



AYER SENIOR CENTER FEASIBILITY STUDY

TOWN OF AYER, MASSACHUSETTS
OCTOBER 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS



BACKGROUND FOR THIS REPORT

The existing Council on Aging facilities do not meet the needs of Ayer today, and will be increasingly inadequate as the user population grows, the facilities age, and expectations for what a Council on Aging offers continue to expand. The existing COA is well organized and offers a variety of programs, but is severely limited by the constrained spaces in the public housing complex where it is now located. But as more and more communities broaden their user base with a “Center for Active Living” rather than a “Senior Center” model, providing facilities for a more diverse range of users in terms of age, family structure, experiences and lifestyles becomes more critical. This pays dividends in strengthening the community and encouraging participation in programs, but requires the physical infrastructure that the current building and site cannot provide.

There is a broad community consensus that a new facility is needed for a growing user base. Based on this understanding Ayer issued a Request for Qualifications for a COA Study, reviewed submissions, and retained Abacus Architects + Planners - The Consultant – in the Spring of 2019 based on their expertise and similar experience. This report documents their investigations and recommendations.

The Senior Center Feasibility Study examined a series of different challenges and opportunities to define an optimal CEO facility. These included:

EXISTING FACILITY:

The Consultant reviewed and documented the existing building and site, programs accommodated, limitations, location and overall character.

POSSIBLE SITES

Representatives of the Town identified 7 possible sites for an expanded COA Facility. These were studied from a number of perspectives: size, location, availability, possible constraints, and opportunities to support other town goals.

- Current Senior Center Location: 18 Pond Street
- Parcel 1-3: 99 Fitchburg Road
- Parcel 19-8: 106 Park Street
- Parcel 19-13: 0 Brook Street
- Parcel 26-97: 6 Groton Road
- Parcel 20-1: 115 Washington Street
- Parcels 32-11, 32-13: 211 West Main Street

PROGRAM:

The Consultant reviewed existing and projected program needs with the COA Director and the Town. At a well-attended public meeting on September 30, 2019 documented COA needs were laid out, input on a COA vision solicited, and program options for the building and site were presented and discussed. A survey solicited more detailed input. Programming options and input were reviewed with the Town and COA Director, and an optimal program document prepared.

SITE/PROGRAM TEST FIT STUDIES

A detailed examination of the site options initially identified confirmed that three of the sites met preliminary requirements warranting further examination. The Consultant, utilizing the consensus program, prepared site and building plans investigating how the program requirements could be accommodated on each of the three sites.

PROS AND CONS ANALYSIS:

The three site/building options were analyzed for their ability to meet the needs of the Town of Ayer, short and long term, and the needs of current and potential building users. The West Main Street site proved to be the most advantageous for a number of reasons:

- It is on a well-traveled route between Downtown and Devens, making it very visible and accessible.
- The site engages the town fabric on the front, and a natural landscape on the back, providing a broad range of potential experiences for users (i.e. - front porch on the street, nature trails at the back)
- It is close to Downtown Ayer, the train station, bus service and other Town amenities.
- It is large enough and far enough from Downtown to have minimal space and parking constraints, allowing possible expansion if needed in the future.

- The rear of the site is in a 100 year flood zone, but can still accommodate a variety of outdoor activities.
- It supports the transformation of the West Main Street from an auto-oriented commercial strip corridor into a more traditional New England pedestrian-oriented Village Center, in close proximity to Downtown Ayer, and aligned with numerous adopted Town of Ayer community goals and future vision.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT:

Schematic site plans, building plans and three dimensional development of the exterior and interior suggest how a West Main Street Village COA facility can support programmatic and town planning goals, and create a memorable place for residents of all ages.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The site and building analyses to date suggest that this site can support the design and construction of a new facility that meets the needs of seniors and the Town as a whole. We recommend that Ayer investigate purchase of the property looking at the cost, whether there is any environmental contamination that may have costs or constraints, and whether there are other environmental and regulatory constraints that should be taken into consideration. This would be implemented through the Select Board and Town Meeting approval.

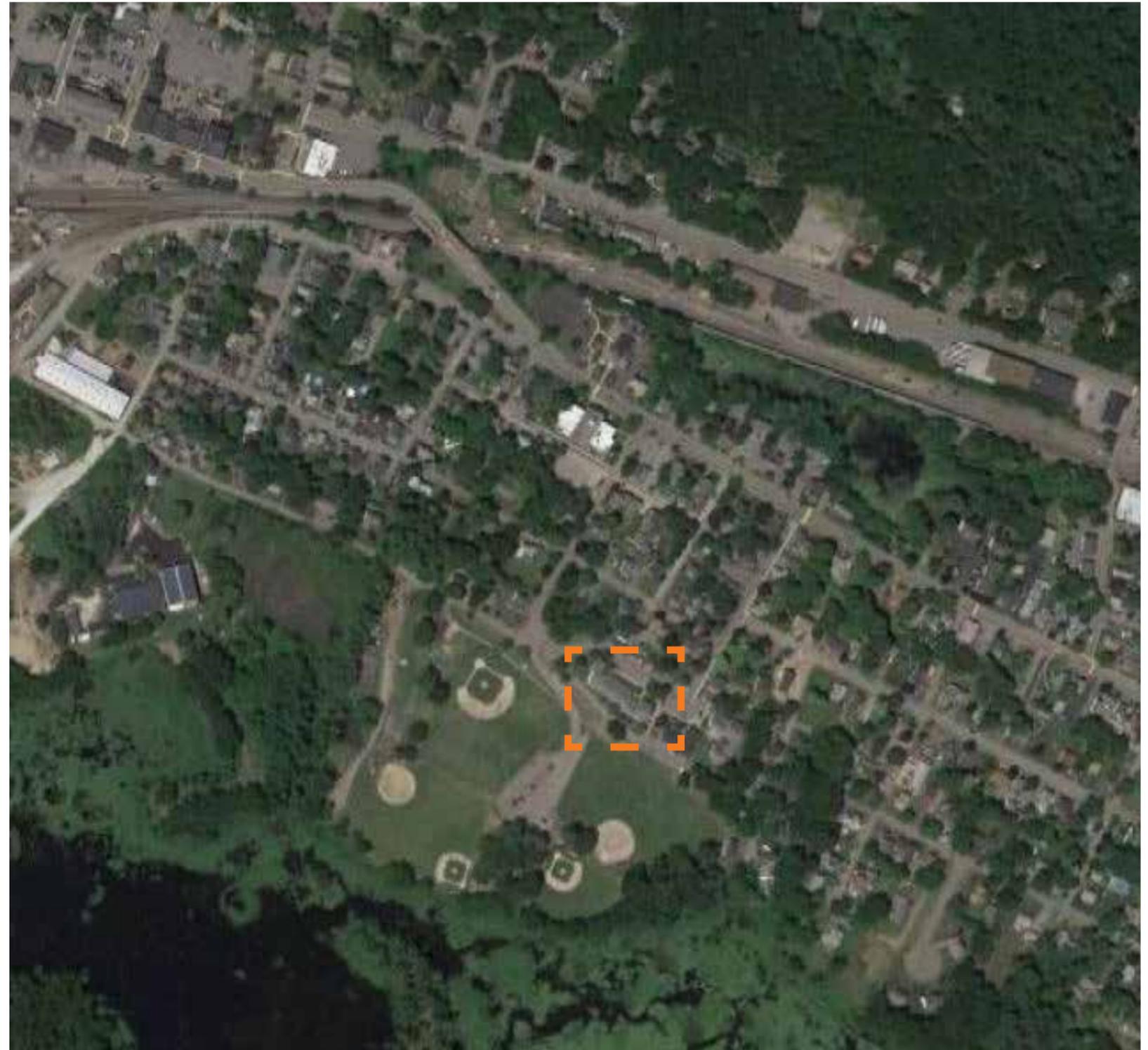
Environmental testing, a detailed site survey, and geotechnical investigations should be considered along with consultation with Town and State officials to discuss approvals and implementation.

In parallel with the investigation, the COA and Town leaders should make residents aware of this report, the recommendations and site investigations, and provide Senior Center advocates with the information they may need to build support for a new COA facility land purchase, further outreach, funding and construction.

EVALUATION OF EXISTING FACILITY

EXISTING SENIOR CENTER NEIGHBORHOOD MAP

2



EXISTING FACILITY OVERVIEW

Council on Aging facilities need to meet a broad range of needs. As seniors live longer and their families, in many cases, live far away, they are increasingly becoming second homes. Users come for social contact, culture, entertainment, health care, physical activities, counseling, and nutrition. Both physical and mental health becomes dependent on the space and programs that are provided. This suggests that there are a series of specialized spaces that should be offered to meet this range of individual and group needs.

At the same time, Council on Aging facilities are increasingly branding themselves as Centers for Active Living, reaching out to a younger demographic while continuing to serve the older population. This helps build support for funding and programs that appeal to a broader range of Town residents and suggests the need for a series of larger and more flexible spaces

The existing facility is very deficient in both of these areas, overwhelmingly because of the limited amount of space, and not because of any lack of effort on the part of the Town or staff. The deficiencies noted below not only document current conditions, but suggest basic requirements for a new Council on Aging/Center for Active Living.

DETAILED EVALUATION- INTERIOR:

Specific deficiencies that interfere with successful delivery of services include:

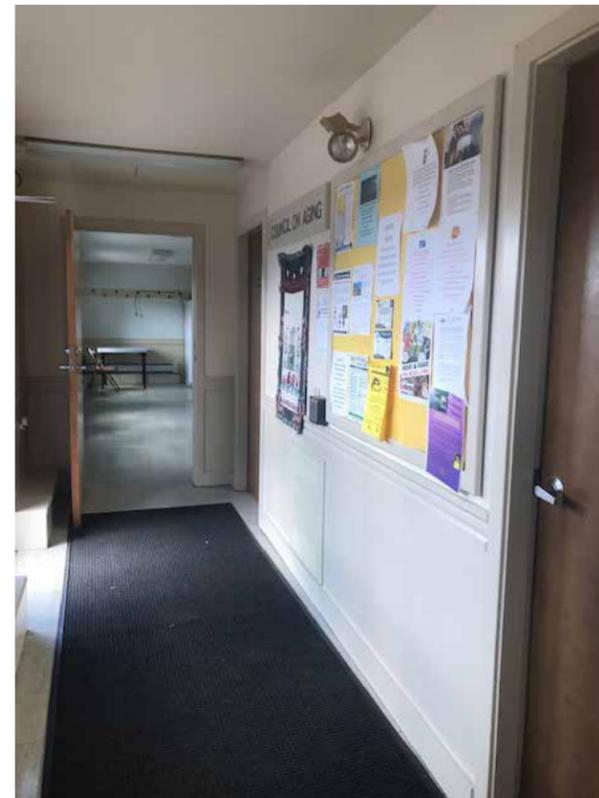
1. An entry that is not particularly welcoming, attractive or visible.
2. Offices do not provide the space or privacy staff needs for planning and collaboration with each other and volunteers.
3. Private areas for discussing finances, health, nutrition, and mental health issues are not available, potentially discouraging requests for support.
4. The kitchen does not provide the space, organization or equipment to meet the growing need for healthy meals, and is not sufficiently contained to avoid a sense of clutter.
5. The dining area is not defined in a way that creates a comfortable and homey environment.

6. The living room area is limited in size and the types of activities it sponsors to support social engagement.
7. Bathrooms do not meet the needs of all seniors or ADA requirements.
8. The limited size does not allow the diverse range of spaces needed for physical activities, arts and crafts, games and socializing typical of most Council on Aging, Senior Center and Center for Active Living facilities.
9. The low ceilings and limited windows do not provide the kind of warm and welcoming environment that encourages physical and mental well-being for staff or users.
10. There are no spaces large enough to accommodate the kind of inclusive activities that build support in the community.
11. The limited space does not offer opportunities for flexibility in how rooms are used or activities accommodated.

DETAILED EVALUATION - EXTERIOR:

1. The Senior Center has virtually no visibility to the public, and lacks a welcoming presence, discouraging use and community support.
2. The front entry provides only limited opportunities for social engagement and is removed from the life of the town. Parking, especially handicapped parking, is not sufficient to engage larger user groups.
3. There is virtually no space for outdoor activities such as exercising, nature walks, gardening, outdoor games and outdoor socializing that support physical and mental health.
4. The small housing authority site and buildings within which the Senior Center is located do not offer opportunities for expansion or outdoor spaces for physical or social activities.
5. The Senior Center is not located in an area that can benefit from its life and vitality, or where there are activities around it that can benefit users of the Senior Center.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF EXISTING SENIOR CENTER



PHOTOGRAPHS OF EXISTING SENIOR CENTER



INITIAL SITE OPTION INVESTIGATIONS – 7 SITES

3

SITE SELECTION CRITERIA:

Determining the optimal site for a renewed Senior Center is a critical part of this study. The investigation began by outlining parameters that could be used to evaluate property options:

1. Is the property available for purchase at a reasonable price and within a reasonable time frame?
2. Is the site large enough to accommodate a new building, parking and open space? The Consultant and Town representatives reviewed other senior centers and anticipated needs and determined that 1 acre is the smallest possible buildable needed area to accommodate possible expansion, overflow parking and outdoor activities and that 1.5 acres or larger would be desirable
3. Are there regulatory obstacles – zoning, wetlands, contamination etc. – that might hinder successful development?
4. Are there topographic conditions, rock outcroppings, abutting uses or other characteristics of sites that would make a site less advantageous?
5. Is the location appropriate in relation to visibility, accessibility to the largest number of users, proximity to other Ayer amenities and supporting the Town's redevelopment and goals to protect open space and support local business and townscape vitality?

SITE MAPPING:

Consulting with real estate brokers, knowledgeable Ayer residents, Town personnel and property owners a list of possible properties for development was assembled. Site options were delineated on an overall aerial map of Ayer to show their location in relation to roads, downtown, water, the rail line, and other elements that define the Town.

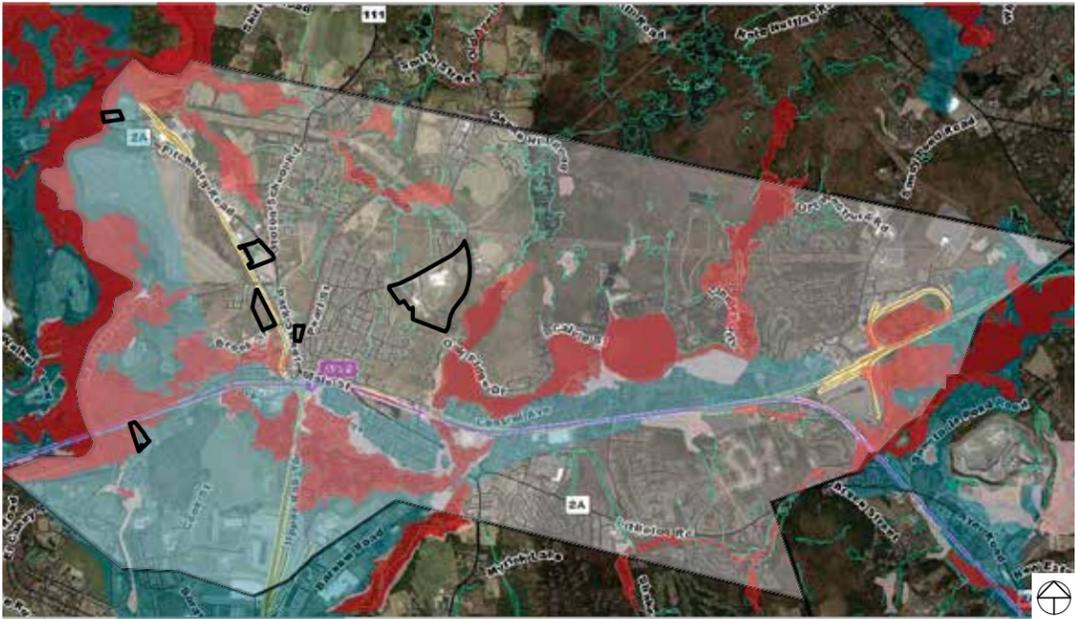
Then each site was delineated at a larger scale showing the property lines, abutting properties, wetlands, flood zones and zoning. This mapping suggests the environmental and regulatory concerns that might be associated with each parcel.

An additional delineation showed 100 parking spaces and a 10,000 square foot senior center footprint superimposed on the property as blocks scaled to the underlying aerial site plan. This allows an understanding of the relative size of the property in relation to preliminary building and site planning requirements.

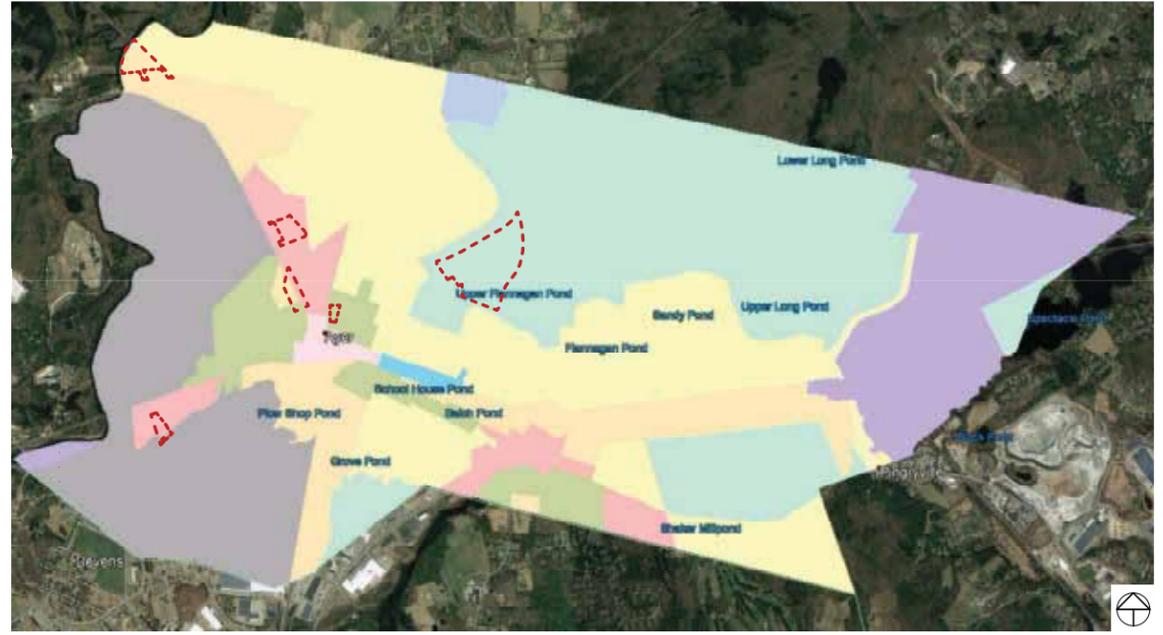
LOCATION MAPS, ZONING AND WETLANDS



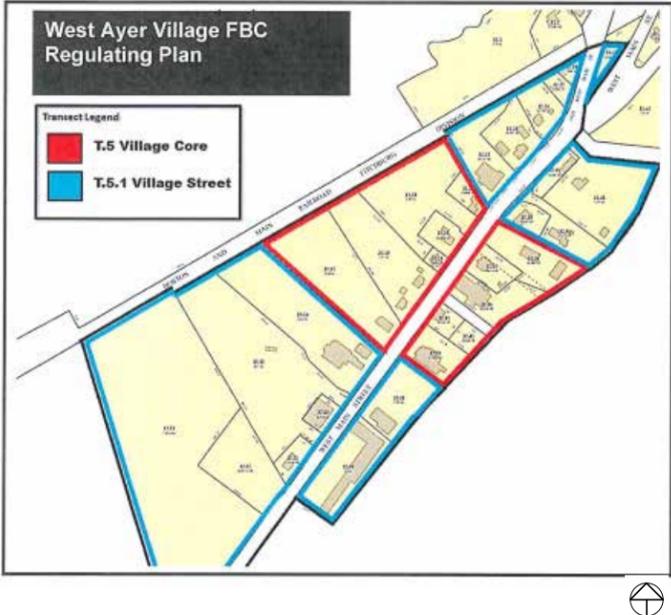
Town map with site options located



Wetlands map with site options located



Zoning map with site options located



West Ayer Village Form Based Code Plan with parcelization shown

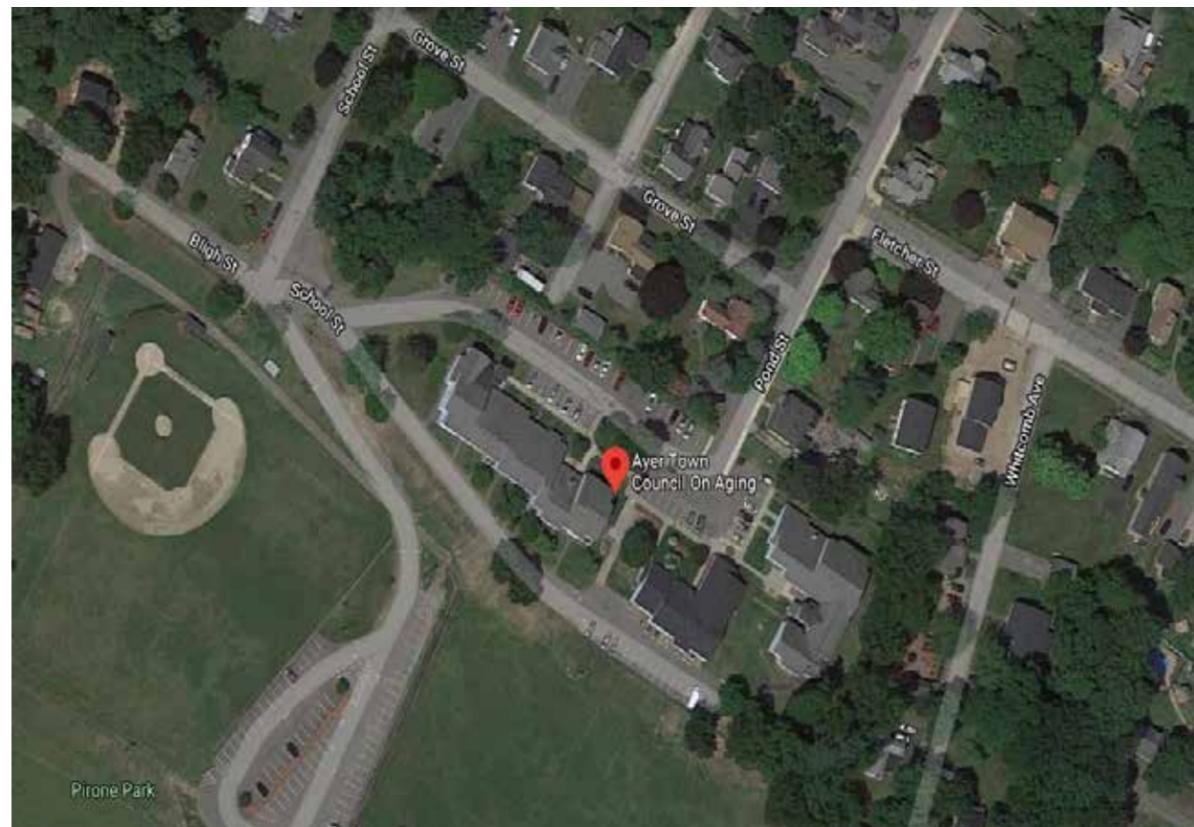
SITE EVALUATION - CURRENT LOCATION, 18 POND STREET & PARCEL 1-2, 99 FITCHBURG ROAD

SITE EVALUATION PROCESS:

Utilizing the site evaluation criteria noted above, and the information conveyed on the site maps, each property was evaluated for its appropriateness as a location for a new Senior Center.

CURRENT LOCATION, 18 POND STREET:

The limitations of this site were clear to all concerned without pursuing the site mapping noted above. The location within an Ayer Housing Authority property offers no opportunities for expansion without negatively impacting the Housing Authority and its mission, and without expansion the COA cannot fulfill its missions. The Housing Authority property is tightly constrained by the East/West section of School Street and the adjacent playing fields to the south, and the AHA parking lot to the north, which is pushed tight to the residential properties that abut it. Expansion to the east and west is constrained by Whitcomb Avenue and the north/south section of School Street. No further study of this site was pursued.



PARCEL 1-2, 99 FITCHBURG ROAD:

This is the farthest property from downtown, is zoned industrial and is surrounded by industrial uses. It is accessed from a drive off of Groton-Shirley Road; it's location hidden from the main road would make it virtually invisible. The location close to the Nashua River offers a proximity to nature, but adjacent properties do not allow for direct access to any type of waterfront.

The size of the site is one of the smallest, and would not allow as many opportunities for exterior programming. This site location is also adjacent to the airport which suggests that noise will be a significant problem. This site does not appear to be desirable for accomplishing COA and Town goals.



SITE EVALUATION - PARCEL 19-8, 106 PARK STREET & PARCEL 19-13, 0 BROOK STREET

PARCEL 19-8, 106 PARK STREET:

The prominent location at the intersection of Park Street, Fitchburg Road and Groton School Road in an area with stores and restaurants makes this an attractive site. It is zoned General Business so rezoning will probably not be required. It's relatively close proximity to Downtown is also advantageous in terms of the Town's broader goals.

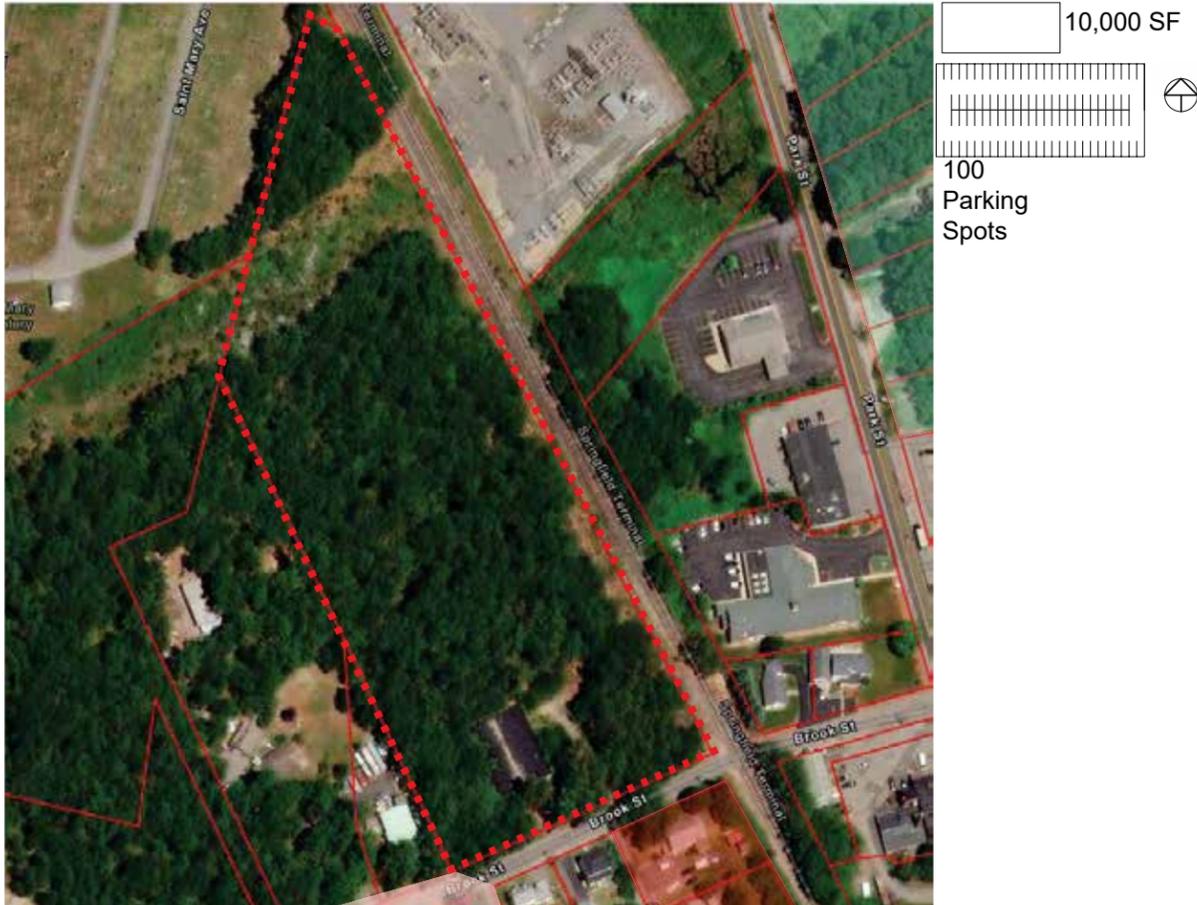
The site is fairly large in relation to the Senior Center program and parking requirements, but wetlands and the 100 year flood zone take up most of the back half of the site. The front half of the site, abutting Fitchburg Road, may offer enough space for development to warrant additional study.



PARCEL 19-13, 0 BROOK STREET:

Although this property is located fairly close to downtown, it's location on Brook Street across the railroad tracks from Park Street would leave it barely visible from public ways. It is not part of a larger neighborhood and abutting uses are industrial in character.

The site is completely covered with woods, which offers opportunities for shade and nature trails, but it would require substantial clear-cutting for development. The Residence A-2 zoning suggests that there may be resistance to development that brings traffic and larger construction with it. This site is unlikely to be provide an optimal location for a new Senior Center.



SITE EVALUATION - PARCEL 26-97, 6 GROTON ROAD & PARCEL 20-1, 115 WASHINGTON STREET

PARCEL 26-97, 6 GROTON STREET:

This is the closest site to downtown and would expand Ayer's civic core from Main Street north up Park Street. It's location at one end of the new commuter parking lot reinforces this connection, and provides overflow parking for Senior Center events. Immediately to the east is the Nashua River Rail Trail, which helps connect the site to its context. The size of the site is a significant disadvantage.

A new Senior Center and parking would take up virtually all of the buildable area, with significant slopes at the north and west edges of the site making construction a significant challenge. The Town Center location suggests further investigation is warranted to see if constraints prove too limiting.



PARCEL 20-1, 115 WASHINGTON STREET:

The Ayer-Shirley Regional High School/Page Hilltop Elementary School site appears to offer a significant amount of undeveloped land that could accommodate a new Senior Center. Construction on this site offers the opportunity to share open space amenities and sponsor multi-generational programs.

Development on the site would be visible to those utilizing the schools, although it would be remote from the Town's other civic and commercial amenities. An additional concern is whether the School District would be amenable to development on the site, which might limit their options in the future. This site should be considered only if the School District would dedicate an appropriate space for a Senior Center



SITE EVALUATION - PARCEL 32-11 & 32-13, 211 WEST MAIN STREET

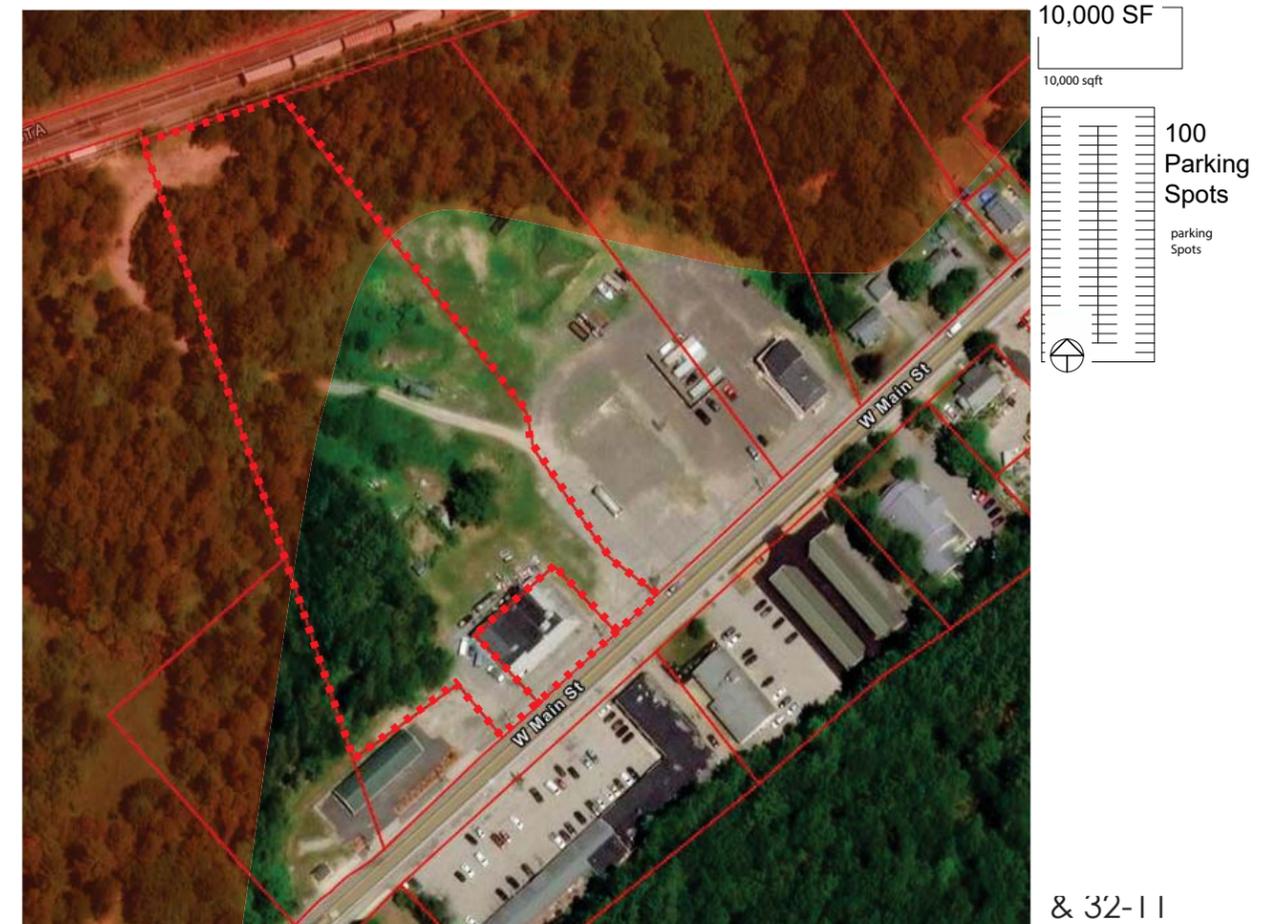
PARCELS 32-11 & 32-13, 211 WEST MAIN STREET:

This site appears to be large enough to support the construction of a new Senior Center while fostering long term development adjacent to it that fulfills Town goals. The rear of the site is in the 100 year flood zone but is appropriate for walking trails and outdoor activities. The front of the site is large enough to give the Senior Center a presence on this important street. Parking can be accommodated in appropriate ways.

The dry cleaner that once occupied the site produced contamination which was remediated under Department of Environmental Protection oversight. Possible continuing constraints on development should be investigated if the site continues to be considered.

West Main Street has been a focus of the Town's planning efforts because it can extend the small town pedestrian character of Main Street towards Devens. Although it currently functions as an auto-oriented commercial strip corridor, the recently adopted and prescriptive Form-Based Zoning Code requires new development conformance with a more traditional and compact pedestrian-oriented New England Village setting.

This is a high priority site for further investigation due to its location and to the range of opportunities it offers for Ayer residents and Senior Center staff and users.



PROGRAMMING OUTREACH AND DEVELOPMENT

4

PROGRAMMING PROCESS

The Consultant, the Council on Aging Director, Town personnel and Ayer citizens worked closely together developing a program for a new facility. This was an iterative process intended to define a building large enough to meet a broad range of needs in the community, while small enough to be affordable. It is focused on the expanding senior community, while allowing necessary space and flexibility to meet the needs of other demographics. Key steps in the process were:

REVIEW OF EXISTING FACILITY: Section 2 documents the physical deficiencies of the existing building and site. Discussions with the Director and others suggested the kinds of programs that are needed, but can't be implemented, because of space limitations.

REVIEW OF OTHER FACILITIES: The Consultant introduced a variety of programs for similar facilities that they have designed. They include a small Senior Center, a larger Center for Active Living, a Community Center and a Multi-Generational Community Center – ranging from 10,000 to 35,000 square feet. The consensus was to keep this facility on the small end of the spectrum.

COMMUNITY MEETING: On September 30, 2019 The Consultant and the Town of Ayer organized a well-attended public meeting to solicit input on a new Senior Center/Center for Active Living. The following activities took place:

- Introduction and Overview - The deficiencies of the existing building and the need for a new one were discussed, along with the need for input on the program. Possible sites were not discussed pending further investigation.
- Discussion - In an open discussion attendees were encouraged to describe their vision for a new facility, what it would include, and how it would be similar to or different from the existing Ayer Senior Center and those in other towns. These were recorded on post-it notes and flip charts to help build a consensus on what Ayer needs.
- The Consultant showed a series of images of the kinds of programs and spaces that are typical at other Senior Centers and Community Centers. Attendees were asked to state their preferences for those they would like to see included.
- A survey was distributed with on-line follow up.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT: Survey results were totaled. Based on the survey, input at the meeting, and detailed review with the Director and the Town, an optimal program was developed that would form the basis for design studies. The program can continue to evolve in response to additional input and clarification of needs.

COMMUNITY MEETING AGENDA AND ACTIVITIES

AYER COMMUNITY MEETING: VISION FOR NEW SENIOR CENTER SEPTEMBER 30, 2019 AT AYER SHIRLEY REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

To facilitate the development of the program for a new senior center for Ayer, the Town and their planning consultants, Abacus Architects + Planners, organized an open meeting to solicit input on community needs. The existing facility is considered inadequate by users and staff, and its replacement has long been a priority. Town officials, Council on Aging (COA) Board Members and over 50 residents attended the meeting in order to understand existing needs, and contribute ideas on how to address them.

The agenda was organized to inform residents of the status of the existing facility, get input on the kinds of spaces and activities that should be supported, suggest the opportunities that might be available, and have attendees prioritize perceived needs. This information will form the basis for an itemization of spaces and their sizes that can then be laid out on possible development sites to test their viability.

MEETING AGENDA:

Part 1: Welcome & Project Overview

- Introduction by Robert Pontbriand, Ayer Town Manager
- Ayer's Growing Senior Population by Alan Manoian, Director of Community and Economic Development

Part 2: Facility Conditions, Challenges and Opportunities

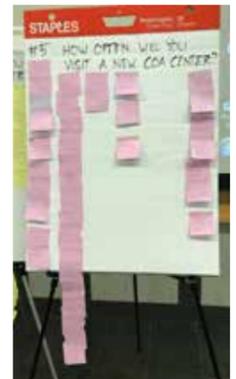
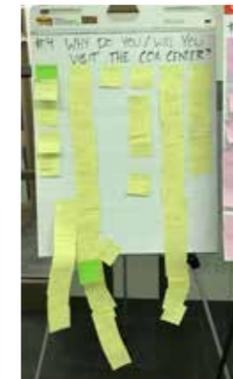
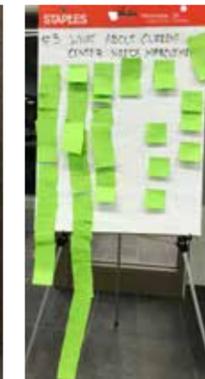
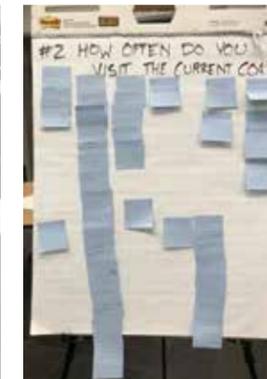
- Presentation of images of existing facility conditions with captions
- Community participation introduction
- Five questions with Post-it note attendee responses
 1. What motivated you to come tonight?
 2. How often do you visit the current COA?
 3. What about the current center needs improvement?
 4. Why do you / will you visit the COA Center?
 5. How often will you visit a new COA Center?

Part 3: Ayer COA Center For Active Living - Future Options

- Presentation of images of program opportunities options
- Community discussion of program needs and alternatives
- Question 6: What programs would you most like to see accommodated in a larger COA Center For Active Listing - rank options listed from 1 to 20

To allow participation in the information gathering from those who were unable to be present at the meeting, the six questions introduced at the meeting were asked in a SurveyMonkey online survey. The answers from the meeting and the survey are compiled in the pages that follow.

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH POST-IT NOTE ATTENDEE RESPONSES



Post-it notes allow those in attendance to answer questions and submit ideas without the need to speak up in a public setting. They facilitate honest answers to critical questions. Post-it notes were distributed, answers written, notes collected and displayed, and then organized according to responses,

Findings were summarized at the meeting. Responses tended to fall into broad categories of ideas and concerns.

The SurveyMonkey online survey followed up with the same questions.

COMMUNITY MEETING QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTION #1: WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO COME TONIGHT?

Support and Curiosity: 44% of responses

The largest number of the attendees came to the community meeting to support the effort to provide a better COA facility, and learn about the master planning process in progress. They appreciated the opportunity to voice their opinions and give their own insights into the decision making process that will affect the planning and design of a new site and building.

Space and size concerns: 32% of responses

Many of the attendees are dissatisfied with the current size and condition of the center, and wanted to see how the future planning would accommodate their needs with an expanded facility. Respondents requested improvements and increased sizes for gathering areas, recreational facilities, support spaces and common areas to create a new COA center responsive to the needs of seniors and to all residents of the Town of Ayer.

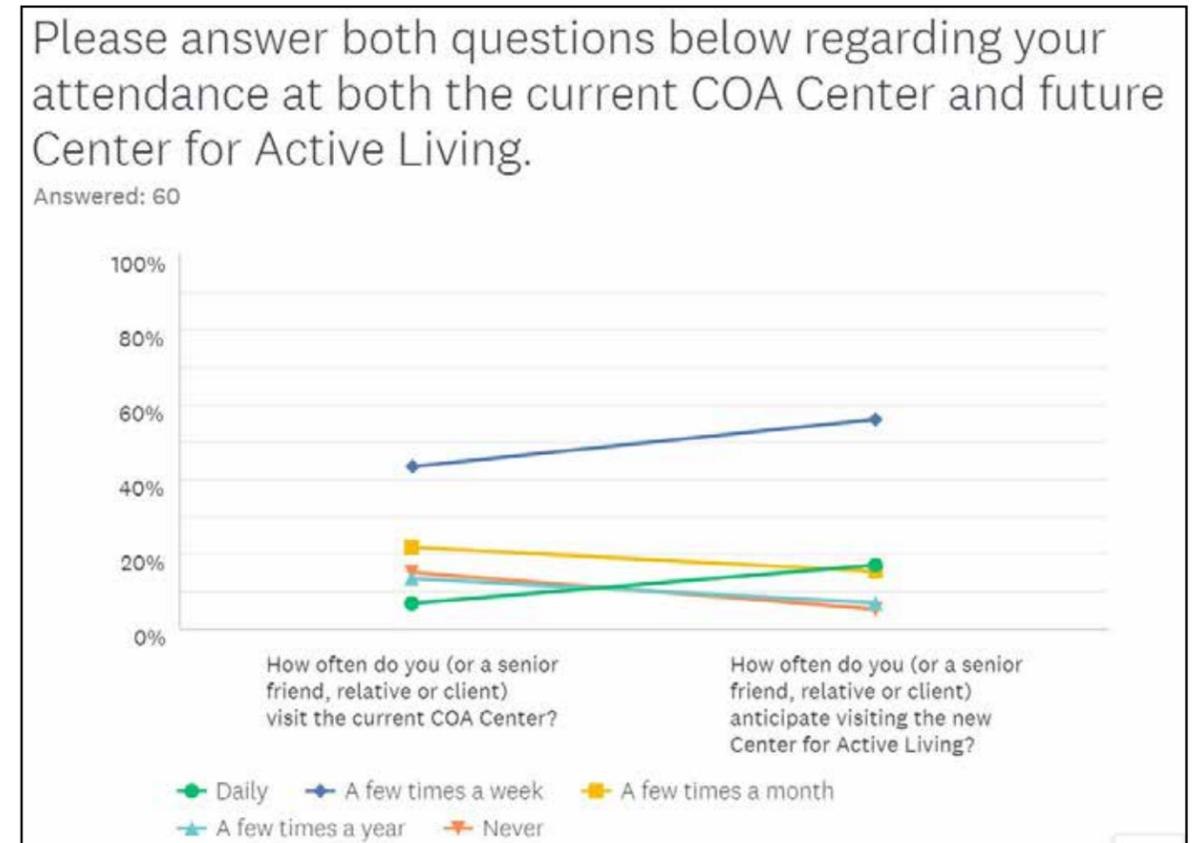
Future users: 18% of responses

A significant number attendees decided to attend and participate in the meeting because they are looking towards their future. These responses indicate that while not all residents of Ayer feel they are old enough to utilize the current COA, they realize it is an asset to the community and their anticipated needs, and have taken an interest in the planning process. Renaming the facility a "Center for Active Living" may lower the age at which residents feel the center can accommodate their needs.

Program discussions: 7% of responses

Current COA users responded that they are interested in increasing the number of programs and activities. Suggestions include increasing the hours that the COA is open, the number of programs intended to help people stay active, and a broader range of program offerings. References were made to COA and community center facilities in nearby towns.

GRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONS #2 AND #5



The attendance survey data collected from the public outreach meeting concluded that if a new Center for Active Living is provided in the community overall attendance would increase. More community members are likely to visit more often. The approximate attendance rates might change as follows:

Daily attendance: From 7% to 17%

Multiple times per week: From 43% to 56%

A few times a month: From 22% to 15%

A few times a year: From 13% to 7%

Never: From 15% to 5%

Regionally, expanded and improved facilities tend to have a significantly greater increase in use if they diversify and expand their programs and their outreach to the public beyond the Council on Aging's typical "senior" population.

COMMUNITY MEETING QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTION #3: WHAT ABOUT THE CURRENT SENIOR CENTER NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Size: 41% of responses

The most critical issue that was noted during the meeting was the size of the current facility and the limits on amenities due to the lack of available space. Attendees requested larger spaces for programs such as exercise and games, as well as a significant increase in common areas including dining areas, kitchen and social spaces. Staff members noted that their work and office areas are inadequate in terms of meeting community needs, and should be larger and offer more privacy for counseling and conferences.

Programs: 21% of responses

The programs offered at the current COA are generally considered to be satisfactory, however visitors want an increased range and frequency of activities. Community members noted that the schedule, methods for sharing events, and equipment and supplies that would support increased program offerings are not robust enough to support the current and anticipated demand.

Parking: 20% of responses

Community members who are able and willing to drive to the center noted a significant need for additional parking. This is especially pertinent during meal times and events. The current parking only allows about 20 cars, but during lunch time, significant events, and community dinners there can be more than 40 people requiring more than the 20 spaces.

Management: 13% of responses

Residents who responded about management concerns didn't complain about staff, but instead noted issues regarding available space for staff to work. Residents would like to have increased staff to operate the COA, along with cleaner and larger facilities, and a more streamlined system for delivering news and schedules of events.

Miscellaneous: 3% of responses

Issues include safety improvements to avoid trip hazards, physical appearance of the spaces and building, and residents who don't use the current center at all because of concerns noted.

Transportation: 2% of responses

Many others agreed with the 2% who prioritized availability of van transportation for residents who cannot drive as a top priority. The current van is too small, doesn't run as much as some residents would like, and the travel radius does not cover the entire town of Ayer.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTION #4: WHY DO YOU / WILL YOU VISIT A NEW COA CENTER?

Activities: 27% of responses

The data collected reveals that visitors are most interested in activities that keep "their brain working" and allow them to continuously be involved through educational and challenging activities such as learning how to play an instrument, arts and crafts, and getting up to date with the latest computer technologies. Residents offered a broad range of activities that they would like to see in a new COA center. Guest speakers and "lunch and learns" were heavily supported.

Companionships: 27% of responses

Responders expressed interest in visiting the community center in order to mingle and meet with other Ayer residents, as it is not as easy to meet people as it used to be. Introducing new programs and larger common spaces allows seniors, and people of all ages, to interact with each other and feel a sense of companionship and community more easily.

Physical Activities: 26% of responses

Residents are specifically interested in physical activities. Ayer community members are invested in trying to get more space for fitness and exercise in order to improve both their physical and mental health. They have expressed interest in classes such as Tai chi and Zumba, Yoga, and other lower impact exercises and activities.

Meals: 8% of responses

It is hard for some to cook their own meals, either because they are not able to go to the store, or they are unable to prepare the meals. Many have noted an interest in having a hot meal or two most days. This request defines key elements of the program, including a larger gathering and eating space, and a large kitchen to support food preparation. Most COA facilities have meals-on-wheels service at least several times a week.

Counseling, Tax Prep, etc: 5% of responses

There is a current lack of retirement preparation services for Ayer residents ranging from filling out tax forms to having someone to talk to about the changes that are affecting the quality of their lives and their health. In a new COA center, residents would like to continue and increase these services with more staff and more private offices.

Undecided / Other: 5% of responses

FOCUSED SITE OPTION INVESTIGATIONS – 3 SITES



INVESTIGATION PROCESS

The programming discussions, outreach, activities and analysis described in the previous section was distilled into an optimal building space program shown below. In parallel the Town and the Consultant reviewed the initial site options and selected the 3 most advantageous sites for further review based on their availability for purchase and development, size, site features and location.

With an optimal building program established the Consultant was positioned to do a more detailed investigation of how to accommodate Senior Center needs on each of the 3 sites. This was accomplished with “test fits” – laying out site plans and building plans suggesting how the program could be distributed on the site, where entries could be located, where access and parking could be located, and how a Senior Center on each site could engage with its context.

These analyses were intended to form the basis for a decision on the best site for the Town to pursue for purchase and construction - understanding the constraints and opportunities, pros and cons, associated with each. All three sites are privately owned.

SENIOR CENTER PROGRAM

PUBLIC:

Entry Vestibules:	300 SF
Reception:	150 SF
Public Toilets:	345 SF
Circulation & gross area adjustment:	100 SF
Total:	896 SF

OFFICES:

2 private offices:	336 SF
Office for wellness & bathroom:	220 SF
Open office:	645 SF
Conference / lunch / break room:	315 SF
Employee restroom:	65 SF
Copy / mail area:	100 SF
Storage:	175 SF
Circulation & gross area adjustment:	300 SF
Total:	2,156 SF

PROGRAM SPACES:

Kitchen:	360 SF
Lounge / cafe:	1,000 SF
Great room (sub-dividable):	2,300 SF
Large Multi-Purpose room:	1,200 SF
Small Multi-Purpose room:	800 SF
Game Room	760 SF
Circulation & gross area adjustment:	2,000 SF
Total:	8,420 SF

BUILDING SUPPORT:

MEP, FP Room / Janitors room:	200 SF
Circulation & gross area adjustment:	98 SF
Total:	298 SF

GRAND TOTAL: 11,770 SF

PARKING TOTAL: 75

PARCEL 19-8, 106 PARK STREET

Overall Layout:

Most of the back half of the site is wetlands and subject to flooding, so the building and parking are located close to Fitchburg Road. The building is at the intersection of Fitchburg Road and Park Street for maximum visibility. A nature trail winds its ways through the undisturbed back portion of the site.

Site Design:

A drive off of Fitchburg Road leads to a drop-off, and then to parking. Over 100 spaces can be accommodated; parking could be built in phases as demand is evaluated. A spur drive allows deliveries to the kitchen. Terraces reach out in several directions.

Building Design:

Program spaces are organized around a central Lobby/Lounge/Living Room that can accommodate meals and a variety of activities. Light comes in from entries, glazed interior walls and skylights. The adjacent spaces for meetings, exercise, arts and crafts and games can be opened up to - or closed off from - this central space.

Offices are close to the entry and offer private places for counseling and the provision of other services. The kitchen is located for easy access from the inside and outside and trash screen from view.



PARCEL 26-97, 6 GROTON STREET

Overall Layout:

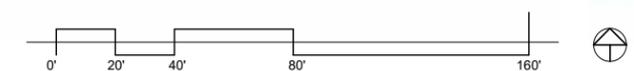
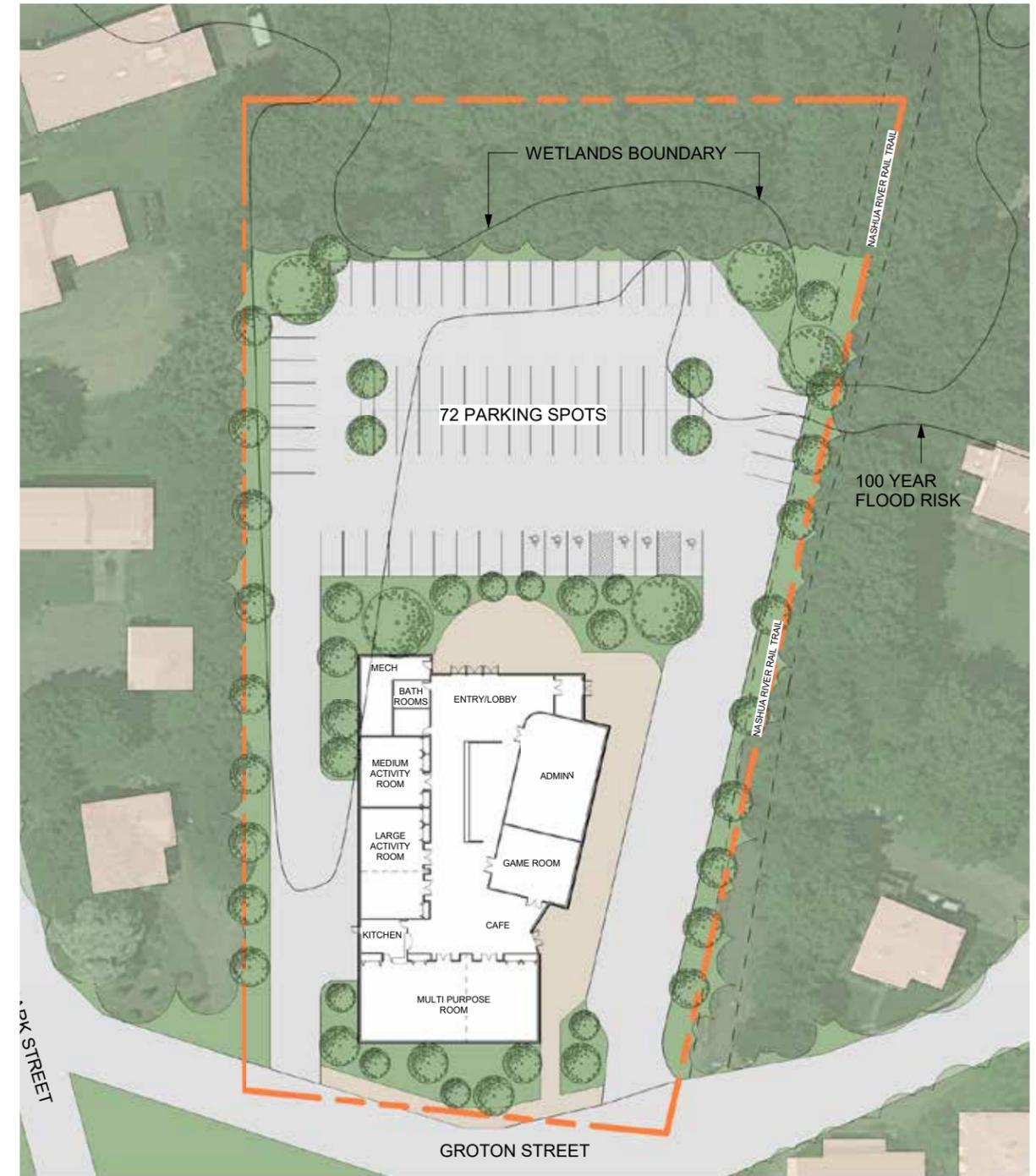
This site is tightly constrained on all sides, but its downtown location may be advantageous. The building faces the street to give it a prominent presence while parking is located behind. There are minimal opportunities for expansion of the building or parking, but overflow parking may be able to use the adjacent town owned lot. Traffic on Groton Street may be a concern.

Site Design:

A drive off of Groton Street leads to a drop off and then back to the parking. The kitchen is serviced by a drive on the opposite side. Terraces surrounded by landscaping provide sheltered outdoor space adjacent to the building. Parking is limited to 72 spaces and may require retaining walls at sloping areas to the north and west. The entry looks out to the rail trail on the east.

Building Design:

The program spaces wrap around two open areas for socializing and dining that look out to the terraces. Office are close to the entry. The Multi-Purpose Room is located where it will address Groton Street and become the front face of the building. Operable partitions allow flexible use of activity areas with storage located throughout the building to serve each area and allow furniture to be stored when not in use.



PARCEL 32-11, 32-13, 211 WEST MAIN STREET

Overall Layout:

The back half of the site is in the 100 year flood zone, so the building and parking are located close to West Main Street. This gives the Senior Center a strong presence on the street. A nature and exercise trail extend out to the back. The long thin proportions facilitate the zoning of the site for a variety of uses.

Site Design:

A drive leads to a drop-off and to parking. 92 spaces are shown; this could be expanded. The kitchen is serviced off of this drive. Terraces face the street, drive and rear to connect to the context surrounded by landscaping. The site design would need to be coordinated with the Town's broader vision for an emerging West Main Village.

Building Design:

Program spaces are organized on both sides of a central Lobby/Lounge/Dining space. Its proportions allow it to be zoned for a variety of uses. Open at both ends it connects the street in front to the green space in the rear. The entry, Game Room and Multi-purpose Room face the street, offering those going by a view of the activities inside.

Entries, drop-off, landscape and overall design should be considered in relation to the long term vision for this neighborhood as it transitions from strip commercial to a pedestrian oriented continuation of downtown.



6

OPTION EVALUATION AND CONSENSUS

The three site options laid out in the previous section were evaluated by Town personnel, the Senior Center Director and the Consultant. Pros and cons were assessed. The consensus was that the West Main Street site was the most advantageous for a number of reasons:

1. It had enough land unencumbered by steep slopes, wetlands or flood zones to allow the construction of the facility as now envisioned, or an expanded facility with additional parking should needs change in the near future or long term.
2. The land appears to be available for purchase at a price that seems reasonable.
3. The West Main Street location is highly visible, relatively easy to access by foot, bus or car, and supports the redevelopment of the western portion of West Main Street as a distinctive traditional New England Village with a strong neighborhood fabric that prioritizes pedestrians.

Based on this decision the Consultant worked with the Senior Center Director and Town personnel to clarify needs, options for meeting them, and approaches from the previous studies that could best inform the development of a final Conceptual Design Plan.

SMART GROWTH PLANNING OVERVIEW

A key requirement for the further development of the West Main Street Senior Center planning and design was that the building engage the street and sidewalk as it is anticipated to be as the West Main Village Form-Based Code goals are implemented - in line with “Smart Growth” principles. This implementation will likely be a combination of Ayer investing in new sidewalks and “Complete Streets” public infrastructure design, new water and wastewater lines, and private investment in buildings that create a more human-scale, mixed-use, walkable, and socially vibrant village center.

The appropriate design of the Senior Center will help move these agendas forward. In response, the Consultant revised plans to accommodate automobile traffic while redesigning the building and the site to better address the street.

Senior Centers are particularly challenging in that vehicular traffic – cars, vans and buses – need to deliver frail users very close to the entry in drop off areas large enough to accommodate multiple vehicles, while providing pedestrian-friendly entries directly connected to sidewalks unencumbered by traffic. In response the Consultant developed two planning options.

SMART GROWTH DESIGN OPTION A

This option orients the building parallel to the street with two separate entries. One faces directly onto West Main Street to the south and is oriented primarily towards pedestrians. This encourages facility users to walk, or those already in the neighborhood to become facility users.

A second entry faces a drop-off and the parking on the drive off of West Main Street on the west side of the building. The building plan is based on an arrangement of spaces favored by the Senior Center Director and reflects a consensus on appropriate program relationships.



SMART GROWTH DESIGN OPTION B

An alternative plan orients the building perpendicular to West Main Street with an entrance on the corner serving both pedestrians and drop-off traffic. The overall building plan space arrangement is similar to Option A. It has the advantage of having only one main entry for control and identity.

The consensus was that Option B compromised both the pedestrian and vehicular-oriented entries. Option A's multiple entries work well for the COA from an interior perspective, and addresses the context in a convenient and attractive manner.



PLAN AND THREE DIMENSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Based on the investigations, plan options, programming and assessments described in the previous sections of this report, the Consultant developed a conceptual site plan, floor plan and 3 dimensional massing that meet Ayer’s short and long term needs in a cost-effective manner on the West Main Street 211 site. These will continue to evolve as a range of site and building constraints and opportunities are investigated further in the next stages of development.

SITE PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The site plan has been developed in alignment with the West Main Village Form-Based Code. A sidewalk lines West Main Street with trees along the curb line and parallel parking spaces. This is the typical town fabric used in communities throughout New England to create downtown vitality. These elements would need to be coordinated with Town-sponsored improvements that might precede, or follow, the construction of a Senior Center.

Parking would need to be evaluated in more detail, but the current plan recommends 75 parking spaces in a parking lot with the option for expanding it by 30 spaces. The parking lot is located so that it is visible and convenient, but is set back from the street and sidewalk to defer to the building and landscape. A small drop-off is suggested at the front door on West Main Street, and a longer drop-off parallel to the entry drive. Kitchen deliveries are accommodated without dominating the side of the building. Trash can be enclosed while still being convenient to the interior and exterior.

The building lines the street with limited landscaping and trees to soften the front face while allowing a direct connection between those inside and outside – similar to typical storefronts. A garden wall lines a portion of the frontage – providing continuity along the sidewalk and giving defined green space a public presence. If the building were to expand, it could expand into the garden space along the sidewalk, towards the rear, or up with a second floor.

Terraces, covered “front porch” areas, gardens and paths through the surrounding landscape connect inside to outside and provide flexible spaces for a variety of outdoor uses. Benches and other site features can promote outdoor socializing and provide welcoming entries while becoming part of the broader West Main Street streetscape.

OVERALL SITE PLAN & ENLARGED SITE PLAN



FLOOR PLAN DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The planning of the building is intended to provide a variety of spaces - some more private, others very open, that can meet a broad range of needs. Priorities are:

- Flexible space that can adapt to changing uses over the course of a day, a week, a year, and decades
- Spaces meeting a range of specific functional needs in effective ways
- Spatial arrangements that facilitate social activities
- Offices and service spaces that provide privacy to staff and Senior Center users
- ADA/MAAB compliance in line with Universal Design principles.
- Visual and physical connections between inside and outside
- Views of greenery and generous daylight
- Sustainable design and construction that can set a standard for what is built in Ayer.

Study after study indicates that sunlight, the presence of nature, and connections with other people are critical for mental and physical health - for everyone, and especially seniors. The plan and overall development of the building are oriented around meeting these needs.

Built-in flexibility should allow a maximum number of uses to be accommodated in a relatively small floor plan, which can then be expanded if needs increase in the short or long term.

FLOOR PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Activity spaces and specific uses are contained within three “building blocks” that surround a triangular open area. One block lines the sidewalk, one is perpendicular to the sidewalk parallel to the property line, and one is at an angle. The angle is a response to exterior conditions – the entry drive, parking and terrace in the rear. It also serves to energize the interior and provide a variety of different spaces in an economical manner.

The block facing the street houses the administrative area which monitors the entire interior. The perpendicular block contains smaller activity areas that open both to the central space and out to the gardens on the east.

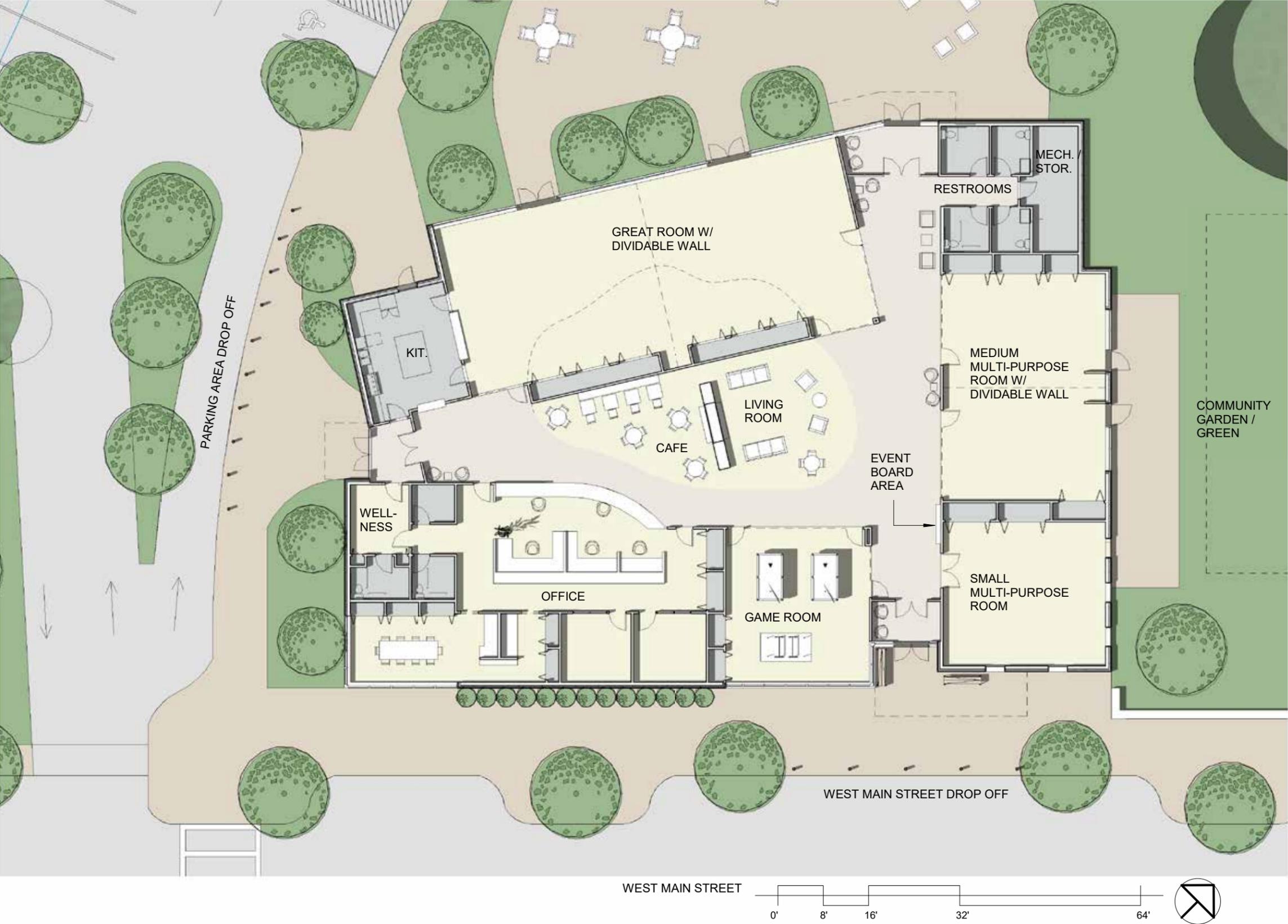
The large multipurpose room faces the rear, and again opens to the central space. This space is defined by a lower ceiling, a central fire place, light coming in from above, and its adjacency to the more enclosed activity rooms. It is intended to be a quiet “island” with circulation around it.

This organization facilitates wayfinding – everything is easily seen and accessed – while providing cozy corners, more generous seating areas and different kinds of places to occupy. Front, side and rear entries connect inside and outside from the three corners of the central gathering place. Activity spaces have their own doors to the outside for use on nice days. Large “garage doors”, sliding panels and operable walls can open rooms up to each other, the central lounge and gardens outside, and provide flexibility for changing uses.

Storage areas, bathrooms and service spaces are integrated into the plan so that they are convenient to access but are out of the way when not being utilized. Furniture can be easily stored and then brought back out to allow morning exercise, lunchtime dining and an evening presentation.

The entire building and site are fully ADA/MAAB compliant.

FLOOR PLAN



THREE DIMENSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Senior Center's massing and facades are based on two basic goals:

- Provide a backdrop for civic life along a revitalized and pedestrian oriented West Main Street
- Express the life and vitality within the Senior Center on the outside, while bringing the life and light outside into the interior.

The Senior Center is a one story building. It is anticipated that new development around it will be several stories higher, so the massing has been developed with expressive elements that can "stand up" to larger housing, commercial and retail that might grow up around it. Goals are accomplished through:

- The exterior form makes the building's organization legible from the interior and exterior. This supports wayfinding and expresses the public use of the Senior Center and West Main Street.
- Broad expanses of glass provide a 21st century connection between inside and outside and a light filled interior. At night the building will glow – suggesting the activities going on inside.
- Walls and glazing are designed to create smaller scaled corners for intimate conversations, which contrast with open circulation and activity areas. Inside and outside there is a sense of transparency that invites everyone to be part of community activities.
- Windows high and low fill every space with light and views of the sky and tree tops and animate the exterior.
- Entries have been emphasized with projecting canopies and glass set back to welcome people in.
- Flat roofs are utilized, as they commonly are in downtown areas, to emphasize the continuity of the frontage along the street and provide a non-residential character.
- Sloping roofs recall the simple vernacular architecture of the region, and emphasize specific spaces. Clerestory windows bring light in from above and give the roofs a light, floating quality.
- The relatively flat front face of the building is typical of downtown buildings that defer to the continuity of the sidewalk and street.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Senior Center can be a model for sustainable development for the Town of Ayer and beyond. The building and site can be designed and engineered to meet LEED, Net Zero or other sustainability standards. Systems and assemblies for consideration include:

- High performance walls and roofs to keep water and air infiltration as low as possible and keep winter heat and summer cooling inside.
- High performance glazing to bring natural light deep into the building with roof overhangs providing shading during the summer. The low sloping roofs allow generous areas for photovoltaic panels. Windows can be operable for natural ventilation.
- All-electric air source heat pumps can provide fossil fuel free heating and cooling utilizing the photo-electric power generated on site. Water source heat pumps (geo-thermal) can also be investigated.
- Ventilation system utilizing ERV or HRV technology to recycle the heat from exhausted air. Ventilation systems should be engineered using the lessons learned from COVID-19.
- Permeable pavers and rain gardens can be used throughout the project to return storm water to the ground. Drought resistant native plantings can use rain water harvested from the roof for irrigation. Local sourcing of sustainable materials can be investigated.
- Electric car charging stations can be provided. Use of recycled materials wherever possible and low VOC products throughout to maintain high indoor air quality.
- The West Main Street location is accessible by foot, bike and bus - reducing the need for cars.

THREE DIMENSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IMAGES



Placeholder for Exterior View 1



Placeholder for Exterior View 2



Placeholder for Interior View 1



Placeholder for Interior View 2

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS



OVERVIEW:

Sections 2 - 6 of this report document a comprehensive review of possible sites for a new Senior Center in Ayer, and an assessment of programmatic options for the new facility. Section 7 illustrates the recommended proposal for a new Senior Center at 211 West Main Street. The investigation indicates that these are the right building spaces on the right site to meet critical Ayer needs, pending verification of availability and site constraints.

What is shown is conceptual design. It will evolve over time, as all conceptual designs do. Additional information on the site, space and program needs, and further development of a vision for West Main Street, may suggest a wide variety of changes that will enable this proposal to be even more responsive to the community. This work will take place in the next stages of development pending approval of the recommended site.

Funding will have an impact on development. The project could be phased to lower short term costs, while meeting long term needs. It could be reduced in scope to reflect a limited budget, or it could be expanded to incorporate elements that might ultimately raise money for operations. Again, these questions will need to be addressed in the next stages of development.

When the design and engineering have evolved further and the site evaluation has provided more detail about constraints and associated requirements, a meaningful cost estimate can be developed and reviewed with the Town and public.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS:

On October 6, 2020 the Ayer Select Board approved Warrant Article 4 for consideration at the October 26, 2020 Town Meeting. This Article, if approved by voters, would authorize the Select Board to purchase the 211 West Main Street property, and to borrow necessary funds – as further defined in the Article.

To accomplish the goals that have emerged from this study, the following steps are recommended:

1. Those who support the purchase of the property should advocate for passage of Article 4 through word of mouth, social media, and other means considered appropriate. This study can be made available for voter education.
2. If Article 4 passes, advocacy should be continued to raise, borrow or allocate money for the planning, design, engineering and construction of a new facility on the West Main Street site. This study can form the basis for initial planning.
3. A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment and/or other assessments should be initiated to insure any contamination is identified, and appropriate action is taken before, during or after construction.
4. Town Departments and other regulatory authorities should be contacted so that any and all constraints can be taken into consideration in the appropriate ways.
5. A detailed site survey and geo-technical investigations should be considered, funded and implemented.
6. Planning, design and engineering should be continued at the appropriate time to facilitate continued civic dialog, engagement with Town departments, funding and preparation for bidding and construction if approved by the Select Board and the Town.