



Town of Ayer  
Senior Center/Community Center Building Committee  
Ayer Town Hall - 1 Main Street  
Ayer, MA  
First Floor Meeting Room

**\*\*[DRAFT]\*\* Wednesday, August 23, 2023, 4:15pm In-Person and Zoom Meeting**  
**Open Session Meeting Minutes**

**Committee Present:** Katie Petrossi, COA Director, Chair; Ken Diskin, Vice Chair; Dan Van Schalkwyk, DPW Director; Kevin Malantic, Parks and Recreation Representative; Dennis Curran, COA Representative, Clerk; Ellen FitzPatrick; Marge Withee; Christine Logan

**Also Present:** Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 4:15pm by K. Petrossi who read the remote participation statement into the record.

**Motion:** A motion was made by K. Diskin and seconded by K. Petrossi to move Public Input to the end of the meeting agenda. **Motion Passed 9-0.**

**Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes:**

The Committee reviewed the DRAFT meeting minutes from July 26, 2023.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Ellen FitzPatrick and seconded by D. Curran to approve the July 26, 2023 meeting minutes. **Motion passed 9-0.**

**Update on the Future Viability of the Senior Center/Community Center Project and Building Committee:**

K. Petrossi stated that on August 10, 2023 the Ayer Parks Commission voted to revoke their authorization and support to use Field 6 of Pirone Park for the building of the Senior/Community Center. She read their official statement issues on August 11, 2023 (see attached to meeting minutes) as follows:

*August 11, 2023*

*At the August 10, 2023 meeting of the Parks Commission a vote of 4-0 (with one abstention) was cast to revoke authorization to use Field 6 of Pirone Park for the building of a community center. The main concerns were lack of public support, issues with the process and timeline of the project, removal of open space, and it affecting Parks Department priorities.*

*The Commission discussed future proposals to build at Pirone Park would be considered only if the abutters are consulted before, public input is weighed, and the proposed location is in an area that is not being used in any capacity for open space or recreation. This is in addition to initial requirements that were voted on by the Commission when Pirone Park was first considered.*

K. Petrossi stated considering this recent development, the question becomes how do we proceed?

D. Curran stated that he was extremely disappointed in the Parks Commission's abrupt change of position and that the path forward for this project is very problematic without their support. He further questioned to what extent and authority the Parks Commission has over Pirone Park which is Town land. He further questioned how a five-member Commission can simply determine the fate of Town owned-land and in essence stop a project that would benefit everyone in Town. Where, specifically, does the Parks Commission's authority come from? Is it a Bylaw? Is it State law? This is very disappointing and concerning.

K. Melante stated that he could not answer these specific questions, but he would like to see what we could do in terms of areas beyond Field 6 perhaps to the west of Field 6.

K. Diskin stated that without the Parks Commission support the project is not going to be on Pirone Park.

K. Petrossi concurred with K. Diskin and stated that is how she understands it. This specific Senior/Community Center on Field 6 was based on a partnership between the Parks Commission and the Council on Aging and the Town. This is very disappointing that the Parks Commission abruptly withdrew their support due to perceived pressures from one subset of individuals. The interests of one subset of individuals have been deemed more important than others and one constituency has taken priority over all other constituencies without all the due diligence, public discourse, and decision of Town Meeting on this project.

E. FitzPatrick stated that this has turned into a "growing snowball" largely fueled by a few people on social media that has resulted in this outcome. It appears that without the Parks Commission, Field 6 is not a viable option, and that partnership no longer exists as the Parks Commission is not interested in a Senior/Community Center project. They are not interested in an indoor facility at this time.

J. Thomas stated that the indoor facility is within the Parks Department 10-year goal but not in 2026-2027. It is a good idea, but this is not the time. There is a lot of misinformation out there which is unfortunate, and this project is reaching a point of tearing our community apart as opposed to bringing it together.

E. FitzPatrick stated that the needs for a Senior Center have not changed, and we need to move forward with a Senior Center project and give up on Pirone Park as a site location for that Senior Center.

D. Curran stated that he understands the reasons J. Thomas stated. He also understands there is a need for an indoor gym. We investigated in detail to make this happen in a manner in which it would benefit Parks, Seniors, and the whole Community. Field 6 is under used per the statements by the Parks Department. The Parks Department or Commission are the ones who determined and stated that Field 6 is underused. That came from them. This project would have maximized the use of Field 6 for the benefit of the Community, including Parks. This whole project started out as a Senior Center project initially. Then the Parks Department presented an opportunity for us to work together with a Senior/Community Center with an indoor gym on a portion of Pirone Park which turned out to be Field 6. I am very disappointed that this project and this great opportunity has been hijacked by a vocal minority. I see signs now that say, "Save Field 6". My question is save it for what? Save it for who? Are we saving it for six games to be played a year? It is unfortunate that this project has been hijacked by a narrow group of self-interests to the determinant of the larger community.

C. Logan stated that she is a citizen representative and she agrees with E. FitzPatrick that we need to move on from Pirone Park. To eat up open space does not make sense. I was away most of the Summer

but watched this unfold on social media, this would most likely ultimately fail at Town Meeting which is in no one's interest.

K. Diskin stated that there has been a vocal negative response to the Pirone Park location on social media and at these meetings and there are significant Article 97 concerns that need to be overcome at this location which we were not fully aware of at the outset. All the required steps and the potential legal process to comply with Article 97 make the Pirone Park site very difficult as a viable site. In my opinion, we need to start over with a new Committee and with a Senior Center only project not located on Pirone Park.

D. Van Schankwyk stated that he concurs with K. Diskin. The Article 97 challenges are considerable for this site and without Parks support we should look at a different project at a different location.

D. Curran stated that Town Meeting approval at this time will be an uphill climb. We were not even afforded an opportunity to fully understand and resolve the Article 97 issues and part of that has been the delay from the State in advising us. This is very disappointing but the fundamental needs for a Senior Center have not gone away, and we must move forward.

E. FitzPatrick proposed that this Committee be reconstituted with a new charge to find a viable location for a Senior Center that is not on Pirone Park.

K. Petrossi stated that considering these recent developments and the discussion this afternoon, we should recommend to the Select Board that this Senior/Community Center Building Committee be dissolved and that the Select Board form a new committee charged with selecting a new site (not on Pirone Park) for the construction of a new Senior Center.

D. Curran stated that we should also recommend that the Select Board commit the \$150,000 in ARPA Funds to this new Committee.

K. Petrossi stated that we can only recommend and that would be the purview of the Select Board.

C. Logan asked about locating the project on Pirone Park but down by the Parks Building and not on Field 6.

K. Petrossi stated that considering the Parks Commission's August 11, 2023 Public Statement, Pirone Park is not a viable site for this project.

J. Thomas stated that there would be many issues with that location as well.

K. Diskin also stated that there would still be Article 97 issues to overcome at that location on Pirone Park.

E. FitzPatrick stated that it is clear that Pirone Park is not a viable location for this project and we need to look elsewhere.

R. Pontbriand explained the process to the Committee. Considering the Committee's vote, the Committee should send a formal recommendation to the Select Board recommending that this Committee be dissolved. Additionally in that recommendation the Committee can report that it has not spent any of the \$150,000 in ARPA funds originally authorized by the Select Board and that Pirone Park is off the table in terms of a future site.

D. Curran stated that it is important that the Select Board hear from us, especially about the importance of keeping the ARPA funds in order to move forward with a new effort to find a new site.

E. FitzPatrick stated that the report to the Select Board should include our recommendation that the ARPA funding be maintained for the new Committee's efforts. We should also recommend that considering the Parks Commission's position that the new Committee should be focused on a Senior Center only project and that project will not be located on Pirone Park.

K. Petrossi concurred with E. FitzPatrick and volunteered as the Chair of this Committee to write the report/recommendation to be presented to the Select Board.

K. Diskin as Vice Chair stated that he would go with K. Petrossi to the Select Board Meeting.

D. Curran as Clerk said he would as well.

R. Pontbriand stated that in addition to this Committee's formal recommendation to the Select Board to dissolve this Committee, the Committee's recommendation/study report could recommend that the Select Board reauthorize the \$150,000 in ARPA funds for the new Committee, additionally, the recommendation that the new committee only focus on a Senior Center Project not to be located on Pirone Park can also be included. The Select Board has the authority to vote to dissolve this Committee on your recommendation and it has the authority as to whether to reconstitute a new Committee as well as to determine the issue of the ARPA Funding. He stated that the Select Board next meets on September 6, 2023.

There was consensus of the Committee that it should recommend to the Select Board that it be officially dissolved; that a new committee be constituted by the Select Board charged with site selection and building a Senior Center only project; and that the Select Board maintain the ARPA funding for this new Committee.

**Motion:** A motion was made by K. Petrossi and seconded by E. FitzPatrick to recommend to the Select Board that they officially dissolve the Ayer Senior/Community Center Committee and that this Committee issue a formal report of its activities to the Select Board to include a recommendation(s) for a future site selection and building committee for a Senior Center project not to be constructed on Pirone Park and for the new committee to retain the ARPA funding for its work. **Motion passed 9-0.**

K. Petrossi asked E. FitzPatrick to follow up with the State regarding the status of this project and that we will not be proceeding with Pirone Park and any of the Article 97 matters with that site. She also asked D. Van Schalkwyk to communicate with the firms that had responded to the RFP that the Committee will be dissolved and hopefully a new effort will be forthcoming soon.

D. Van Schalkwyk stated that he received three responses to the RFP and that he will let them know.

D. Curran suggested that they be given a heads up that there will be a future project.

R. Pontbriand stated that he will have Alan Manoian, Director of Community and Economic Development contact DCHD regarding the grant application submitted and of the current status.

K. Petrossi stated that we should plan to deliver the recommendation and report to the Select Board on September 6, 2023.



**Public Input:**

Nancy Jackvony (Resident) stated that her name was spelt wrong in the previous meeting minutes. She stated that she is honored to be part of the self-interested few. She thanked everyone for saving the park. A new Senior Center is needed, and she wishes everyone good luck. She offered some suggestions for future community events. She loves the park and looks forward to the new project.

Laurie Sabol (Resident) stated that she has a "Save Pirone Park" sign in her yard. She asked if the future plan will still be a joint project of a Senior Center and Community Center. It is a good idea, and the joint concept makes sense.

K. Petrossi stated that we definitely need a new Senior Center and that was the original intent of this effort. The opportunity for the Community Center with an indoor gym came about from the Parks Department as part of this process. Hence the idea and opportunity for a joint project to be located on Pirone Park. However, the Parks Commission has indicated that they are not interested/supportive of this currently.

D. Curran stated that as the process moved along, it was made clear that Parks wouldn't publicly advocate for this project. They voted initially in support of the project and now they are not. We are now in a position that we need to move forward with a Senior Center Project.

Laurie Sabol (Resident) asked if the new effort could still look at the Community Center component?

K. Petrossi stated that everything will be on the table. However, I do not see how that will work since it is now not a priority of Parks, and they are not interested? Additionally, it is clear that no facility is to be built on Pirone Park.

Pauline Conley (Resident) asked if the RFQ and if the responses will be public and part of the record. She stated that she is one of the self-interested few and thanked the Committee for being open-minded. She is a Senior and supporting but she loves Pirone Park.

R. Pontbriand asked for confirmation that the recommendation and report will be presented to the Select Board at their meeting on Wednesday, September 6, 2023 at 5pm.

K. Petrossi stated yes.

K. Petrossi thanked everyone for their time, efforts, and service on the Committee.

**Adjournment:**

**Motion:** A motion was made by M. Withee and seconded by D. Curran to adjourn the meeting at 5:09pm.

**Motion passed 9-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 5:09pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by Robert A. Pontbriand, Town Manager

Signature Indicating Approval: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Approved by Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

[Former Senior/Community Center Building Committee Public Document - Committee Dissolved 9-6-2023]

## AYER PARKS DEPARTMENT

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August 11, 2023

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[Former Senior/Community Center Building Committee Public Document - Committee Dissolved 9-6-2023]

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