

Exeter Facilities Advisory Committee

Exeter Recreation Department Renovation/Expansion- 4 Hampton Road Review and Recommendation

In fulfilling its Charge from the Exeter Select Board (SB) to advise the Board and others about Town-wide facilities priorities and specific facility proposals, the Exeter Facilities Advisory Committee (FAC) submits for consideration the following Report.

The Facilities Advisory Committee was formed as an advisory board to assist the Select Board in cross coordinating Town of Exeter facilities projects to align with the community's priorities. The FACs role serves to balance the needs of individual project goals across all of the project initiatives current and future. The Committee works to ensure the success of all projects and mitigates risk associated with project inception, development and implementation. This goal is attained through a collaborative approach with each stakeholder and the community using objective information and data to support each initiative. The FAC is guided by the strategic initiatives outlined in The Town of Exeter's Master Plan. This Committee is committed to remaining objective and providing professional advisement to the Select Board in regards to Facilities Planning.

The Exeter Facilities Advisory Committee has reviewed the project plan including documents prepared by the following organizations:

- Recreation Advisory Board
- Parks and Recreation Department
 - Community needs assessments
- Tighe and Bond
 - Banwell Architects
 - Eckman Construction.

The FAC also conducted in-person reviews with most of the aforementioned groups.

Overarching Recommendation:

The Facilities Advisory Committee, by a unanimous, 5-0 vote, recommends that the Exeter Select Board not move the **Exeter Recreation Park Department Renovation/Expansion project-4 Hampton Road** to a warrant article on the 2020 ballot. We recommend holding this project until the following items can be completed --

1. The Select Board conducts a debt service analysis of current debt burden in conjunction with anticipated debt burden to determine the affordability of all planned and expected projects over the next 10 years. This analysis would assist in establishing a capital budgeting process that would create budgets to which all project stake holders would need to adhere.

2. Completion of a comprehensive Facilities Master Plan to inform and consolidate facility replacement, renovation and maintenance projects Town-wide. With this information the Select Board could then determine the priority of current and future projects and assess alternatives as they pertain to the available Town budget. The Exeter Master Plan approved in 2018 will be the strategic document guiding the Facilities Master Plan.

The Facilities Committee concludes that these analyses will provide an objective basis for prioritizing the fiscal feasibility and fiscal sustainability of all capital projects now and in the future.

In addition to the preceding overarching recommendation, the FAC makes additional, detailed recommendations in specific sections of this report.

1. Capital Planning

The FAC reviewed the information and evaluated the project in regard to long-term capital planning. In this review the FAC looked at this specific project in the context of the competing facility needs that the Town of Exeter currently has as well as projected project needs in the near future. These projects include (1) Public Safety Complex, (2) Public Works support facilities (garage), (3) Town Hall, (4) Town Offices, (5) Water and Sewer, (6) Existing Parks & Recreation Department facility, as well as continued maintenance of all existing facilities.

The FAC considered that, without a method to evaluate an overarching prioritization of these competing projects, it would be premature to move forward now with the Recreation Park Renovation/Expansion project. Such a method would be embodied in the Facilities Master Plan that the FAC is recommending.

The Facilities Master Plan would be a valuable and essential tool to forecast capital needs for the community over a longer-term period and would be updated periodically to ensure that it represents current conditions. It will be used in conjunction with the debt service analysis recommended previously to reconcile project costs, schedules, budget resources, and taxpayer impacts/burdens. Also, it would assist in evaluating, prioritizing, and moving proposed projects successfully through the Town budgeting process.

To accelerate development of the Facilities Master Plan, the FAC intends to conduct a Town-wide facilities condition assessment this year. The results of this assessment will be incorporated into the Facilities Master Plan.

2. Site Use

The FAC reviewed the project information in regard to the process of evaluating alternative sites and development opportunities. The FAC did not receive or extensively review any information about alternative site solutions. The FAC noted that the concept of leveraging Town-owned property was a good start and should be used as one of the criteria for site selection and evaluation. Based on the changes to the project during the last few years, the FAC

noted programmatic changes that modified the site use initiatives. These changes to the site programming and the FAC's evaluation of previous project proposals brought the committee to the consensus that the program and site evaluation need additional review and consideration. More specific details are offered in the next section of this report.

3. Site Plan Development and Program

Past versions of the project were based on a phased approach and focused first on athletic fields which seemed to be a higher priority. The current project is now focused on the construction of a much larger (+61%) recreation and community center with a high cost of site development required for the building construction and parking. The added athletic field is now a second priority. The current project with its high price tag is proceeding in a single phase, "all or nothing" approach and, if not supported as now structured, will not accomplish any goals of the Parks & Recreation Department.

The FAC had difficulty understanding why replacement of Planet Playground is not the top priority for this project, considering such replacement is universally recognized as necessary and overdue.

It also appears that an analysis of the current athletic fields was not included in the project other than adding a new field and eliminating at least two other fields that were included in two previous versions of the project proposed to the Town. This latest proposal also reduces the number of tennis courts.

It is our understanding that modifying the current field layout was not included in the current project due to the recent improvements completed on the softball fields. This approach is commendable, but the FAC concludes that an analysis still should be completed to determine the most efficient layout of the athletic fields since part of this project is adding an expensive field. The FAC believes this analysis should be part of a larger Town-wide athletic fields plan that could identify short term improvements (e.g. adding one or two fields) and long-term improvements and could assist with balancing needs and priorities among all Town athletic fields.

In recognition of these concerns, the FAC makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation: As stated above, the current project is "all or nothing." The FAC recommends that the SB conduct an objective analysis of alternatives for this project, including phased or incremental approaches so that the most urgent needs are addressed at a lower cost. The SB should establish these most urgent needs for this project (e.g. replacement of Planet Playground) and allow the project team to develop a phased project which then can be developed into several warrant articles.

For example, two warrant articles could be developed with one being the full project and the second warrant article consisting of a first phase of the project that achieves the highest needs as established by the SB. Under this scenario, Town residents would be able to choose which warrant article best represents their first priority between the two articles.

This analysis of alternatives by the SB should be completed in the context of the Facilities Master Plan in order to fully understand the overall needs of the Town not just the more-narrow needs of the Parks & Recreation Department.

Recommendation: The SB engage a parking consultant to review and project parking needs based on the use of all the anticipated programs at the proposed location and including a determination of peak demand. This would include review of wayfinding and managing parking adjacent to the building, drop off, pickup, van parking and turn around. This parking area does not have a visual link to other proposed parking areas, thus potentially generating excessive traffic in pedestrian areas as people search for parking. A pickup and drop off area for the pool and community center should be considered. It does not appear one exists now in the current design.

Recommendation: Conduct a traffic review of the access to the site. This should include expected seasonal utilization. Access on to Hampton Road and a crossing at this location are safety concerns, and parking should be provided on site to accommodate a high percentage of facility use.

Recommendation: Discuss with the owner of One Hampton Road to secure a long-term lease on a defined number of parking spaces. The FAC understands that the property owner has been generous by providing free parking on its property.

Recommendation: Review Wayside Drive access with neighbors and determine wayfinding or parking area use to minimize traffic patterns by those looking for parking.

Recommendation: The Parks & Recreation Department develop participant growth projections to test whether the capability of the proposed program and project will, at a minimum, meet the Town's needs during the minimum length of the bond.

4. Building Development and Program

Recommendation: Replacement of the pool house be included as part of this project, or that it be put on a future capital planning list to address the current pool house's many deficiencies.

Recommendation: Comprehensive energy and sustainability goals be established for this project in consultation with the Town Energy and Sustainability Advisory Committees and the Town Planner/Sustainability Officer. The design team has shared information on the current

design approach and has incorporated some “green” features such as low water flow fixtures and LED lighting. However, the FAC concludes that new construction is the most productive time to incorporate high performance concepts such as an above-average building envelope that will greatly reduce the energy consumption. This would be an opportunity for the Town to incorporate strong sustainability design goals that will make a difference for the life of the building.

Recommendation: The Parks & Recreation Department stated that the fuel source for the building heating system is propane, but the FAC recommends that the Town examine whether there is an opportunity for natural gas or other energy sources. The building design was presented as “solar-ready,” but there are insufficient detailed project documents available currently to validate this statement.

Recommendation: Some project design aspects, such as the building envelope insulation, seem to just meet International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) 2015 requirements per state code. The FAC believes that the Town should examine whether this project can increase its compliance beyond that minimum level. The FAC recommends that the project design team use energy modeling to quantify energy cost savings over the building’s lifecycle based on different design options. The FAC notes that there may be significant tradeoffs between higher initial project costs and lifetime energy cost savings.

Recommendation: Evaluate further the possibility of using the grade change proposed for the site to incorporate a basement space into the building. This will be the only opportunity to gain that space. A basement also would provide access to the rear of the building that the current plan omits. Such access might well be requested by the Exeter Fire Department.

Recommendation: Review and further define individual program use and space utilization. The current plan includes spaces that cannot be used when an adjacent space is in use, such as the proposed gym and surrounding track. The current plan accepts this inflexibility, but the FAC notes that resolving such conflicts might reduce the size of the proposed building.

Recommendation: Balance rest rooms with building use and actual occupancy. Rest rooms designs should incorporate changes for non-gender specific use and for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, bariatric patient use, and family use.

Recommendation: Draft a Town-wide athletic fields plan to enable Exeter to consider all its playing field assets together, and prioritize investments for improvements among them, as discussed previously in this report.

5. Additional Observations and Recommendations

A. The FAC reviewed the project plan and project approach as outlined and presented to us. Our consensus was that the plan and schedule do not meet the timeline as we understand the budgeting process. It was noted that some parts of the project would be started prior to completing full design of the building and before final bidding had been completed.

This concurrency between construction and ongoing design and bidding needlessly increases the risk that any completed construction might have to be modified after the fact and at additional cost to conform to the final building design and final bid components.

Recommendation: Modify schedule and project plan to ensure that the overall project budget, schedule, bidding process, and program are aligned to eliminate any design/construction concurrency and conflicts with the Town budgeting process.

B. The FAC further concluded that the current Town organization is not set up to support these types of projects that exceed the parameters of typical Department of Public Works (DPW) projects. The consensus of the FAC is that the Town needs to adopt a project delivery process that has more independent oversight of capital project management and execution.

When individual departments manage their own building projects, the oversight on scope, cost, and schedule is limited due to a lack of construction expertise and use of a narrow departmental focus, which understandably tends to be on what is best for the department but not necessarily best for the overall Town.

Centralized oversight and management can see the “big picture” and can weigh the department’s needs with other departments’ needs or initiatives. It could also ensure more streamlined and straightforward participation by various committees, boards and commissions such as ours, the Energy Committee, the Sustainability Advisory Committee, etc.

The FAC believes that it may be unnecessarily inefficient and time-consuming to require any Town department with a capital project to meet separately with each of the relevant Town bodies. An independent oversight function might serve as a coordination point for more joint committee oversight.

Recommendation: Beyond facilitating joint committee oversight, such an independent function should have continuing access to all project information and activities, and should have the responsibility to recommend directly to the Select Board and the Town Manager whether the Select Board should approve any changes in the project that significantly impact cost, schedule, and design before those changes are implemented. Such a function also could provide regular progress reports and serve as an early-warning system for emerging issues.

The FAC suggests that there are at least three ways of obtaining this independent oversight function: (1) contracting out for it as the Town does now for property assessment services; (2) including funds for a separate contract for such a function in each project; and (3) embedding this function part-time or full-time in the Town Manager's Office.

Continuing oversight by an independent authority, the Town Manager, and the Select Board may be the only way to protect Exeter's taxpayers and rate payers from unjustified cost, schedule, and design growth in any project.

C. Recommendation: Conduct further evaluation addressing issues in the following areas:

1. Financial
2. Transportation
3. Site use and development
4. Multi-modal access
5. Energy
6. Storm Water
7. Dark Sky Compliance (minimizing nighttime light pollution).

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Corson	Chair
Kris Weeks	Vice Chair
Amanda Kelly	Member
Mark Leighton	Member
Peter Lennon	Member