

PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITY COMMITTEE
Via Zoom
December 15, 2020

CALL TO ORDER

Chair R. Weatherall called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. with the following members present: L. Alexson, R. Donahue, R. McShera, Chief P. Nikas, J. Fay, C. Surpitski, Chief A. Theriault, H. Schwartz, P. Dziadose, K. Carlson, P. Polonsky, and J. Emerson. Absent: T. Jones.

CITIZEN QUERIES

None.

CONTINUING DISCUSSION OF APPROACH TO MAY 2021 TOWN MEETING

Bob addressed the fact that Ryan McShera has bought a home in Essex. Charlie pointed out that he still has the right to be a member of PSFC; Ryan agreed to stay as long as he is needed and looks forward to it.

Bob announced that Janet of HKT Architects has written a draft of her executive summary which she will send to the committee. This report came about as a result of a Tri Board meeting. Chief Nikas commented that it is well written and comprehensive, covering the process that the two departments went through over the last 2 ½ years. He is sending it to members for a 45-minute read. PSFC will review and make recommendations.

PSFC's last meeting questioned whether to move forward with seeking a design only or whether to be bold and seek a design/build strategy. Linda, Chair of the Select Board, announced that their 12/21/20 meeting will discuss thoughts and possibly vote on feelings re the Strategic Plan. Jamie, Fin Com member, remarked that his group and many people feel that the Town cannot afford both public safety and school buildings, and that projections must be done on tax burden and reasonable rate of growth. A normal 3% tax rate increase might increase to 5 or 6%. More information will come with the January TriBoard meeting. School overrides are a concern as well because school budgets grow over time. Charlie wondered about industrial expansion in Ipswich (i.e. NEBiolabs), and Jamie confirmed that a number has been plugged in and will offset some of the cost.

Bob returned to the original plan for asking for funds for the design only. Jamie mentioned an option for a schematic design and trying to fund it without an override once the world recovers from the pandemic in the Spring. Stretching the plan out, however, sets the timing out so as to bump up against the school project.

Discussion ensued about people's reaction to a flat-roofed design for the public safety facility as uninspiring. The schematics shown were not favorable. Bob said that voters wish to see what it will look like. Rob advocated for asking for the whole project, and Harvey agreed. Chief Nikas favored the full amount, wanting to wait until the October Town Meeting. Linda, while on the fence, would not support this for the Spring Town Meeting and urged putting out a

lot more information about the project and engaging the public. Jean felt that information needs to be broadcast to the public on a steady basis for the complete project, and Linda felt that ICAM should be at every one of the PSFC meetings. Paul Polonsky agreed with the group to go for the full cost and new designs. Chief Theriault viewed it as an “all or nothing” approach and Spring Town Meeting would probably too soon. Peter felt that people are looking for a hard number and a vision of how the facility will look—one package, one shot for the fall—a facility which must fit within the community. Residents are picturing Rowley, Salisbury, Hamilton, and Essex facilities and are against a flat-roofed, industrial-type building.

Chief Nikas suggested that Janet might give us a simple gabled design, and Harvey suggested having the people vote on a design! Ryan thought that, having seen both sides, he sees value in getting a much closer target range for cost because the voters expect us to know what it looks like and how much it is costing. Seek out public participation, he said, and get people involved for the next six months. Nikas added that we need the gabled schematic so that we can ask the residents which way they wish to go. Rob asked “How much less money are we talking about with a flat roof? What is the vision we have for the Town? Do we base it on a gable roof at more than \$25 million? We need a Political Action Committee.” He commented that the Strategic Plan has people scared.

Keith, as union representative, expressed the firefighters’ feelings “that the Town has always kicked the can down the road and it is being done again. All they see is talk. Select Board members say we really need a new facility. If you want to put money into an old building, keep doing it.” He felt that the Select Board and Fin Com must agree. Bob spoke on the poor job the media did in presenting the Public Safety building concept. The TriBoard, to some extent, would create a hierarchy for action, and we need these two Boards to cite agreement to convince the townspeople that the new Public Safety facility needs to move ahead.

In discussion of a new vote by PSFC, Harvey commented that the Town owns the land, PSFC has taken a vote that we will be presenting at Town Meeting, and his opinion would be to vote tonight to ask for the full amount at Town Meeting while still determining whether it will be the Spring or Fall Town Meeting.

Rob asked Jamie if it would be more powerful for him to go back to Fin Com saying that PSFC has made a decision, and Jamie agreed to carry the message to Fin Com and TriBoard. Linda suggested that, a Warrant Article would read as a “not to exceed number”. She would be in favor of the Fall because there must be an extraordinary amount of community outreach input. Jamie agreed. Charlie challenged that we show leadership and ultimately it will be up to the Select Board. In addition to public outreach, research and a dollar number that is buildable will be really important. He continued by saying that so many projects are pushed off because “they are not ready yet,” and do not have hard numbers. We have to get to a point where that number is as hard as we can get it. A vote tonight would send a pretty strong message.

Chief Nikas moved, seconded by Keith, that PSFC vote to go for a full funding of the Public Safety building and design. Roll call IN FAVOR: L. Alexson, R. Weatherall, J. Emerson, R. McShera, A. Theriault, H. Schwartz, C. Surpitski, R. Donahue, P. Dziadose, K. Carlson, P. Nikas, P. Polonsky, and J. Fay. (UNANIMOUS).

The group will move forward to promote education to the public: website, ICAM, a request to HKT for a schematic with gable roof, and better graphic representation of the facility. Chief Nikas noted that there will be a lot of information when Janet (HKT) gets the new document done and, made public, would allow people to understand the reasons for cost, especially if some of it was highlighted. The report includes department needs and programming.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Linda moved, seconded by Charlie, to approve amended Minutes of 11/17/20. Roll call IN FAVOR: L. Alexson, R. Weatherall, J. Emerson, R. McShera, A. Theriault, H. Schwartz, C. Surpitski, R. Donahue, P. Dziadose, P. Nikas, and J. Fay. Carlson and Polonsky abstained.

NEXT MEETING

After discussion, the group set a meeting date for January 26, 2021. If a need arises sooner due to a TriBoard meeting, an earlier meeting can be set after a 48-hour posting.

ADJOURNMENT

Harvey moved, seconded by Paul P., to adjourn at 8:34 p.m. Roll call IN FAVOR; L. Alexson, R. Weatherall, J. Emerson, R. McShera, A. Theriault, H. Schwartz, C. Surpitski, R. Donahue, P. Dziadose, K. Carlson, P. Nikas, P. Polonsky, and J. Fay.