

The Harrison Report

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Mintzer Center debate concluded at Town/Village meeting

*Board also discusses eminent
domain, flood repair costs*

By Joshua Denenberg

On July 26 at the Harrison Town/Village meeting, the debate over a proposal for the new senior center finally drew to a close.

Since April, one of the hot button issues in Harrison was the construction of the new senior center on the location of the current Mintzer Center off Underhill Avenue.

The most recent proposal addresses space issues, a major concern with the initial design, and incorporates several aspects of a design by senior citizen and retired designer Lucille Held, including a lobby greeting area. The new design has added an additional 400 square feet of space to the main area, an area specifically for video viewing, and plenty of new storage space, including some in the attic. Even with these changes, the actual floor space

remains the same as the initial design, which gives ample room for further development of the property as well as plenty of parking space.

This did not deter Held from objecting to the most recent design. She expressed her dismay with the new building, saying how it pales in comparison to several of the senior centers she has been to in the past. "I was embarrassed to walk into the South Burry Senior center... why are we redesigning the building again when mine accounted for everything?" Other council members did question some aspects of the design, such as the lack of divider walls. Senior citizen Anne Gaudenzi expressed concern for exercise area as well as sound proofing.

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Mayor Stephen Malfitano (R) responded to Held's arguments, stating that "...this is not meant to be a permanent solution, only one for the near future: the next 3, 4, or 5 years. We needed to consider other uses for the building as well as the plot of land."

"Once we start a new design, we will only continue to debate," concurred councilman Thomas Scappaticci (R).

Debate continued on the naming of the building. Several of the seniors present expressed their displeasure at the center's formal name, "The Mintzer Annex Building". Some seniors felt that the official name should be the "Harrison Senior Center". This debate was laid to rest quickly, as the village board defended its position, stating that the name left open the possibility of using the building for purposes other than a senior center.

The debate was not all serious. When discussing the newfound space in the main area, one senior quipped about maybe putting in a putting green.

The center plans were finalized and passed by unanimous vote.

This was only one of the highlights of Thursday's town meeting. Earlier, the town proposed a resolution, drafted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), to fly the M.I.A. flag on all town flagpoles. The resolution passed with unanimous vote. The VFW plans to follow up with this by proposing it to the school boards.

What was meant to be a simple eminent domain claim became a miniature debate. Prior to the meeting the town lawyers settled an eminent domain case involving the expansion of Veteran's park. Concerned citizen Robert Portle voiced his dissatisfaction. "In my mind, this is a criminal act," said Portle. Portle continued to claim that the decision gets rid of open space by the town acquiring land parcels and then developing them, as well as being invasive and an overextension of the government. Malfitano was quick to respond. "We're acquiring property

to add to a park! If anything, we are adding open space as opposed to taking up space." Malfitano pointed out that the board is not doing anything wrong or illegal, and only has the best interest of the town in mind.

Another debate was staged around the improvement of flood conditions. Commissioner of Public Works Robert Wasp required the board's approval to acquire more money to pay contractor Leonard Jackson and Associates, raising the funds from \$49,000 to \$100,000, thus making the entire bond cost for the Sanitary Sewer and Storm Water projects \$720,000. The initial cost for Leonard Jackson was not supposed to exceed \$51,000. On top of this, an agreement with a prior contractor that did not work out has further added to the cost. Wasp defended the increase, saying, "This is the nature of this type of work. It's on a need basis."

"I'm just wondering where this \$100,000 dollars is going," questioned Councilman Robert Paladino (D). He was the not the only member of the board that was curious as to where the money was being spent and why so quickly. Councilman Joseph Canella (R) proposed that the council should consider drafting an outline of how the money would be spent. "I don't think Jackson is worth this \$100,000," stated Councilman Pat Vetere (D). "Why does he need it if we already agreed on \$50,000?"

Some Harrison residents also voiced concerned with the projects. Joe Derwin, a Harrison resident who has had experience with drafting contracts, asked what happened with the prior contractor. "Where was the failure to perform clause?" stated Derwin, citing that the town should have gotten money back according to the contract. He then questioned Wasp's ability to draft a contract. "Aren't we also supposed to hire the lowest bid?" Derwin asked.

In spite of these objections the board did pass to grant Wasp the additional money.