

Town of Ayer

Senior Center Site Selection and Building Committee

Meeting Minutes from January 11, 2024

Attendance: Katie Petrossi (Chair); Ken Diskin (Vice Chair); Dennis Curran (Clerk); Dan Van Schalkwyk; Ellen FitzPatrick; Carolyn McCreary; Dave Grubb

Absent: Chris Prehl; Dave Cibor

Also in Attendance: Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager); Matt Hernon (Town Engineer); Janine Nichipor, Resident (On Zoom); Pauline Conley, Resident (On Zoom); Geof Tillotson, Resident (On Zoom).

Call to Order/Approval of Agenda:

The January 11, 2024, meeting of the Senior Center Site Selection and Building Committee was called to order at 5:30pm by K. Petrossi in the First Floor Meeting Room of the Ayer Town Hall and on Zoom for a remote participation option for the Public.

K. Petrossi read the following statement into the record:

This meeting will be held in-person at the location provided on this notice. Members of the public are welcome to attend this in-person meeting. Please note that while an option for remote attendance and/or participation via Zoom is being provided as a courtesy to the public, the meeting/hearing will not be suspended or terminated if technological problems interrupt the virtual broadcast, unless otherwise required by law. Members of the public with particular interest in a specific item on this agenda should make plans for in-person vs. virtual attendance accordingly. This meeting will be live on Zoom. The public may access the proceedings by joining Zoom (Meeting ID# 852 5823 2163) or by calling (929-205-6099). For additional information about remote participation, please contact Carly Antonellis, Assistant Town Manager at atm@aver.ma.us or 978-772-8220 ext. 100 prior to the meeting.

Motion: A motion was made by C. McCreary and seconded by E. FitzPatrick to approve the meeting agenda. **Motion passed 7-0.**

Approval of Minutes from the December 7, 2023 Meeting:

The Committee reviewed the DRAFT meeting minutes from the December 7, 2023 meeting.

Motion: A motion was made by D. Curran and seconded by K. Diskin to approve the December 7, 2023 meeting minutes as presented. **Motion passed 7-0.**

Continued Examination of Town-Owned Parcels:

The Committee continued with its comprehensive review of Town-owned parcels.

D. Van Schalkwyk provided an overview of the Town-owned parcels to be reviewed this evening and referenced a spreadsheet of the Town-owned parcels to be reviewed (Spreadsheet is available on the Committee's webpage on the Town's website at www.ayer.ma.us).

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that he would be using two maps for each parcel which will also be posted and available on the Committee's website on the Town's website at www.ayer.ma.us. Each map has the added layers of details for wetlands delineation; Article 97 status; and other critical concerns.

0 Rear Victor Drive (Parcel 12-59):

The site has some environmental constraints. No Article 97 concerns. Some State Heritage issues and is not an ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern).

D. Curran asked for clarification on what makes a parcel subject or qualify for these various designations.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that there are FEMA flood maps; various industrial and/or legal standards; and components of the permitting process.

D. Curran asked if they require some level of State approval.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that Article 97 requires State approval. FEMA flood plain maps are set by FEMA and there is some State involvement with the permitting of endangered species and heritage sites.

K. Diskin stated that with the exception of Article 97, these designations are not insurmountable and happens all the time through the permitting process.

D. Van Schalkwyk added that there is a 100-foot wetlands buffer zone required by the local Conservation Commission and a 50-foot non-disturbance zone.

K. Diskin recommended that the Committee should go through the list and knock out any properties as we go along to trim the list.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that the 0 Victor Drive property is about an acre, and we would have to deal with two brooks on the property.

D. Curran stated that it would not be prudent to build in a known flood plain. Additionally, doing so will increase costs significantly.

K. Diskin agreed to an extent but noted that we are going to run into something no matter where we are.

E. FitzPatrick stated that this site looks to be only one acre and is not big enough nor will the site work.

C. McCreary concurred with E. FitzPatrick and stated that only if we are desperate should we come back to this site.

D. Grubb stated that there would be parking issues with this site as well.

There was consensus by the Committee to eliminate 0 Rear Victor Drive (Parcel 12-59) from consideration.

0 Park Street (Parcel 19-24):

The site is a steep lot of approximately 1.68 acres with power lines to the north and a private lot to the south. There is no flood plain and not much in terms of environmental issues.

K. Petrossi stated that the lot appears very narrow.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that there is approximately 74 feet of frontage.

C. McCreary stated that the slope is a killer.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that if there was an opportunity to acquire the private lot to the south, the site may be more viable.

K. Diskin stated that it is narrow at the front, which is concerning, and a driveway would need to be constructed. If we were in a pinch and could get the adjoining parcel it would become a more viable site. Walking down the slope is not ideal. I wouldn't completely discount the property, but it is not a high priority site.

K. Petrossi stated that though it is Town-owned land it appears to be contingent on a private lot to the south.

115 Washington Street (Parcel 20-1) (ASRSD School Campus):

This is an approximately 55-acre site which constitutes the ASRSD School Campus.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that there are steep slopes on the Groton-Harvard Roadside of the property including a lot of ledge and woods. There is also a portion of land across from the Transfer Station which is currently a practice field area and a detention basin.

K. Diskin asked for clarification about the light shaded area in green on the map being part of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that a portion of the parcel appears to be designated as open/recreational space.

C. McCreary asked about the portion of the parcel over by Norwood Avenue.

K. Petrossi stated that the land is very sloped in the back there.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that there is trail access there to the Town's water tank.

K. Diskin stated that portion of the parcel is right next to the Page Hilltop School. I have walked it, and it is not that great.

K. Petrossi stated that it does not seem that large.

D. Grubb stated that there is not much room for the building landscape.

K. Petrossi stated that there is also the issue of the proposed new elementary school and how that would fit in to this overall location. The district has stated that once approval is obtained from the State it would be a five-to-seven-year timeline and the application for this year was just denied.

D. Grubb stated that if the site is protected under open space/recreation space we could run into a similar situation as the Pirone Park controversy. That controversy could follow this site.

D. Curran stated that he is concerned that we would have to negotiate with the schools and perhaps through a Town Meeting process that could further delay. Remember the recent field project and how that got delayed.

K. Diskin stated that we should look at this site in the context of potentially carving off a specific lot and concentrate on that lot. We should not focus on the whole parcel but is there a possibility that there is a viable portion of the parcel which the Senior Center could be located.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that it doesn't hurt to ask and inquire about further possibilities including the exact process in terms of the lease with the Regional School District.

K. Diskin stated that historically there was a town farm on the site and that it was and is town owned property.

D. Grubb asked K. Petrossi as the Senior Center Director, how she feels about the location.

K. Petrossi stated that there is no one ideal location. Downtown would be walkable especially for younger seniors, but not older seniors. Many people will still be driving and the Groton Harvard Road side is a windy road but people do travel it every day to get to the hospital. The idea of carving out a piece is interesting. I will say waiting five to seven years for the elementary school project is not viable.

E. FitzPatrick stated that as a resident of Autumn Ridge this is one of the first areas plowed as it is access to the schools and the hospital.

K. Diskin stated that the road is tricky, but we need to decide if the land works or if there was a specific portion of the land that would work and meet our criteria.

K. Petrossi stated that we should keep it on the list for further exploration.

DPW Parcel (Parcel 25-23) 0 Macpherson Road:

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that the parcel is located near the old sludge landfill and the brush dump. There is a small building on the parcel which is a small shed used by the Boy Scouts. The utilities servicing the Wastewater Treatment Plant pass through the site. The entire site is under endangered species. Previously the DPW looked at this site for a potential solar field and it was deemed not to be viable. There are also some flood plain considerations. I would be concerned as we have active operations at these locations including sludge hauling. Issues of operations and site security would be of concern. If we were to consider doing something at this site, we would want to keep it closer to the road.

D. Grubb asked if the brush dump could be relocated.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that we would need to look at that as the brush dump was sited by the DEP. D. Van Schalkwyk pointed out that the triangle piece of land adjacent to the site currently belongs to Devens.

K. Diskin stated that he is concerned with the soils. There is also the issue of the brush dump. A lot of people prior to use thought this was the best spot for the brush dump.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that he does not know the history of the site.

K. Petrossi stated that she would be concerned about potential environmental issues at this site/location.

K. Diskin stated that there are concerned about ownership of Bishop Road and the location of the gate on the road.

D. Curran stated that access to the site is impacted by the gate.

K. Diskin also stated that he is concerned about it being on a dead end. The former airport is across the street. If we could acquire the Devens parcel, we may have something to work with.

E. FitzPatrick stated that there seems to be a lot going on at this site.

K. Diskin stated that the utilities are an issue.

E. FitzPatrick recommended that we set aside this location for now.

C. McCreary stated that we should leave it on the list for now.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that we could leave it on the "B List".

DPW Parcel, 25 Brook Street (Parcel 26-10):

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that access to this 50-acre property is from Brook Street. The issue of site security and DPW operations would need to be considered. It is an open area where the old 1961 Wastewater Treatment Plant was with the old sludge beds and tanks. The Town has a cell phone tower on the property which is leased. There are some ACEC issues and endangered species issues and some flood plain considerations.

K. Petrossi stated that the current buildings and old sludge beds are not good in terms of the site.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that if we did anything, it would need to be toward the front of the property near Brook Street.

K. Diskin stated that the site might work. The section south of the current DPW Admin Building could work and there is a Town easement strip that could be created into a trail toward West Main Street. There also seems to be the possibility of some parking.

K. Petrossi asked if DPW is considering this property for anything.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated no and that there is some ledge on this site.

K. Diskin stated that there could be a two-to-three-acre area that would work.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that we should keep it on the list and have the Architect look at the site.

K. Diskin stated that we would need to move the DPW gate and could install some fencing in terms of DPW security and additional parking could be across the street.

D. Curran stated that it should be kept on the list with further exploration. He stated that given all the spots looked at so far, I would hope there would be a higher visibility site for the Senior Center and for the community to actually see the Senior Center as a place and gathering area. I realize that visibility is a hard needle to thread. People go to a place more if they can see it.

K. Petrossi agreed that the DPW sites do not have visibility.

C. McCreary sate that visibility is a nice criteria but that she has been to multiple Senior Centers such as in Groton and Billerica that are tucked away.

0 Cambridge Street (Parcel 27-40):

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that this property is not three acres but more like 1.7 acres. It is a steep site with no easy access.

K. Diskin stated that it is zoned residential.

The Committee agreed to eliminate this property.

0 West Main Street (Parcel 32-42):

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that this 1.1-acre site is down in a gulley. There are no environmental issues. Utilities are nearby. The size of the site is an issue. MassDevelopment property surrounds it and it is in close proximity to the former Shepley Hill landfill.

D. Curran stated that he is concerned about the Shepley Hill Landfill being so close and even the perception of environmental concerns.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that though there are arsenic runoff concerns in the groundwater, the site would be served by public water.

C. McCreary stated that the steepness of the site is a concern.

K. Diskin stated that there are two adjacent private properties and didn't know that there was Town owned land next to it. We could potentially connect with a Deven Easement. We should keep it on the list for now.

E. FitzPatrick stated that it should be kept on the list for now.

Barnum Road (Parcel 34-87):

This is a 2.30-acre site and contains Article 97 land.

The Committee agreed to remove the site from consideration given the Article 97 issues.

0 Snake Hill Road (Parcel 36-218):

This 7.62-acre site contains Article 97 land.

C. McCreary stated that it is too bad as it is a good size site, but it is in a residential neighborhood.

The Committee agreed to remove the site from consideration.

0 Bennetts Crossing (Parcel 37-11):

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that this lot has a lot of hydrology, and it is very steep.

K. Petrossi stated that the site becomes smaller when you come out of the buffer zone.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that there are two private lots to the east of this site. This property could be kept on the "B List" as a potential.

K. Diskin stated that Route 2A traffic is a concern and the turning radius into the property.

D. Grubb stated that he lives near there and turning left is terrible during busy traffic times.

The Committee agreed to remove the site from consideration.

28 Pingry Way (Parcel 37-26):

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that this 1.47-acre site has some hydrology issues and some flood plain issues.

C. McCreary stated that she looked at this site today. It is narrow. Perhaps the back of the property is a possibility.

K. Petrossi stated that the property is located within a residential subdivision and not an ideal location.

The Committee agreed to remove the site from consideration.

K. Petrossi stated that the following Town-owned properties were still on the list, and some had contingencies as follows: 0 Park Street; 115 Washington Street; 0 Macpherson Road; 25 Brook Street; and 0 West Main Street. She stated that further research and exploration of these sites was in order per the Committee's review.

Review of Draft Architect RFP:

D. Van Schalkwyk provided an overview of the RFP as written by Matt Hernon, the Town Engineer, and himself. It is a general services agreement with each task developed by the Committee.

E. FitzPatrick stated that she reviewed the RFP, and it looked good.

K. Petrossi asked where the cost estimate component was.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated it is on page 2.

D. Curran asked when this should be issued.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that it can be released as soon as the Committee decides to issue it and the due date for responses would be February 2, 2024.

E. FitzPatrick asked if that was enough time.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated yes.

Motion: A motion was made by D. Grubb and seconded by E. FitzPatrick to authorize D. Van Schalkwyk on behalf of the Committee to issue the RFP with a due date of February 2, 2024. **Motion passed 7-0.**

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that it will be published in the General Services bulletin and released to other firms that the DPW has worked with.

Preliminary Discussion of the Program:

K. Petrossi stated given the time constraints of the meeting, this item is for a larger discussion at a future meeting.

The Committee agreed.

Public Input:

Pauline Conley (Resident) stated that she will write to the Committee regarding tonight's meeting and some concerns that she had regarding quorum and the RFP.

K. Petrossi stated that we do have a quorum this evening of seven out of nine members present.

Pauline Conley stated that she will follow up in writing to the Committee and thanked everyone for their work.

The Committee scheduled its next meeting for Thursday, February 8, 2024, at 5:00pm in the First Floor Meeting Room of Town Hall with a Zoom remote participation option for the public.

Adjournment:

Motion: A motion was made by C. McCreary and seconded by D. Curran to adjourn the meeting at 6:53pm. **Motion passed 7-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 7-0.

Minutes recorded and submitted by Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager

Minutes reviewed and approved by the Committee on February 8th 2024

Signed: D. Curran 4-12-2024

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TOWN CLERK

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