

# **UNH Town Feasibility Committee**

## **Summary Report to the Board of Selectmen UNH Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment**

**June 18<sup>th</sup> 2015**

**Celeste Burns- School Board**

**Al Hume- Citizen at Large**

**Susan Noyes- SAU 45 Superintendent**

**Donna Kuethe- Recreation Department Director**

**Paul Punturieri- Selectman**

**Josh Bartlett- Selectman Alternate**

## **Overview**

The purpose of this report is for the Town Feasibility Committee to present the results of a thorough review of the UNH team's report, specifically the first four (4) high level recommendations, and provide input to the Board of Selectmen to answer recommendation number five (5), *"Prepare a warrant article for the development of a new indoor recreation center and gym facility."*

**It is very important to note that the original intent of the Board of Selectmen in authorizing the UNH study was to answer this question so that the community could move on.**

The University of New Hampshire team was engaged to perform a parks and recreation needs assessment for the Town of Moultonborough, NH during the fall of 2014. The purpose of the study was as follows:

- 1. To examine the parks and recreation needs as identified by the residents and key stakeholders in the Town of Moultonborough;*
- 2. To determine which parks and recreation needs expressed were deemed to be priorities for the Town of Moultonborough;*
- 3. To develop a set of recommendations that would allow the Town of Moultonborough to meet the priorities that were identified throughout the study*

The report was received by the Town Feasibility Committee in January 2015.

The UNH report offered five (5) high level recommendations for the Town to consider:

- 1. Extend partnerships between the Town and the MSD for school facility use, particularly in the afterschool and in the summer.*
- 2. Explore partnership opportunities for indoor recreation facility use with local communities and organizations.*
- 3. Provide sufficient financial resources for on-going operations and maintenance of existing recreation facilities, including outdoor athletic fields, town beaches, boat launches, and playground facilities*
- 4. Explore options for the development and renovation of the Lion's Club building to accommodate senior adult meals and social programs/activities or divest from the property*
- 5. Prepare a warrant article for the development of a new indoor recreation center and gym facility.*

## **Review of UNH Report Recommendations**

The Town Feasibility Committee was subsequently charged to fully review and investigate the UNH recommendations and report back to the Board of Selectmen in June of 2015. Underlying the five (5) high level recommendations were twenty nine (29) specific action items that the committee reviewed. Following each recommendation below are the committee's findings.

### **Recommendation # 1: Extend partnerships between the Town and the MSD for school facility use, particularly in the afterschool and in the summer.**

There were nine (9) specific action items under this recommendation and the committee determined that a school/ recreation subcommittee be formed to address them. The subcommittee met on May 11<sup>th</sup>. (Attached are the subcommittee comments, list of co-curricular activities for the past two school years and after school program options in Moultonborough).

#### **Major Findings**

- Classroom space will be made available at the Academy and the Central School for the current half day summer camp programs on inclement weather days. Camp will start on June 29<sup>th</sup> and run for six weeks with a seventh week add on camp. The school is not available for the seventh week.
- At this time, there is no plan being submitted for a full day 6-8 week summer recreation program. Much work needs to be done to define the program and what is needed as well as the impact before it can be determined if it is feasible.
- Co-curricular activities are part of the collective bargaining agreement and are determined by student needs. There is no way to drop or consolidate them. All are important.
- After school program options besides those offered by Moultonborough Recreation Department and Moultonborough School District in Moultonborough are very limited in number and are for very specific needs. The majority of after school activities are met through the school or town.
- The Moultonborough Recreation Department has use of the MCS gym 4 days per week this year for the CATCH and drop in programs.

**Conclusion:** *Even with a reduction in enrollment, no significant space will be freed up in the schools as basically the same activities will be required just with smaller numbers. The schools and the MRD have a history of having a great relationship of working together. It is a model that other Rec Depts. are often envious. With the exception of further exploration of the possibility of full time summer camp programs, the committee believes at this time that we have extended the partnership between the two entities as far as possible.*

**Recommendation # 2: Explore partnership opportunities for indoor recreation facility use with local communities and organizations.**

This recommendation was focused on increasing indoor facility space as the current two gyms and “multipurpose” room do not offer sufficient capacity to meet the demand. There were five action items highlighted in the UNH report.

**Major Findings**

- The multipurpose room is used for many different purposes (band/lunch/chorus/stage) and is truly a multipurpose room and not really a true gym space. **The schools have one full NHIAA size gym and one elementary size gym and one multipurpose room.**
- The owner of the ELAN property allowed us to tour the facility as use for a possible gym / community center. It was the consensus that the space while large was not suitable for recreation needs and the cost to retrofit may be prohibitive. In addition the facility lacks outdoor open space.
- The use of the Meredith Recreation Center and the Moultonborough gyms on Sunday’s was determined to be viable, but Moultonborough has chosen not to run these programs on Sunday.
- While we may at some point be able to find willing partners with other communities for shared recreation facilities, it will require a concerted effort (similar to the intermunicipal milfoil committee) to develop a firm plan as well as a financial commitment.
- Camp Tecumseh gym has limited availability, but is still being explored.
- The Immaculate Conception School just across the Town line in Center Harbor is closing and merging with a school out of state. They are planning on retaining the property and would like to see the space utilized. The school has a full sized stand-alone gym, as well as a professional size and well maintained soccer field. The Recreation Department would have access to the facility on a full time basis.

**Conclusion:** *With the exception of the Immaculate Conception school, opportunities within our local lakes community for partnerships or shared space appear fairly limited and do not solve the core problem of adding gym space. We possibly see the Immaculate Conception School facility as a viable space that could solve in the near term, gym capacity issues.*

**Recommendation # 3: Provide sufficient financial resources for on-going operations and maintenance of existing recreation facilities, including outdoor athletic fields, town beaches, boat launches, and playground facilities**

There were five (5) action items in the UNH report regarding this recommendation.

- There is no need to reiterate the commitment to restore States Landing, recognizing that no decision has been made regarding potential dredging.
- The park area is actively being planned. Funds have been allocated by the community the past two town meetings.
- Use of the area as “prime real estate” was not seriously considered by the committee and after the States Landing Neighborhood meeting held in January 2013, the communities’ desire to keep and improve that property was made very clear.
- The soccer and softball fields are being adequately addressed as the Town has made the commitment to maintain our existing facilities.

**Conclusion:** *The committee believes that the intent of this recommendation has been met and is ongoing. The committee believes that no further action is required on this recommendation.*

**Recommendation # 4: Explore options for the development and renovation of the Lion’s Club building to accommodate senior adult meals and social programs/activities or divest from the property.**

**Major Findings:**

- The committee felt strongly that the Lions Club property was very highly utilized.
- As the lease for the Lions Club will expire in 2017 and no decisions have been made from the Lions Club as to their intentions or the Town’s. It is premature to think in terms of any possible renovations/ improvements such as recommended by the UNH team until a decision has been made.
- The Town Feasibility Committee has no knowledge of the cost to bring the facility up to ADA requirements or even for certain that it will be required.
- The facility is maintained by the Town as are all Town owned properties.
- Purchasing new tables and possibly room dividers seem to be a reasonable approach to better utilize the space, but await a determination of the final decision as to the facilities future.

**Conclusion:** *The Lions Club property fills many needs for the community and we disagree with the statement in the UNH report that the town gets little benefit from the facility. No decision has yet been made as to the future of the facility and no option is off the table including divesting the property. In short, the facility can be improved to better utilize the space, but it is beyond the scope of this committee.*

**Recommendation # 5: Prepare a warrant article for the development of a new indoor recreation center and gym facility.**

The end game of the entire UNH study and subsequent report leads to this final question. Without rehashing recent history in terms of warrant articles, committees, studies and reports, the Town Feasibility Committee did look at the totality of the history and made some observations that are worth repeating:

- Per the UNH report, the majority position heard during the UNH process was against building a new facility. It should be noted that when discussing “facility” the Blue Ribbon Commission recommendation was the benchmark.
- The UNH report refers to “not enough existing public debt” coming off the books to leverage bonds to fund the entire project. The committee did not see this as a negative but rather a sign of a financial stability.
- UNH recommends a modest indoor recreation facility consisting of gym space, indoor walking area, recreation office, multipurpose room, bathroom facilities and storage and with the possibility of phasing the project.
- It should be designed and built with little or no impact on current tax rates and done in partnership with other communities.

**Major Findings:**

- It is clear to the committee that demand for gym space exceeds capacity for all activities. The usage data provided by the school district and analyzed by the committee is compelling:
  - **% Utilization** (M-F, 5 hours per school day) all scheduled activities (Rec. Dept. and Schools):  
**MCS: 96.3%**  
**MA: 97.2%**
- **Twenty seven (27) teams** use the MA gym. Some teams/activities are unable to find more than a minimal amount of gym time for practice and games.
- The schools have one full NHIAA size gym and one elementary size gym and one multipurpose room. Due to the stage and lack of storage and use as a cafeteria, it makes it inadequate to use for many other sports and other active pursuits as well.
- Some of the space problems have been addressed and solved with the recreation department and school for half day summer camps on inclement weather days and after school programs, but the issue of full day camp has yet to be resolved and may very well not be. In addition, extra wear and tear on the gym floor will require perhaps a second refinishing throughout the year and there is no time during the school year when that is possible. The school gyms have no significant down time.

## **Final Conclusions**

As a committee, we can say with confidence that we reviewed the entire UNH report and investigated the recommendations as best we possibly could.

The committee would like to present the outcome of its work to a Joint Board of Selectmen/School Board meeting tentatively scheduled for August 2015. We think it is critical that both bodies come to some consensus on this matter as well as provide input and guidance.

The challenge we present to the Board of Selectmen is how to balance the needs of a minority in the community with the opinion of the majority. It is clear from the UNH report that the majority of respondents did not favor building a new facility. A vocal minority however did. It is also clear from the study that additional gym space is a true need for the community. We believe that we have validated that claim.

As stated in the beginning, the original intent of the Board of Selectmen in authorizing the UNH study was to answer this question: *“Prepare a warrant article for the development of a new indoor recreation center and gym facility”* so that the community could move on.

***So that there is no confusion in interpreting this committee’s conclusions, please note the following:***

- *The committee agrees that there is indeed a need for more gym space and that there is insufficient space available currently to accommodate a comprehensive year-round Recreation Program for all ages.*
- *Changing demographics do not significantly impact the demand for gym space.*
- *The Recreation department should continue to work closely with other communities and organizations to increase capacity where possible.*
- *It is time to settle this issue and move forward one way or another at Town meeting.*

## **Suggested Plan of Action**

### **1. Immediately explore a short term lease of the Immaculate Conception School gym**

#### **Rationale**

- Aligns closely with UNH Recommendations:
  - Alleviates the gym capacity issues
  - Provides a near term cost effective solution with no tax rate impact
  - Aligns closely with wishes of community
- While not a “ final” solution ( we anticipate the space will be available for 3-5 years) it does allow:
  - Opportunity for “ lessons learned”
  - Create a following/ business model
  - Create partnerships

#### **From the UNH report:**

*“There is support for exploring partnership opportunities with surrounding communities and businesses. One theme that cut across focus group sessions was the interest in partnering with surrounding towns, organizations, and businesses.”*

*“Per the Town Wide meeting on October 22nd 2014 nearly 86% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement: “It is reasonable to explore and expand opportunities for recreation partnerships with surrounding communities (e.g. Meredith, Sandwich, and Center Harbor)”*

*“However, there is not enough indoor physical activity and gym space available for viable recreation programs when the needs for such spaces are most prevalent.”*

### **2. Evaluate programs/participation and needs based upon use of the leased facility over the first 12 months.**

### **3. Consider a warrant article for 2017 Town Meeting**

#### **Rationale**

As clearly noted from the surveys, focus groups and Town Wide meeting, there is no clear consensus of all segments of the population that clearly settles this issue. We need to make a decision and move forward.

#### **From the UNH report:**

*“Opponents point to other indoor recreation facility projects in the area that have not been successful or are underutilized, or they suggest that there is existing capacity that is not being effectively utilized. There is frustration that this issue continues to come up for discussion when opponents of the project believe that it has been defeated in a past town meeting.”*

*“Some focus group participants mentioned that they could possibly support a new indoor recreation facility if it was small in scope, did not significantly add to the current tax rate, and if it could be shown that there was a need for the facility.”*

*“There was frustration about the fact that this issue has been studied many times, and that construction of an indoor recreation facility has been recommended in the past yet continues to be a point of contention in the town”*

*“While every effort was made to engage all residents in some facet of this process – focus groups, public input meeting, community survey, and various public meetings on the project - the majority position that was heard during this process was against building a new facility”*

**We respectfully suggest the following process before crafting a warrant article:**

**(Assuming a lease agreement can be reached with the Immaculate Conception School)**

- A. Authorize a study that focuses strictly on the financing, construction cost options both hard and soft, ongoing operating expenses, and impact to the tax rate for various build scenarios. Without this information, it would be impossible for the Selectmen and voters to make an informed decision
- B. The Board of Selectmen should consider meeting with their counterparts in neighboring communities and determine if there is sufficient interest in their respective communities to ask for a financial investment to share the cost and use of a potential new facility.
- C. Based upon the outcome of the financial study, program evaluation and meetings with other communities, the Town should consider a warrant article to be put forward for 2017 **(2016 if lease agreement cannot be obtained)** Town meeting that is as clear and unambiguous as is humanly possible, **so that this issue can be finally resolved.**

[Tecumseh Gym Memo](#)

[Tecumseh Gym Floor Plan](#)

[Recreation Strategic Plan 2008](#)

[Blue Ribbon Commission Report](#)

[BRC Facility Site Study](#)

[UNH Recreation Needs Report](#)