

Letter to Editor – October 28, 2011:

We ask Town Meeting to vote in favor of funding construction of a new building to house the Town's Senior Center and Council on Aging (COA). Research and experience clearly shows a Senior Center is the focal point for aging service issues in any community and serves residents of all ages in responding to these issues. A Senior Center is the gateway to information and services that support and enable this multigenerational group (ages ranging from 60 to over 100) to maintain health, independence and an optimal level of functioning in many aspects of life.

This new building will also house the staff of the COA and its many active volunteers, all of whom contribute to the fulfillment of this department's mission and goals. The essential services provided by a Senior Center and COA to a group of citizens that constitutes almost 25% of our population are far too many to list.

The existing Senior Center and COA is located in a basement that has environmental issues as well as inadequate parking, programming and office/counseling space to support its core missions. From 2008 – 2010, a Senior Center Study Committee comprised of our fellow neighbors visited other Senior Centers, conducted research, held open meetings, and conducted many public hearings. Based on what they learned, this independent committee concluded overwhelmingly that a Senior Center is a necessary and appropriate Town function and that a new building to house the Center and COA should be sited at the now Town-owned Needham Heights MBTA parking lot.

This project has undergone a feasibility study, and last fall Town Meeting appropriated \$500,000 to the Permanent Public Building Committee to prepare a wonderful and prudent design that has just been completed. All that remains is to build it – the cost of which will be paid out of the regular yearly capital operating budget – meaning there will be no request for a tax override. All of the Town's other capital projects, including for the schools, remain part of our Capital Plan.

The need for a new building to accommodate an improved Senior Center and COA has been identified for over 12 years. The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee both recommend this project. We are grateful for Town Meeting's previous support of this important Town asset, and as we now reach the home stretch, we respectfully ask for Town Meeting's "yes" vote to approve funds for construction.

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