

## **Capital Needs Assessment Recreation Department Report**

Thank you again for the opportunity to have the Recreation Department needs considered as part of the capital needs assessment for the town. As we continue evolving and growing the Recreation Department, it has become abundantly clear that the existing building in which the Recreation Department is housed is inadequate. Currently, we are housed in the Lewis Building with the Billerica Highway Department. Our building features our offices and only one shared common room that we try running select programs out of. Unfortunately due to vast differences in operation, sharing a building with the Highway Department sometimes impedes program operations (for example: trying to conduct morning yoga classes with the noise of the highway department, or running a pre-k or youth program on our lawn with large trucks coming in and out). Housing recreation in our current building truly is like having a square peg in a round hole.

Due to size constraints of our building and complete lack of program space, we are often forced to choose between programs we can offer or pass on expanding programming even further. Additionally, we are often having to extend programs outdoors later into the cold season than most participants like, or starting later in the spring than other communities. This puts our programming at a distinct disadvantage. Throughout my time in Billerica, I have developed a good relationship with members of the School District, including Superintendent Piwovar, Robin Hulsoor, and Leslie Harrower. When space and schedule allows, they have been as accommodating as they can be with us. However, because we are at the mercy of their availability it significantly hampers the services we are able to provide residents looking for year round recreational opportunities. In addition to the scheduling and availability restraints, we are also burdened by the financial strains that come with renting out schools as well. Due to custodial contract obligations, our school rentals are subject to a \$45/hour charge for a minimum of 3 hours for all adult and any weekend programs. Over the course of the last three calendar years (excluding 2020 due to Covid inaccessibility), we have booked an average of 1,950 hours of building use in the schools annually, and paid an average of nearly \$18,000 per year to do so. This significantly impacts our ability to offer affordable programs to residents, as we must pass on this financial burden in our registration fees, and schedule around the limited availability of school buildings and limited room choices. Not having a dedicated Community Center is a significant detriment to the programs and services we can offer, and the price in which we can offer them.

In recent years, our department has seen a steady increase in all key areas, including: number of programs offered, number of town events held, enrollment/registration, and revenue generated. Since upgrading our registration software in December 2018, we have processed registrations for over 5,700 individuals. In 2016, the Recreation Department's total revenue deposits for the calendar year equaled \$375,301. In 2019, our department's total revenue deposits totaled \$528,185. This is an increase of 41%! With the increasing demand for services, the need for adequate space to meet the needs and desires of the residents is an issue deserving of immediate attention. In 2019 the town recognized the immediate need for

our department to be relocated, and we went to work planning our move to the Vining School. While that building would not have been a perfect fit for our needs, it certainly would have been a significant upgrade from what we deal with on a daily basis now. Unfortunately as we know, due to unforeseen issues the building was taken offline and our move was put on hold. We are hopeful that the same recognition for short term relocation needs will continue to be acknowledged through this study.

In addition to the lack of functionality our building provides, it is also in poor condition with repeated HVAC issues, old mechanicals, significant rodent problems, and water issues. Throughout the year it is not uncommon for many feet of water to be present in the crawl space underneath the building, presenting a high likelihood of mold issues. It is a building we make the most of, but is not an ideal setting for community use.

What our goals are in this study is to express our deepest needs and desires when it comes to a future Community Center. In discussions with COA Director, Jean Bushnell, we believe there are many overlapping amenities that would service our respective departments, and our residents as a whole. For example, a kitchen/culinary area, banquet/event space, computer/technology room, gymnasium sized for multi-court use for multi-programs at one time, indoor swimming pool, multiple function/classroom spaces to be used for various dedicated programs such as yoga, art, music, etc., a dedicated cardio/fitness room, and the list goes on. By creating a community center with these amenities, it opens up a significant opportunity for our department to expand on programs that we have long wanted to do, but have had no space in which to do them. In addition to our own programs, the opportunity in which we could seamlessly partner with the COA to create far greater intergenerational opportunities and greater reach to the still active seniors would create a pairing that would greatly benefit the community as a whole. Additionally, with these amenities we would be able to significantly open up our daytime and Pre-K programs that have long been hampered by the inaccessibility of daytime facilities.

As you can see, there are very substantial reasons why we believe a Community Center should be strongly considered as a top tier priority for short term development. The needs are present now, and delaying this development will continue to negatively impact the residents and hamper the services we are able to provide. I very much look forward to working with the committee and community to provide any further information needed.