



Charter Township of Meridian
Senior/Community Center Task Force
Township Municipal Building, 5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864
Tuesday, October 22, 2024 – Minutes

Members

Present: Scott Hendrickson, Patrick Malley, John Hood, Josh Robertson, LuAnn Maisner, Steve Vagnozzi and Mary Nardo Farris (for Amanda Lick)

Members

Absent: Suchir Nagisetty, Michele Steed and Amanda Lick

Staff

Present: Interim Township Manager Timothy Schmitt, Deputy Township Manager Dan Opsommer, and Parks and Recreation Director Courtney Wisinski

Others

Present: None

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Supervisor Hendrickson called the meeting to order and called the roll at 6:01pm.

2. PUBLIC REMARKS

Supervisor Hendrickson opened comments from the public at 6:03 pm.

Barbara O’Kelly, Township Resident/Senior Center Advisory Board Member, shared a modification to the design plan from the former task force. This design shows how the seniors would use the space. She asked the feasibility of adding a second floor to the current Service Center building then making the first floor a Senior Center and the second floor the Parks and Recreation offices.

Supervisor Hendrickson closed comments from the public at 6:05pm.

3. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

MOTION BY MEMBER ROBERTSON TO APPROVE THE AGENDA. SUPPORTED BY MEMBER VAGNOZZI.

Supervisor Hendrickson mentioned they received a communication earlier in the week asking that public remarks be added at the end of the agenda.

SUPERVISOR HENDRICKSON MOVED TO AMEND THE AGENDA TO INCLUDE PUBLIC REMARKS BETWEEN ITEMS 8 AND 9. SUPPORTED BY MEMBER VAGNOZZI. MOTION APPROVED 7-0.

SUPERVISOR HENDRICKSON MOVED TO APPROVE THE AMENDED AGENDA. SUPPORTED BY MEMBER VAGNOZZI. MOTION APPROVED 7-0.

4. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES-September 23, 2024

MEMBER ROBERTSON MOVED TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 23, 2024 MINUTES. SUPPORTED BY MEMBER MALLEY. MOTION APPROVED 7-0.

5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Supervisor Hendrickson reviewed several communications in the packet. Discussion was had regarding the method that the task force will receive communications from the public. The Interim Manager will continue to forward the emails to the task force in a timely manner.

6. FOLLOW UP ITEMS FROM SEPTEMBER MEETING

A. Usage Metrics

Director Wisinski presented the usage metrics of the Senior Center to date for 2024. Currently, there are 383 members. Of those members, 200 have attended at least one type of event/activity. Membership was at 483 in 2019. The membership has continued to grow over the past few years since the pandemic. There are 93 new members since 2023. The Parks Department continues to market the Senior Center in the following ways: Parks and Recreation's monthly e-newsletter, Facebook, 517 Living, Nextdoor, Senior Preferences resource guide, a brochure mailing every 2-3 years, and outreach events as available. The Parks Department has three other senior groups outside of the Senior Center. There are two groups of pickleballers, one at Towner Road Park and one at Hillbrook Park with around 80 participants. Also, the 55 plus fitness group that meets three times a week at Central Park Pavilion or Meridian Mall.

Member Vagnozzi stated that the trend looks like we should be back to pre COVID membership numbers next year.

Supervisor Hendrickson asked the numbers of 55 year olds plus in the Township. Director Wisinski stated, based on the 2020 Census, there were 16.6% (approximately 7,500 people) of our population that was 65 years old plus in the Township.

Member Robertson asked for membership data prior to COVID from 2010-2020. Director Wisinski will bring back the total membership numbers for those ten years.

B. Needs Assessment

Interim Manager Schmitt stated we are currently under contract with Progressive and that would be the easiest path forward. He suggested that whichever firm is chosen that they attend the November task force meeting to start the discussion of perceived needs, where we have been and where we are headed. The firm would reach out to meet with the Senior Center Advisory Board between the November and December task force meetings. Then, hold one or two public meetings regarding concept plans in January. This would allow for a February/March action from the task force. Discussion about the cost of this assessment. It was stated it would be between \$20,000 - \$30,000 for one or two sites. One concept would be the 10,000 square feet Senior Center and the second a 40,000-50,000 square feet Senior/Community Center.

Member Vagnozzi questioned how we will decide the size of the facility. Interim Manager Schmitt suggested we focus on sites first. This will aid in meeting the Board's direction of a recommendation by April 2025. The decision of site(s) needs to be made by the task force tonight.

Discussion on whether to conduct the needs assessment for a stand along Senior Center or for a Senior/Community Center. Interim Manager Schmitt stated the Board has directed the task force to provide both options.

Member Vagnozzi suggested looking at a Senior Center only facility with the potential to add on the Community Center component.

Park Commission Chair Farris asked if the only constraint on the project is the site. Supervisor Hendrickson stated that cost is the other constraint. It is far more expensive to build and operate the combined Senior/Community Center.

Supervisor Hendrickson expressed support with moving forward with the needs assessment. The task force was in agreement with having Staff work on getting the needs assessment started for \$20,000 - \$30,000.

Superintendent Hood suggested that in addition to the current Senior Center members, seniors who are not using the Senior Center, and stakeholders from the local schools should also be involved in the needs assessment.

7. SENIOR COMMUNITY CENTER LOCATION ANALYSIS

Interim Manager Schmitt shared an update on the Nokomis Center. Included in the packet is their land lease. They have a plan to start a capital campaign in the next year to 18 months to expand the facility. He stated that the Nokomis site is not viable for new construction at this time.

Supervisor Hendrickson asked if the Nokomis Center was asked if they would be interested in examining the possibility of becoming a part of the Senior Center on that site. Deputy Manager Opsommer says they have not been asked, but we could have that discussion, but the price tag may be too large. Discussion was held about parking, and it is outside of the lease. For that location, the utilities would be easier to bring in from Marsh Road.

Deputy Manager Opsommer reviewed the recreation fields at the Municipal Building. There are just under two acres, which the Township owns, near the Central Park Pavilion. The site is constrained by utility needs and wetlands. Another issue with this site would be finding other land for the recreation events that currently take place there.

Deputy Manager Opsommer presented 5280 Okemos Road, located at the northeast corner of Okemos Road and Gaylord C. Smith Court. The Township acquired this property for a trailhead/park facility. The site is 1.7 acres and close to the train track and would have noise. It may be possible to mitigate the noise through a railroad quiet zone for about \$800,000. The site has direct access to utilities. It is unlikely it would be on a CATA route.

1492 Grand River Avenue is coming off the market so that is no longer a viable site.

Deputy Manager Opsommer presented the Central Fire Station site as a Senior/Community Center option. There is about 10 acres to work with and the building would face Central Park Drive. Discussion that noise from the Fire Station would not be an issue on this site and there is already a water main on the site. A wetland delineation was done on the property as part of the original Task Force review and found that there

is less than a half of acre of wetlands on the site, outside of the main floodplain on the southern half of the site.

The former Younkers site was presented for a Senior/Community Center. It is 95,000 square feet. The Township has already designed the space with Progressive. The floor plan is included in the packet and based on the elevator shaft and the gymnasium space there is not a lot of flexibility with the floor plan. It is on the CATA route. The operational cost was too expensive when presented previously and the Township Board opted not to proceed with the location.

Supervisor Hendrickson asked if demolition of the former Younkers site was ever discussed to build something smaller. It was discussed in the past and determined to be in excess of \$1,000,000 to demo and detach from the Mall and another \$1,000,000 to reconnect to the Mall, making demolition not a viable option.

Discussion occurred about the costs of renovating the existing former Younkers building versus building new on the Fire Station site.

Deputy Manager Opsommer presented the former Wardcliff Elementary site. Space would not be an issue, it is a block from the CATA stop, and there are four recreation fields that we would not build on. Okemos Public Schools owns the property. It is not centrally located in the Township. Superintendent Hood stated he would not recommend to the School Board to engage this site for a Senior/Community Center because there could be a need to use the school as a building in the future due to Bennett Woods growth and the aging Central Montessori building.

Deputy Manager Opsommer presented 1410 Grand River Avenue, currently a driving range, it is 21 acres. It is for sale for \$4.5 million. The site might require some road work on Grand River Avenue by MDOT. The parcel seems larger than we would need. Discussion that this property is flat and may be a good fit for cricket or other recreational park facilities. Supervisor Hendrickson mentioned it might be interesting to discuss land acquisition with the Land Preservation Advisory for this property.

Discussion about the various CATA stops and which ones are the highest frequencies. It was stated that being on a CATA bus route was a criteria, but not a high priority. Member Vagnozzi said there may be room to negotiate Redi-Ride services around a particular location, if needed.

Member Maisner explained that she is most excited about the site at 1410 Grand River Avenue.

Deputy Manager Opsommer described 1510 West Grand River at Powell Road. The site was clear cut and a little under 9 acres. It is listed for \$2.25 million.

Deputy Manager Opsommer presented a parcel located on Central Park Drive between Belvedere and Columbus. It is not currently on the market. It would be expensive to acquire. Likely more than \$4.5 million. It is not on a high frequency CATA route. The site has some wetland concerns as well, but acquisition is the main hurdle for the site.

Supervisor Hendrickson summarized, for the Senior Center only, sites include Nokomis, Central Park, and 5280 Okemos Road. The Senior/Community Center sites include Central Fire Station, Younkers, Driving Range, Powell and Grand River and Central Park.

Park Commission Chair Farris and Member Robertson mentioned reviewing parcels that could fit both a Senior Center and Community Center would be best.

The Task Force chose to eliminate pursuing the following Senior Center only sites: Nokomis, Central Park, and 5280 Okemos Road.

Member Vagnozzi mentioned that a lot of work has already gone into the Youngers site and there is not a need to address it further at this time. Superintendent Hood stated there are limiting issues with the site including the elevator shafts and not knowing who the neighbors may be.

Discussion about limiting the sites down to one site we own and one that we would need to acquire and Youngers being the last option. There was consensus to have Staff pursue the Central Fire Station and the Driving Range sites.

Supervisor Hendrickson mentioned we should consult with our Township Attorneys regarding funding for the Grand River site and the possibilities of using land preservation funds.

Supervisor Hendrickson stated on November 12, 2024 there will be an update given to the Township Board on the Task Force and asked for two volunteers to present. Member Maisner and Member Robertson will present.

We will need to reschedule the date for the March Task Force meeting due to spring break.

8. PUBLIC REMARKS

Kathy Harrison, Township resident, stated she was reviewing discussions from the first meeting and confirmed if the Senior Center is not built on a school site, bond money will not be available. She questioned why is there discussion of a Community Center in addition to the Senior Center? Supervisor Hendrickson commented we did receive a \$5 million grant from the State of Michigan and the Community Center has been a goal of the Township Board for several years.

9. NEXT MEETING DATE

a. November 19, 2024, 6:00pm-Township Municipal Building, Town Hall Room, 5151 Marsh Road.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05pm without objection.

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