

Town of Harvard Capital Request Form Fiscal Years 2023 – 2027

Request/Project: _COA Senior/Community Center_ Amount: \$??? _____
(Replacing HH Phase 2 request)

Fiscal Year: 2022 _____

Requestor: Council on Aging – Board of Directors Dept: Council on Aging _____
Please use additional pages, if necessary, to provide complete information for items below

General Description of Project and Benefit to Town:

This funding request is to purchase and renovate a building that will serve as the Town’s Senior/Community Center. The original Hildreth House building project addressed the first of two critical requirements for a senior center: safety/accessibility and adequate programming space. The safety/accessibility requirement has been met for Phase 1, which was funded at the 2015 Annual Town Meeting with additional funding at a June 2016 Special Town Meeting. Phase 1 provided expanded and level parking; an expanded porch with renovated accessible entrances for people with disabilities; full access to existing second floor offices, computer lab, and parlor; a handicap-accessible bathroom on the second floor; as well as numerous improvements in energy efficiency.

This request tackles the second requirement: space. The original plan, as established in 2015, was a two-story addition, including a new dining room downstairs to seat 35 to 45, roughly double the capacity of the present dining room. Above the dining room, the design called for a new multipurpose room for exercise classes, crafts, and other activities. But with increasing participation in COA programs in the past few years, the need for a much larger facility has become clear. Therefore, the COA worked with DAI architects to design a one-story addition next to Hildreth House to accommodate a dining/multi-purpose room that could seat up to 90 for a meal or be divided into a smaller dining space and separate areas for exercise classes and other activities. That request failed at town meeting and the CPIC highly recommended finding a less costly alternative site. The COA took that to heart, and we have gone back to the drawing board.

The COA needs more and appropriate space to execute its mission and programs adequately. COA services are specialized, requiring facilities tailored to the needs of both well and frail elders. COA’s staffing is lean; spreading this expertise over multiple locations to cover both regular programming and outreach emergencies is counterproductive. Part of COA’s mission is to engage Harvard’s senior population regularly so that our staffers can create and maintain trusting relationships. Relationship building is critical to our social work mission, allowing staff to quickly identify and troubleshoot quiet emergencies, and take rapid action to maintain independence. COA facilities must support these varied forms of outreach. In the light of the ongoing pandemic, the need for space is even more necessary.

The original Phase 2 plan was created in anticipation of construction in 2017, two years after Phase 1, and did not occur. Now Harvard’s growing population of seniors raises concerns that the previous plan does not answer present circumstances. Demand for services is rising as the number of seniors in Harvard

grows. As of September 15, 2021, there were 1,755 Harvard residents age 60 and above, comprising 29.9 percent of the total population of 5,868. (Information obtained from Town Clerk). Participation in meals served at Hildreth House increased 65% over the past seven years; transportation demand is up over 73% and social service needs have grown by over 100 percent. Demand for space for COA programs and services continues, and some Harvard seniors are unable to participate in COA events due to space restrictions.

Data from a 2016 senior needs survey conducted by COA and the Select Board further demonstrated the need for a robust senior center. When asked what types of services offered by the COA were most important, its programs - such as meals, exercise classes, and other social activities - were overwhelmingly rated first. The survey also showed that 63 percent of responders plan to remain in Harvard as they age. Providing reliable, targeted services keeps Harvard's seniors independent and in their own homes if possible. The COA believes this is in the best interest of the town because we benefit from their high rate of volunteerism on town boards and committees. In addition, the town benefits financially from keeping this population here as they contribute far more in taxes than they receive in services. Many of the young homebuyers who flock to Harvard are attracted by its engaged community of involved residents. This attribute adds market value to every home in Town.

1. Is this a: Replacement New or Expanded Program Study

2. Why is the Project being requested?

Emergency or protection of public safety Legal Mandate
 Efficiency/Cost Savings Other (note & explain below)

Please explain why it fits into above category:

As noted above, Harvard is experiencing a significant demographic shift as baby boomers move into retirement. This year, close to a third of the town's population is over the age of 60, and the use of COA services is greatly outpacing the annual population increase. Specific program and service use is detailed below. We include numbers for our under-60 populations because we not only serve the seniors, but also those who are disabled or need help with other social and financial issues such as fuel assistance and food stamps. Although we do not travel to Devens for outreach services, they are always welcome to attend our programs and events and for social services. Currently, there are 54 people who are 60 years of age and older living in Devens.

We also believe that the new building could be used as a backup emergency shelter not just for seniors but for the entire town. This can be done by properly sizing the natural gas generator to power the entire building. The new building would have kitchen facilities, handicapped bathrooms, and a large space which could accommodate cots if necessary. In past years, the Hildreth House building was open to the entire town population as a cooling center when other public buildings in town were closed and this past summer of 2021 there were three separate heat waves.

Prior to COVID, every month town committees and groups use the COA facility for meetings including Park & Rec, Warner Free Lecture, Energy Advisory Committee, Historical Commission, Agriculture Advisory, Land Stewardship, Zoning Board of Appeals, Community Preservation Committee, Bare Hill Pond, War Monument, ConCom, and others. Besides town committees, the Girl Scouts meet here, as do the League of Women Voters, and other local groups. Many of these committees are still utilizing the

Hildreth House porch for in-person meetings. There is no doubt that this new building at 16 Lancaster County Road will be an asset to the town as a community center.

Because of our space limitations at Hildreth House, we appreciate the generosity of churches who allow us to use their space for our larger events. We are not their priority, however, and if there is a memorial service that must be set, or if some outside group wishes to rent their facility, then we are unable to use it and must scramble to find other accommodations for our scheduled events. This is especially the case around the holidays. We try to plan around the church's schedule, but sometimes it is exceedingly difficult. When using a church facility, we are required to pack up all our necessities such as: cups, napkins, plates, plastic-ware, coffee, coffeepots, sugar, cream, milk, food, service needs, tablecloths, etc. It is a major undertaking to serve a large meal offsite. This also takes our staff away from their normal work with our Seniors. There have been some instances when we have had to avoid planning an event for the seniors because we have had no space.

3. Please explain how this project is consistent with the Town's priorities (for example. helps achieve a Select Board goal, project need revealed by Town survey, consistent with Master Plan, or other).

After reviewing the Select Board goals and the Master Plan, this will help support the Town to "Initiate programs that improve service delivery to residents, while controlling costs."

4. Is this project eligible for a grant or other alternative non-tax revenue funding? If so, what is the grant source, amount potentially available and the application timing?

If no, then why not?

The COA Board is working with the Friends of the COA to raise funds to support this project. The "First Night" celebration have been earmarked to support this as have the Artisan sale funds from a separate donor. In addition, the Friends group has started reaching out to the community to request pledges for this project.

5. If this is a cost savings show assumptions, savings, and payback (either ROI or years):

This new proposal of purchase and renovation of the building is a cost savings compared to the older request to the town of building a new facility which was estimated at \$4.3million.

6. How will the cost savings be measured and reported?

The renovation costs will be available as soon as the estimate is prepared by DAI Architects. The asking price of the building is \$1.425 million dollars (which may be negotiated down).

7. If this is a replacement, can the current asset be repaired? What would the cost and life of the repair be? Why is it advantageous to replace?

N/A

8. Will on-going annual budgets increase or decrease if this project is approved? Consider anticipated annual maintenance or other expenses required by this project: (e.g. – maintenance contract price, software upgrades if applicable, etc.)

The estimated annual maintenance costs are unknown at this time; however, the building purchase request is a 20-year-old building as compared to the 100-year-old building the town is maintaining at this time.

9. Environmental Considerations:

--Describe any potential environmental impacts or considerations associated with this project. What choices were made about seeking ways to reduce environmental impacts (e.g., alternative designs, locations, sharing resources etc.)?

--Describe any energy efficiency or green energy options you considered. What are their advantages and disadvantages?

The building will be renovated to prevailing codes and therefore will be energy efficient as much as possible.

10. What is the basis for the amount you are requesting? Include a quote or estimate and the source.

Please see DAI budget attached.

11. If approved, how many of the Town's residents will this project regularly serve:

--Over 50% of residents

X --Between 25% and 50% of residents

--Project will be used intermittently or serve less than 25% of residents.

Please include your calculations and assumptions.

12. Detailed Project Description: include major elements, overall measurements, precise location of where project will be located and pictures, if available. (For current year requests only)

Event Room – will be used to serve 90 meals when open, or can be partitioned into 2 multipurpose room for other use

Warming Kitchen

Men's and Women's toilets – wheelchair accessible and depending on code requirements

Please see DAI Floor Plan attached which shows the described use of the building.