

**PUBLIC HEARING MEETING MINUTES  
7:00 PM, THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2008  
LOWER LEVEL, DURHAM LIBRARY**

The Public Hearing was called to order at 7:03 pm. The purpose of this public hearing was to receive testimony about Long Range Capital Plans for the Town of Durham.

Laura Francis, First Selectman, thanked those present for attending the hearing. She explained that the Board of Selectmen was devoting the month of March to discuss the capital needs of town and how to prioritize these needs. The Board of Selectmen would like public input because the board is responsible for development of a plan that represents the wishes of the town's residents. In order to give residents ample opportunity to provide their opinion, Mrs. Francis announced the times and locations that have been scheduled to meet with her and/or her board:

- March 8th: Perk and Main, 9-11 am
- March 11th: First Selectman's Office, 6-8 pm
- March 12th: Town Hall, 1:30 pm
- March 15th: Perk and Main, 9-11 am
- March 18th: First Selectman's Office, 6-8 pm
- March 25th: First Selectman's Office, 6-8 pm

Mrs. Francis enumerated the capital projects that have been studied extensively and are viewed as having the highest need: Emergency Services Facilities; Senior Citizen Center; Open Space (due to economic benefit and preservation); Equipment for Emergency Services and Public Works; Public Works Facilities. She further explained that the final capital plan that is developed needs to support a stable overall town budget. By providing this balance, the town and its' residents can plan their budget now and in the future.

Mrs. Francis read a letter from Scott Wright, Captain of Durham Volunteer Ambulance Corp (DVAC), since he was unable to attend the meeting (however, Mr. Wright did attend the meeting during the reading of the letter). In summary, Mr. Wright wrote that the future of emergency medical services in Durham is in jeopardy. The facility that is home to DVAC is in decay and has become a health hazard. The facility is inadequate for modern needs, and renovation of the existing facility would not solve the need for another ambulance and for parking. Call volume has increased and DVAC has responded to the needs of Durham; however, there is a critical need for a second ambulance.

Duncan Milne, member of the Emergency Services Facilities (ESF) Committee, endorsed the recently presented plan for an ESF complex at the location of the current firehouse. He assigned the complex as a top town priority. Overall, the plan renovates/expands the firehouse, includes bringing in DVAC, and reuses the 2 adjacent town-owned buildings to house the police, Emergency Management, and the Fire Marshal's Office. Mr. Milne stated that the 2 houses should be a priority because the renovation cost is moderate, yet the outcome addresses emergency services needs and removes the blight on Main Street. He estimated that 37 Main Street would cost approximately \$350,000 for renovation and 51 Main Street would cost approximately \$250,000 for renovation. He explained that the interior of the houses would be gutted and refinished with heating, plumbing, and electrical, and the job could be completed quickly. The roofs are in good condition. He said the houses should not be torn down. Mr. Milne also felt that renovation of these houses would build momentum for larger project of the ESF complex.

Elaine Melvin discussed the need for a Senior Citizen's Center. She claimed that different properties have been investigated for years; at present, a 7-acre piece of land on Meeting House Road and Route 17 is of high interest to the Senior Citizen's Board. The land has been listed for \$400,000. Mrs. Melvin also described the possibility of renting space at the Dolphin Daycare site off of Route 68. She explained that there would be a cost to prepare the existing facility and that rent would be required. She asked the audience to consider the question: "Do we buy property or rent?" She questioned the possibility of a referendum to gauge people's opinion. Elmer Clark inquired about the cost of Senior Citizen Center. Mrs. Melvin answered that plans have been developed, but they were just a possibility. Currently, a reserve \$310,000 exists for a Senior Center/Community Center.

Althea Parmelee asked when the reserve line item changed name from Senior Center to Senior Center/Community Center. She cautioned that grant funding would be limited if the project includes a Community Center. Mr. Clark answered that the reserve account was renamed by Board of Finance 2 years ago. Mrs. Parmelee stated that the site on Meeting House Road and Route 17 would address the needs for a Senior Citizen Center. She believes that a Community Center should not be part of the project.

Jim Kwieraga introduced himself as a 72 year-old senior who raised 5 kids in town. He lives on a fixed income and has no extra to spend. He asked how many seniors live in town and Mrs. Melvin stated that there are 680 residents 62 years of age and older. Mr. Kwieraga stated that he would support a Senior Citizen Center if seniors would use it, but

he doesn't think they will. Seniors also travel throughout the year. He would rather fund an item that will have the maximum use in town, like a new track at the high school where many seniors walk. He cautioned the cost of running and maintaining a new structure. He also stated that the location of the senior citizen center should be considered and that the center of town is better than the south end of town. Mrs. Parmelee stated that she believes 100 people would visit the center. He suggested that money be spent on things that are used and benefit most.

Irene Roberts stated that she has lived in town with her husband for her entire life. She reminded people that the senior tax relief program was approved in town and that the taxpayer now shoulders this burden. She questioned the need for an expensive community center and stated that the current space limitations at the existing facilities used by the senior citizens don't warrant a new facility. Renting is also a waste of taxpayer's money. Mrs. Roberts believes the two town-owned houses on Main Street should be torn down and a suitable facility be built for the seniors at this site. We must use what we own and we need to take care of both our seniors and our younger people in town.

Gail Gorton introduced herself as a senior who has lived in town for 25 years. She stated that a center on the south end of town does not make sense and that a central location is preferred. She also believes that renting throws money down the drain. The priority should be a Community Center/Senior Center, but that \$400K is a lot of money for a piece of land. She questioned the rehabilitation of the Merriam Manufacturing site as a potential central location for the Senior Citizen Center.

Mrs. Francis responded that the Merriam Manufacturing site is a superfund site and that the EPA has filed a remediation plan. The clean-up could take many years because of a long list of superfund sites that the EPA must fund. She informed the audience that a person (Jan Exman) has expressed an interest in purchasing the delinquent tax liens, foreclosing on the property, and cleaning it up for reuse. He is interested in working with the town regarding future plans for the site. Bob Melvin pointed out that ground water would still be contaminated at that site even if the soil is decontaminated. Mrs. Francis stated that funds to conduct a study to bring water from Middletown have been promised State of Connecticut. However, the town would have to address some of the costs to actually run the water system from Middletown to Durham.

Joe Pasquale stated that he spoke with Jan Exman and that according to Mr. Exman, remediation might be possible within 2 years. Clean-up funds would be available from the EPA, and grant money could be secured to support the water system. Mr. Pasquale believes we should work with Mr. Exman.

Rick Parmelee acknowledged the hard work of the Boards of Selectmen and Finance on the annual budget. He supports the town process for approving/spending money. He stated that RSD13 spends most of our taxes, yet we have no say or oversight in the process for approving/spending money. He doesn't approve that they have proposed a bonding package for 6 million dollars that combines needed items and questionable items like the athletic fields. He believes that the needs of the senior citizens in town have been neglected. He is not in favor of renting. Top priorities for the town include purchasing property on the south end of town for a Senior Citizen Center and consolidation of emergency services facilities. Mr. Parmelee supports the proposed plan for the ESF complex. Regarding the Public Works site, he believes the site should be assessed as to how to better utilize it before buying more land for public works. Affordable housing is also needed in Durham. Mr. Parmelee also supports Open Space acquisition, but more pressing needs should come first.

MiMi Schmidt questioned why the Rod and Gun Club wasn't purchased for the seniors? Mrs. Melvin responded that it wasn't for sale to the town. The developer was going to renovate the club house so that the senior citizens could use it. However, subsequent problems with the property derailed the developer's plans. A location on the site in the back of property has been offered; however, the site isn't as desirable and is currently on the back burner.

Gwen Clark explained that she had worked on a project with the Durham Public Library to reach out and encourage seniors to participate in library-sponsored activities. Mrs. Clark stated that different programs were tried, but overall, they were unsuccessful in getting attendance. She feels that a designated Senior Citizen's Center is needed for meeting, exercising, running crafts/arts programs, and healthcare screening. Parking needs to be adequate. She does question how many would actually use it, though.

Mr. Clark asked why a rental start-up amount of \$100,000 would be necessary. Mrs. Francis stated that was an estimate, but perhaps \$100,000 - \$200,000 would be necessary for rental, plumbing, kitchen remodeling, and other facility needs to get the building in walk-in condition.

Ginny Harmon stated that the rental site does not have adequate parking. She believes the site is completely unacceptable even if it was given to us.

Mr. Kwieraga asked why we spent 35 million to rebuild and renovate schools, yet we are being told now that we need 2 new roofs, new wells, etc for the schools. He believes the planning was poor.

John Hogarth introduced himself as a 25 year resident of town who serves on the Senior Citizen Board. He is also Director of the Meriden Senior Center. He confirmed that the board has been looking for good land, but it has been very frustrating to find a suitable location. He believes seniors will use the center based on his experience and that rental, at least for the time being, allows seniors to have a center now. Harry Hall asked how many people use Meriden Senior Center. Mr. Hogarth responded that 80 lunches are served a day and that 100-150 people use the programs. He stated that Meriden has approximately 12,000 seniors. Mr. Hall pointed out that 100-150 out of 12,000 isn't very many and suggests the turnout in Durham would be very low based on those proportions. Mrs. Melvin added that the 60+ Club has a large membership and that the Senior Citizen Center would serve as a nucleus for services and programs. Nearly every town in CT has either a community or senior center.

Mrs. Francis introduced the concept of regionalization and sharing of services with neighboring towns. Jon Brayshaw, First Selectman from Middlefield, has expressed an interest in working together. Sharing a Senior Citizen Center with Middlefield may be an option.

Robert Melvin asked about the status of funding for bridges, culverts, and other infrastructure items. Mrs. Francis stated that funding will continue through grant support from the government, but some planning is needed. Brian Curtis is conducting research in this area and identifying areas of long-term needs.

Andy Meiman asked about the timeline for movement on a new ambulance facility? He said that several administrations had discussed the need for a new facility, but nothing has been done. Mrs. Francis explained that the point of this hearing is to obtain resident's input on priorities and to use this information to put together a plan that reflects the wishes of the town. She wants a plan that the town will support. Going to referendum for the purchase of land or approval of a plan will fail without consensus up front. She used

the Town Hall renovation as an example and noted that it failed 2 times before being approved on the third attempt.

Jim McLaughlin noted that taxpayer's money will be spent regardless of the support we receive from the government. He asked the audience to consider how we should pay for these projects. The Town of Durham currently has no debt. So, should we spend from our reserve fund or should we bond? The town has a very good bond rating. Mr. Parmelee stated that he supports bonding. Mrs. Francis commented that these are two very different approaches. Bonding allows us to move quicker, and would spread the cost to a much greater population of residents; but then we are in debt. If we saved for the projects, the question becomes what kind of impact will that have on the budget and how long will we have to wait to accomplish our goals. Both options are being investigated.

Mr. Hall, Chief of the Fire Department, asked that a substation on the south end of town be considered before developing plans for the ESF complex on Main Street. The land at Meeting House Road and Route 17 may be adequate for both a Senior Citizen Center and a substation. There are many limitations with the property where the firehouse resides and forcing a complex there may not make the most sense if better land is available. The southern location would solve the problem of providing faster support to that side of town. Jan Muraco stated that this idea was good and might be supported by the seniors.

Mr. Wright stated that he has been in town for 18 years. He agrees with Chief Hall and further stressed the problems with traffic on Main Street as an obstacle for emergency services.

Mrs. Parmelee asked how much longer the land would be on the market? She was answered that according to the owner, the land is still available but he is considering changing the plans for housing to reflect current market conditions. He is planning to advertise shortly.

Mr. Melvin asked if RSD13 seeks competitive bids for their purchases and what kind of oversight exists? Mrs. Francis responded that bids go out on all reimbursable items.

Mr. Pasquale summarized the number of options now facing residents including the Senior Citizen Center, Community Center/Senior Citizen Center, and Emergency Services Facilities Complex/Senior Citizen Center. He would like to get consensus among residents on the various options and asked if a referendum could be held to vote

on the options. Mrs. Francis responded that a referendum could not be held for information seeking purposes. Mr. Pasquale finished by stating that he supports a Community Center/Senior Citizen Center and believes we should take care of all residents - young and old.

Frank DeFelice stated that foreclosures are at a record high in CT. He agrees that bonding is an option, but is concerned about enjoying today and paying tomorrow. He believes we should be conservative and cautious, and we should prioritize items and not try to do them all at once. He questioned whether a survey of the town could be conducted? Mr. DeFelice supports a Community Center/Senior Citizen Center. He stated that our seniors have been very patient and they deserve a facility due to their contributions and their overall low cost to the town. A Senior Citizen Center would assist seniors with basic needs, providing meals, and information-seeking. He believes grant money can be found for combined a Community Center/Senior Citizen Center. Combining these two facilities makes sense in that the town wants both and it would maximize the benefit received relative to the cost. He stated that it costs less to support one 2-story building than two separate buildings in terms of energy and maintenance. Seniors would use the facility during the day and others could use it in the evening. He doesn't support renting and stated that renting is throwing taxpayer money down the drain. Mr. DeFelice also doesn't believe facilities should be shared between the Emergency Services and the senior citizens. He suggested that an ESF complex could be constructed at a new location and the existing firehouse could be modified to use as a Senior Citizen Center. He emphasized the availability of grant money with a well-developed plan. Mr. DeFelice ended by stated that he supports regionalization.

Mr. Clark responded that regionalizing doesn't always work. There have been numerous complaints about RSD13 and DMIAAB due to the fact that we can't control the costs of these regionalized entities. He reminded the audience that the formation of a Regional Health District was defeated in Durham. He ended by stating that we need a Senior Citizen Center and plans for one have been derailed over the years. He supports 10-year bonding.

Mr. Melvin stated that a Community Center/Senior Citizen Center and an emergency facility at the south end of town is a good idea and that we should move on it.

Mr. Kwieraga asked if the town ever bought property and then sold it. Mrs. Francis responded that she didn't think so but it is possible.

George Roberts offered that we should buy the land now and then decide how to use it.

Mrs. Francis reminded the audience that all land purchases would go to referendum.

Mrs. Muraca stated that if the Board of Selectmen is making a list that they should put affordable senior housing on it. She receives many calls for senior housing. John Szewczyk agrees that affordable housing should be a priority. He added that we should make sure people can afford to live in town.

Mr. Parmelee stated that seniors shouldn't be in the same building as the emergency services because it could impede emergency operations.

Mrs. Francis thanked everyone for attending the hearing and for their input. She stated she was thrilled by the exchange of opinions and ideas and how engaged the audience was. She finished by concluding that we must all be involved in the planning. People should speak with neighbors and participate in other sessions during the month of March. She also offered that she was willing to attend other meetings to discuss capital planning.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:05 pm.

Respectively Submitted,

Renee Edwards, Recording Secretary