Memorandum

To: Cape Elizabeth Town Council

From: Michael K. McGovern, Town Manager

Re: Community Services Programs, Senior Citizens Report and Former Library Building

Date: January 1, 2016

As we begin a new year and the council begins implementation of its goals for 2016, I wish to offer some suggestions on moving forward with a number of initiatives the council is considering. These include reviewing the structure of community services within the organization, a process to implement the report of the Senior Citizen’s Advisory Committee and the use of what is soon to be the former library building.

**Community Services**

The community services program was created beginning in 1977 when the then town manager contracted with the recreation director in Portland to develop a new model for Cape Elizabeth’s recreation program and its adult education offerings. The plan was to move from an ad hoc hodge podge of recreation programs run by a part time seasonal employee to a formalized program that would provide enrichment programs for citizens of all ages. There was also strong interest in developing far greater use of school buildings as they then were little used after hours and during the summer.

The program was successful from the outset with great cooperation between school and town elected and appointed officials. A community services advisory committee was established jointly appointed by the council and school board to provide citizen input to the committee. The community services director reported to both the superintendent of schools and to the town manager and there was no unified budget. The program operated from a succession of small offices in the high school and in the middle school. The pool had separate administration from the community services program and there was no community center.

In the 1980s’ the program was responsive to a need for pre school care and began to operate pre school programs that have remained popular over the years. The program has always had many adult enrichment programs offering courses in varied areas such as cooking , computer instruction and language instruction. These were advertised through well presented semiannual brochures mailed to each home.

A major focus of community services over the years has been the summer youth programs conducted beginning a week or so into summer school vacation. Along with providing support to fall, winter and spring youth sporting activities, this concentration on youth programs has been a mainstay of community services. Over the years and especially in the last 20 years, community services has also focused on providing various fitness programs including pilates, yoga and other exercise opportunities for all citizens. This now includes a small fitness center at the high school.

The Donald Richards Community Pool is a major offering of community services. It is open more hours than any other community program and receives high praise from its users.

Community Services strives to provide services to all citizens including the senior population. Most of the current programs offered by community services have many users who are in the 55+ age cohort. There are some specialized programs for seniors but there is no one staff member devoted full time to focusing on programs of the senior population.

Over the years the management and oversight of the community services program has evolved. In the 1990’s and into the late 2000’s community services took on many responsibilities for the school department including overseeing all of student transportation and all custodial services. The then director was also detailed to work as the school liaison for a couple of large school renovation projects. As a consequence of this school focus, the oversight of the community services director was moved directly under the superintendent of schools. The community services commission became 100% appointed by the school board.

In more recent years, school transportation and custodial services have been moved elsewhere in the school department. Community services has evolved as full day kindergarten has been implemented and as the school department considers school based preschool programs. The demographics of the community have also changed as the 55+ segment of our population is fast growing and the baby boom generation moves into retirement years. Some older citizens including the recent senior citizens advisory committee have called for community services to do more for our aging population.

As the programs and activities of community services have evolved, it has become more crucial than ever to provide additional focus on what community services can offer all citizens of Cape Elizabeth. The school board and the superintendent already have much to focus on with all their responsibilities. Dealing with issues involving enhancing programs for senior citizens, determining pool schedules and running non-school youth soccer programs is better suited to municipal responsibility.

I have discussed this evolution with Superintendent of Schools Meredith Nadeau and she concurs that it is time to move community services from the school department to become a separate municipal department reporting to the town manager.

**Recommendation**

It is recommended that the community services program be transferred on July 1, 2016 from the school department to become a municipal department. This includes all programs including the pool, youth programs, pre and after school care, community enrichment programs, programs focused on senior citizens and the community center.

It is recommended that we retain the current community services advisory commission and that as terms expire, new appointees will be appointed by the school board through June 30, 2016 and by the town council beginning July 1, 2016.

**Senior Citizen Committee Recommendations**

The senior citizen committee made a number of recommendations regarding services and programs for the older segment of our population. Action on the report was deferred until the new council was seated and until it became clearer what role if any community services would have in implementing its recommendations.

The committee report was strong in suggesting specific opportunities to provide service enhancements to our age 60 plus citizens. The report also got quite specific on the delivery model for implementation of it recommendations.

If the first recommendation of this memorandum is adopted, we are then well positioned to utilize the existing community services department framework to deliver the desired program outcomes desired by the seniors advisory committee.

Senior information can be expanded in all of the community services media opportunities and can also be expanded to include greater dissemination of information through community newspapers. A seniors tab has already been created on the town website as recommended in the report, but we need staffing devoted to ensuring that the information is known to be there and is otherwise shared.

The position of senior citizen navigator was recommended as a volunteer or for hire position to better access services. This can be accomplished through an upgrade of a staff position in community services to focus on senior issues and programs and a person in this position could solicit volunteers who can assist. The community services department should be asked for a specific proposal on staffing and funding needed to provide the services described in the navigator position and to expand senior programming as described in recommendation 4 of the committee’s report.

The committee recommended the purchase or lease of a 14 passenger van to “supplement the expansion of community services senior programming.” The community services advisory commission should be charged with reviewing this proposal and making a specific recommendation to the council. The recommendation should be timed so that budgets may be considered for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2017. While the seniors committee suggest that this may be done at neutral or no cost, I believe that running a regular van service impacts budgets and the costs issues need further review.

The committee recommended the town reserve a space in the town proper to act as a senior hall. The community services department should be charged with conducting a review of space within the community center to accomplish this objective. The committee wrote that “if the concept of a senior hall were to flourish, future discussion should ensue to determine the feasibility of expanding this community resource to a more permanent structure.” Thus, it is consistent with the recommendation that community services should pilot this idea as part of an overall expansion of services to our older citizens.

The only recommendation from the seniors citizens advisory committee that I have not yet specifically addressed is to amend the charter to provide for a standing senior citizens commission. Most of our committees are not created by charter. Placing any committee in the charter does not allow flexibility to modify committees as circumstances change. Most committees are established by ordinance which allows for including terms of reference and changing committee makeup. My strong preference is that we have a single committee that provides citizen input in all activities that are under the community services umbrella and that the committee be an updated version of the community services advisory commission with terms of reference specifically providing for oversight of programs related to senior citizens. I would also like to work with community services to create an ongoing panel of seniors to meet quarterly with the community services director to discuss priorities for all programs and activities related to the aging population. My belief is that this would ensure an active engagement of seniors in the oversight of community services without the bureaucratic structure that often inhibits innovation and collaboration. The members of the recent seniors’ advisory committee could constitute the initial panel to facilitate their monitoring progress on their recommendations.

**The Former Library Building**

The town council has earlier asked citizens about the future use of the former library building with the majority indicating it should be repurposed for public use. The council then authorized an invitation be extended to parties interested in repurposing the building for public use.

The town practice over many years is to first survey municipal departments and the school department for needs before offering any properties to other parties. In this instance, the only substantive proposal from an internal department was from the Cape Elizabeth School Department. My recommendation which I have discussed with the superintendent of schools, and to which she concurs, is to establish a four member working group consisting of two council members and two school board members appointed by the respective chairs to return as soon as possible with a specific recommendation on the school proposal. This committee would look at the proposal utilizing a business model clarifying costs, funding sources and anticipated outcomes resulting from implementation of the proposal.

In the meantime as the building becomes vacant in late January, we will continue to heat it and keep it in good condition while awaiting a decision.

**Conclusion**

I look forward to discussing these recommendations with you at your January 7th workshop meeting. If you wish to pursue most or some of these recommendations, it would also be in order to discuss them with the school board at a workshop to be scheduled in late January.