

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

**TOWN OF EXETER
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Russ Dean, Town Manager

CC: Melissa Roy, Assistant Director

FROM: Greg Bisson, Director of Parks and Recreation

RE: Recreation Park Project Update

DATE: 01/17/2020

TIMELINE:

The current Recreation Park Project is the culmination of in depth review and analysis of various independent studies commissioned by the Town, the 2018 Exeter Master Plan, multiple community input sessions, focus groups, and key stakeholder meetings.

2014-2018

The process started in 2014 when the University of New Hampshire conducted a Town Recreation needs assessment. In 2015, a Town Wide Facility Study was commissioned by the Town of Exeter and completed by HL Turner. Both studies were completed by independent contractors with no ties to the community giving it a subjective perspective. In 2018, a Town wide master plan was adopted, and again supported the goals of the Recreation Redevelopment Project.

The Recreation Advisory Board and the Parks and Recreation Department looked at numerous alternative properties for locations of new facilities, ultimately, coming back to the 4 Hampton Rd property due to exuberant redevelopment costs. It was determined by the UNH Needs Assessment that the Recreation Park property would be the most feasible location to correct the deficiencies of the Department and meet the needs of the community.

The Department's 2018 request for design and engineering money was submitted after feedback from the 2017 park proposal. The feedback received in 2017 was the project lacked community input regarding the design as well as accurate material costs for construction.

2019

In March of 2019, The Town passed a ballot proposal for design and engineering of the Recreation Park by 62%. Shortly thereafter, The Department sent out an RFP for the project that resulted in 6 qualified firms submitting proposals. Each proposal was reviewed and scored by a Review Committee consisting of the following; Doug Eastman (Exeter Building Inspector), Mark Leighton (PEA Facilities Director), Dave Sharples (Exeter Planner), Greg Bisson (Exeter Parks and Recreation Director), Melissa Roy (Exeter Parks and Recreation Assistant Director),

For instance, Page 11 of the Exeter Master Plan states:

“Department staff operate out of 32 Court Street, which was built in 1848 as a high school then converted in 1921 to an elementary school. The Parks and Recreation Department has been in the building since the 1970s. The building itself is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and lacks many amenities to meet administration and programming needs. There are no elevators in the building, and stairs are the only way to access the second floor, where many of the programming rooms are located. The 2014-15 Recreation Needs Assessment and Planning Report prepared by the University of New Hampshire (UNH) provided an assessment of the Department and its current activities and compared this to input from stakeholder meetings, an input session with the public, and a community needs survey. Its findings showed that the Department could benefit from a new indoor facility that would not only accommodate indoor sports and activities, but could also meet ADA requirements and support administrative offices for staff, storage, and other needs. The redesign of the Recreation Park, an existing multi-use complex, could accommodate a new facility as well as upgrade outdoor facilities including the playground and fields. The Final Town Wide Facilities Plan: Space Needs and Building Assessments (December 2015)¹ also references the UNH study and supports its findings. Preliminary designs are complete, and the project was approved by the Planning Board, and subsequently included in the 2017-2022 Capital Improvement Program. Cultural trends surrounding organized recreation have changed dramatically over the past several decades, with higher demand for organized activities and high-quality facilities across several demographic groups.”

Exeter Master Plan Action Items recommended are as follows:

- 1) *Evaluate the needs of seniors today and in the future. Determine if existing programs and services in the community and around the region (public, private, and non-profit) are meeting/will meet those needs. Consider needs around housing, lifelong learning, recreation, social interaction and stimulation, and health and wellness, among other issues- **Completed with the formation of our senior council, 2 senior forums & community older adult survey (55+).***
- 2) *Based on public input, prioritize existing recreational facilities in need of improvements that address safety, access, and general maintenance. Estimate costs and develop a six-year schedule that can be incorporated into the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Build off of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Needs Assessment and Planning Report (2014-2015). - **Completed***
- 3) *Identify new facilities or programming, using the findings of the UNH Needs Assessment and Planning Report (2014-2015) as a starting point. Estimate costs and feasibility of providing these new facilities/activities. -**Completed***
- 4) *Prioritize public facilities and spaces (including recreational sites) where ADA improvements are needed or could be improved. Estimate costs and develop a 6-year schedule that can be incorporated into the CIP. -**Completed***

conducted within the context of a Senior Center, but may also wish to consider possible local church options to remain in a central downtown area. We do not recommend renovating the space at this time because the need at this time is limited. Furthermore, the Senior Center activities are tied to Parks and Recreation at this” (HL Turner-2015)

Facilities Committee Recommendations (1/17/2020) Rebuttal:

In reviewing the recommendation from the Facilities Committee dated 1/17/2020, the Parks and Recreation Department has the following responses:

Site Use:

1. *“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.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)*

Parks and Recreation Response: The Parks and Recreation Department and Recreation Advisory Board did an extensive examination of alternative sites. Each option would not have solved all of the goals set out in the supporting documentation mentioned. Unfortunately, there are not large enough properties available within Town to accommodate the amenities needed to achieve these goals. Lastly, the Recreation Park is an LWCF property. This property must be used for recreational purposes only and can never be sold. Redevelopment of a new park in a new location that does not fit the necessary amenities needed by the Town is not recommended by the Parks and Recreation Department. Consolidation of Parks and Recreation business offices and senior center to one location frees up the Court St. property for either town development or sale.

Site Planning:

2. *“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.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)*

Wayfinding signs are planned to control the flow of traffic in the parking lot and program management will help to manage parking capacity.

6. *“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.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)*

Parks and Recreation Response: The Hampton Rd crosswalk was identified by a crosswalk consultant with DPW as a problematic crosswalk. Modifications to the site lines were suggested to DPW and a blinking light is currently in the budget to be placed on that site. The goal of the Recreation Redevelopment project is to minimize people from crossing Hampton Rd, not to encourage it. Additionally, encouraging parking across the street at 1 Hampton Road subjects the Town to increased liability and should be only considered for high volume events such as tournaments.

7. *“Review Wayside Drive access with neighbors and determine wayfinding or parking area use to minimize traffic patterns by those looking for parking.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)*

Parks and Recreation Response: Wayside parking is being examined and working with abutters is a top priority.

8. *“The Parks & Recreation Department develops 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.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)*

Parks and Recreation Response: Parks and Recreation is ready to program the facility fully and believes it will meet the needs of Exeter for the next 10-15 years, if not longer. Current facilities limit our programming capacity and do not meet our current needs (UNH Needs Assessment, Town Wide Facility Study & Master Plan).

Building Development:

9. *“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.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)*

Parks and Recreation Response: Parks and Recreation expanded and renovated the bathhouse only 6 years ago. Ongoing modifications will be done to meet the needs of the

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.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)

Parks and Recreation Response: Parks and Recreation Department staff is knowledgeable in the programming aspect of the building and is confident in programming the building utilizing it fully without conflicts. The new building relocates spaces so that they are accessible and multipurpose. Currently, we have limited use of the Senior Center (after 2:30 pm; Mon - Fri) and the upstairs of the Parks and Recreation Court St. building which is referenced in both the 2018 Master Plan and the 2015 Town Wide facility study.

14. “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.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)

Parks and Recreation Response: Bathrooms are designed per code and we have 2 family bathrooms to utilize with adult changing tables and a shower, meeting the building/parks needs for people of all abilities.

15. “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.” (Facilities Committee - 1/17/2020)

Parks and Recreation Response: All facilities/parks have been examined and are currently in the capital improvement plan.

In conclusion, The Parks and Recreation Department and the Recreation Advisory Board believe this project has been fully vetted and planned responsibly.