

Recreation Department Info Session
Tuesday, November 30, 2021
Town Offices, Nowak Room
7:00 PM
Draft Minutes

Melissa Roy, Greg Bisson, and Rec Advisory Board Chair Stephanie Papakonstantis were present for the public information session.

Mr. Bisson showed a video tour of the property.

Mr. Bisson said 10 Hampton Road is on a property of 1.64 acres directly abutting the Rec Park at 4 Hampton Road. The building has 4,578 feet of finished space with 12 small offices and 2 large multipurpose rooms, as well as 585 square feet of space in the finished garage. This purchase would allow a second access point to the fields and increase parking by 45 spaces, with more parking possible in the future. It could house the Rec staff with minimal renovations. There would be more programming space, with three accessible rooms rather than 1 at the current space. This building would provide access to the indoors for campers in dangerous weather. It would allow increased response time to the pool and programming in case of an emergency. The property is large enough for future expansion into a multigenerational community center. This property would allow us to expand and renovate incrementally. It has immediate renovation needs of \$100,000 to create an ADA entrance and egress, renovate the first floor bathroom to meet ADA needs, renovate 2 program areas, and connect with the town's fiber network. Potential future renovations include ADA access to the 2nd floor, an ADA bathroom on the 2nd floor, and expanding parking.

The town has signed a Purchase & Sale agreement for \$1.15M, so with building renovations of \$100,000 the total would be \$1.25M. There would be a tax impact of 6.2 cents per thousand, or \$18.53 in the first year for a \$300,000 home, and a \$17.80 per year average cost for the 10 year bond for a 300,000 house. This purchase would lead to a reduction in requests for capital improvements; it would eliminate \$4.5M of athletic field parking expansion, \$75,000 for an ADA assessment of 32 Court Street, and decrease a \$6.5M request for the previous multigenerational center to \$2-3M. This acquisition is unanimously supported by the Facilities Advisory Committee and BRC. The Select Board will decide what happens to Court Street, but will likely not decide immediately. Parks and Rec would move in Fall 2022. The town can use the parking now. This would not be a rain site for the 2022 summer camp, since the town would not take ownership until July 1, 2022. Meals on Wheels will stay at the Senior Center until the Select Board decides the future of the Court Street properties. We intend to make small, incremental improvements to the property over the next five years, and do a building expansion when the town can support the financing.

Mr. Bisson opened the session to public comment

Jen Clarke of 61 Acadia Lane asked about adding a small multipurpose gymnasium. If there are additional parking spots, where will the gym go? Mr. Bisson said a site analysis said that both can be accommodated.

Eileen Flockhart of 7 Jacks Court said the potential for this space is something that many of us have dreamed of. It opens a wonderful door for expansion. She hopes it comes to fruition.

Enna Grazier of 8 Warren Avenue said the BRC was excited when Parks and Rec presented this, because it does ease some of the problems of the Department. The activities and administrative functions are currently separate, and both sites are inadequate for parking and programming. There was a lot she liked about the previous proposals, but she's glad we're taking a step back to review. It's important to continue to share the shortcomings of the Court Street property, such as in a chart comparing the assets of each property.

Gerry Hamel of 17 Little Pine Lane said properties like this don't come up often. Most people in town would support this because of how it ties in to the Rec Park. He wants to make sure that we will be getting rid of the property at 32 Court Street. It shouldn't be up to the Select Board, it should be a town vote. People are paying too much in taxes, and he wants to see it balance out. This sale would also open the gates for other departments to expand.

Paul Royal of 3 Pumpkin Circle said this purchase is a no-brainer. He would like to know why we need \$30,000 for the fiber connection. How important is being directly networked? Mr. Bisson said we maintain our own servers here in town. Being able to have our dedicated line is important. Mr. Royal said taxes here are not low, but they're not high, considering what we get as a town. The Town Manager and Select Board act in a responsible and thoughtful way on spending. We don't want to put selling properties on a warrant article. Police and Fire is also coming up. Both properties are in a central location, and it may take some time to determine the highest and best use for them. There's not a lot of land available in downtown Exeter. If a year or two goes by without a decision, then it can go on the warrant. The purchase of 10 Hampton Road will be a super opportunity for the town.

Doug Flockhart of 7 Jacks Court said he's in full support of this project. It couldn't be in a better location and the price is right. People will want to know what they will do with the existing facilities on Court Street, but we don't want to rush into judgement. The Master Plan will have to be revised. The Select Board should tell the voters how they will approach the problem, although they don't have to say a particular solution yet.

Enna Grazier said Public Works and IT Departments are the unsung heroes of our town. One item on the budget is to help Public Works make an inventory of town buildings. This property is valuable, but it's not Parks and Rec's domain to attach the purchase of this property with the sale of Court Street. It would be tragic for the town to sell without completing an inventory of our current properties.

Artis Sutef of 29 Acadia Lane said they've been saying there are two commercial abutments to this property, but there's also Windsor Crossing residential. Have there been any impact studies done? Mr. Bisson said there are no current plans to do anything at 4 Hampton Road. We're doing a recreational analysis with Facilities. Any parking spaces would go at 10 Hampton Road. There's no plan for any large building or reconfiguration of 4 Hampton.

Matthew Morse of 47 Acadia Lane said his family moved to that area for their family to play in the park. With the proposals that have come up over the last few years, the prices have scared them, but this plan seems very rational. His biggest fear was that the property abutting the back of their town house would have traffic and people looking into his house. He likes this approach better. There are 18 townhomes on that property line. Ms. Roy said the Department

heard the community loud and clear during the process last time. Even if this property didn't come up, we would look to move any future project away from 4 Hampton Road. This property coming up allows more flexibility. Ms. Papakonstantis said we approached the owner of this particular building at that time as an alternative to impacting the neighborhoods, but he wasn't ready at the time. With Covid and the ability to work remotely, he changed his mind.

Anne Surman asked if there's an elevator in the building. Mr. Bisson said no, but that would be something we'd assess in the future. Ms. Surman said someone should put their heads together on the Court Street property so a couple of years don't go by without doing anything about it. Putting it up for sale would help sell the acquisition to the town.

Don Clement of Thelma Drive said this is a great opportunity. We should look at disposing of the existing property. Is the intent to move the Senior Center to 10 Hampton Road? Ms. Papakonstantis said yes. Mr. Clement said moving the Senior Center out of downtown wouldn't allow seniors to walk there. Ms. Roy said part of the Parks and Rec analysis will include seniors and community members.

Gail Phillips of 4 Wayside Drive said this is a wonderful opportunity. It couldn't be better located. Regarding the Court Street property, her town closed an elementary school, mothballed it for four years, then sold it for condos. Two years later, we had a population explosion and needed to buy land and build another elementary school. They should take their time deciding what to do with that property.

Jim and Gisela Manna, owners of Churchill's Garden Center at 12 Hampton Road, asked whether they will repave the site and put in an infiltration field. Mr. Bisson said that would be in the future after a full site analysis. Mr. Manna asked about the cost, and Mr. Bisson said haven't determined what that would be. Mr. Manna said even though he is a taxpayer at his business, his kids aren't allowed to use the fields as out-of-towners, so he's wondering about future costs. Mr. Bisson said any improvements would be incremental. Future building expansion depends on the results of the Recreation Analysis. Mr. Manna asked about the access gate, which he said is on his property. Mr. Bisson said he thinks that's on the 10 Hampton Road property. Ms. Roy said she will confirm. Mr. Manna said according to his site plan, it's on his property. It's not a deeded access, it's a handshake access. Ms. Roy said if it's an issue, we will look at making a gate access on the 10 Hampton Road property instead. Mr. Bisson said there was a site survey, but we don't have it with us.

Ms. Roy said next step will be the BRC presenting to the Select Board Dec 6, so please send us any questions or comments.

The information session ended at 7:54 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary