



Recorder Staff/Aviva Luttrell

Jean Crisafulli and Mary Gamache color at the Senior Center on Friday afternoon. Both said they don't see including a youth center in the new Senior Center building as a practical option.

Seniors ambivalent about combined youth/senior center

By AVIVA LUTTRELL
Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD — The idea of incorporating a youth component into the new Senior Center building, which was raised during January's Town Council meeting, is drawing mixed reactions from seniors.

While some say they are in favor of a combination youth and senior center, as it would provide the two generations an opportunity to learn from one another, others think children — and especially teenagers — are too rambunctious for the centers to be housed in the same space.

Others expressed concern that the plans for the building are too far along to consider adding a youth component at this point.

"The people I have talked to, and I haven't talked to everyone, are very skeptical about that idea because all the design work and all the money that has gone into the design work has been aimed at a senior center," said Mary Williford, vice chair of the Council on Aging Board. "I don't think there's any objection to town groups using the center on a case-by-case, once in awhile basis, but I don't think it would work as a combined youth center/senior center."

Janet Spencer said she has

strong thoughts about the possibility.

"My experience with having lunch at the Senior Center (several years ago) with the children from Federal Street School made a huge impact on me, how important children are in their relationships with seniors," she said.

Spencer said she believes seniors that are opposed to the idea are probably thinking about teenagers, who can be intimidating. However, Spencer said she believes interaction between teens and seniors is a good thing.

"We can reach out to them as seniors and learn from them and give to them," she said. "If we

exercise a little tolerance, what comes around goes around. We're the foundation, they're the hope for the future."

However, Jean Crisafulli, who was coloring with her friend Mary Gamache at the Senior Center Friday afternoon, said she has a 16-year-old grandson and knows first-hand how difficult it can be to communicate with teenagers.

"They don't want to learn from seniors. Half the time they don't even listen to their parents, never mind older people," she said, adding her grandson once told her that he and his friends can't talk the way they want to around adults.

See CENTER Page B3

Center: Kumbaya idea?

From Page B1

"I think (seniors) are afraid kids will get too rough and knock one of them over or call them names," she added.

Gamache said she thinks the idea is a good one, but she doesn't see it as a practical option — especially, she said, because it takes a special type of person to mentor children and not all seniors are interested in doing that.

Williford agreed, adding the idea came up out of the blue.

"These two groups could have a lot in common, but they're also very different and I think it's

kind of a kumbaya idea where somebody thought, 'Wouldn't it be sweet? All the grandmas and grandpas and the kids,' but I personally don't think it would work," she said.

Jerry Moore, chair of the Senior Center Building Committee, said his committee was tasked with building a senior center and was also asked to incorporate space for community use, which he said was included in the design as a room that can be closed off and used by other groups after-hours.

"The charge we were given is moving along quite well," he said. "I think where some confusion arises is in the language. I think that the word 'community' has been conflated somehow with 'youth' or 'teen,' so it began to

seem like we were not being responsive to what we were asked to do."

"We were never asked, initially, to create a teen center," he added.

Moore said the town is moving into the schematic design phase of the center, which includes specific interior plans, and trying to incorporate a youth component at this point would "pose a huge amount of difficulty."

Hope Macary, director of the Council on Aging, said the center has been buzzing with discussion ever since the

idea was brought up, and said she's glad the project is on people's radar.

She said the center currently offers intergenerational programs and will be able to expand those with the additional space in the new building, but as far as the idea of incorporating a youth center goes, Macary said she has more questions than answers at this point.

Public info session set for Wednesday

The Senior Center Building Committee will hold a public information session Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in the current Senior Center, 54 High St., to bring the community up-to-date on the project's progress and to provide an opportunity for public input.

"We were never asked, initially, to create a teen center."

Jerry Moore
chairman, Senior Center
building committee