

Brighton-Pittsford Post – “From the Supervisor” column – August 4, 2016 issue
Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

Pittsford’s Community Center

Two weeks ago Pittsford’s Town Board submitted to the public our recommendation for a way forward on a community center. We rejected the extremes of, on the one hand, a band-aid fix for the current building or, on the other, what we concluded would be an unnecessary and wasteful extravagance of building a new one from scratch. Our unanimous recommendation is for a complete renovation and expansion of our current Spiegel Community Center at 35 Lincoln Avenue. I encourage you to read our report on this decision at www.townofpittsford.org/community-center-project.

From the outset, the Town Board’s position has been that, whatever our recommendation, we would proceed only upon approval of financing for the project by a vote of Pittsford residents. A referendum will be held in mid-October.

In the months ahead, from time to time in this column I’ll drill down into the factors that led to our recommendation.

First, an overview, that begins with a threshold question: Do we need, or should we have, a community center building in the first place?

The Town Board concluded that we do. We need it in order to control the siting and scheduling of our programs. We need it to provide meeting space for Pittsford’s many clubs, neighborhood groups, civic groups, music groups, theater groups and others, that seek a place to meet. We believe the public broadly supports having a community center, for these reasons as well as to have a spot to meet with friends.

The moment that question is answered in the affirmative, as we have done, it means at bare minimum a cost to the Town of \$6 million.

That’s the least-cost solution. It represents the cost to repair or replace everything that needs repair or replacement in our current building after decades of deferred maintenance. Doing this would give us a fully functioning shabby building that looks little different than it does now. It would retain all of the limitations and inconveniences of the current physical configuration of the building’s interior and entrances. It represents a band-aid solution that gives us the least, in return on investment, of any of the practical options.

At a cost of an additional \$3 million we can do all of the repairs, as well as a complete renovation, modernization and aesthetic restoration of the building. For practical purposes, we’d be building a new community center in the existing building, expanded with additional new space at the back and the side. We’d have a fully functional and modernized facility of high aesthetic and architectural appeal that could serve Pittsford for years to come. This is what the

Board has recommended. It would cost taxpayers \$69 per year for 15 years, for a house assessed at \$275,000, which is the average in Pittsford.

The renovated and remodeled building would offer additional space for meetings and programs. It could house the Senior Center comfortably. It would provide the level of security and controlled access required in the modern era. For the additional cost over what we would pay for repairs alone, it would accomplish all of the goals the Board defined, as part of this process, for a community center fit to serve into the future. We would accomplish this at a cost that is reasonable in the context of realistic alternatives.

The Town Board rejected the idea of constructing an altogether new building. We did so for two reasons. The first is cost. A new building would cost nearly \$15 million. This is \$6 million more than the choice we've recommended. We do not believe taking on an additional \$6 million in expense represents a fiscally responsible choice.

The second reason is because the additional \$6 million would be spent on more community center than we need, in light of our programming goals for recreation offerings. Our goal is to carry on our existing programs, with accommodation for reasonable growth and development over time. We seek, specifically, to avoid adding extensive new programs that require additional capital expense, operating expense and staffing expense.

The Town Board is not interested in competing with the abundant array of private-sector recreation and fitness providers in and around Pittsford. We're not interested in competing with other towns to see which can have the biggest community center or the most expensive. We want to provide what makes sense for Pittsford residents and to carry on our current schedule of recreation programs. We want to avoid unnecessary additional costs to taxpayers.

Next time, I'll discuss in more detail our programming goals and how they helped to define our recommendation for the community center.

You can contact me at bsmith@townofpittsford.org or (585) 248-6220 about this or any other matter of interest to you.