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## ***What to do with the old Center School***

~~June 15, 2018~~

by Michael Karlis

June 15, 2017 -- Possibilities for the soon to be vacant Center School include a youth recreational center, administrative offices, and classrooms for life skills, according to The Center School Reuse Advisory Committee.

Last night's meeting was the committee's second meeting in four months. The committee invited Superintendent Dr. Carol Cavanaugh, Director of Parks and Rec Bob Dobinski, and Director of Youth and Family Services Denise Hildreth to present how their department would utilize the space.

### ***Demolition of 1950's addition of Center School***

Co-Chairmen of the committee, Ken Weismantel, began the presentation saying the goal of the committee is to maintain the historic facade facing the common and to preserve 1980's addition where the gym is.

Weismantel also noted that the town will have to pay \$890,000 to remove hazardous material from Center School.

"We [will] get a new entrance to the parks and rec building. We have to demolish the 1950's addition, and that would include perhaps the principal's office on the north side of the building," Weismantel said.

Center school, constructed in three phases, includes the iconic landmark built in 1928, the narrow structure connecting the main building to the gym built in 1950, and the gym complex built in the 1980's.

According to the proposal, the second addition will be demolished as it is no longer useful. Chairman Richard Flannery cited the fact that the library considered using this part of Center School during their renovation but decided against the idea due to safety concerns.

### *Possible uses for Center School*

Dr. Cavanaugh, representing the interests of the school district, proposed two classrooms for the high school's "life skills" program which will be in the 1928 building. This program, mandated by the Commonwealth, includes 18-22-year-olds on Individual Education Plans (IEP).

Dr. Cavanaugh admitted that Hopkinton high school currently only has three students enrolled in the program, but added that Hopkinton could bring in youths from other towns and charge tuition as high as \$60,000.

Dobinski and Hildreth proposed that the 1980s addition and gym would become a youth center for children. Dobinski suggested that the gym will be home to various Parks and Rec leagues such as Rec Basketball, but also will include non-athletic related programs such as STEM and Art Class, Red Class Classes, and a kid's newsroom.

Hildreth, a self-described "risk management reduction specialist," cited how family life today is harder now than ever before and how space would allow youth to have a home away from home.

Town Clerk Connor Degan proposed that some space in the original building should be for town record storage. Currently town records are stored in the basement of the Department of Public Works Building. The humid New England summers and cold winters are causing permanent damage to the documents and must move to a climate controlled environment, according to Degan.

The last proposal came from Jane Moran, Chair of the Upper Charles Trail Committee. The Upper Charles Trail, which begins in Milford and ends at Hopkinton State Park, would be rerouted to include the refurbished Center School.

"This would be a real Jewel of the trail if we could do this," Moran said.