

New Era Planned for Town Community Center

Cost, efficiency and programming goals drive decision

Anyone who uses Pittsford's Spiegel Community Center is familiar with the consequences of years of deferred maintenance and related inconveniences. It's been deferred for those years as the Town has sought to identify the best way forward.

Now, after two years of focused study, planning and solicitation of public comment, the Town Board unanimously has recommended a complete renovation, remodeling and expansion of our community center building.

The path to this recommendation began with an inescapable reality: in order to continue to provide Pittsford residents with any community center at all, the minimum cost to the Town is \$6.1 million. That's what it would cost merely to repair or replace the systems and major components of infrastructure of the existing building on Lincoln Avenue. These now demand attention.

Yet doing that, but nothing more, amounts to a “band-aid” approach. Everything would work, in a building that remains shabby in appearance and whose physical limitations and inconveniences remain the same. For additional investment that the Town Board considers reasonable, in light of the realistic alternatives, the Town can completely renovate, expand and reconfigure the interior of our current Spiegel Community Center, with improved and expanded parking. This approach would furnish residents with a modernized facility of aesthetic and architectural distinction inside and out that can serve the Town for many years to come. We would have a facility in its way commensurate in quality with our outstanding Community Library. For this we would need to bond, in the amount of \$9.3 million. This will give Pittsford a community center well equipped to fulfill our programming goals and to allow for reasonable growth and program development in the future.

As a roadmap for making a decision on the community center, the Town Board adopted a set of general principles. These are included as part of the Board's report on the community center, available on the Town website. Among those principles were **reasonable goals in programming, avoiding duplication of programs available elsewhere**, and **continuity in existing recreation programming**. The Board's duty is to act as responsible stewards of your tax dollars. We consider it inadvisable to spend public funds to compete with programs and amenities of similar quality and value offered by the many gyms, health clubs, YMCAs, and other fitness centers in Pittsford and nearby. The Board does not think it right for Pittsford taxpayers to finance an expensive competition with other towns to see which can have the biggest or most costly community center. For these reasons, it has recommended full renovation of our current building, rather than spending an additional \$15 million to construct a new building, which is what it would cost.

The proposed renovation, remodeling and expansion of the current building would provide the continuity in programming that we seek and would fulfill our other programming goals. A new building would do the same, but at the cost of an additional \$5 million or more. The Board considers it irresponsible to spend that amount on more community center than we need, with all of the additional operating and staffing expense that would go along with it. By and large, Pittsford's recreation programs complement, rather than duplicate, programs readily available from other sources. We consider this a responsible approach to recreation programming. It follows that our need for a building conforms to this concept.

For these reasons, the Town Board has proposed, as a way forward, a reasonable pathway between two undesirable extremes: either spending \$6 million for mere maintenance representing a band-aid approach or, alternatively, the unnecessary extravagance of a new building that would cost at least \$5 million more than the renovation the Board has proposed. In the context of the practical alternatives if we're going to have a community center at all, the Board has recommended a cost-effective solution that creates a modern and efficient facility.

Our approach is not novel. Other communities have done the same thing, producing appealing facilities that serve the needs of residents spanning generations. To cite a few examples, the Kittery, Maine community center uses a refurbished elementary school built in 1941. A renovated 1944 school, now the Fairlington Community Center, serves Arlington Virginia. East Lansing Michigan refurbished a 1926 high school building for its facility. All have been successful.

The Town Board will schedule a referendum for later this year to seek public approval for funding the community center renovation. This \$9.3 million renovation would cost the owner of a house of average assessed value in Pittsford \$69 per year for 15 years. Average assessed house value in Pittsford currently is \$275,075.

Our goal is to obtain for Pittsford's residents the solution that works best, at a reasonable cost we can afford. To see current updates on the project and view the Town Board's complete recommendation report, including the set of guiding principles upon which the decision was made, please visit the Town website at <http://townofpittsford.org/community-center-project>.