

**CAPE CODDER**

# Can Orleans come together on a community center? Planning workshop planned for public

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ORLEANS — Residents can get a glimpse of what a new community center could look like and a chance to have a say it what it will include.

The Orleans Community Center Feasibility Study Task Force, which has been working on the project since last fall, is holding a planning workshop Aug. 15 to get public comment. Architect Dave Eisen of Abacus Architects will provide some conceptual designs.

“What we are looking to do is get further feedback on the design concepts,” task force Chair Fritz Luft said. “I think they’re very exciting concepts.”

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Town Planner George Meserve said the task force was leaning towards including a gymnasium in any design.

“There will be a 20-minute presentation on what the committee has gone through to help everyone understand what the issues are, what the needs are as heard from the community, the challenges to make this work and then they’ll go through some planning exercises,” Meserve said.

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Orleans' existing community center is a small building next to Whole Foods on Main Street. It houses the Orleans Chamber of Commerce and Nauset Together We Can and so has limited space for other activities.

The task force sent a questionnaire to service providers like the Council on Aging and library as well a survey to the general population.

## What do residents want in a center

Seeing conceptual designs of building makes a difference, Luft said. The designs show a lobby, a gym, the different rooms and spaces. The center would be across the street from town hall, where the VFW was, a location that is not actually available, but about the right size.

“We’ll ask ‘do you like a building like that?’” Luft said. “My team came alive when they saw the actual building and could imagine walking into the building and going in for art, sitting down for a coffee or playing pick-up basketball and using the facility. All of a sudden they light up.”

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Meservey noted the community center would not want to duplicate what other buildings provide.

“The library could be the place sitting activity could take place. The community center would be for active activities,” Meservey said.

“While the Council on Aging facility serves some needs, this might be the kind of facility that is for general use by the community during the school day and then the kids come in in the afternoon and then the adults come in during the evening,” Meservey said. “There are different needs for different age groups so how do we piece this together in a cost-effective way?”

Meservey said the task force looked at many community centers in different towns, including many off Cape facilities.

Luft said they were very impressed with the Harwich Community Center.

They focused on communities of similar size, demographics and with a seasonal population. The seasonality of Orleans is a key issue, they don’t want a facility that’s too small in the summer and empty in the winter.

## Gym key part of plans

The community center could provide a place to play pick-up basketball or pickleball on a rainy weekend.

“The gym is kind of core,” Luft said. “And we want to have a warming kitchen and a dedicated art room with a big sink. We’re looking to have room for yoga classes. We’re looking at a game room and maybe a hang out area for kids.”

“What are our special needs?” Meservey asked. “We honed in on square footage and size and determined we need a two-acre site.”

Finding a location is a big issue. Meservey said the Governor Prence planning committee is leaning towards devoting that 5.5-acre site to affordable housing so there likely won’t be space there. There is little other town-owned land downtown.

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## Sharing with Brewster?

Meservey said the committee might suggest the town look at private properties and feedback suggested citizens wanted a location within walking distance of the Nauset Middle School somewhere downtown.

While the possibility has been raised that Orleans might combine with Brewster, a town also contemplating a community center, Meservey said that was unlikely.

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“That adds a level of complexity,” he said. “The location seems critical.”

“We’re not going to put forward a real proposal,” Luft said. “But we will put together ideas and information that later on when land is available and there is a budget it will be something for the next group of people to pick up on.”

## If you go

The community center workshop will held Aug. 15 from 5-7 p.m. in the Public Works Building on Giddah Hill Road. Email [Jamie.balliett@gmail.com](mailto:Jamie.balliett@gmail.com) to preregister because

Orleans to host workshop on planning for a community center  
seating is limited.

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