

ANC Special Meeting on the
Future of the Community Center
December 14, 2017
Minutes

ANC 3/4G sponsored this special meeting as another in its series of community meetings on the future of the Community Center building. Commissioners Speck, Fromboluti, Bradfield, and Malitz attended along with about 25 residents and Community Center users. The Chevy Chase Citizens Association was also represented.

Commissioner Speck chaired the meeting and began with a summary of the previous meeting on November 28. That meeting included (1) a report on preliminary data from the ANC/Chevy Chase Citizens Association Community Center survey; (2) presentations by the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Department of General Services about the scope of work that would be included to rehabilitate the existing building; and (3) discussion of the possible scope of work for replacing the existing building. The DPR and DGS presentations indicated that, because of the extensive work that will be required to modernize the existing building, they expected to strip the building down to its core structure and to remove all the exterior and interior walls before constructing the new facilities within that framework.

Commissioner Speck also reported that he and Commissioner Malitz discussed the Community Center's future with several Councilmembers at the ANC holiday party on December 7, and they all expressed support for the ANC's process. Councilmember Cheh, who chairs the committee that oversees DPR, indicated that the money in the Capital Budget for the Community Center was always considered to be a placeholder, and she expected that the amount necessary to do the required work could be significantly greater. She expressed confidence that additional money from the general funds could be available to improve the Community Center facilities.

In response to questions, Commissioner Speck made it clear that no decisions had been made about what recommendations the ANC would make. These community meetings would evaluate possible alternatives, and any recommendations that the ANC makes will be fully vetted with the community before being finalized. Commissioner Speck emphasized that any identification of possible programs or facilities is tentative at this point and is evolving as the ANC gathers additional feedback from the community. The Commission is considering all options — using the existing structure, using the existing structure with additions, and constructing a new building on the existing site.

Some attendees asked whether the ANC was considering modernization of the entire site, including the Chevy Chase Library. Commissioner Speck said that they ANC had initially envisioned a program that could include the entire complex — e.g., the Library, parking lot, basketball court, and playground. As the review progressed, however, we have focused on the Community Center. At present, the Library is not planning capital improvements, and there is no money in the FY 2018-FY 2023 Capital Budget for the Chevy Chase Library (which was last renovated between December 2015, and February 2016, at a cost of \$650,000). It may make

sense at some point to include the Library, but we do not plan to include any specific recommendations for the Library when we submit proposals to the Mayor and the Council.

One resident asked whether there are any plans to propose a public-private partnership to finance the Community Center modernization. Commissioner Speck responded that the ANC has no such plans. It appears that the District can fund the facilities that the ANC will recommend without using a public-private partnership. He said that the ANC would not make any recommendation for alternative financing arrangements without first exploring them in a community-wide meeting, and there was no expectation that alternative funding mechanisms will be necessary.

Commissioner Speck proposed the following meeting agenda: (1) review the results of the Community Center survey, (2) discuss the types of programming and facilities that should be used in planning for the future Community Center, (3) consider the space required to accommodate the identified facilities, either in the existing structure, in the existing structure with an addition, or in a completely new structure, (4) estimate approximate costs that would be entailed to construct the required facilities, and (5) develop the strategy for presenting these recommendations to the Mayor and the Council.

Commissioner Malitz then described certain data points gathered from the community-wide survey that the ANC and CCA conducted from September 16 through November 6. Among the highlights presented were the following:

- There were 929 total respondents (777 completed the full survey and 152 completed parts of the survey).
- 289 respondents also indicated that they were answering on behalf of their children under the age of 18, and 541 children met that criteria, for a total pool of people in the survey of 1,470.
- The age breakout of those responding to the age question was:

18 to 25 years old	3	0.33%
26 to 35 years old	56	6.22%
36 to 45 years old	157	17.44%
46 to 55 years old	182	20.22%
56 to 64 years old	128	14.22%
65 to 74 years old	227	25.22%
75 and older	147	16.33%

NOTE: This represents an oversampling of those 65 or older who based on recent data represent 21% of the ANC population.

- An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated they lived in either the 20015 zip code (76%) or the 20008 zip code (10%).
- To the question of how interested respondents in certain facilities the following seven were the highest rated when combining responses for “Very Interested” and “Interested” — in rank order (all closely bunched between 69-76%) were: “Fitness Center with exercise Equipment,” “Outdoor Open Space,” “Environmentally Sustainable Structures,” “Auditorium with Stage (for Theater and Movies),” “Community Room,” “Meeting Rooms,” and “Gymnasium.”

- Additionally, to the question of importance when it came to aspects of the facility, “Physical Space is Appealing” received a 97% combined score when adding “Very Important” to “Somewhat Important.”
- Where respondents indicated that they took programs elsewhere but would take them if offered at the CCCC, the following ranked highest (in order): “Fitness Club/Exercise,” “Music,” “Creative Arts,” “Theater,” “Foreign Language,” “Pilates,” and “Computer.”
- Where respondents indicated that they took programs at the CCCC over the past 24 months, the following ranked highest (in order): “Senior Fitness,” “Fencing Club,” “Gymnastics,” “Ballet,” “Club 60 Program,” “Bridge Instruction,” “Yoga,” “Line Dancing,” and “Qi Gong.”
- There were some differences for all questions when controlling for the age of the respondent — e.g., a “Gymnasium” was of “Interest” to 82% of those between the ages of 26-45 and only 60% to those age 65 or older; an “Activities/Game Room” was of Interest to 68% of those between 26-45 and only 52% of those age 65 or older; “Adequate Parking” was considered “Important” to 86% of those 65 or older and only 67% of those between 26-45.

Commissioner Speck next introduced a tentative list of Community Center programming that could be used for planning the future needs for facilities. He emphasized that this provisional list drew mostly on the survey results, with supplements based on the community meetings, and was merely the starting point to stimulate discussion. We expected the list to be modified based on continuing community input. To that end, he asked the attendees to identify any programming needs that were omitted from the list or programming that should be added to the list. Based on an extensive discussion, the following programs were identified:

- Exercise/yoga
- Physical training
- Informal gatherings
- Fencing
- Computer/Technology
- Dance
- Arts and Crafts (painting, pottery, etc.)
- Games (bridge, scrabble, etc.)
- Meetings/
- Performances
- Activities/parties
- Cooking
- Basketball/volleyball/pickleball
- Gymnastics

We then discussed the facilities necessary to support these programs. Some of the ballet instructors noted that the floor of the current dance studio is state-of-the-art and the only such DPR facility in the District. They said that this facility could be shared with yoga or Pilates instruction, but it could not share with fencing because of the size of the room and the need to protect the specialized floor. The fencing instructor agreed but said that the fencing room could be shared with exercise classes or other activities. Commissioner Speck thanked them for this clarification and said that these were exceptional, valued programs at the Community Center, and would certainly be accommodated in the new facility.

There was also discussion about the need for a gymnasium. The Commissioners noted that a full-court gym probably could not be fit into the available space and could create additional problems with parking for users from beyond the neighborhood. Attendees noted that there are full-court gyms nearby at Lafayette Elementary School. A half-court gym, however, could be used for a variety of activities — e.g., basketball, volleyball, pickleball, exercise classes, gymnastics, etc.

Some attendees were concerned that designation of particular facilities for one age group — e.g., a seniors' lounge — was unnecessary. Rather, the facilities should encourage multi-generational spaces. For instance, there could be a “quiet lounge” and an “activities lounge.” Facilities could also be used by different people during different times of the day. Even a childcare room could be used for other purposes. Commissioner Speck emphasized that to the extent possible, we should be planning for multifunctional spaces. One necessary component to support those the various functions, however, would be adequate storage space.

Attendees pointed out that specialized arts and crafts would need to be accommodated. For instance, pottery requires pottery wheels, kilns, and sinks that are not required for other crafts. Art would also need some specialized facilities.

Some attendees questioned whether a performance hall was necessary, but Commissioner Malitz noted that it was highly ranked in the survey responses. Moreover, a performance hall could have many other uses — e.g., lectures, meetings, films, presentations, theater, music performance, dance recitals, etc. Such a facility would give the Community Center a unique ability to host varied events that cannot be accommodated elsewhere.

Some attendees asked whether a rooftop cafe would compete with businesses on the Avenue. Commissioner Speck indicated that the cafe would be more like an outdoor lounge that would be a place where Community Center users could overlook the Avenue and have soft drinks, coffee, or tea. It could be an added attraction to augment an indoor lounge and would take advantage of the desirable rooftop area.

Commissioner Speck also emphasized the survey results that place great value on sustainability. The roof should certainly be used to promote sustainability through a roof garden and/or solar panels. He noted that we should also make the modernized Community Center resilient so that it could be self-sustaining in an emergency. If we build in resilience, the Community Center can be a safe haven if there are power outages, extreme heat or cold, or any

other disruptive event. With solar panels and the latest battery technology, the Community Center could be able to withstand widespread power outages.

Based on this discussion, the group identified the following facilities or activities that require specific facilities:

- Fitness Center with equipment
- Lecture/performance hall
- Meeting/games/party rooms
- Half-court gym
- Childcare room
- Kitchen
- Quiet Lounge
- Activity/Tech Lounge
- Dance Studio/Yoga/Pilates
- Fencing/Exercise
- Pottery
- Arts and Crafts
- Offices
- Rooftop garden/greenhouse/cafe

Commissioner Fromboluti, an architect, then described a very preliminary, rough estimate of the space requirements for the type of facilities that we have identified. These estimates will need to be adjusted based on further discussions and additional information. It appears, however, that the facilities that we require can be built within the framework of the existing structure, with a possible addition. There is some room for an addition to the current structure between the existing building and the parking lot — e.g., to fit a half-court gym. Patrick Williams, a neighbor and also an architect, said that he had made a similar estimate of space requirements and reached similar conclusions.

Several attendees raised questions about parking and suggested underground parking. Underground parking would not be feasible under the existing building, but would be possible for an entirely new building or under the space that is the current basketball court. Commissioner Fromboluti noted, however, that underground parking is almost prohibitively expensive since an underground garage requires ventilation and other support. If additional parking is important — and the survey suggests that it is more important for seniors — it could be possible to add more spaces to the existing surface parking lot. If more spaces were needed, an elevated level could be constructed for much less than an underground level.

Some attendees asked about the tradeoffs between using the skeleton of the existing structure and building an entirely new building. The architects said that there would be

substantial cost savings in using the existing structure. The drawback, however, is that it will be more difficult to optimize the use of the space since the existing structure dictates how particular facilities can be fit into it. With an entirely new structure, it is possible to use the space more efficiently. It would also be possible to integrate the new Community Center better with any added parking spaces.

Several attendees asked about the closure of the Community Center during any modernization. Commissioner Speck noted that DPR and DGS said that it would be impossible to do the kind of modernization that is necessary without closing the Center entirely for at least 15 months. Because major systems will have to be replaced and structures reconfigured, it will not be possible to leave any portion of the building open during construction. Commissioner Speck said that it would be important to find suitable space for key activities at the Community Center to continue uninterrupted so that they can be resumed at the Community Center when construction is completed. Construction of an entirely new building would take only marginally longer to complete.

Commissioner Speck noted that using the \$435 per square foot cost that DPR and DGS said was reasonable based on its experience and the rough space requirements that Commissioner Fromboluti presented, the cost would be about \$14 million. Of course, that would not be the final cost because it does not include all of the necessary equipment or any normal contingency. Nevertheless, this estimate suggests that the costs for the facilities we recommend could be available in the budget process.

Commissioner Speck then described the timetable that we need to follow in order to get the necessary money appropriated for FY 2019. The Mayor submits her budget to the Council in mid-March. We are more likely to be successful if the proposed appropriation is in the Mayor's budget instead of trying to obtain the money during the Council's budget review process. Thus, we need to get our recommendations to the Mayor's office no later than the end of January so that she can incorporate them into her budget. To do that, we need to have a draft of the recommendations to share with the community by mid-January so that the ANC can vote on the framework for our recommendations at its January 22nd meeting. The ANC will need to hold one or two additional special meetings earlier in January to refine our proposals further.

In closing, Commissioner Speck emphasized the need for a Community Center that builds community. The Community Center should be a gathering place for diverse, multigenerational activities for decades in the future. The ANC hopes to use this opportunity to create a Community Center that lives up to its potential.