

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM OTHER TOWNS?

The community center project offers Lincoln an opportunity to build a facility that meets the unique needs of our residents at a time when the Council on Aging (COA) and the Parks and Recreation Department (PRD) are growing and the desire for a multi-generational campus is strong. Community Centers are common in our neighboring communities due to the wide array of public services they provide collaboratively and, due to space sharing, cost effectively. Yet, each community and each community center is different in terms of what departments and organizations it houses and what activities and services are conducted within it.

Lincoln has a number of characteristics that make it particularly appropriate for building a new community center. First, a greater proportion of Lincoln's population is over 60 than in other towns Lincoln's size (Table 2), indicating a need for more space for programming and services. Also, Lincoln's COA and PRD have grown tremendously in the years since their founding, demonstrating the need for their programs and services and the support they have from the town's residents. Finally, Lincoln has a site for the community center, Ballfield Road, that already hosts community events and functions, has room for the community center, and will be enhanced by the addition of a building that will be designed by one of the Boston area's foremost architects.

While we need to consider the benefits to Lincoln as a unique community in determining an appropriate size and design, there are lessons we can learn from other towns. We have gathered information from area towns that have community centers (Table 1) and towns statewide that have total populations that are most similar to Lincoln (Table 2). In addition, we can review the one statewide benchmark that exists, that of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA), which recommends that senior centers have 5-6 gross square feet (gsf) per senior (60+).

Among the conclusions we can draw from the data are:

1. Towns vary greatly in the COA and PRD services they provide and the facilities they build to house them. This is true even among towns of similar populations. This may be because both COAs and PRDs have generally only been established in the last half-century or so and so there is less standardization of services and facilities. However, when towns offer a robust slate of COA and PRD activities and programs and house them in adequate facilities, they are well-used.
2. Based on the EOEA's benchmark, the proposed community center is appropriately sized. Lincoln currently has 2,026 seniors and thus the COA's portion of the community center should have 10,130 to 12,158 gsf. If we consider the COA's portion to be all of the COA administrative space and one-half of all programming, storage, bathroom and other similar space, multiplied by 20% for hallways, utilities, etc. then the COA's portion is 11,706, which is well within the benchmark.

3. We need to be sure that we do not repeat the mistakes of other towns by building too small. An almost universal comment we heard from Council on Aging directors when inquiring about their facilities is that their senior or community centers were built to be too small. This includes Merrimac, is a town about the size of Lincoln that built a 15,000 square foot senior center, bigger than the EOEAs benchmark. While we want to build a facility that provides value for taxpayer’s dollars, it is ultimately more expensive to build a center that is too small and needs additions in the future. Our estimate of 23,000 square has been determined to be necessary for the program the various community center planning committees have developed based on Lincoln’s population and programming data and numerous public forums, focus groups, and surveys.

Lincoln is well-known for being in the forefront of cities and towns in such areas as affordable housing and the preservation of conservation land. These help ensure our town’s vibrancy and quality of life into the future. Building a community center that meets the one benchmark available while including enough space to meet well-documented current and future needs will benefit the community for decades to come for a relatively modest investment.

**Table I – Neighboring Community Centers**

TOWN	DEPTS	TOTAL POP	60+ POP	SQ FEET	SF/POP
Bedford	COA, PRD, YFS, community	13,320	3293	18,000	1.351351
Concord	COA, PRD preschool only	17,669	4666	18,000	1.018733
Sudbury	COA, PRD, teen center, schls	17,659	3132	38,000	2.151877
Weston	COA, PRD	11,261	2746	22,500	1.998046
Lexington	COA, PRD, Human Serv, comm	31,390	7,898	32,000	1.019433

**Table 2 -Towns with the Most Similar Populations to Lincoln, and Carlisle**

TOWN	TOTAL POP	60+ POP	Rec Facility	COA Facility
Harvard	6520	1114	None	in old house
Groveland	6459	1356	office space only	in Town Hall*
Berkley	6411	896	None	in Town Hall
Lincoln	6362	1518	Pods	Bemis Hall
Merrimac	6338	1232	None	15,000 sf senior center (running out of space)
Granby	6240	1262	None	In Town Hall
Carlisle	4852	1030	rooms in schools	in Town Hall and other sites around town

\* working on initiative to build a senior center