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# CITY OF BIDDEFORD, MAINE

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## **Ad Hoc Community Center Review Committee to Open the Floor for Feedback at Listening Session**

**BIDDEFORD** — On Wednesday, September 19, the Mayor’s Ad Hoc Community Center Review Committee will hold a listening session to hear from the community on the value of the J. Richard Martin Community Center. The listening session, scheduled from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Community Center’s auditorium at 189 Alfred Street, will allow both tenants and community members to speak directly to the committee and share their opinions on the facility.

The committee will begin the session with a brief overview of the building's history and current status, and then the floor will be opened to comments from the public. Feedback from the session will be considered as part of the committee’s recommendation of whether the City should further invest in the existing building, or pursue alternative options such as building or acquiring a new community facility.

The 130-year-old J. Richard Martin Community Center was first used as a public school beginning in 1888 and currently services as the hub of the City’s recreation programs. It also houses various organizations that provide services to the community, including the Ross Senior Center and 50+ Club, Meals on Wheels kitchen, Adult Education courses, AARP tax aide, and La Kermesse offices.

“We want residents and representatives from these organizations to take this opportunity to share their thoughts before our committee makes any final reports or recommendations to the Council on how to move forward,” said Ward 5 Councilor Victoria Foley, the committee’s chairperson. “We really value public opinion in this process, and we encourage anyone who uses the Community Center or the services of the organizations that are housed there to consider attending.”

The Ad Hoc Community Center Review Committee was formed in Fall 2017 to collect information on the value of the facility to make an informed decision on its future after one of the two fuel oil-fired boilers failed due to extreme corrosion. The Biddeford City Council allocated \$40,000 for a short-term replacement of the boiler as a temporary solution to ensure the building could be heated through the winter, but recognized that the significant investments needed to fully address building repairs required a long-term research and planning process.

The committee’s research began by reviewing available information on the size and layout of the building,

known maintenance and structural issues, community demographics, and program offerings. More recently, the Committee conducted a survey of the building's tenants to identify how the facility meets their needs in its current condition. Of the 19 tenants that were contacted, 13 provided responses, with many respondents finding the Community Center to be a vital space for their services. Several of the organizations also indicated that they have made their own monetary or in-kind contributions to the maintenance of their space. The September 19 listening session will build upon the information collected to date by opening the floor to tenants and residents alike to provide additional feedback on the community center.

“The collection of this information is very important to help the committee paint a picture of the center and its role within the community,” said Recreation Department Director Carl Walsh. “There are a lot of different options on the table, but this shared space is something that is very important to the community and I feel is very rare today.”

The Listening Session will be recorded by Biddeford Public Access, and those that are unable to attend may view the video on the City's website following the meeting. Interested parties may also submit written comment through Wednesday, September 26 by dropping off written comment at the recreation office addressed to Victoria Foley, committee chair, or through email. For more information on the session or the committee, or to submit email comments, please contact Committee Chair Victoria Foley at [Victoria.foley@biddefordmaine.org](mailto:Victoria.foley@biddefordmaine.org).

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