review committee revised the scoring as appropriate before the final report was submitted in October. Please refer to the following link to see the full report: townofgroton.org

7. Why is secondary access important to the Prescott site?

Access and egress is an important part of the planning for any building that is constructed or renovated in town. The purpose of secondary means of egress often includes the accessibility for the fire apparatus, sufficient evacuation routes in case of a fire or other emergency and traffic concerns on the public roadways. When emergencies occur often the first issue is the blockage of primary routes requiring alternatives for fire apparatus as well as alternate methods for occupants to exit the property.

Specific to the Prescott School the primary issue requiring additional access is poor clearances and turn radius to exit Main St and drive around the building. Due to the size of fire apparatus fire code includes specific language for fire department access and movement around the property. Looking at the Prescott site, many of these fire codes are not currently met nor can they be easily met on the existing site without secondary roadway toward the rear of the building.

8. Why is an outdoor setting so important?

A Senior Center is more than just a building. In a rural town, an outdoor environment is essential in enriching the lives of seniors who have downsized their living arrangements. This environment must be welcoming and non-threatening to our seniors insofar as accessibility and is an integral part of their larger Center community. Senior centers must have accessible outdoor space that may include a productive vegetable, flower garden, and recreational area. The site must be in an area that allows participants full engagement.

9. Why is universal accessibility so important?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), adopted in 1990, requires that all public buildings be accessible to people with disabilities. These requirements include parking spaces, walkways, ramps, elevators, bathroom facilities, acoustics, lighting, etc. All programs and functions must be fully accessible and welcoming to all participants. Such accommodations must provide support for people with hearing or vision losses, mobility issues, and other challenges. The programmatic design of the senior center must be done thoughtfully to address such concerns.

10. Why is there a need to include an emergency shelter at the center?

It is a consideration and will be part of a cost add on for any proposal presented to the public for a vote. In conversations with public safety, it was considered an important factor should West Groton become the final site. West Groton has a potential of being cut off in the case of a natural disaster and it does not have an emergency shelter. River Court Residences, because of the vulnerability of its population, could also require, in an emergency situation, immediate attention and/or evacuation by virtue of its location.

11. Is it possible that the senior center will stay in the current building with accessibility updates?

Yes, however as of this writing, no final recommendation has been made. Once the Feasibility Committee reaches its final decision, it will be brought to the BOS and ultimately the voters for approval. The architect recommended the existing site for either renovation or building a new structure over the other 2 sites: The Prescott School and the Country Club. At this time, however, further vetting of The Prescott School, in particular, is underway.

12. Why are traffic considerations important to a senior citizen's center and why do they need to be addressed in siting decisions?

Rationale:

- Age-related declines in vision, hearing, and other abilities, as well as certain health conditions and medications, can affect driving skills.
- A recent study determined that Route 119 traffic approaches upwards to 20,000 vehicles daily.
- We can estimate at least 50% of our participants will be turning left when leaving the Prescott School site in the center of town.
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety statistics show:
A third of all accidents involving seniors takes place at intersections, 35 percent of all of their traffic violations occur because of failure to yield, and one in four are due to improper left turns.

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According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration-- "When a crash involved an older driver and a younger driver, the older driver was 3 times as likely as the younger driver to be the one struck. Moreover, 28 percent of crash-involved older drivers were turning left when they were struck-- 7 times more often than younger drivers were struck while making left turns."

- Research on age-related driving concerns has shown that at around the age of 65 drivers face an increased risk of being involved in a vehicle crash. After the age of 75, the risk of driver fatality increases sharply, because older drivers are more vulnerable to both crash-related injury and death. Three behavioral factors in particular may contribute to these statistics: poor judgment in making left-hand turns; drifting within the traffic lane; and decreased ability to change behavior in response to an unexpected or rapidly changing situation.

13. Will the center really cost \$6.9 million dollars?

The Feasibility Study Committee is not recommending a new Senior Center at a cost of \$6.9 million. The Draft Study Report dated October 3, 2016 prepared by RAI, the architectural firm engaged by the Town, provided this preliminary estimate based upon conceptual space requirements for the town's seniors. As is typical, the draft report did not have the benefit of schematic and construction drawings, general and sub-contractor bids or value engineering. Upon Town Meeting approval to fund the design phase of this project, technical service professionals (architect and civil, structural, mechanical and electrical engineers) will value engineer the plan to manage costs and address taxpayer concerns.

14. Does the financial situation of the town factor into the planning for the center?

Absolutely. There are many reasons for the town to pursue large capital projects (such as developing a new space for the Senior Center). However, the town's desire to invest in our infrastructure needs to be balanced against the town's ability to afford such investments in a sustainable and carefully planned manner. Just as important, the Town of Groton must assess the desirability of proposed projects against standard criteria used to evaluate such projects. Such an evaluation is under way and will be made available as part of the committee's efforts. Please refer to the Town of Groton website for a link to the complete description for Evaluation Criteria for Funding Capital Projects:

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Standard Reasons for Capital Investments	Senior Center Status
<p>Risk to public safety or health</p> <p>Protect against a risk to public safety or health</p>	<p>Many safety hazards including deficiencies in primary and secondary emergency egress options</p>
<p>Deteriorated Facility or Equipment- Reconstruct or rehabilitate a facility or equipment to avoid or postpone replacing it with a new, costlier facility or piece of equipment</p>	<p>Committee looking at options to reconstruct or rehabilitate current Senior Center facility</p>
<p>Systematic Replacement or Reconditioning-</p> <p>Replace or upgrade a facility or piece of equipment as part of a systematic replacement program</p>	<p>Spending on the Senior Center is part of the Town's Capital Plan</p>
<p>Delivery of New Services-</p> <p>Development of facilities or services for a segment of the town's citizens that are currently underserved</p>	<p>Current Senior Center facility contains several deficiencies that prevent or interfere with the Council of Aging's offering of desired services</p>
<p>Protection of Resources-</p> <p>Protect natural resources or important existing infrastructure against threats to continued use</p>	<p>Current Senior Center as well as other potential buildings for housing the Senior Center need repair to allow continued use</p>
<p>Improve Operational Efficiency -</p> <p>Replace, upgrade or purchase facility or equipment as part of plan to significantly improve operating efficiency of town</p>	<p>Looking at leveraging effort to reconstruct or build new Senior Center to address other town needs</p>
<p>Project Coordination for Cost Savings-</p> <p>Coordination of projects that enable cost synergies (e.g. sidewalk installation to coincide with street reconstruction)</p>	<p>Looking at feasibility to locate Senior Center in location of currently owned Town Properties</p>

In addition, the following questions are being looked at:

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Question	Addressed
Does the requested project contribute to the achievement of existing town goals, policies and plans?	This project is driven by discussions that have occurred during BOS meetings, the meetings leading up to the creation of the Master Plan and through extensive efforts of the COA to survey and discuss the programmatic requirements of the Senior Center
Is the committee considering the total cost of the project (both building and annual operating expenses)?	Yes, the committee is working with the architect to look at both initial costs to renovate or construct a new Senior Center as well as to determine associated operating costs
Is it funded by the tax levy or by borrowing and how would it affect the tax rate?	The exact mechanism of funding will be determined prior to any action requested by Town Meeting. A project of this size would most likely require borrowing. Based on current Financial Forecasts, it is also likely that any borrowing costs would need to be authorized as a Proposition 2 ½ debt exclusion
Are alternate funding sources being looked at?	Yes, depending on the nature and location of the project, the committee and the COA are looking to determine if there are any available alternative sources of funding outside of raising and appropriating the money.