

Senior Advisory Committee – Special Meeting Minutes – May 5, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm by Chair Vail. She turned the meeting over to Russ Anderson.

Roll Call

Members present were: Russ Anderson (Council Liaison), Lucky D’Ascanio (Community Programs Director), Jen DeRice, Joel Glass, Raymond Jett, Carol Kauffman, Amy Lamontagne (Staff Liaison), Peggy McGehee, and Dolores Vail.

Item 1 – Continued Discussion Regarding a Senior Center

Russ introduced Town Council Chair Karen Farber and Town Manager Nathan Poore. They wanted to speak with the committee after the last meeting when OceanView presented. Chair Farber provided a recap of the land transaction that occurred between the Town and OceanView in 2012. She also spoke about the April 13 Council meeting where OceanView presented their Plummer Plan. Note...this was the same presentation the SAC received on April 28.

The current OceanView proposal is asking for part of the Village Green for the construction of 36 affordable senior apartments. Space inside Plummer would be preserved and turned into a senior center. The senior center would be run by the Town. OceanView is also asking the Town to provide a sidewalk and take care of the lightning on Lunt Road. Meetings were held in Executive Session to discuss a possible land sale. When the Senior Advisory Committee was formed, the Council did not have enough information about the possible project. Even now, they can’t make a decision about the space. Chair Farber explained it is hard to know the value of the property. OceanView is anxious to start work on the project because Plummer has been vacant for a long time and also suffered some damage during the winter.

Joel asked Chair Farber about the Senior Advisory Committee charge. He doesn’t think the committee should get between the Council and a developer. Chair Farber explained that all town committees serve at the pleasure of the Council. However, the Council wants feedback from the group and values its opinion. She said that the Council is hesitant to turn OceanView away without public discussion. The Council needs to decide if the proposal has value to the Town because there are only so many spaces available in town.

Dolores asked what the Plummer space looks like now. Lucky described the false floor (where the library was) and says the gym is beneath it. The space needs to be restored. Chair Farber said the Council has asked OceanView for sketches – specifically, what would the renovated space look like? The Council needs more information about the tax credits and possible restrictions about space design (i.e. could walls be put up in the gym or does it have to be open)? According to Chair Farber, there are several layers to this proposal and questions including – Is it likely that we as a town want a dedicated gathering space for seniors? If so, where might the space be?

What are the possibilities? If space in Plummer is viable, what would we need to design the space?

Dolores doesn't think there should be dedicated space for seniors. She likes a multi-purpose room and/or a multi-purpose facility.

Russ explained that if the Town doesn't convey the land to OceanView for a building expansion, OceanView has said their "Plan B" is to develop high end condos instead of affordable senior housing.

Dolores mentioned the parking issue that was discussed with OceanView on April 28. Thirty-six units will take parking away from the whole area and impact disabled people who cannot walk far.

Russ asked the committee if it is possible to accelerate its thinking and provide feedback to the Council before September. This isn't an ideal time for the OceanView proposal but we have to work with it. Could we make a decision before late June?

Peggy had questions about what the public wants for services, etc. She said we need a survey and isn't sure if we can get everything done in one month? A rush prevents public input. She said the committee must perform its due diligence. The committee has opinions but hasn't coalesced yet. September is a tight deadline and we can't responsibly do a report in June. The Town's Comprehensive Plan discusses the need for a senior center. She also believes the Town Council should take control of what happens to the Village Green. The 2012 contract outlines a playground, gazebo, farmer's market, etc. If the Town conveys land for the current proposal, we don't have control. Outdoor green space is valuable to seniors.

Ray agreed with Peggy's suggestion about the value of the green space.

Chair Farber asked if it's the right use of the committee's time to focus on the Village Green and the OceanView contract in 2012? She thinks the group must step back and look at the larger charge. The September deadline is a guideline. The date was set because without one, the Council will never hear back from a committee. The Council doesn't want to preclude the group from all options and can extend the deadline.

Jen said the committee must focus on the aspect of a senior center. It feels like we're approaching the process backwards. It is hard to make a decision without knowing what services are needed and if residents will use the services. If a senior center is the direction, we must focus there.

Dolores would like a table at the polls on June 9 to survey residents. Amy reminded the group that a survey form must be completed ASAP, especially if it will be distributed during early voting at the area nursing homes. Nathan said a table at the polls is fine and he'll ask Ellen Planer (Town Clerk) to contact Dolores.

Peggy distributed a document to the committee titled “Outline/PMCG Presentation to Town Councilors and Town Manager at 5/15 SCAC Meeting.”

After his informal poll, Russ informed Chair Farber and Nathan that the group doesn’t want to accelerate its work. It will gather information and report to the Council in September.

Chair Farber reiterated that the Council still needs to work through its process and respond to OceanView. This is an offer that we cannot ignore.

Russ has told the Town Council repeatedly that it cannot pre-empt the work of the Senior Advisory Committee. If the Senior Center at Plummer is taken off the table, are 36 affordable housing units a better deal for the Town than high end condos?

Carol had an idea for alternative space in Plummer. The Historical Society needs accessible space that is not available at Whipple Farm. Perhaps some office space could be provided if the space isn’t used for a senior center? The group would like a reception area and genealogy room. Chair Farber suggested approaching OceanView and asking for it.

Amy asked Nathan to review upcoming Town Council dates for the committee. Nathan reported the following –

May 11 – OceanView returns to the Council for a continuation of the April 13 discussion. There will be public comment. The meeting agenda is always posted online by 5:00 pm on the Thursday before the meeting. Reminder – a site walk will be held at the location before the meeting.

May 27 – A Public Hearing related to the May 11 meeting. Reminder - this meeting will occur on Wednesday because of the Monday holiday (Memorial Day).

Chair Farber and Nathan left the meeting.

Item 2 – Other Business

The committee discussed its meeting schedule. Based on future Council meetings that will encourage SAC attendance and the upcoming holiday, the following dates were confirmed –

May 13 at 6:00 pm – Tom Gruber from the Town Of Cumberland Town Council and Aging in Place Committee will be a guest.

June 2 at 6:00 pm – Larry Gross from the Southern Maine Agency on Aging will be a guest.

Item 3 – Adjourn

Chair Vail adjourned the meeting at 8:34 pm.