

Revised on 11/15/10

Selectmen's Meeting seeking Guidance

## Formation and Evolution of the Public Safety Committee

The public safety committee was formed in 2001 to review the status of our public safety facilities, both Police and Fire and their ability to adequately serve the community. The drive behind this effort was the immediate and ongoing major maintenance issues at both fire and police facilities, but particularly the fire station. A large portion of our review has included the physical aspects of the public safety buildings with respect to the buildings' systems well being and their compliance with modern day codes, along with their capabilities to house personnel and equipment to carry out their respective missions.

**The results of several aspects of our review, reached some time ago, and as reported to the Town Meeting in 2005 by Committee member Paul McGinley, is that both the Fire and Police Facilities are inadequate for the current and future needs of the community.** Maintenance cannot fix their underlying inadequacies, and piecemealing the cure is financially imprudent.

So what have we been doing since 2005? As our committee mission evolved, it became clear that in addition to looking at all the factors that make Public Safety work; we needed to focus on **where those services would be provided from.** Our 2005 report to Town Meeting discarded the current Fire Station location because the "site was constrained and cannot meet the long term needs of a Central Fire Station and the larger and heavier modern fire equipment". Although we had casually looked around town for new locations previously, in 2006 we undertook a comprehensive and detailed study of every possible site. But one basic question kept sidetracking our progress: **Do we build a Public Safety Facility with Police and Fire combined, or do we build separate facilities like we have now?**

## **COMBINED POLICE AND FIRE BUILDING VS. SEPARATE FACILITIES**

The evolution of the process to resolve this question has been considered by our Town Fathers as far back as 1953. The “Town Hall Building Committee” wanted more room in the then Town Hall, which also housed the Police. They went to the Town Meeting hoping to put an addition on the current firehouse to accommodate a courtroom and the Police Station. It wasn’t approved and built for the \$77,000 budgeted, **so here we are in 2010 still searching for solutions.**

**As a committee we are all in agreement that a combined facility makes the most sense.** There are many economic efficiencies, along with the improved communications provided by simply being together on a daily basis. As a practical matter, we only wanted to go to, the taxpayers, one time to resolve the public safety issue. Here are the dictates that have defined our process resulting from trial and error since our inception:

- ◇ As reported in 2005, there will be one central fire Station due to the financial constraints of staffing a second or third location for a town our size, this is our only choice
- ◇ The response time studies we conducted place a new central fire station between Rite Aid on Central St and the Old Town Hall on So. Main Street as the area of focus that serves the largest number of homes and businesses. Because Police are largely a mobile force they have much more flexibility
- ◇ We were given direction previously by the selectmen and then town manager, George Howe, that they do not wish to use Eminent Domain to advance a combined facility or separate facilities.
- ◇ The cost of acquiring private land and the political process involved in pursuing private land eliminates private property acquisition as an option

**What was the outcome? We concluded that the parcel chosen had to be owned by the town, could not have a conflicting, alternative use, and depending on the size and physical characteristics would support a combined police/fire facility, or individual facilities.**

**WHAT SITES WERE CONSIDERED FOR COMBINED OR SEPARATE FACILITIES**

Before acquiring private land was eliminated from the thought process we looked at:

- ◇ 114 Central St., Rite Aid
- ◇ 116 Central St., Sovereign Bank
- ◇ 108 and 110 Central St./ tow properties
- ◇ 2 Lord's Square, Laundromat
- ◇ 16 Hammatt St, behind 1<sup>st</sup> National Bank of Ipswich
- ◇ 11 Washington St, Car wash
- ◇ 4 Pineswamp Rd. Our Lady of Hope Garden Land
- ◇ 6 Topsfield Rd. Markos Seafood
- ◇ 30 Jeffery's Neck Rd. Sisters of Notre Dame

Since then we have looked at Town owned properties in detail including:

- ◇ 124 County Rd., The town sledding Hill
- ◇ 100 County Rd., The Town garage
- ◇ The Veteran's Memorial on So. Main St.
- ◇ Lands in and around the Old Town hall on So. Main St and Elm St.
- ◇ Land in and around the New Town Hall at 25 Green St.
- ◇ 17 Linebrook Rd. Bialek Park
- ◇ 65 Central St. The land in and around the Winthrop School

**Once again, Depending on the size of the parcel considered, the location, the physical characteristics, including visibility and site distance at the point of access, the sites were considered for EITHER the New**

## **Proposed Central Fire Station, or a combined New Public Safety Facility.**

### **WHERE OUR COMMITTEE STANDS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE SELECTMEN AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

After careful review of all of the alternative sites, our full committee, understanding all of the pertinent facts needing to be considered, were polled, and were requested to prioritize the potential sites for further consideration. **The top two sites by a wide margin were the locations of the existing Fire Station and the area in and around the existing police station. Maybe there was comfort in established patterns of location and response, maybe we could not envision such services in another place, but most importantly the facts of our review supported the choices hands down!!**

So what did we do as a committee knowing the existing fire station site is inadequately sized to support a new modern facility? **We looked to the school committee and the Winthrop School property in particular to explore mutually beneficial alternatives to expanding the current fire station site, our goal was not to compromise the Winthrop School and in fact take the opportunity to enhance and improve the Winthrop grounds.**

Representatives of the School Committee including Rick Korb, Jeff Loeb, and Barry Hopping have participated in discussions surrounding the reconfiguration and redistribution of the combined Winthrop School/Fire Station town-owned land. **There are numerous benefits we feel that could come as a result of a reconfigured Town owned land to provide a new fire station only.**

- 1. Our current site for providing Fire and Emergency services will not change**
- 2. Our existing Fire Station will be adaptively reused and incorporated into a new design**
- 3. The ingress and egress into and out of the Winthrop School will be studied, engineered, and improved as a result of the new Fire Station improvements**
- 4. No new land will have to be taken or acquired. The site is 100% owned by the town**

5. **The Winthrop School will gain engineering knowledge and infrastructure toward solving their drainage problems**
6. **The majority of the residences and businesses in town will have the continuing benefit of the best possible response times and uninterrupted services.**

Expansion of the existing Fire station site, while working with the schools to improve their usable land, is a mutually beneficial solution to an old and ongoing problem of both properties. But this represents a good solution for the Fire Station ONLY!

**As a committee we are hard pressed not to recommend to the selectmen that a SINGLE PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE COMMUNITY for both short term, and the long term for all the benefits it offers including, efficiencies of size by combining functions like community rooms, training rooms, bunk areas, locker rooms, reception, staffing, as well as operating efficiencies over the long term.**

In addition, if you believe as we do, that both police and fire will have to be replaced within 10 years there is enormous efficiencies in only going through the building, bonding, financing, legal, and town meeting process one time, not to mention the cost savings allowed by only building those combined function areas once.

By way of example only.....if a fire station needs 15,000 sf and a separate police station requires 15,000 sf we estimate that a combined facility may only need 25,000 sf instead of 30,000 sf if they are done separately

Estimates from Winter St Architects for the fire station @300psf for building costs suggest a savings on combined building of \$1,500,000.

Operating costs including utilities, maintenance, snow removal, insurance, rubbish removal, landscaping etc are estimated at \$4 psf. For 5,000 sf, that's \$20,000 per year. Over 50 years, the expected life of the building, it suggests a potential cost savings of \$1,000,000 at today's costs.

**So, here we are requesting guidance from the selectman.....we would like to pose some questions:**

- 1. Should we as a committee pursue a dual purpose public safety facility?**
- 2. If so, what steps should our committee consider? And what time frame should we allocate/**
- 3. If the answer is no to the single facility, what steps should we take to pursue the individual facilities and what time frame is adequate understanding that the fire station is much farther along?**
- 4. Finally, if we are to provide qualified and reliable information for both you and the community to make an informed decision, should we engage professional guidance to look further at the dual vs. single facility, the costs of those individually, and together, and the chosen sites?**