

## Millis Senior/Community Center Frequently Asked Questions



### **Why is the Town considering this project now?**

Millis has outgrown our current Senior Center. When the Veterans Memorial Building opened in 1999, the Senior Center was moved to the basement from Saint Paul's Church. At that time, the Senior population (defined as 60 years of age or older) was 1,070 residents. Since 1999, the Senior population has grown 145% to 2,620 people. The Massachusetts Office of Elder Affairs estimates a further 47% increase in the Senior population by 2030, bringing the total to 3,851. The Senior population in Millis is headed toward one-half of the Town's total population in this decade.

In 2019, the Town secured a grant from the state to fund a feasibility study for a new Center, and the Select Board has chosen Cassidy Farm, Town-owned land situated on the corner of Exchange Street and Island Road as the site for a new Center. The entrance to the Center would be on Exchange St.

### **What types of programs are currently run out of the Senior Center?**

The Senior Center provides cultural and educational programs; referrals to State and Federal assistance that allow Seniors to remain independent; and a setting for Seniors to congregate, socialize, exercise, learn, and enjoy the company of others. Meals on Wheels operates out of the Center and serves approximately 8,000 meals a year. These programs compete for the limited space currently available. The setting is uninviting for the Seniors and unwelcoming to volunteers who provide the majority of the staffing for these programs.

**What would a new Senior Center offer?**

A new Senior Center would provide a welcoming, hospitable home for our Seniors and volunteers. Multiple programs could be run simultaneously, a game room could offer drop-in activities, a lounge area would provide a friendly space to congregate and socialize. The square footage would accommodate our growing Senior population and enable new program development. A supportive day program for our family members and neighbors struggling with cognitive decline would be one of the first new additions. All we need is the appropriate infrastructure in place to support much-needed health and wellness activities, allow socialization opportunities and provide education and training classes, all of which will positively impact the lives of our Senior residents.

**If we build a new Senior Center, would other Millis groups be able to make use of the space?**

Yes, the Center would be available to other Millis groups during the hours in which the Senior Center is not open. This is the Community Center aspect of the project.

**Are there any other functions that operate out of the Senior Center?**

Yes, a Town-wide social worker is housed in the Senior Center. This social worker is available to all residents, regardless of age, to help with housing issues, financial assistance, food stamps, fuel assistance and many other needs. Transportation for our Senior and disabled population is also provided. Veteran services are provided. Currently, the social worker's office is too small, and meetings must be held in public spaces, lacking the necessary privacy.

**Is the picture of the building on this document an actual rendering of the building that would be built?**

No, it is a place holder. The exterior and the finalization of the floor plan will be addressed if the Town votes to move forward.

**Would the new facility be energy efficient?**

Yes, all new construction would be subject to the current building code, which contains multiple energy efficient requirements. In addition, the Town would supplement the building with solar panels and energy-efficient heating and cooling systems.

**How many parking spaces will there be?**

There will be approximately 100 parking spaces available at the Cassidy Farm site, expandable as needed.

**I heard that Cassidy Farm is not buildable land; is that true?**

The Cassidy Farm lot is approximately 32 acres; two of those acres would be used to build the new Center, leaving the remaining land as open space. Tests have been conducted on the land where the building would be sited and there are no issues, and there is access to public sewer. This site also leaves the possibility of future outdoor recreational space.

**If the Town votes to fund a new Senior Center, when would it be open?**

Construction would begin at the end of 2023 and take approximately 16 months to complete.

**What would the increased tax burden be on residents if the Senior/Community Center is approved?**

The grid below shows the average yearly increase and the range of the yearly increase over time (the tax bill decreases over time) for the new Center across a variety of assessed home values (the average home in Millis is assessed at \$462,618).

Property Value	Average Yearly Increase	Range of Yearly Increase
\$462,618	\$266	\$366 to \$166
550,000	316	435 to 198
650,000	374	514 to 234
750,000	431	593 to 270
850,000	489	671 to 305

**\$16 million bond fixed at 4.25% over 30 years**

**Won't operational costs increase for a new Center?**

Yes, it's estimated operational costs will increase between \$150,000 - \$300,000. Some of that increase can be funded with grants for educational and care programs. Also, the Town can re-shuffle priorities and fund the additional operational costs from existing revenue. If the entire additional operating costs were funded with a tax increase, the impact on an average valued home is:

**\$150,000      \$45.13/year      \$300,000      \$90.26/year**

### **Why is the cost higher than other commercial or industrial buildings?**

Public buildings are typically built for a 50-year life span, and the cost is based on life-cycle cost not cheapest construction cost. Public buildings have more extensive security, accessibility, and communications requirements. They must meet more rigorous sustainability requirements. Most significantly, public construction projects require that all workers be paid prevailing (union) wages.

### **What programs are available to Seniors to alleviate this increased burden?**

If you are age 60 or older and your income meets defined limits, you may be eligible for tax relief in the form of an exemption or deferral. With property values increasing year-over-year it might make sense to defer that increased amount. Over the last 20 years, the average single-family home has increased nearly 200% in value. To find out if you meet income eligibility and asset requirements for a deferment, call the Tax Assessor's office. Staff will walk you through the process and help you fill out the necessary paperwork.

Other options exist for relief under specific circumstances: Seniors whose property taxes (plus 50% of water & sewer charges) exceed 10% of their income; those of any age who are disabled or experiencing financial hardship due to extraordinary circumstances; and Veterans with combat related disability and a surviving spouse. There is also a tax "work off" program available to Seniors.

### **Can we put this off, and is it worth the increase in our taxes?**

The current Senior Center cannot provide the level of programming and socialization that our Senior residents need and deserve. Many Seniors deal with loneliness and isolation, and need a welcoming place to congregate, socialize, and engage in new activities. An Aging-in-Place environment could provide care for those with mild memory-loss or physical ailments, giving relief to family members. A welcoming environment would invite volunteers to share their expertise. Everyone can participate in educational, exercise, nutrition, cooking, entertainment, and engagement programs. A welcoming, warm, and friendly environment will give our Senior population the support they need to be active and healthy.

It is time to support *their* needs.