

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Ayer Senior Center/Community Center at Pirone Park

Updated July 24, 2023

### What is the Town proposing to build?

The Senior Center/Community Center Building Committee (SCCCBC) has been charged with overseeing the design, funding, public outreach, and eventual building (if approved) of a Community Center at Pirone Park. Design work is just beginning, conceptualized as an approximately 25,000 sq ft building which would include approximately 15,000 sq ft of a Senior Center and 10,000 sq ft of gym space. The Community Center would operate in the morning and early afternoon as a Senior Center, and then transition over to community space in the after-school & evening hours to host structured programs for children and adults. In addition, the space will include a full-sized (10,000 sq ft) gym with a suspended walking track for programs such as basketball, volleyball, pickleball, indoor soccer, walking club, group fitness and more. While a community center at Pirone Park will require some changes to the park, benefits of the project include a right-sized senior center to provide a variety of programs and services to seniors, year-round opportunities for indoor and outdoor recreational programming for residents of all ages, community-building social events, health and wellness offerings, after school programs, adult community education and more.

### Why Pirone Park? Has the committee looked at any other viable sites in Ayer and the surrounding areas?

Following a Senior Center feasibility study in 2019, the West Main St site was brought to Town Meeting in October 2020 and subsequently tabled due to a variety of concerns. In an effort to keep the initiative moving forward, the Town Manager convened a Senior Center Site Selection Working Group in early 2020, to investigate previously identified and new sites for a Senior Center. This working group examined and eventually eliminated 14 sites over the course of 18 months. These sites were comprehensively investigated, the results of which can be found [here](#). Discussions between the Council on Aging and Parks & Recreation revealed the potential for collaboration. Parks and Recreation has needed an indoor recreation facility for many years to address a shortage of space for current & future programming and is willing to relocate the approximately 10-15 games played on Field 6 to accomplish this goal. The site at Pirone Park is an ideal location due to its central location in town, walkability for nearby families, and proximity to existing Senior Housing, among many other reasons (see page 6 of the [report](#)). A Community Center available to children, families, adults and seniors is an investment in Ayer's sense of community well-being and would increase both structured and unstructured use of Pirone Park.

### What about the limited supply of green space in Ayer? Will this take it all away?

The SCCCBC is committed to limiting the footprint of the building, while still providing a building that provides year-round indoor recreation that enhances the existing outdoor recreation space at Pirone Park. While the area of Field 6 was chosen by Parks & Recreation as the best possible site at Pirone Park for their programmatic needs, the precise orientation of the building, amount of square footage needed, how much of Field 6 or surrounding areas will be needed, etc. is yet to be determined. Based on the floorplans developed for a stand-alone senior center plus the square footage needed for a gym, we anticipate the building will cover only the baseball diamond area of Field 6 (with priority on preserving the viewshed from School St) and the park support structures west of the baseball field, out to the lower parking lot. We will be working with architects and civil engineers to determine if locating the Community Center to the west of School Street is possible, to preserve the viewshed while also ensuring that the flood zone and wetlands area are minimally impacted.

## **I love the view of Grove Pond from the street. Will the building block the view?**

The SCCCBC members live and/or work in Ayer and understand that the view is extremely important to all residents. As such, we will work with the architect to prioritize the preservation of the view. How this will be accomplished – by digging the building into the landscape, placing the building to the west of School Street, or creating architecture that enhances the view – is not yet determined.

## **What will happen to the baseball games that are played on Field 6? Is that field the only one of its size in town?**

The Ayer Department of Parks & Recreation indicates that Field 6 is underutilized and would be a trade worth making, to obtain year-round indoor recreation space including a full-size basketball court. There are other fields in the area that can host Babe Ruth youth baseball games. The committee will investigate these other options to ensure that the games can continue here in Ayer and the surrounding towns. The committee will be working with all involved parties to ease be assured that we will do our best to find suitable and agreeable alternatives.

## **What's Article 97 and how does it affect a Community Center at Pirone Park?**

Article 97 is a legislative process put in place to protect conservation/open space land and ensure that it is not disposed of, or its use changed substantively. It means that if residents of Ayer are interested in building a Community Center at Pirone Park, there will be a few extra steps. At Town Meeting, the vote to approve the building will require a 2/3 vote of support rather than a simple majority. This vote, along with the building plans, must be sent to the MA Legislature for review and approval as well. In some instances the Legislature may require the Town to replace the open space lost by deeding other Town land into conservation. This will likely add additional time to the process. The Town Manager's office has contacted the State for more information and assistance with this process.

## **Who is going to pay for the Community Center? Where is the money going to come from? How long will the process take?**

The SCCCBC is in the very beginning stages of planning the building. The process includes working with an architect and engineers to determine if Pirone Park can support a building, and what that building could look like. The Town and SCCCBC have applied for a State Housing Choice Grant and been granted ARPA (federal COVID Recovery) funds for preliminary conceptual design and engineering work. This means the SCCCBC will not be spending local taxpayer money to draw up the plans needed for residents to decide whether the project should move forward. The Committee will seek public input about the proposed building and make any needed changes.

If the conceptual plans are approved by voters at a future Town Meeting, the next step is to seek local taxpayer and grant funding for design and construction costs. This process requires Town Meeting approval to expend local funds for each of these steps. The process will take several years to complete. The SCCCBC will continue to look for other sources of funding (grants, private donations, etc) to complete the project.

## **When will the building be built, if approved by the taxpayers?**

## **How can community members give input? How else can residents engage in the process?**

The SCCCBC plans to seek community input in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) a survey, public hearings and forums for community members to meet the architect and planning team, site tours, etc. All SCCCBC meetings are open to the public and include opportunities for public input. Additionally, the SCCCBC has a page on the Town website with all details of the project including (link here).