

January 11, 2026

Dear Members of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals,

RE. Support for the Center for Active Living (CAL) Project

Since 2012, I have volunteered as a member of several Town committees in support of initiatives that relate to Hingham's substantial and growing population of older adults. I am reaching out to share my historical perspective and highlight key elements of the close to 15-year path of research, advocacy, and planning in support of the CAL project. It is a pivotal time for community planning related to aging in Hingham and across the country. The proposed CAL will become a community focal point, and foundational resource that supports the vision described in Hingham's 2020 Master Plan -- to be a community that *promotes the safety and well-being of older adults and supports aging in the community by providing high quality amenities and services*. As proposed, the CAL will foster engagement across generations, and drive increases in utilization to promote health and wellness outcomes at the individual and community level.

The existing 5,000 SF CAL has been increasingly limited by space constraints, insufficient parking, and outdated features for close to 15 of its 30 years at Town Hall; and the need for a modernized Center has been recognized since 2012. I joined the Council on Aging (COA) in January 2012. During my first meeting, I was informed of limitations at the Center and evolving plans to expand or build a new Center. A COA Facilities Committee had been established, and members were conducting visits to learn best practices from peer communities. In 2012, based on MA Executive Office of Aging and Independence guidelines, a center with 32,500 to 39,000 SF (for a 60+ population of 6,500 residents) was recommended by the Facilities Committee.

Today, in alignment with past population projections, Hingham's 60+ population is large and growing. As well, there are diverse interests, needs, and changes in health status among multiple generations of 60+ residents. Hingham's CAL is at a challenging intersection of demographic shifts and inadequate space. Today, close to 8,000 residents are over age 60. The share of residents age 60+ nearly doubled from 17% in 1997 to 32% in 2025. Hingham's share of residents 60+ (32%) is larger than the state of MA and is projected to reach close to 40% (over 9,000 residents) by 2030, soon after the estimated completion of the proposed CAL. (Currently, close to 50% of Hingham residents (11,400) are over age 50). The MA Executive Office of Aging and Independence (AGE) Annual Council on Aging (COA) Report compiles extensive data from 350 COAs to demonstrate the breadth of programs and services provided throughout Massachusetts. The report demonstrates that multiple variables drive utilization levels at the town or city level, including the size of the population. Soon after the estimated completion date of the proposed CAL, Hingham's 60+ population will be approaching the largest 60+ category in the AGE report: 10,000 or more older adults in a municipality. (MAPC SQ projections suggest that there will close to 9,600 60+ residents in Hingham by 2030.) It is crucial to emphasize projected growth in the 60+ population to ensure that the facility, with a 50+ year life, meets long-term needs. Historically, AGE has suggested 4 to 6 SF per resident 60+ for the design of a CAL/Senior Center. At 25,950 SF, the proposed Center is close to 10,000 SF less than the minimum guideline when 4 SF is applied to the projected population of 9,000+ Hingham residents over age 60 by 2030, suggesting at least 36,000 square feet for Hingham's population.

This project was informed by years of data collection, research and analysis; two Community Needs Assessments conducted by the Gerontology Institute; the findings of the 2024 Feasibility study conducted by EDM Studio, Inc.; public engagement that included 68 Building Committee Meetings; and Peer Community Analysis. Highlights from the analysis of South Shore peers are highlighted below. (Data and narratives for additional towns, including benchmark communities, are available in a separate report.)

- While Hingham has the largest share of 60+ residents in comparison to Cohasset, Duxbury, Marshfield, and Scituate, Hingham's proposed CAL, at 3.28 SF/resident 60+, would be smaller than the average of those four South Shore peers: 3.52 SF/resident 60+.
- Soon after the estimated completion date, with 2030 60+ population projections --that fully remove data for Linden Ponds --the proposed CAL would still be smaller than the 2025 average SF/ resident 60+ for Cohasset, Duxbury, Marshfield, Scituate.
- In 2025, each of the four South Shore peers emphasized the need for more, or modified, space to accommodate their (smaller than Hingham's) 60+ populations.
- A Center with adequate space and modernized features responds to diverse needs and interests among three generations of residents age 60+. Newly built and renovated Centers with modern spaces for fitness, nutrition and wellness programs, and lifelong learning have experienced significant increases in participation.

There are costs and risks associated with *not investing* in the modernization of this foundational resource. Since the enactment of the Older Americans Act in 1965 Senior Centers have been recognized as centralized access points for essential resources on the path of aging. Hingham's CAL is one of more than 11,000 centers in the national aging services network. Limitations of the CAL will increasingly be barriers to developing and providing essential evidence-based health and wellness promoting programs and social services (e.g., health screenings; nutrition programs; fitness programs; health insurance and financial counseling; information and referrals; and transportation services); obtaining program specific grant funds; building participation levels among thousands of adult residents; and fostering community wide connections. Research demonstrates that community based healthy aging initiatives generate social, health, and economic benefits. Centers for Active Living are an efficient and economical form of preventative healthcare. According to the National Council on Aging, older adults who participate in programs at a Center for Active Living can learn to manage and delay the onset of chronic disease and experience measurable improvements in their physical, social, spiritual, emotional, mental, and economic well-being. As well, there is extensive research on the mutually rewarding benefits of civic and social engagement (e.g., sense of belonging, reduced levels of isolation; improved emotional and physical health; and fulfillment derived from mentoring, and educational opportunities.)

A tremendous amount of time, dedication, expertise, and planning brings us to 2026. Hingham opened its 1st Senior Center in 1971. For 50+ years the Town has remained dedicated to fostering healthy aging in the community. In 2023, the Senior Center was renamed the Center for Active Living to reflect its dedication to older residents; community wide impact across the lifespan; and the longtime, closely held goal to advance plans for a modernized Center. At this historic time of demographic shifts, it is critical to advance this project and ensure that an adequate and accessible CAL will be a cornerstone of the community of Hingham for the next 50+ years.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the community.

Sincerely,

Beth Rouleau, Vice-Chair, CAL Building Committee (2020 to present); Former Member/Chair, COA (2012-2018)