

**Council on Aging / Library
Community Building Committee**

Minutes of Meeting Held on Wednesday, November 15, 2023
Freetown Police Station Community Room,
15 Memorial Drive, East Freetown

Present: Jeff Amaral, Nicole Davignon, Wayne Jaye, Norman Landreville, Carlos Lopes, Paul Lubin, Brenda Motta, Paul Sadeck, Kent Wilkins, and alternate member Alicia Boivin

Absent: Amanda Barlow and Thomas Matthews

Also Present: Town Administrator Deborah Pettey and Recordings Clerk Timmothy McIntosh

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm by Mr. Lopes. The meeting was recorded by Recordings Clerk Timm McIntosh.

Roll Call

The Committee introduces themselves. Mr. McIntosh reads off the full Committee roster, which the assignments with their appointments (representing the Library, representing the COA, at-large, etc.). Mr. Wilkins believes he is on the Committee representing the Finance Committee rather than as an at-large member; Mr. McIntosh will research this and get back to Mr. Wilkins.

Re-Organize Committee

Mr. Lopes informs the Committee that former Chairman Mike McCue has resigned; Mr. McIntosh informs the Committee that former Vice-Chair Amanda Barlow has indicated to him that she must step back from the vice-chair position, though will be remaining on the Committee. After some discussion, the committee opts to return to this agenda item at the end of the meeting.

Approve Minutes from June 14, 2023 Meeting

Mr. Matthews was unable to attend and sent thoughts with Mr. McIntosh, which have been distributed to the Committee. Mr. Jaye questions whether a noted discussion between Mr. McCue and Ms. Pettey in the minutes presented took place at the meeting or outside a meeting; Ms. Pettey says she was not at the June 14th meeting, so it must have been outside a meeting. Mr. Jaye suggests striking the bullet point in question.

Motion to accept the minutes as presented with the noted change made by Mr. Amaral, seconded by Mr. Lopes, carries seven votes to none, with Mr. Lubin and Mr. Sadeck abstaining.

Discuss and Review Library & Feasibility Study for Location of New Building

There is some confusion as to which study this is in regards to. Mr. Jaye says it is his understanding the ACG feasibility study was to be sent out to the Committee by Town Administration; Ms. Pettey believes it was, but will make sure it is sent again. Ms. Davignon says the library program she has been working on is complete and will be presented to the Board of Selectman next week, but was not aware she was expected to present it tonight. Mr. Jaye notes previous meetings of this Committee were cancelled until that presentation was made to the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Sadeck ask if the Board of Selectmen are dead fixed on a joint building, saying the library has done its job and we aren't hearing anything from the Council on Aging. Mr. Lopes says the Council on Aging did a study, and the study was highly favorable to a joint building, though there were tax concerns. Mr. Sadeck asks what the study said about a plan on the size of the COA portion; Mr. Lopes says that is what this Committee is for. Mr. Sadeck says the voters at the last Town Meeting gave a mandate to go forward with the grant for a new library, he wonders if the Library Trustees are spinning their wheels with the planning, asking what the Board of Selectmen are going to do. He reminds everyone that adding a Council on Aging to the library changes the amount of grant funding they can get, and would like the Board of Selectmen to finally make a definitive decision. He questions the study the Council on Aging did, as it was only sent to seniors on their mailing list, not a town-wide survey. He is concerned that everyone will do all this work only to go to Town Meeting and get blown out of the water. Mr. Lopes says the Board of Selectmen have made the decision to go forth with a joint building, and it is the job of this Committee to work out the specifics. He notes this decision is based on information currently available, perhaps the presentation on Monday evening will change minds.

Mr. Jaye says going back to February of 2022, the minutes reflect the Library is ok with a joint building about 6,000 sq ft in size. Mr. Landreville says the library grant has specific guidelines regarding size, so the Committee has to be careful with that; Ms. Davignon says the grant requires a plan for a 30-year life, so that dictates the size. Mr. Landreville asks about shared spaces; Ms. Davignon says there can be additional shared spaces, but the grant requires dedicated library space to qualify. Mr. Lubin wants people to understand that the Town can get half of the library paid for by the state through the grant, but if we don't get the grant, we'll have to settle for a much smaller building for the same amount of money spent. Mr. Lopes reminds everyone that we also need to understand the Council on Aging needs a building.

Ms. Pettey wants to make it clear that she was responsible for that 6,000 sq. ft number, which was an example, that she came to by figuring the new Police Station was 12,000 sq. ft. and \$13,000,000, which she believes the Town can absorb financially again. Splitting that 12,000 sq. ft. in half, she arrived at 6,000 sq. ft each. She notes a Police Station is higher tech than what we are looking at, but that this is just a ballpark. She also warns that the police station is very expensive to maintain, and the Town has other increasingly critical needs coming down the pike, including a Town Hall that is falling down and bursting at the seams. She thinks everyone is going to need to scale back to get at least something, even if it's not everything. Given the rising Fire Station costs and other lingering economy concerns, she wonders if putting a non-binding question on the coming elections in 2024 to take the temperature of the Town is the best next step.

Mr. Sadeck thinks the non-binding question is a great idea, but if we aren't going forward with the grant, wonders why the Town should even apply for it, saying we are just wasting everybody's time. As chair of the Library Trustees, he would like an answer from the Board of Selectmen on Monday night whether or not they should proceed with the grant. Mr. Lopes says he will have many questions on Monday. Ms. Davignon says there are plenty of state people to bring in to give answers.

Ms. Pettey says the Board of Selectmen will also need to know from the Library Trustees if they'll support a smaller joint building. She believes to get this or anything passed by the voters, they'll need unity on the project.

Ms. Motta asks what the square footage of the current Council on Aging is; Ms. Pettey says around 3,400 sq. ft. Ms. Davignon thinks the Council on Aging should be working on a program as the library did, to also present to the voters; Ms. Motta says the COA Board was working on that, but not in such a formal or robust way at this point.

Mr. Jaye asks where the Master Plan project stands on this building; Ms. Pettey explains the Master Plan does not really get into the Town's infrastructure in that way, it is more focused on zoning and planning-related things. The work on the Town's infrastructure informs the Master Plan, not the other way around.

Ms. Pettey speaks to the lack of attention the Town has paid to its infrastructure for a long, long time. We are now at a breaking point where there are too many needs to be addressed in a timely fashion, there are no short-term fixes anymore. She believes we need to be looking at one building to meet many needs, or else we are going to be sitting here in 10 years with no buildings. She adds that joining Bristol Plymouth is going to be another burden next year. She says we don't want to raise taxes, anything we do has to be within our capacity. She says we have \$5M and \$4M in the Town's stabilization accounts, and the Fire Station will be paid for out of existing funds. We can bond the rest of this project out of the operating budget. She doesn't think the BP building will be too bad. She says the numbers are hard, but we need a lot of balance, and focus on the most critical needs for now.

Mr. Jaye asks how much longer until the Police Station is paid for; Ms. Pettey believes 2029 or so. Mr. Sadeck asks about the expected timeline for this new building; Ms. Pettey estimates three to four or five years seems realistic, given the pace she's experienced with the Fire Station.

Mr. Sadeck asks for an update on the pods for the COA. Ms. Pettey says she is working on the procurement for that, along with other short term fixes using grants to alleviate some other critical needs, such as a Limited Use, Limited Application (LULA) lift. Mr. Lopes reminds everyone these are not fixes; they are just band-aids that buy more time.

Mr. Landreville asks if the non-binding question comes back as no, are we done? Ms. Pettey doesn't think so, but that will tell us that we need to work harder on the plan. She reiterates that the bottom line is whether or not taxes will get raised. Ms. Motta agrees, saying that's where the COA was coming from because there was just no information, only rumors.

Mr. Jaye asks if the Town should be thinking about acquiring land, since the previous study showed we are running out of options. Mr. Lopes says all options are on the table, though that hasn't been explored yet, but doing that will only add to the price tag. Mr. Jay asks if there's thought to taking existing buildings down; Ms. Pettey says only if they prove they need to be taken down for more space after they have been replaced.

A resident asks about the \$1.2M previously allocated by the voters for the Council on Aging expansion. Ms. Pettey explains that part of that was reallocated at Town Meeting for the purchase of the pods, but the rest is still sitting there for the project. If grant funding for the LULA lift does not come through, that money could be used for that. She notes the procurement process for all aspects of the project are very involved and time-consuming, so it is unfortunately slow going.

Re-Organize the Committee

Mr. Lubin thinks given the differences in opinion, the Chair should be an at-large/neutral member. Various members decline for various reasonings. The Committee believes Mr. Matthews would be a good option, though he is not present this evening. Without any volunteers, Mr. Lopes is nominated as acting chair until Mr. Matthews can be present.

Motion to make Mr. Lopes acting chair, made by Ms. Motta, seconded by Mr. Lubin & Mr. Sadeck, carries unanimously.

The committee will revisit this when Mr. Matthews can be in attendance.

Next Steps

Mr. Lopes says the second Wednesday of every month was the original schedule, making December 13th the next scheduled date. This may need to be adjusted due to other scheduling conflicts.

Ms. Pettey thinks a feasibility study specifically for a joint building may be a good idea, though there is no funding at this time. She thinks a feasibility study, which could cost as much as \$50,000, would produce a much better idea of the budget for the project. She's concerned with proceeding with planning for the building and then being shocked by the price afterwards.

Mr. Jaye thinks the Committee has an identity problem, suggesting calling the building a Community Center would be more appropriate. Mr. Lopes says we can settle those details down the line. Mr. Jays is concerned that calling this building a Council on Aging or a Library may alienate critics of either building. Mr. Lopes thinks that's a good suggestion to explore at a later date.

The Committee is reminded about the Library presentation to the Board of Selectmen, to be held at 6pm on Monday, November 20th.

At 7:38pm, motion to adjourn, made by Mr. Sadeck, seconded by Mr. Lubin, carries unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by:



Timmothy McIntosh, Recordings Clerk

List of Documents Used by Committee at this Meeting

- Draft minutes of June 14, 2023 meeting, as prepared by Recordings Clerk Cheryl Quinlan
- E-Mail Correspondence between T. McIntosh and T. Matthews, dated November 15, 2023