

Report of the Board of Selectmen and Council on Aging to 2013 Annual Town Meeting

This is a Report of the Board of Selectmen (“BOS”) and the Council on Aging (“COA”) regarding the status of the Tolles-Parsons Center (“TPC”) (previously known as Senior Center). Given the passage of time since the last update on the proposed Center, this Report will include a thorough review of the work completed to date.

History of Council on Aging

The National Council on Aging originated in 1950 in response to concerns about rising health costs and the impact of mandatory retirement. The Older American Act was enacted in 1965 to promote the development of senior centers for coordination of services and to improve the lives of older Americans through:

- Work and volunteering
- Healthy aging practices
- Providing access to benefits and
- Ensuring their ability to remain independent.

In 1972, Wellesley’s Town Meeting established the COA “to coordinate and implement programs designed to meet the needs of the elderly.” In 1973, a Senior Needs Assessment Survey was conducted and the results focused on the needs of the seniors in town related to transportation gaps, the need for outreach, a drop-in center and a program coordinator.

By 1974, the COA saw its purpose as:

- A clearing house for various senior programs offered by civic, fraternal and religious groups in town;
- Obligated to create specific programs for seniors including Mini Bus program, Meals-on-Wheels and a merchant discount program.

Wellesley Friendly Aid and Wellesley Community Center

In 1975, the COA rented a single room in the Wellesley Friendly Aid (“WFA”) building and hired a Program Coordinator. In 1982, the COA moved to the Wellesley Community Center (“WCC”) and included a Director and part-time assistant in one office and provided information and assistance on issues including health insurance, social security, housing, employment, legal assistance, financial assistance, fuel assistance and nutrition information.

The COA remains housed in the WCC, a non-profit and privately held and managed facility, and employs a Director, two full-time employees, three part-time employees and over 200 volunteers. The COA pays approximately \$80,000 for rent and custodian services for office space, one dedicated room in the basement of the facility, two additional rooms that are available to the COA from 9-4 each day and access to two other rooms on an as requested, as available basis.

Chronology of Tolles-Parsons Center

In 2005, the Town received a bequest of \$825,000 from the estate of Mary Esther “Billie” Tolles. The bequest specified that the funds be used to found, construct and equip a free-standing senior center in Wellesley. This bequest prompted a review of the current facility and services.

Formation and Findings of Senior Center Study Committee 2007-2009

In January 2007, the Senior Study Committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Their mission was to evaluate how the Town could best meet the evolving needs of Wellesley’s senior population.

During the period January to November 2007, the BOS and COA had multiple discussions with the WCC to explore the possible renovation and expansion of the WCC to accommodate the expanding needs of the COA. Several plans were developed and discussed and the parties concluded that there was not a sufficient convergence of interests to support the approach.

The Senior Center Study Committee initiated a comprehensive review of senior support in Wellesley and opportunities for improvement, as well as a review of other location alternatives. The review consisted of focus groups, interviews,

public forums, surveys and benchmarking, including visits to senior centers in other towns.

It was found that the level of senior support in Wellesley was lower than that of neighboring towns; programs were difficult to coordinate and confirm; dedicated space was extremely small impacting the number and types of programs that could be offered; physical access to programs and offices was severely limited given accessibility issues; and as a result, participation rates were quite low.

Based on these findings, the Senior Study Committee concluded the following:

- In order to age well, individuals need to maintain an active, healthy and socially engaged lifestyle. Given the economic environment, it is even more necessary to provide adequate and functional programs and services to our senior population.
- Seniors are increasingly seeking opportunities to learn, socialize, exercise and otherwise remain vital.
- The quality, size, accessibility and availability of facilities impact a town's ability to provide senior support. Well-designed, thoughtfully planned senior centers are attractive, welcoming environments that flexibly support concurrent activities. Accessibility is vital and the opportunity for social interaction is essential.
- Communities that have invested in a new or renovated senior center have seen a significant increase in participation, including senior volunteers, to support an expanded program.

The Senior Study Committee undertook a review of possible sites for the Tolles-Parsons Center and in April 2008, Town Meeting authorized \$50,000 for an assessment of the needs of the Town's senior population (\$25,000 from free cash and \$25,000 from the Tolles bequest) and to initiate a feasibility study for the construction of a free-standing senior center at 496 Washington Street, the former American Legion property.

Feasibility Study in 2008

In September 2008, the architectural firm of Sterling Associates was hired to conduct a feasibility study which included a needs analysis, review of program plan and space requirements, options review (site and parking), estimated

operating budget and preliminary floor plans. The results of the feasibility study suggested that the AL site would readily support a two-story facility of approximately 12,400 square feet. The structure would be fully compliant with the Town's zoning by-laws including footprint, building height and setback requirements. A preliminary design concept was developed which provided offices for the COA staff and visiting support professionals, the Town's Veterans' officer, a drop-in area, socializing spaces, a number of flexible spaces for various size activities and programs, a kitchen and a large hall that could be configured or subdivided for various uses.

It was proposed that the parking needs of the proposed center would be met through a combination of 34 on-site spaces, on-street parking and increased use of senior transportation.

Design Work in 2009-2010

In 2009, by 2/3 vote, Town Meeting appropriated \$600,000 for a detailed building design at the AL site. During this phase, a building program review and benchmark study on design was completed by the newly formed Senior Center Building Committee.

This phase of work carefully considered the vision and goals of the Tolles-Parsons Center. The vision was to enable and enhance a vibrant, engaged and healthy lifestyle in the senior population, provide opportunities for interpersonal connections and increase overall well-being.

The goals of the Tolles-Parsons Center were to:

- Provide the adequate size and type of spaces necessary to enable a sense of place – to gather, connect, socialize, learn, exercise and maintain healthy, socially engaged lifestyles – to promote aging in place;
- Effectively deliver and expand programs to meet the needs and interests of the population;
- Engage, encourage and expand participation;
- Provide welcoming, comfortable, flexible spaces accessible and conducive to multiple activities;
- Foster intergenerational participation.

Building Program Review

The Building Program Review included the following:

- A detailed review and summary of the activities and services being provided at that time, the anticipated number of participants and the types of spaces needed to accommodate them;
- A summary of potential activities in anticipation of growth in offerings and in the rate of participation;
- The development of a floor plan which had the flexibility to accommodate the current activities as well as activities and programs for the future, including specification of the number, type, size and adjacencies of each space.

The major findings of the review were:

- New facilities yield increased participation and utilization;
- 20-25% utilization rate among seniors;
- Socialization, drop-in area is key;
- A vibrant lunch program is important and attracts seniors for other activities;
- Spaces should enable concurrent programming
- Flexible spaces enable multiple and changing uses;
- Private meeting spaces are highly utilized.

Based upon the information gathered and findings, five categories of spaces were identified as necessary to accommodate activities and programming:

- Informal drop-in area/gathering spaces for spontaneous interaction and socializing;
- Spaces for scheduled activities and programs including large and small multi-purpose activity rooms and a main hall, all designed for maximum flexibility;
- Meeting spaces;
- Dining/food preparation spaces; and
- Office/administrative spaces.

Benchmark Study on Design

The Benchmark Study on Design included a descriptive summary of information collected from site visits and research focusing on the design, adjacencies and use of spaces. The objective of this study was to compile information on best-practices and design elements which were effective and efficient and adopted by neighboring senior centers, and to incorporate relevant aspects into the design for the Tolles-Parsons Center. Based upon this information, a preliminary design was developed for the American Legion site.

Traffic and Parking Study in 2009

A Traffic and Parking Study was conducted by Howard Stein Hudson in 2009 and a report issued in January of 2010.

The site plan for the project included 34 on site parking spaces (including two HC spaces). Forty-seven public parking spaces exist on Washington Street adjacent to the site; however, the number of parking spaces may be reduced to 41 as a result of curb cuts and site planning.

It was determined that the new vehicle trips generated by the Tolles-Parsons Center would not adversely impact the study area intersections.

With regard to the adequacy of parking, five parking demand scenarios were considered and conclusions were made based upon parking counts. Under all scenarios, use of public spaces on Washington Street would be necessary:

- Scenario 1A – weekday with 150 visitors; peak parking demand for 50 spaces at 10:30 am; need for 16 spaces on Washington Street
- Scenario 1B – weekday with 130 visitors; peak parking demand for 56 spaces at 10:00 am; need for use of 22 spaces on Washington Street;
- Scenario 2 – typical Wednesday during noon dismissal of St. Paul’s school during school year; school dismissal coincided with peak activity at Center;
- Scenario 3 – major mid-day event at the Center with 120 visitors; parking demand will exceed available spaces
- Scenario 4 – funeral at St. Paul’s Church; parking demand likely to exceed available spaces if over 130 attendees at funeral.

Proposed Acquisition of 494 Washington Street

As a result of the concerns over the adequacy of parking at the AL site, the Selectmen engaged in negotiations with the owner of the property adjacent to the AL site, 494 Washington Street. The lot size is 12,489 square feet and when combined with the AL site, totaled 41,924 square feet (almost an acre).

A price of \$1,270,000 was negotiated with the owner and the proposal was presented to 2010 Town Meeting. Town Meeting did not approve the purchase price of \$1,270,000 but agreed that it would accept \$1,000,000. The owner declined to accept this offer.

Further Discussions with WCC

During the period 2010-2011, the Selectmen, COA and WCC engaged in further discussions regarding the viability of the COA remaining in the WCC on a long term basis. The land on which the WCC building is located is owned by the WFA. Additionally, the property includes a building which houses the WFA and a private counseling organization, a building used by the Wellesley Service League and the Wellesley Historical Society with adjacent parking.

Renovation Options

The WCC proposed three specific options involving renovation to the current WCC facility. These are briefly summarized:

- Option 1
 - Ground level addition to accommodate Drop-in room and reception area;
 - Convert current pre-school space to meeting rooms
 - Construction cost estimate of \$2,538,000
 - Cost to Town of \$2,138,000
 - Cost to WCC of \$400,000
- Option 2
 - Similar to Option 1 above with larger addition to lower level
 - Construction cost estimate of \$2,513,000
 - Cost to Town of \$2,113,000
 - Cost to WCC of \$400,000
- Option 3

- Two story addition to accommodate Drop-in room, reception area, activity space and small kitchen
- Addition of two activity rooms and COA office space
- Construction cost estimate of \$3,113,000
- Cost to Town of \$2,713,000
- Cost to WCC of \$400,000

The BOS rejected these options because they did not provide adequate exclusive space for senior programming, activity spaces were on more than two levels, COA offices were separate from primary meeting and activity spaces and, given that the WCC was willing to contribute a maximum of \$400,000 to construction costs, a disproportionately large financial contribution by the Town was required without ownership or operational control by the Town.

Tear Down/Rebuild Option

Another option proposed by the WCC involved tearing down and rebuilding the facility to provide the COA with adequate office space and seniors with adequate activity spaces. The total construction cost was estimated at \$4,425,000, with the Town contributing \$4,025,000 and the WCC contributing \$400,000. While this was a conceptually viable option, this option was rejected by the BOS given the large financial contribution by the Town without any ownership interest or control of the facility.

Condominium Approach

A “condominium” approach was also explored which would require tearing down and rebuilding the facility; the WCC would own and control one floor of the building and the Town would own and control another floor of the building. Several concerns were raised with this approach including 1) land is owned by Wellesley Friendly Aid (“WFA”); 2) financial contribution would have to be equal between WCC and BOS; 3) timing of the project; 4) operational and management logistics; and 5) maintenance of the facility including common areas and structures.

After consultation among the Board and with Town Counsel, it was determined that the condominium approach would not be pursued.

In summary, although the existing WCC facility may have met the historical needs of Wellesley's senior population, our senior population has grown and changed over the years to the point where the configuration of the building no longer provides adequate space, including rooms equipped for designated purposes, to meet the seniors' needs and the BOS does not believe that the WCC building warrants further capital investment. Additionally, the possibility of investing in the renovation or redevelopment of the WCC facility is not in the best interests of the Town. If the Town were to make a significant capital investment in a new facility, the BOS believes the Town should own and operate the facility.

Campus Vision

In an effort to find a resolution that would be feasible and appropriate for the WCC and the senior citizens of Wellesley, the BOS proposed a “campus concept” at the current WCC site that would provide spaces for senior activities, the COA, the WCC, the WFA and other community groups. The long term goal was a new facility to replace the WCC facility and the WFA buildings on the WFA property located at 219 Washington Street that would enable the WFA, the WCC and the COA to continue their missions. The new facility would house the COA and its programs and services consistent with the design and programmatic requirements of a stand-alone Senior Center, and provide meeting spaces for community groups. The new facility would be owned and operated by the Town of Wellesley.

The COA, BOS, WFA and WCC met to discuss the possibility of a new facility with the following criteria:

- The new facility to be owned and operated by the Town of Wellesley;
- The new facility to provide spaces for the WFA and WSA, as well as the WCC and COA and their activities, and other organizations to be determined as the project progressed;
- The WCC to continue its mission in the redeveloped facility as a tenant of the Town;
- The Town to consider the consumption of alcohol in the new facility.

On April 6, 2011, the BOS requested a definitive response from the WCC by April 11 regarding whether it agreed to having its current building demolished, enabling a new Town-owned and operated facility to be constructed on the site to accommodate the COA, WCC, WFA and WSA and to have the WCC operate as a tenant in the new facility. The BOS further stated that such an agreement was essential to moving forward.

After further discussion between the parties, it was clear that the COA and WCC were both trying to expand their services and that the site was not large enough to accommodate all of the parties' needs and that sufficient synergies did not exist among them. Additionally, by increasing the footprint of the building to accommodate the various parties, parking spaces would be lost leaving insufficient parking. And, given the size of the building needed, the cost likely would increase over what had been projected for a senior center and it was not reasonable to ask the Town to pay for a building that would not be used solely for municipal purposes.

On April 25, 2011, based on these conclusions the BOS voted to terminate discussions with the WCC.

Consideration of Other Sites

During 2011, several sites were evaluated to determine whether another site was viable. These included:

- Property owned by Wellesley College – Washington Street; Turner Road
- Town land on Turner Road near Morses pond
- Town land near Ouellet Field off Cedar Street
- Town land near Prospect/Walnut Streets
- NRC land near senior housing on Morton Field
- Sharing space with Recreation Department at Warren Building

After careful consideration of each site, it was determined that none of the sites was a viable alternative.

2012 – A New Look

In Spring, 2012, the Board of Selectmen reaffirmed that a senior center was a major priority for the Town. Given the passage of time since design work was performed in 2009, concerns raised about the need for a senior center, and the increasing numbers and diversity of the 60+ population, work needed to be done to include new insights and updated information to support healthy living and aging in place. To that end, a review process was developed to review the mission of services and programs for older adults in Wellesley to ensure that it reflected the most current insights and a comprehensive strategy for the future that would meet the needs of a growing 60+ population.

Planning Committee

A Planning Committee was formed to review the mission and vision of how Wellesley will meet the needs of older residents, provide updated and supplemental information on the population, services and programs for current seniors as well as the “new seniors” (baby boomers), and to assess the current design. This Committee included:

- Terri Tsagaris, Chair, Board of Selectmen
- Ellen Gibbs, Vice-Chair, Board of Selectmen
- Susan Kagan Lange, Chair, Council on Aging Board
- Gayle Thieme, Director of Senior Services, Council on Aging
- John Schuler, Board, Council on Aging
- Harriet Warshaw, Board, Council on Aging and former chair of Senior Study Committee and Board of Selectmen
- Frederick Wright, Professor of Marketing, Northeastern University, former Recreation Commissioner

The Planning Committee analyzed the demographics and found that by 2030 the 60+ population will be 92 million or 25% of the U.S. population. In Wellesley, this group accounts for 19% currently. This group is increasingly more diverse, mobile, active, remain in workforce longer and have a broad range of needs, priorities, interests, and activity levels.

Further benchmarking was conducted which included reviewing practices for service delivery, new models of organization and the potential for integrated approaches. Wellesley’s current model for delivery and depth of programming

was evaluated and discussions were held with many town departments and organizations. The following findings were made:

- COA's services and programming for the 60+ group are delivered from a central location which is inadequate;
- The need for services in this population is increasing dramatically;
- Services and programming town-wide for this group are delivered by multiple departments in relative isolation, resulting in some redundancies;
- Coordination of outreach between departments is sporadic and inconsistent.

In addition, the Planning Committee found that:

- 60+ adults want to "age in place" and remain a vibrant part of the community;
- 60+ adults who participate in senior center programs experience a sense of well being when they have a place to socialize, learn, exercise and contribute to community;
- Social interaction enhances mental health and is key to sustaining a high quality of life;
- Regular physical activity contributes greatly to the fitness, health, functioning and quality of life;
- Many 60+ adults rely on senior centers and other aging and social services for their basic needs;
- Baby boomers or "new seniors" have different expectations and needs than those that guided the development of the current system;
- Programs must be innovative and expanded to meet the changing needs and interests: adventure, travel, continuing education, cultural events, evening and weekend programs, opportunities to give back to community;
- We must accommodate all 60+ adults with more of everything – multi-service, a wide range of programs for young, old, fragile, active, retired and working adults.

Based upon these findings, the Planning Committee reached the following conclusions:

- Demographic review: individuals 60+ is a growing demographic group that increasingly encompasses a broad spectrum of interest, needs and capabilities;
- Delivery and depth of services and programming can be greatly improved, expanded, and made more efficient by:
 - Creating a central location or hub with appropriate, flexible and thoughtfully designed spaces for offices, services, programs and gatherings for individuals 60+ now and into the future;
 - Integrating and supplementing program delivery across Town departments through evolving relationships, collaboration and leveraging use of multiple venues;
 - Increasing partnerships through communication and coordination among departments to ensure effective, efficient and expanded outreach and programming.

The Planning Committee's research affirmed the importance of housing the COA administration and mandated and core services in an identifiable, dedicated, accessible location. A new vision – The Collaborative Model - was designed with a centrally located service infrastructure, strengthened and expanded through collaborative programming and use of multiple venues.

Parking Plan

As discussed above, concerns have been raised about the adequacy of parking at the AL site. In addition to attempting to acquire the property adjacent to the AL site, the Natural Resources Commission and the Selectmen discussed the use of parkland on Morton Field (across Washington Street from AL site), as well as use of Wellesley Housing Authority property adjacent to the Police Station. Recognizing the complex issues involving the use of parkland for parking and the time involved with obtaining legislative approval of a land swap, it was determined that this was not a viable alternative.

It was known that the Police Department was in need of expanding its driveway to accommodate emergency vehicles and the WHA bus as well as additional parking spaces. Through collaboration with the Police Department, WHA and DPW, a plan has been developed to meet the needs of the Police Department and the Tolles-Parsons Center.

The concept uses 8700 square feet of WHA land and involves some reconfiguration of the police station parking lot. The plan will widen the police station driveway and add 32 additional spaces, 20 for the TPC and 12 for the police (98 existing spaces to be increased to 130). The crosswalk currently located in front of the police station will be relocated to bring it closer to the AL site and will include a pedestrian activated light.

The New Vision and Paradigm – The Collaborative Model

The research of the Planning Committee demonstrated that many departments and organizations contribute to the well-being of our 60+ population and encourage generational integration. It also recognized the importance of housing the COA administration, and mandated and core services in an identifiable, dedicated, accessible location. These findings resulted in a new concept for the Tolles-Parsons Center – the collaborative model – a service infrastructure with a central location strengthened and expanded by collaboration with other departments and use of multiple venues. This model was developed in an effort to address the growing number and diversity of the 60+ population and the space constraints at the American Legion site, as well as to increase coordination and collaboration with other departments and organizations by reducing redundancies, expanding and diversifying activities and opportunities for the 60+ group, integrating the 60+ population with all generations across town to avoid isolation of seniors, and taking advantage of other spaces in town.

In this Collaborative Model, the Tolles-Parsons Center will serve as the center for COA's mission, services and programs providing a welcoming and accessible focal point for weaving together the resources of the entire community. The COA staff and volunteer offices will be located and social services and outreach programs for basic needs of some individuals 60+ will take place at the TPC. The Center will also provide activities and programming – social and recreational activities, life-long learning opportunities and fitness and exercise classes.

We recognize this age group is growing and increasingly encompassing a broad spectrum of interests, needs and capabilities. In order to accommodate all 60+ adults and to expand and enrich the opportunities, it will be necessary to go beyond the walls of the Center and utilize other spaces in Town such as the

Wellesley Free Library, Recreation Center at Warren, and schools. The Planning Committee spoke with representatives from many departments including Recreation, Schools, Library, Board of Health, Police and Fire and to organizations outside of town government such as the colleges, private schools and Waterstone. All were enthusiastic about partnering and collaborating with the COA to institutionalize this collaborative model to increase opportunities for all Wellesley residents.

The Review Committee

In order to review the findings of the Planning Committee, the Selectmen created a Review Committee and appointed the following members:

- Heather Sawitsky, Chair
- Jean Boyle
- Tim Driver
- David Himmelberger
- Dona Kemp
- Phil Laughlin
- Todd Himstead
- Kathleen Woodward

The Review Committee was charged with the following:

- Evaluate the collaborative model
 - Creation of central location with appropriate, flexible and thoughtfully designed spaces for offices, services, programs and gathering for individuals 60+ now and into the future;
 - Integration and supplementing delivery across Town departments through evolving relationships, collaboration and leveraging use of multiple venues;
- Review the vision, service delivery approach, programming and space; requirements necessary to meet current and future needs of population;
- Assess 496 Washington Street site as the central location of COA mission, vision and goals;

- Evaluate town wide resources and how other town departments and organizations might contribute to expanding and strengthening the mission, vision and goals of the COA.

In sum, the Review Committee supported the Collaborative Model and concluded that the AL site was a reasonable and favorable location for the Tolles-Parsons Center. The Report of the Review Committee is included in the appendix of the Report of Advisory.

Recent Proposal from WCC

On February 14, 2013, representatives from the WCC met with Town officials to present a new proposal for locating the TPC at 219 Washington Street. WCC proposes to construct, own and control a new building adjacent to the current WCC building to house the TPC, with a bridge housing a café to connect the two buildings. An additional 65 parking spaces would be created at the rear of the parking lot. The BOS is currently evaluating the proposal and will supplement this Report at Town Meeting.

The property at 219 Washington Street is owned by the Wellesley Friendly Aid. The WCC leases the land on which its building is located from WFA. At the time of the meeting between town officials and WCC representatives, the WCC had not yet spoken with WFA about a lease of additional land.

The Town contacted a representative of WFA and inquired as to whether it would be interested in leasing or selling its land at 219 Washington Street directly to the Town so that the Town could design, construct, and own the TPC at that location. Before moving forward with negotiations between the Town and the WFA, the Town is conducting its own due diligence to evaluate whether a new building with adequate parking can fit on the site, including site circulation and traffic issues.

The Board of Selectmen will supplement this Report at Town Meeting to include developments regarding the WFA site.

Respectfully submitted,

Board of Selectmen
Council on Aging

April 1, 2013