

January 3, 2019

Mayor Mark Kaczynski and Members of the Berlin Town Council
Berlin Town Hall
240 Kensington Road Berlin, CT 06037

Dear Mayor Mark Kaczynski and Members of the Berlin Town Council:

Thank you for undertaking the planning process for the proposed Berlin Senior and Community Center. As you know, we have discussed these projects here in town for many years. I am excited that the projects are finally moving forward and I write today to request that stakeholder and public input be a robust part of the planning process.

As Chair of the Commission for Aging I have been advocating for a new senior center for years. Along the way, I have collected a great deal of feedback as to what older residents would like prioritized in the planning process for this new facility.

I have included much of this feedback in the statement of need below. I understand that the town will likely be hiring one or more consultants to guide the planning process. I hope that you will consider convening an advisory committee of resident stakeholders to help select the consultant and craft the request for proposals. There are a number of specific questions that the study should answer. I would be glad to serve on such a committee and hope you would also include representatives of the Parks and Recreation Department and other residents who will ultimately benefit from the project.

On behalf of the Commission for Aging, I appreciate your consideration.

Regards,

Barbara Gombotz Chair, Commission for Aging

Statement of Need

The Commission for Aging requests that the planning process for a new Senior Center address needs at the current Berlin Senior Center. The planning process should include a comprehensive assessment of the needs of the facility and its programs, services, activities and operations.

The Berlin Senior Center is located at 33 Colonial Drive, which is adjoined to the Berlin Housing Authority Senior Housing Complex, Percival Heights, located at 31 Colonial Drive. The owner of this property is the Berlin Housing Authority. The Senior Center portion of the building is leased to the Town of Berlin. This building was originally built in 1956 as the Percival School, which closed in the late 1970s due to low enrollment. In 1981, it was proposed that it be turned into senior housing and the Senior Center. Renovation began in 1982 with the completion in 1985. Since that time there has been no major renovations or additions made to the Center.

The existing portion of the building used for the Senior Center is approximately 17,575 square feet in size, serving the 60 and over population of the Town of Berlin by providing its 5,865 members with programs, services and activities designed to provide access to leisure, intellectual, physical and cognitive activities, fostering new friendships and companionship, and developing strategies for successful aging for its members.

This is currently achieved primarily through an atmosphere of caring by the Center's Director and Assistant Director, staff, volunteers and user members, and by an efficient use of the existing and older undersized facility. Even though the building is well maintained, much of the facility is outdated and some areas have outlived their useful life.

The Senior Center is a vital part of this community. We are a lifeline for many seniors – enriching their lives, empowering and educating their minds. From July 2017 to April 2018, the Center served 2,916 congregate meals, transported 160 residents to medical appointments, grocery stores, the Senior Center itself, and had 25,366 (duplicated) seniors use the Center.

The Commission on Aging Recommends that the Following Criteria be included in the Request for Proposals for a Professional Consultant to Conduct the Senior and Community Center Planning Process

* Robust resident stakeholder input process. There should be an advisory committee that guides the planning process. The process should also include several public forums where residents are given the opportunity to comment on the project during the planning phase.

* **Site selection criteria:**

* The entire facility should be located in a central area of town.

* The parking area must be convenient to building with extra handicap parking available. Parking should be on a flat surface, rather than an incline in order to make it more accessible to older residents.

* **Facilities criteria:**

* Staff offices – location of Director and Assistant Director should be behind reception desk area allowing privacy for confidential consultations with clients.

* Kitchen Area – large, commercial grade kitchen adequate for senior daily lunch program and special events.

* Dining/Multipurpose Area – adjoining the kitchen area with ample amount of space for lunch and large events.

* Craft room – ample amount of space for large tables and sewing machines.

* Health room with an adjoining waiting room for health care screenings and programs.

* Library – locations needs to have ample amount of room for numerous shelving units for books and seating for groups to meet there.

* Meeting/classrooms – need to have plenty of storage space along with counter space and sinks.

* Carport for the Town's Senior Buses and Van

* If the planning process includes an evaluation of building the new facility in partnership with the YMCA or another private entity, the final report must include an assessment of the costs and benefits of this arrangement to residents, such as whether the YMCA would take over existing town property; whether residents would be charged membership fees and how much these might cost; and restrictions on usage.