

## THE PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITY COMMITTEE

CHARGE. On December 19, 2016, the Select Board voted to create the Public Safety Facility Committee. The Committee was told to identify and evaluate suitable locations for a combined public safety facility; to recommend an appropriate sum to conduct a feasibility study; to work with the Town Manager and town staff to obtain Owner's Project Manager and architectural services; and to design, construct, and commission a facility suitable to present and future public safety needs of Ipswich.

HISTORY. The PSFC studied the history of the two facilities and various proposals over the past decade to improve or replace them. The Fire Station was built in 1907 for horse-drawn apparatus. When the original building was built, traffic on Central Street consisted of horse-drawn buggies, not vehicular traffic averaging over 16,000 cars daily. The Police Station was built in the 1930s as a storage facility for the Electric Light Department and was renovated in 1986 as a Police Station when the Police Department moved out of the old town hall and courthouse. It was undersized for police programming from the first day of occupancy.

FIRE STATION DEFICIENCIES FOUND. After study, the Committee concluded that the present fire station is simply too old, too small, and in too poor condition to adequately support the present needs of the town, much less future fire needs. Some of the deficiencies include:

- The building was designed only to support horse-drawn equipment, not modern fire engines. Just to keep the ground floor from collapsing under the weight of this equipment, ninety columns were installed in the basement holding up the apparatus bay floor
- Bay doors are too narrow and station depth too short for modern apparatus. Because of this, Ipswich must special order all fire apparatus at extra expense
- The eight-foot apron between the bay doors and Central Street is too short for modern apparatus to egress safely. This results in slower response time and numerous accidents over the years
- There is no space for a female firefighter.
- The restricted size of the station hinders modern maintenance of equipment, modern programming, mechanical and storage facilities
- Close proximity of Winthrop School prevents training and creates standstill in front of station during dropoff/pickup at the school
- Drainage issue and leaking water through the fieldstone wall on two sides have created mold/mildew
- The building lacks modern insulation.
- All these issues create working conditions that are unhealthy and unsafe, causing problems with the morale and health of fire personnel
- The lack of space means that some emergency vehicles are stored outside in the weather

POLICE STATION DEFICIENCIES FOUND. The Police Station similarly was found to be deficient to meet the town's needs.

- Nearly 3 times smaller than estimated needed program space (7,500 sq. ft. presently)
- The building lacks privacy, administrative space, locker-room facilities (especially for women), indoor equipment storage, and public/visitor space
- Cells are non-compliant with state Department of Public Health regulations
- The building does not meet seismic nor American Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements
- Handicap-access offers no visual sightline from the dispatchers; consequently, requiring an officer to be called off the street to assist
- Serious officer-safety issues exist with narrow accessibility when handling combative arrestees due to steep stairway and small booking room
- Emergency vehicles and equipment are housed outside in the weather
- Shellfish, Harbors/Waterways, Emergency Management, and Animal Control have no office space to meet with the community
- The four departments (above) have no storage space for their vehicles/boats and no winter operations

The town has been studying these deficiencies with the police and fire stations since a similar public safety facility committee was created in 1953. Design plans were created for a Police/Fire/Court building (Public Safety Facility) at the Central Street Fire Station, but the \$77,000 Warrant Article to fund the project was defeated at Town Meeting.

Time and again in the 1960s and into the 1980s, committees were formed, studies were conducted, conclusions were reached that the facilities were not adequate, and recommendations for improvement were made, only to be rejected. Because there were several call firefighters residing in the outer Linebrook area and a desire to have a second station, the Town appropriated \$80,000 and bought the Rust brick garage in 1976. In 1984 it was refurbished as a Linebrook substation. This substation was never manned but was supported by call firefighters and fundraising. At that time, there were as many as 30 call firefighters in the town. At present, there are only eight who all reside in the center of Ipswich.

Another committee was formed in 2002 following a tragic triple loss of life. The committee hired Winter Street Architects to conduct an independent study of the Town's Public Safety Facilities. The result of the 2002 study found that both Police & Fire Stations were grossly undersized for the departments' functions, failed to meet numerous State Building Codes, and violated numerous American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. This committee recommended that the Police Department move into the old Town Hall, after extensive rehabilitation, and a 4,500 sq. ft. addition be added to meet the programming needs of the police. The old police building would be razed and a new Central Fire Station would be built on the municipal lot with a new municipal parking area being created between the two new Stations. The study further recommended a full rehabilitation of the Linebrook Fire Station, with 24-hour manning, and the creation of a new substation at the Air Force Radar Site. No action was taken by the Town.

In 2005, the PSFC again reported to the Town Meeting and Selectmen that both the Police and Fire facilities were inadequate for present (2005) and future needs, and that both facilities had approximately ten years of service life. Again, the town took no action.

In November , 2010, the PSFC unanimously recommended to the Board of Selectmen and the Long Range Planning Committee that a singular Public Safety Building is in the best interest of the community for both short-term and long-term considerations. No action was taken.

In 2012 a Task Force was created to study three alternatives: renovations and repairs of existing facilities, renovation and expansion of existing facilities, and combining operations into a singular facility, which may include the purchase of land at a site proximate to the center of downtown. That task force concluded, as had all the previous study committees, that simply rehabilitating the existing Police and Fire facilities, without expansion, was not a prudent course of action as the facilities were woefully undersized for the then (2012) department functions. The committee, in 2013, worked with an architect and proposed a combined police and fire building to be located at the Elm Street location of the police department. The proposed cost was approximately \$17.4 million. A request for \$100,000 to study this proposal was rejected.

Finally, in 2016 the Select Board felt it was time to make yet one more effort to address this problem and the present committee was created.

FEASIBILITY STUDY. As the town continued to grow and develop, adequate sites for a public safety building located near the crucial center of town were developed into other uses. For example, the sale of the old town hall reduced the available space at the present Elm Street police location. Another possible location at St. Stanislaus Church on Washington Street, similarly, was sold into private hands. At a March, 2017, meeting, the group examined ten possible sites on paper, four of which were town-owned and six, privately owned. Most were discarded for various reasons: too far from the center of town, too wet, too small, too cumbersome for exiting fire apparatus, too complicated to acquire, citizen opposition, etc. Meanwhile, expenses to maintain old facilities in 2017 were as follows: \$65,000 for police to add an interview room; \$612,000 for police, fire, and Linebrook station for windows, boilers, fixing roofs, emergency repairs to generators/boilers, and bricks falling down. The town later spent \$64,000 for mold remediation at the Fire Station. If the Linebrook station were to be put on line, manning (3 firefighting personnel per shift) would cost \$1.2 million annually.

In early 2018, PSFC remained active with an upcoming Warrant Article for a feasibility study approval by the Town. Town Meeting approved the Article not-to-exceed \$140,000. The RFQ (Request for Qualifications) for design for Ipswich Fire and Police Stations took longer than hoped, but three architectural firms submitted bids by 12/11/18. They were interviewed on 1/9/19 and HKT, Inc. of Charlestown, MA, was selected.

CONSULTANT. HKT Architects, Inc. has been in continuous operation for four decades and has a long list of public safety facility projects to its credit including design and construction in

Holbrook, Upton, Chelmsford, Charlestown, Salisbury, and Tewksbury. They are committed to environmental awareness and energy conservation measures.

Janet Slemenda, Principal of the firm, began discussions with the committee on 3/19/19 in a difficult series of meetings regarding site selection. As did all of the previous consultants hired by the town, she recommends against renovation of the current facilities. On April 16 she made a presentation of early schematics for a combined facility. Ms. Slemenda confirmed that the entire combined facility will require four acres including parking for police and fire employees and the public.

SITE. On December 3, 2019, after many months of discussions with church authorities and Town officials in Executive Session, a purchase and sale agreement was agreed to with the Boston Diocese of the Catholic Church to acquire approximately 12 acres at the intersection of Linebrook Road and Pine Swamp Road. While much of the land is too wet to build on and will be preserved as open space, there is a buildable portion that is more than sufficient for a combined public safety facility. The purchase will be \$630,000. The agreement includes an understanding that the purchase will be completed only for a public safety building and for no other use. As a near perfect site, it is within the confines of the center of town, providing multiple variations for fire apparatus to respond to all parts of town and avoiding, for the most part, the high traffic area of Central Street. Fire officials say that response time will, in fact, be the same or faster than currently. Crossing railroad tracks (five spots) has never caused a problem nor a hindrance because train cars take only seconds to pass.

#### COMBINED FACILITY BENEFITS

- Provide economy with construction, maintenance, utilities, etc. on one site
- Provide technology and mandated requirements (ADA & OSHA compliance) and elevators
- Have combined meeting and training areas
- Provide energy-saving and sustainable buildings
- Provide public toilets and community space in emergencies
- Provide emergency coverage for harbor, shellfish, electrical, water, and animal control 24/7 under the Communications Department
- Keep Fire and Police boats in climate-controlled environment

SCOPE OF PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENTS. The mission of first responders has changed drastically in the last few years. Examples expressed by department chiefs are counseling, mental health, drug addiction within police jurisdiction, and weather-related emergencies such as flooding within the town due to global warming. Besides police and fire, the town's public safety responsibilities include 911 and communications, emergency medical services, harbors/waterways, emergency management, animal control, and shellfish. The Communications Department operates 24/7/365, particularly when emergencies arise. Fires are much more complicated and potentially dangerous with increased use of plastics in buildings, and firefighters run a greater risk of illness from absorption of toxins. Ambulance

service with a full complement of certified responders is in the future. As the years pass and as the Town repeatedly fails to upgrade facilities, the nature of Public Safety work gets more complicated with a growing scope of responsibilities.