

Exploring the Need for a Community Center in Lincoln

By Penny Billings

In May, the Board of Selectmen appointed the Community Center Study Committee (CCSC) to evaluate the concept of a new Community Center for Lincoln. Their charge requires that we evaluate options for the long and short-term facilities needs of the Parks & Recreation Department and Council on Aging. That evaluation will include what succeeds and what fails with respect to their current locations. Many towns recognize the value of a facility serving both populations and as a central gathering place for all residents. Our goal is to make this evaluative process comprehensive, open and transparent.

On Wednesday, October 8, from 6 to 9 PM we will hold a town-wide planning charrette at Hartwell School Pod B. Everyone is encouraged to attend and participate. Refreshments will be served. You can attend for the entire evening or come and go as you please. We are seeking residents' views on what form a Community Center might take in Lincoln and where it should be located.

The CCSC has been meeting all summer, has invited town boards and organizations to work with us, and has hired consultants under a 2014 Town Meeting appropriation. A link on the Town of Lincoln website home page brings residents to the page which includes our charge, a list of CCSC members, our meeting agendas and minutes, and other information.

In a nutshell, we are exploring interest in a new Community Center to house and offer programs for Parks & Recreation and the COA, as well as the numerous community organizations now using Town facilities. If Lincoln residents want a Community Center to intersect with a school building project, that can also be discussed.

Following a 2012 report and the 2013 State of the Town Meeting, we have identified the five most logical Town-owned locations for a Community Center: Bemis Hall, the current Hartwell School area, the Pierce House, the town-owned commuter parking lot adjacent to the Mall, and the Lewis Street DPW site.

It is not the task of the CCSC to decide if a Community Center should be built as new construction, adapted from an existing structure, or exist at all. Nor, if the Town decides that it should exist, will our committee select the final site. We merely serve as the conduit through which various options will be presented to the Town for its collective decision. We are therefore reaching out to Lincoln residents, boards and organizations for their input now.

Information gleaned from the workshop on October 8 will be used by the CCSC as we work with the Selectmen to present the most viable options and elicit discussion at the 2014 State of the Town Meeting on November 15.

Finally, we will present our findings to the Selectmen so that they may frame a warrant article for the 2015 Town Meeting, asking residents whether they want a Community Center in Lincoln and, if so, to select the location for it.

We hope that all Lincoln residents will join us in this important task. You are welcome to attend our public meetings at the Town Offices, participate in the October 8 planning workshop, discuss the matter at the State of the Town Meeting in November, and vote at Town Meeting in March.

Through open communication, sharing concerns, and working together as this issue moves forward, we can do what Lincoln does best and develop the most sensible result for our Town.

Penny Billings is a long-time Lincoln resident and former Selectman. She currently serves as Chair of the Community Center Study Committee.