

LYMES' SENIOR CENTER RENOVATION FAQ

When the renovations are to Lymes' Senior Center are completed, the center will have:

- An additional 3,265 square feet of interior space (for a total of 8,737 square feet of interior space) that will enable the center to accommodate more members and activities.
- Motorized room partitions that allow for multiple room configurations so programs and activities can take place simultaneously.
- An enlarged kitchen space with multiple kitchen upgrades that allows for greater center luncheon attendance.
- A quiet library room where members can relax and/or read.
- A greeting area that is separate from the activities area.
- A public entrance that can accommodate the arrival and departure of buses and emergency vehicles.
- Redesigned entryway and hallways, improved door thresholds and additional shelving and storage space.
- New furniture throughout.

The Lymes' Senior Center Building Committee has prepared this FAQ to answer questions it has received about the renovation process. The FAQ will be updated with new information, questions and answers throughout the renovation process.

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Why did the building committee close the center in October when construction still hasn't started?

- The building committee, together with the towns of Old Lyme and Lyme, developed a renovation plan and timeline that allowed for sufficient time for all components of the project.
- The plan and timeline had to include a realistic start date for construction management firms so that we could issue the RFP for the project.
- Based on the plan and timeline, we closed the center in October with the intent of beginning the project in October.
- Shortly after closing the center, we encountered a highly unusual delay in October 2023 that had to do with the approval of the \$1 million in grant money (STEAP grants) from the state.
- We encountered another highly unusual delay in November 2023 that involved securing builder's risk insurance.
- Questions and answers on these delays appears below.

Why the did the \$1 million in grant money (STEAP grants) cause a delay?

- The building committee assisted the towns in applying for \$1 million in grants to help offset some of the costs of the \$5.5 million renovation.
- The grants were not needed to move forward with the project – they were a way of offsetting some of the ultimate costs – so pursuing the grants did not alter the plan or the timeline. (We issued the RFP to the construction management firms two months before the grants were awarded.)
- The grant applications were submitted in late August. We did not know if the grants would ultimately be approved or when.
- The grants (totaling \$1 million) were awarded by the state on September 23 without any conditions known to the committee or the towns.
- On October 23, the state informed the towns it had assigned the CT Department of Economic & Community Development (DECD) to oversee the grants and that the towns would need to meet all of DECD's terms and conditions.
- DECD requested a substantial amount of additional documentation from both towns and Newfield Construction before it would agree to release the grant funding for use.
- All parties moved quickly to provide DECD with the necessary substantiation, but this caused a delay that pushed back the construction start time.
- DECD approved the release of the \$1 million in grants in early December.

Why did obtaining builder's risk insurance cause a delay?

- The Town of Old Lyme has to have builder's risk insurance in order to undertake the renovation.
- The committee assisted the town in submitting all required information to CIRMA, the Town of Old Lyme's insurance company, starting back in July 2023.
- In November 2023, CIRMA informed the town it would not underwrite the project – which had never happened before.
- CIRMA said it would help find the town some alternative quotes, but when those quotes came in, they were unusually high, so the committee helped the town to seek quotes from other companies.
- Old Lyme has recently approved a policy with Selective Insurance.

Why didn't the building committee foresee the hurdles and impediments you've encountered?

- Point One Architects, Newfield Construction and committee members have a wealth of expertise, skills and knowledge when it comes to financing and construction.
- The delays we encountered were unexpected and could not have been foreseen.
- In each instance, the committee and the towns responded quickly to address the impediments to keep the project moving forward.

Do the members of the building committee have the financial and construction expertise needed for this type of project?

- Our committee members have a wide depth of expertise, skills and knowledge when it comes to financing and construction.
- The architects and the construction managers the towns selected have excellent reputations.
- Point One Architects, the firm in charge of the design and architectural work, has undertaken projects for a wealth of commercial, educational and medical properties in our area.
- Newfield Construction, the construction-management firm, has implemented construction projects for the East Hartford Senior Center, the Otis Library in Norwich, the Naval Submarine Base in New London, the East Hampton Police Station and various US post office sites.
- Our committee members have financial and construction expertise, as well as individuals fluent in the Senior Center's operations.
- The committee includes the chairs of the Old Lyme and Lyme Boards of Finance, the Old Lyme First Selectman and past First Selectman (as ex officio members), the director of a local architect firm, a retired building contractor and the vice president of a local construction-management firm.
- The committee chair served as a Senior Center board member for 8 years, including 6 as its chair.
- The Senior Center director is on the committee as an ex officio member and five of the committee members are Senior Center members.

Some Senior Center members have said that they have not been kept in the loop on the renovation process or its progress. What communications has the building committee undertaken to date with the public and with the Senior Center board?

- Our committee chair served as the Senior Center board chair until July 2023, so there was a direct communication link with the board during that time.
- The committee has provided the Senior Center board with monthly updates on the project for the past four years (since the renovation became a consideration and then a reality).
- We have solicited input from center members, staff, board members and community stakeholders from the beginning – including by surveying Senior Center members to ask what changes they wanted to see included in the renovation and encouraging their participation in the feasibility study conducted in 2020.
- We held public forums where members could ask questions about the project before voting on its budget.
- That said, we are committed to doing a better job of communicating the status and progress of the renovation as we move forward.
- We will continue with our monthly updates to the Senior Center board; the publication of our meeting agendas and minutes on the towns' web pages and social media pages; and the inclusion of updates in Senior Center communications (emails, Senior Center newsletter, website, etc.).

- We are holding monthly “Building Buzz” meetings for Senior Center members.
- We will include a public comment section in all of our public meetings moving forward.
- We are also planning to begin issuing monthly news releases that provide a progress report on the renovation and reminders on which Senior Center services are taking place where during the renovation.
- We will publish and update this FAQ on the websites of both towns.

What communications does the committee plan to undertake moving forward?

- We will continue with our monthly updates to the Senior Center board; the publication of our meeting agendas and minutes on the towns’ web pages and social media pages; and the inclusion of updates in Senior Center communications (emails, Senior Center newsletter, website, etc.).
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Did the building committee allow for public comment on its renovation plans?

- We have allowed for public comment and will continue to allow for public comment.
- We have encouraged and solicited public comment from the very start of the project.
- We solicited input from center members, staff, board members and community stakeholders from the beginning – including by surveying Senior Center members to ask what changes they wanted to see included in the renovation and encouraging their participation in the feasibility study conducted in 2020.
- We held two widely publicized public forums on the renovation prior to voters’ approval of the budget estimate in June 2023.
- The committee chair has regularly briefed the Senior Center board with news and developments and encouraged them to share questions and concerns.
- There was one very lengthy meeting where the committee was asked during the meeting to include a public comment period. Since a public comment period had not been included on the agenda, the committee decided not to allow public comment in that one instance.
- The committee will include a public comment section in all of its public meetings going forward.

Some Senior Center members are asking why a complete upgrade of the kitchen wasn’t incorporated into the renovation plans. Is the kitchen going to be upgraded?

- A complete kitchen upgrade was not part of the original renovation plans or the budget that the towns approved in June 2023.
- The renovation plan (at that point) only included some smaller kitchen upgrades – e.g., a pass-through window over the sink, a larger window to allow for better light, better door thresholds, additional shelving and storage in the extension.

- In September 2023, recognizing that the center luncheons had expanded significantly after the center reopened post-pandemic, the Senior Center board asked the towns to include a complete kitchen upgrade as part of the project.
- In February 2024, the towns requested that a complete kitchen upgrade be included in the renovation project.
- The committee, the towns, Point One Architects and Newfield Construction and the towns moved quickly to incorporate this request into the renovation plan.
- The additional cost of incorporating this kitchen upgrade is estimated to be \$80,000.

Were the bid documents, drawings and specs that were sent out complete? Did they provide sufficient details in order for contractors to submit bids without adding substantial contingencies to cover themselves?

- Prior to the project going out to bid, Newfield Construction provided a constructability review of the plans and specifications.
- At that point, Newfield and Point One Architects met to ensure all open items were clarified and cleaned up prior to putting the project out to bid.
- During the bidding process, Newfield opened a request for information session with potential bidders.
- All requests were vetted by Newfield and Point One, culminating in a series of clarifying addenda that were provided to all bidders.
- After the bids were closed, Newfield met with each apparent low bidder to review scopes of work and any potential issues.
- No major issues with the documents were identified and the scopes of work for each low bidder were validated.

How can a resident of Lyme or Old Lyme obtain a complete set of the bid documents – including all drawings and specifications – as well as the invitations to bid and cover letters to bidders?

- The RFP, contract drawings and other documents related to the renovation can be found on the Lymes' Senior Center Building Committee Page on the Town of Old Lyme's website at <https://www.oldlyme-ct.gov/356/Lymes-Senior-Center-Building-Committee>.

Is it possible for the Senior Center to reopen temporarily since delays have been experienced?

- No. All of the furniture, supplies and cabinetry has been removed.
- The center's activities and programs will continue at other locations while the renovation is underway.

Why was there a \$1.3 million gap between your estimate and the estimates submitted by the construction companies?

- The reason for the \$1.3 million gap is unclear. (The trade bids were \$1.1 million over budget; related “soft costs” raised that total to \$1.3 million.)
- We developed an estimate in March 2023 (timed to coincide with the towns’ budget cycles) that included a robust, anticipated inflation rate.
- The estimate was approved by the towns in June 2023. The bids were solicited 11 months later in 2024.
- Our focus at this point is addressing the overage without compromising the integrity or intent of the renovation.

Are the delays and the budget gap an indication that the committee and its vendors do not have the necessary expertise?

- It’s a reflection of having encountered circumstances we could not have predicted.
- Both Point One Architects and Newfield Construction have excellent reputations.
- Point One Architects, the firm in charge of the design and architectural work, has undertaken projects for a wealth of commercial, educational and medical properties in our area.
- Newfield Construction, the construction-management firm, has implemented construction projects for the East Hartford Senior Center, the Otis Library in Norwich, the Naval Submarine Base in New London, the East Hampton Police Station and various US post office sites, among others.
- Our committee members have financial and construction expertise, as well as individuals fluent in the Senior Center’s operations.
- The committee includes the chairs of the Old Lyme and Lyme Boards of Finance, the Old Lyme First Selectman and past First Selectman (as ex officio members), the director of a local architect firm, a retired building contractor and the vice president of a local construction-management firm.
- The committee chair served as a Senior Center board member for 8 years, including 6 as its chair.
- The Senior Center director is on the committee as an ex officio member and five of the committee members are Senior Center members.

How are you planning to close the \$1.3 million gap? What are the changes you are making?

- Once the bids were received on Feb. 6, we moved quickly to address the budget gap.
- Our criteria for closing the gap included a commitment to ensuring that there would be no reduction in space or intended functionality; and that there would be no diminishing of the integrity of the plan or the safety of the building.
- Our goal was to find all the cost savings we could within those criteria through value engineering and we tasked Point One and Newfield with identifying those solutions.
- (An initial discussion of potentially postponing specific components such as landscaping that wouldn’t affect the functionality of the building was removed from consideration quickly.)

- We currently anticipate being able to close the gap by reducing the cost overrun by about \$500,000 – net of additional provisions in our Owners Contingency – through construction savings (called “value engineering”) and by requesting \$800,000 in additional budgetary funding from the towns.
- The building committee voted on March 6, 2024, to request that the towns provide an additional \$80,000 to cover the inclusion of a kitchen upgrade in the project (which the towns requested in February 2024).
- Our goal is to get all cost savings and coverage of incremental costs in place before the current bids expire on May 6, in order not to have to restart the bidding process.

What is “value engineering”?

- Value engineering means replacing originally chosen options with less-expensive construction options without compromising overall quality.

Will any of the changes that you’re proposing to close the gap compromise the renovation in terms of the facility’s ultimate utility or safety?

- There will be no reduction in space, safety or intended functionality.
- We intend to honor the integrity and intent of the plan.

What are the \$600,000 in construction savings that you are realizing as a result of value engineering?

- Working together with the committee and town officials, Point One Architects and Newfield Construction identified almost \$600,000 in construction savings that we can realize without reducing the center’s expansion, exterior features or multi-room flexibility, while maintaining quality of materials.
- These savings included identifying construction alternatives to specific renovation components and processes – such as milling, paving, veneers, siding and the fire-suppression system – that would reduce costs without compromising quality.

In the CT Examiner article, Newfield Construction, citing an example of possible savings that could be realized through value engineering, indicated that the movable partitions (which divide one large room into separate spaces so different activities can take place simultaneously) could be eliminated. Are these partitions being eliminated?

- No. They remain an essential component of the renovation and the ongoing needs of the Senior Center. This has been a stated programming goal since the project’s beginning.

In The Day article, the building committee chair said the fire-suppression system was one of the most unexpected expenses. Why was this an unexpected expense?

- The cost of including a fire-suppression system was not unexpected.
- The cost of the system, which was based on construction firms’ estimates of the renovated center’s maximum capacity, came in higher than expected. (Fire-safety systems are determined by the occupant load.)

- Once Point One Architects and town officials confirmed that the renovated center would have a maximum capacity that was less than 300, we were able to identify an effective fire-suppression system in line with the renovated center's final maximum occupancy, which reduced the cost.

Some Senior Center members have said the building committee was considering making up the \$1.3 million gap by recruiting megadonors. Is this true?

- No. While a fundraising campaign has always been a part of our plans, we did not look at or consider private donors as a way of closing the gap.

What's the process of requesting additional funding from the towns? How will those additional funds get approved in each town?

- In both towns, the additional funds will need to be approved by the Boards of Finance, the Board of Selectmen (in Old Lyme), the Board of Selectpeople (in Lyme) and the voters in both towns at a Town Meeting.

How much funding will you be asking for from each of the towns? And what does this funding request include?

- We have reduced the initial \$1.3 million overrun through approximately \$600,000 in construction savings.
- We have increased contingency funds for the project by nearly \$65,000 to cover any unforeseen circumstances.
- Those two moves reduced the \$1.3 million overage to \$800,000.
- We are also requesting an appropriation of \$80,000 to cover the kitchen upgrades the towns requested in February 2024.
- That's a total of \$880,000 to be divided between Old Lyme (75%, \$660,000) and Lyme (25%, \$220,000).

Why are you approaching the towns now for the additional funding as opposed to waiting for the 2024-2025 budget process?

- Our goal is to get all cost savings and coverage of incremental costs in place before the current bids expire on May 6, in order not to have to restart the bidding process.
- All parties are working closely together and moving quickly to get the additional funding approved at a Town Meeting in both towns so we can move forward and begin construction.

Are the respective Boards of Finance and Boards of Selectmen supportive of additional funding?

- The Boards have been kept updated on and involved in the renovation process from the outset.
- The chairs of the Board of Finance from both towns are on our committee.
- The First Selectman and former First Selectman of Old Lyme are ex officio members of our committee.

- A Lyme Selectman is a member of the committee and the Lyme First Selectman has attended meetings.

The towns were awarded \$1 million in grant money from the state. Is there any possibility of getting additional grant money from the state or other sources?

- There are no new opportunities to secure additional federal or state funding during the current fiscal year.
- There is an opportunity to obtain ARPA funds that would help cover some of the audiovisual improvements in the renovation plan.
- The committee is helping the both towns pursue ARPA grants from the CT Department of Aging & Disability Services that could result in grants totaling approximately \$37,000.

Do you risk losing the state's grant money if you don't use it by a certain date?

- The grants we've been awarded from the state (STEAP grants) are good until 2026.

What is the upcoming timetable for the project in terms of meetings, deadlines and opportunities for public comment? What will happen when?

- We meet the second Wednesday of every month at Old Lyme Town Hall and our meetings are open to the public.
- Additional public meetings – called special meetings – will be added as needed.
- A public comment period is being included in all meeting agendas.
- Additional and regularly updated construction data will be available on the committee's web page on the Town of Old Lyme's website.
- Agendas, minutes and news will continue to be posted on town's web pages and social media pages.
- We will continue with our monthly updates to the Senior Center board and the inclusion of information in Senior Center communications (emails, Senior Center newsletter, website, etc.).
- We are holding monthly "Building Buzz" meetings for Senior Center members.
- We are also planning to begin issuing monthly news releases that provide a progress report on the renovation and reminders on which Senior Center services are taking place where during the renovation.
- We will publish and update this FAQ on the websites of both towns.

What happens if you miss the May 6 deadline for the estimates submitted by the construction companies? How far would that likely push back the completion of the project?

- The bids we have received expire May 6. If we miss that deadline, the bidding process will have to start over. It would likely mean additional costs and delays.

How can residents keep abreast of what's happening with the renovation?

- The center's communications – the Senior Center newsletter, website, emails – are a good source of information and will continue to be updated.

- The towns' websites are a good source of the latest information. The building committee has a page on the Old Lyme website devoted to the renovation. Lyme posts agendas, minutes and news on the renovation as it happens.
- All of our committee meetings are open to the public.
- We are holding monthly "Building Buzz" meetings for Senior Center members.
- We are also planning to begin issuing monthly news releases that provide a progress report on the renovation and reminders on which Senior Center services are taking place where during the renovation.

When will the monthly Senior Center newsletter updates begin?

- The updates began in the March 2024 Senior Center newsletter.

Will the Senior Center's various outside program sites continue through this summer?

- The Senior Center's activities and programs will continue to take place at various locations in Lyme and Old Lyme until the renovation is completed.

Is it possible for all the various Senior Center activities and programs, which are currently taking place at multiple locations, to be consolidated into a single location while the renovation is underway?

- The range of programs and activities that the Senior Center is continuing to offer during the renovation required the Senior Center director and the towns to identify multiple locations in order to keep them all going.
- We are grateful to each of the organizations that are allowing us to use their space for activities during the renovation.

What is the anticipated completion date of the project as it stands now?

- If we are able to get Newfield Construction into the building by May 1, we anticipate a 10-month schedule for completion of the project, barring any unforeseen circumstances.

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