



Grand Island residents break into groups to discuss what they would like to see offered in a Community Center. (Nancy Fischer/Buffalo News)

## Grand Island residents debate plan for new community center

By [Nancy A. Fischer](#) | Published 6:58 a.m. July 19, 2017 | Updated 7:51 a.m. July 19, 2017

The Grand Island Golden Age Center has been located at a former Nike missile base on Whitehaven Road since the 1970s. Now, the Cold War relic is showing signs of aging.

Grand Island Supervisor Nathan D. McMurray is leading a charge to move the senior citizens and other services into a new community center and has received support from fellow board members. Costs, location and services still are major issues.

A public forum to discuss these issues and the feasibility of a new community center was held Tuesday night in Grand Island High School, led by project manager Brian Kulpa from the engineering firm of Clark, Patterson, Lee. About 50 people attended and voiced concerns, especially about a rumored \$15 million price tag. But Kulpa tried to dispel the rumors. "Right now, the cost is zero. Nothing has been put forward. Nothing has been asked for," said Kulpa. He said the design was part of the discussion.

Those attending were asked to break into small groups and offer their input on plans for a community center. Kulpa said another meeting will be scheduled for August and online surveys would be taken to determine what residents would like to see offered. Kulpa said the plan is to get a referendum on the ballot by November so the town could be eligible for county funding.

Those who attended had ideas that ranged from doing nothing to save tax dollars to building a community pool and ice rink or offering a public boat ramp. Rosemarie Shelp, of Crescent Road, said she is a senior who uses the Golden Age Center and said she prefers upgrades be made to the current building rather than building a new one.

Rose Bugman of Whitehaven Road distributed about 350 leaflets to "Concerned Citizens" prior to the meeting and said she'd like to see a larger participation in the process. "Everyone should have an opportunity to say what

happens," Bugman said. She said she'd like to see a community pool and service to provide free transportation for island youths.

"I like this as a workshop. Usually everyone is complaining, but I think this is great. Everyone is getting a chance to be heard and has a voice," said Mackenzie Hassan of Countryside Lane. Hassan is a special education teacher with two young children, including a child with autism. She said her family has to go off the island to find programs and she said her parent support group is forced to meet in the basement of a realty office. "I'm one of the people with younger kids here. We want a splash pad for our kids. That's what I'm hearing from mommies," Hassan said.

Councilman Raymond Billica noted that a community center could offer more recreation programs, especially when the summer season is over and parks are closed. "We've gone through this twice before and one of the plans we offered had an ice rink and a pool and it lost by 29 votes," Billica said. "We may not want that now, but the idea is that there is no place for Grand Island residents to get together and do things – such as playing basketball, or going to an art show or a theater production."

Some seniors said they want to leave things alone at the Nike base or "just fix it up." Barbara Gannon, who has worked for the Golden Age Center since 1987 and has been its director since 2001, told The News prior to the Tuesday meeting that now is the time for a move as the center begins to transition from older to newer members. "There are many seniors who like it here. They feel we are hidden away and don't like the idea of (sharing space with a youth center and) having kids running around," said Gannon.

She said the center has little-to-no air conditioning, a patched roof, a septic system that backs up and is running out of space to offer programs. "We've had to temporarily close due to no bathrooms or heat, which some people forget," said Gannon. McMurray said the cost of repairs, removing flooring that contains asbestos and making the bathrooms compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act would cost about \$2 million. Gannon concurred. She said they would like to get younger seniors involved and said it would be nice to have a pool for the community and a fitness center.

McMurray said that the Golden Age Center is a "bunker that needs a lot of work." He said he'd like to see money put into a community center that meets the needs of the entire community – "not a dilapidated old missile base where everything smells like oil." He said the feasibility study is designed to "get the creative juices flowing." "Right now, we are trying to determine what the community wants and needs," McMurray said. "We are going to do this the right way. If the community doesn't want it, fine."