

Frequently Asked Questions About a Senior Services District

Prepared by the Senior Center Expansion Committee

What Is a “Senior Services District”?

A Senior Services District would be a new legal entity designed to financially empower the towns of Ashfield, Buckland and Shelburne. It would be run by a board appointed by the towns and invested with the authority to address any operational and possible capital improvement costs needed as the Center provides for this region’s growing senior population.

Why Replace the Consortium That Works Well for All Three Towns?

The Senior Center desperately needs more space, but the existing Ashfield, Buckland and Shelburne Consortium is financially limited. It allows for cooperative programming and outreach, but it cannot legally provide for capital projects such as physical improvements of the Center or the purchase or construction of another facility.

How Would a District Be Run?

As a legal entity funded by the member towns, the District would operate much the same way as the Consortium. But it will allow the towns to address substantial improvements and capital projects, such as any plans to upgrade or expand the current Senior Center. Such decisions would require the three towns’ approval at Town Meetings. All three towns must continue to agree on operational budgets.

Does This Mean a Tax Increase?

The initial creation of a District will not result in any immediate tax increase or additional financial obligation for the towns. In the future, if a decision is made to secure funding to improve the operation of the Senior Center or the building itself, it will be brought to EACH town’s own Town Meeting for a vote, and EACH town will decide how to pay for its portion.

Didn’t Ashfield’s Select Board Opt-Out of This Process?

Ashfield’s Select Board said they could not support the District at this time as they wanted to understand what their residents want for services, both within and beyond Ashfield boundaries. In a recent letter, the town’s leaders said they have always appreciated and supported The Senior Center, and they remain open to seeking “a flexible and cost-effective model for providing services that will benefit all member towns.” In effect, that is at the heart of the District proposal and the Expansion Project.

Will the New District be Eligible for Grants?

The Commonwealth generally rewards regionalization projects, and our three-town Senior Center already qualifies for some funding. With the establishment of the District it is expected that larger grants will become possible.

Why Not Vote at This Year’s Annual Town Meetings?

The reality of the Covid-19 pandemic made public hearings impossible. In order to seek adequate public comment and input, it was decided to delay any Town Meeting votes until the residents of all three towns have enough time and information to learn what they need to know in order to feel confident about their votes.