



It's an uphill, difficult and, for some older folks, impossible trek to the Maynard Senior Center from the sloping parking lot at the Maynard Country Club. Accessibility is a top reason why proponents say it's time for a new facility.

Focus Group Scales Uncertain Course Toward a New Maynard Senior Center

By Vicki Brown Stevens
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A grassroots group of seniors will try to persuade Special Town Meeting voters on Oct. 10 that Maynard should find a bigger and more accessible space for its senior center.

“We’re just a bunch of rebels,” long-time town resident Peg Brown says of the Maynard Senior Center Focus Group which has investigated nearly 20 sites around town in the past 18 months in their search for a more suitable center.

They might call themselves rebels because they aren’t getting much traction in their effort to push the town to acknowledge the inadequacy of the current center and agree to pay for a space that Brown and others envision could someday serve not only seniors but the whole community.

Money, however, won't be forthcoming at the Special Town Meeting and the focus group knows it. Positive enthusiasm will be enough for this round.

The citizens' petition that focus group member Deb Roussell filed and that appears as Article 4 of the Special Town Meeting Warrant, does seek money - "up to \$120,000" annually for five years to "provide a leased facility," the article states. But because it is not a specific amount as required by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue for Town Meeting articles, "the article as written is not binding," Town Administrator Greg Johnson explained in an email.

Also, the petition seeks funding from the town's free cash source, a fund that varies widely each year depending on the town's revenue and therefore cannot be committed, Johnson noted.

"So a "yes" vote (on Article 4 at Special Town Meeting) could be considered advisory to the Select Board rather than mandated," Johnson wrote. It could encourage the Select Board to direct the town administrator to seek funding options and identify a suitable space, all of which has been discussed previously by Select Board members, he explained.

But so far, discussion hasn't led to action. Peg Brown hopes discussion at Special Town Meeting will lead to a favorable advisory vote that will give them "a little leverage with the town" to make their project a budget item for voters to consider at the May 2024 Town Meeting.

Since 2015, the Maynard Senior Center has been housed in the rear portion of the town-owned Maynard Golf Course clubhouse. It is a lovely spot in Maynard, sitting as it does atop a hill overlooking the greens. But it is uphill and so accessibility leads the list of the center's deficits for Council on Aging Director Amy Loveless.

Seniors need to navigate a sloping parking lot to an uphill sidewalk to the front steps and ramp of the clubhouse. For those with breathing problems or mobility issues access is difficult to impossible, both Brown and Loveless say.

The Council on Aging van can drop people off at the front door and if the sidewalk entrance isn't clogged with golfers or carts, private cars will use it as a drop off, too, people at the center told me.

Space is problem number two. The senior center is about 1,500 square feet, or, as Brown says, translates to about "six square inches per senior," given a senior population of about 3,000 people 60 years old or older, which is nearly a third of Maynard's total population.

Limited space means limited programming. There are just two spaces in the center – one is large enough for an art class of 12, or as recently observed, a Zumba class where maybe a few more dancers could have fit into the joyful movement of the half dozen already there. The other room is about a third the size and is for quieter activities, such as the knitting and crocheting that engaged four women I talked to on a recent Monday morning.



From left, Linda Cetrone, Helen Miccichi, Rita Richard, and Nayer Esmaieli at a Monday morning Zumba class.

about a tenth of Maynard's seniors. She expects more would come if there could be more activities offered, which of course would require more space.

Sorely lacking is a room for private counseling, she said. The center has a white noise machine to try to muffle confidential conversations in Loveless's office. Both Loveless and Pat Kozik, the center's principal clerk, regularly assist residents with Medicare questions, taxes and finance and medical and personal issues. In addition, Kozik counsels residents of all ages on fuel assistance, sometimes seeking a quiet corner of the clubhouse's main function room and bar rather than the crowded senior center.

And the roof leaks. There's a bucket in one corner of the center to catch rain water and a bulging stained spot in one of the bathrooms that Kozik or Loveless regularly check to be

Loveless said she would like to have three areas so three different activities could go simultaneously. As it is, Monday through Friday activities include art and exercise classes, Bingo and cribbage, a book club, games, drop-ins, special programs, movies, and occasional meals. "I pack in as much as I can," Loveless said. (See the most recent senior center [newsletter](#) for a complete schedule.)

Loveless estimates that 300 seniors regularly use the senior center,

sure the floor isn't slippery. Article 29 of the Maynard Town Meeting in May addressed the roof problems but evidently work still needs to be done.

Loveless dreams of a senior center that not only is accessible and bigger but one that could be multi-use. It could provide space for older folks during the morning and early afternoon, a drop-in place for teens after school and community space for other activities at night. A leased space, maybe in a former commercial building, could be ideal, she said. Or, repurpose a building the town already owns.



Eileen Palmacci worked on her crocheted pocket scarf recently at the Maynard Senior Center.

That vision is shared by Peg Brown and her focus group. In January the group hosted tours of a space at Mill and Main near Walnut Street that has some 5,000 square feet and would provide all the room they want. It may be a future option.

Some are not so sure. The crocheting and knitting group of women I visited with recently – Diane Wasiuk, Eileen Palmacci, Nany Hale, and Sandra Martucci (all but Ms. Palmacci have been Maynard residents for more than 60 years) – were concerned about Mill and Main parking and how far one would have to walk to find a bathroom. They all agreed, too, that access to the current center is very hard for them.

But with leaks and all, everyone told me how thankful they are for the senior center, its services and the two-member staff of Loveless and Kozik. They were all happy to be there.

For more information on Maynard's services to residents aged 60 and over, visit the [Maynard Senior Center site](#).