

**MINUTES OF THE JUNE 12, 2019, EASTERN GREENWICH CIVIC CENTER  
COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING**

Meeting Room  
Greenwich Town Hall 7:30 p.m.

Committee Attendees:

Scott Johnson, Co-Chairman  
Gary Dell'Abate, Co-Chairman  
Kirk Schubert, Committee Member  
Karen Fassuliotis, Committee Member  
Liz Peldunas, Committee Member  
Katie DeLuca, Committee Member

Meeting was a Public Hearing duly noticed (at the Town Clerk, to adjacent neighbors, and large 20,000 Parks & Recreation database) with Agenda indicating that the purpose of the hearing was to solicit comments on a potential new Eastern Greenwich Civic Center after a brief introduction on background efforts by the Committee after its inception in September 2018.

Meeting was called to order by Co-Chairman Scott Johnson at 7:35 p.m. He introduced Committee Members and the charter of the Committee from the First Selectman and indicated that there will be a three-minute limit on comments with speakers chosen from the signup sheet. There was also a detailed Frequently Asked Questions Memo available as handouts.

Mr. Johnson gave a brief presentation on the background of the Committee and its activities; this included a description of the hiring of an independent Civic Center Consultant known as FSA from Florida who disseminated questions (survey) to the community as to desires and preferences relating to the EGCC. The results of the Survey are available online and were factored into and presented to the First Selectman for the development of his Capital Improvement Budget in January 2019. This budget item as well as initial architectural and engineering expenses were approved by BET. SFA's recommendations were included in its Executive Summary and included building a new facility, not rehabilitating the existing building with a basic Budget Placeholder of \$15,000,000.00 based on construction costs of \$500.00 per square foot for an approximate 37,000 square foot building. The recommendation also included various space allocations for amenities such as 8,000 square feet basketball court, 6,000 square feet event space, common areas, meeting rooms, offices, bathrooms, mechanical spaces, storage, kitchen, changing areas and the like. The report indicated that the proposal was consistent with the results of the Survey and recommended against a large swimming pool, for example.

Mr. Johnson outlined why it is important for any potential project to give great importance to the CIP budget and placeholder for the project, which had been previously approved, since to significantly modify that can create a likelihood of a

project being delayed or withdrawn altogether. This had happened with prior submissions for this project. In all likelihood, if significant additional money is contributed to EGCC, it will be deducted from other recreational projects, such as hockey rink, field studies and Greenwich High School upgrades.

It was also noticed that there were other recreational CIP projects, such as new hockey rink, new fields and studies at the middle schools and other locations, and significant upgrades of the athletic facilities at Greenwich High School.

Mr. Johnson went through a list of comments made to date, including considering historic preservation, rebuild (do not rehabilitate), get going (this is taking too long), have a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, this is a community center (not an athletic center), increase the number of fields because of the poor field conditions, have more meeting rooms, why have office space?, have a coffee and pastry concession, have a teenage meeting space, have a 14,000 sq ft. field house, limit the project to the CIP allocation, do not limit the project to CIP allocation, etc.

Mr. Dell'Abate confirmed that Project not designed yet and we have plenty of questions for Architect, which will be selected shortly, and Project is not about fields because that is separate and part of a different budget.

Below is a representative sampling of comments by speakers. It is not meant to include everyone and a number of comments not included were duplicative.

Peter Uhry, a resident of Old Greenwich, described himself as an "active user of the deteriorating civic center since 1972" and said he recalled going to the circus in the parking lot. He said, "I'm delighted the renovation of this facility will happen, it's long overdue. You have been negligent about saying where you are in the deliberations. It's appalling the RMA has to have their hearts game out in the lobby. Balance the sports with other activities. I'd like to see a second floor built. People say that's an added cost. But, you only get one shot."

Nancy Ramer, former P&Z commissioner, chronicled decades of her family's use of the civic center. She said, "I have used it for child care, post baby exercise, attending the annual pancake breakfast, dancing class for my children, soccer and about everything it is possible to use it for." She also added that the present square footage is 32,000 sq ft. She also said, "We had an architect who said there was available 96,000 sq ft in FAR calculation. Presently there are 224 parking spaces. That's beyond any other space in town. Keep that in mind. There are a number of events that pack that parking lot." She also said that the civic center is the only Town location where a large event can be held and "Focus on what people think is needed." referring to the results of the committee's survey which indicated 49% of respondents prioritized event rooms. Other "needs" that were top in the survey were for space for fitness and wellness, and adaptive sports and fitness. "That's the voice of people who bothered to fill out your survey. The summary also talked about the ability of adding fitness as cost effective because it can generate income." she said.

Alicia Collier said “It’ll be more economical and cost effective, and less disruptive, and it’ll be better for the environment. You said it’s not about the fields, but 70% surveyed said it is about the fields. Let’s do it one time and do it right. Address the building and the fields at the same time. Let’s keep them playing and keep the money in Greenwich. Addressing the building without addressing the fields will cost the town more money in the long run.”

Merritt McConnell said he and his kids are active users of the civic center, particularly for soccer. He also said, “Often they can’t use the fields. So they go to other facilities and use turf.”

Elizabeth Coelho said her kids participate in Sandpipers Camp and sports, including the Thunder Soccer program. She also said she was grateful for the civic center but “there is a huge issue with the fields.”

Nancy Burke, of the RTM Budget Overview Committee, said, “With all these wonderful and innovative ideas, I hope architects will be mindful of this Town’s budget. You’re talking about 35,000 sq ft. I hear advocates for turning this building into a sports complex but it should give opportunities for young and old and people interested in art and music. I’ve heard for 40 years we need more playing fields. The environmental worries must also be looked at.”

Another resident warned about potential costs of upgrading the fields at the civic center, saying the soil should be tested for PCBs or contaminants. “Because if it is contaminated, the \$15 million goes out the window. Who knows what Electrolux has dumped there.”

Michelle Couture, director of operations for the Greenwich Historical Society, said the annual Antiquarius antiques show is held at the civic center. She also said, “We want one large open 20,000 sq ft space that is flexible, with upgraded electrical, a full kitchen facility, storage space for vendor equipment, supplies and inventory, a PA system, loading dock area, multiple access doors into the open space so vendor vehicles can unload, lockable office or breakout rooms, internet access, ample accessibility, and access for attendees and vendors.”

Darrell Demakes, Vice President of the Riverside Association, said the Town survey indicated people would use the civic center if it had a stage. He also said, “The comment we hear is it doesn’t get used. It is dilapidated and is in disrepair. It would get used if it weren’t. There’s a lot of groups who compete for space who would use it. The stage doesn’t get represented well.” urging inclusion of a stage for performing arts in the new building.

OGRCC did their own survey which revealed respondents were unaware that OGRCC rents space at the civic center from the Town. Tom Casazzone, Executive Director of OGRCC, said last year they registered people for over 6,000 events. He also said,

“We rely on tons of partnerships, and the most important is with the Town. We’re on the phone talking to Parks and Rec talking about the fields and talking about rentals. The building is insufficient and we’re spending \$100,000 on outside private facilities because this can’t accommodate the needs of the community. We’d like a building to meet the needs of the greater Greenwich Community. Consider a larger building with indoor and outdoor space as well as multi-purpose rooms for dance, art, meetings and other community events.”

Kelly Forsberg, President of the Old Greenwich Garden Club, said her group has been using the civic center for 80 years, for their annual plant sale and numerous workshops bringing hundreds of people to the facility. She also said her group wants to see a wide entrance with display space, places outside for event banners, community meeting space with loading space, walls to accommodate posters, a locked closet for coats and purses, good lighting and ventilation, audio-visual and a screen, secure networks, a kitchen, a workroom with water and “sinks with real water pressure”, small meeting rooms, medium rooms, and a green roof for pollinator plants. She also said the building should be ADA compliant and energy efficient.

Ted Larrabee, who has lived one house away for 40 years, said the parking lot has flooded numerous times. He said, “You need a boat to get there. The drainage on the south side of the property underneath the railroad tracks is inadequate and too small. If you improve the drainage it will solve part of the parking lot and a lot of the fields. You can’t fix the building and not look at the fields. Look at them both together and go to the private sector and get sponsorships.”

Patty Roberts urged to “Think Scottish”. She also said, “Think wisely where you spend the money. What’s popular today may not be popular later on. Don’t make it so bold that we get nothing because the budget is tight.

Susan Foster, a 30-year resident, said she appreciated the enthusiasm in the room for a field house and artificial turf. But she said, “That’s not what the community asked for. There is only 31,000 sq ft. If all these sports requests were accommodated, we’d have no civic center. Indoor turf is nearby at Chelsea piers. You, Scott, said you wanted to hear from the senior citizens. Well, I’m a senior citizen. There are a lot of lessons we can learn from the Bendheim Western Greenwich Civic Center. They can’t have a Zumba and yoga class at the same time. There needs to be a true quiet room.

Margot McGee suggested a high end, but reasonably priced, café along the lines of Aux Delices. She recalled how over the years the civic center has been used for everything from cake decorating classes to bridge, and from the Jr. League festival of trees to roller skating. She said, “It was a lively place. Now I bring grandchildren to the playground. If we want a successfully civic center, we need a café. Not just for chips and cookies but...a place with delicious real food at reasonable prices. It would provide a steady rent stream and contribute to its financial health.” She also

said a café would draw people from the neighborhood and employees from nearby office buildings and be a pleasant place to linger over coffee or lunch.

Ellen Shubert, wife of subcommittee member Kirk Shubert who is President of the Board of Directors of OGRCC, urged the subcommittee to be bold. She said, "You have an opportunity to leave a legacy for Greenwich. You have a responsibility as volunteers to be bold. There is a desperate need in the community to deliver. Don't limit yourself to the \$15 million. Many people in the survey said please contact me to contribute privately."

State Rep Fred Camillo echoed Mrs. Shubert's comments. He said, "As a former member and chair of Parks & Rec board and a 50-year user, look to the private money and private sector like the GAF and individuals. There are 168 other municipalities who would be envious of our position. We've done piecemeal with our facilities and it's come back to bite us. Do it right, do it big and look to the private sector. Please, no half measures."

Al Lovejoy said the issues with the field could be solved by installing True Turf fields under a bubble, which would allow winter field sports. He said, "They do it at Innis Arden. It's very cost effective and you can take down in summer. That may solve your field problem. Focus on civic center being a community center with maybe a basketball court and then on field you have two regulation soccer fields with a massive bubble over it, how cool would that be?"

Julie Fitzgerald said she grew up in Old Greenwich but had yet to use the civic center. She said, "We don't have any facility in the Old Greenwich area for dogs. My hope is for a dog run or a dog park as part of the makeup of this new space. In winter at Tod's Point, it is overrun. There is no facility for residents to let their dogs run off leash and socialize and for their owners to socialize."

Tape of the complete hearing was made. It is noted for the record that there were approximately 40 speakers and an overflow crowd. Summaries of various comments can also be found in the newspaper articles which followed on June 13, 2019.

[Subject to ratification by Eastern Greenwich Civic Center Committee]