

Programming Priorities Drive Community Center Recommendation

Pittsford’s Town Board has scheduled a referendum vote for Tuesday, October 18. Its purpose is to ask Town residents whether they approve financing for the complete renovation, remodeling and expansion of our community center.

The Town Board has recommended this as a reasonable way forward, between a mere, but expensive, “band-aid” fix for the current building on the one hand, and the extravagance and expense of constructing a new building on the other. To finance the band-aid fix would cost about \$6 million, a new building about \$15 million and the complete renovation and expansion we have proposed, about \$9 million. If we are going to continue to have a bricks-and-mortar municipal community center in Pittsford, those are the available choices.

The factor driving our recommendation at least as strongly as considerations of cost has to do with our programming goals.

Different municipalities take different approaches to providing recreational amenities. Pittsford traditionally has placed more of a focus on trails, parks and, more recently, athletic fields than on programming that requires a building. To be sure, we offer such programming. Our most recent recreation brochure offers 32 pages of programs to enjoy. To a significant extent, our programs do not duplicate or overlap recreational opportunities readily available at gyms, health clubs and other providers in and around Pittsford.

As the Town Board considered a way forward on a community center, we sought to preserve this balance. Consequently, our goals have been to continue our existing recreational programs, to accommodate their reasonable growth, to avoid duplicating what is available elsewhere at reasonable cost to the user. As a specific policy choice, we sought to steer clear of “empire building” that adds completely new and extensive programs. These, in turn, would require the additional expense of a new building and would impose substantially increased operating, maintenance and staffing costs.

Adding such programming we consider neither necessary, because of resources within the community otherwise available, nor desirable, because of additional cost to the taxpayer.

Pittsford has just invested \$6 million, in a program approved by our residents in a referendum, to completely overhaul our municipal athletic fields and to provide additional fields. We offer an enviable system of hiking trails, representing one of the most extensive trail systems in Monroe County, if not the most extensive. It’s won awards for the Town. At a recent meeting the planners working on our Active Transportation Plan pointed to the map showing Pittsford’s trails and commented, “Nobody has a system as good as this.” Our parks similarly have won awards. We’ll be adding another one, the canal-side nature preserve of nearly 30 acres, in the years immediately ahead.

These impressive amenities, together with our programs offered at the community center, strike the right balance of municipal recreational offerings for Pittsford. They complement opportunities for recreation available to Pittsford residents from a broad range of private providers.

We do not seek to compete with the private providers. As a Town government with a duty to its taxpayers, we should not seek to do so.

It's not about which town can build the biggest community center, or the most expensive. It's about providing a facility suitable for Pittsford's programming needs.

If those needs are modest, they're defined by our circumstances: by the abundant availability of recreation options from multiple providers and by our focus on trails, parks and athletic fields. Over the years, Pittsford's approach to recreational programming has worked to the reasonable satisfaction of its residents. We have struck a balance between what we offer and what we spend in order to offer it. We seek to maintain that balance.

In sum, the Town Board's proposal for the complete renovation, remodeling and expansion of our current facility provides the community center we need, but not more than we need.

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