

*Minutes
OPM Steering Committee
Board of Selectmen
Public Safety Complex Presentation
March 3, 2021*

The members of the OPM Steering Committee invited the public to a presentation of the recommended proposal for the public safety complex on Wednesday, March 3, 2021 by video conference. The chair called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. There was a total of 44 separate logons, and 46 people in attendance.

OPM Steering Committee: Jim Ayres, Kim Boas, Daniel Bonham, Jason Connell, Brenda Lessard, Jean O'Neil, Paul Wetzel, Denise Wickland

Select Board: William Sayre, David Mathers

Also present: Rob Todisco (P3), Kevin Chrobak (Juster Pope Frazier), Thomas Por, Chris Flory, Dave Weber, Collin Black, Dave Chase, Dick Kisloski, John Hoogstraten, Eileen Keegin, Eric Weber, Jeff Ovitt, Geoffrey LeBaron, Heidi Johnson, Helen Symons, Gwen Blogett, Julia Peters, Paul Fenn, Miana Dawson, Diane and Philip Merritt, Paul Rudof, Louis Hasbrouck, Jen Black, Mary Dudek, Tom Adams, Virginia, Eric's iPad, Lisa Bertoldi, Peter Spotts, Susan McCallister, Ruby Chase, Phoebe Shaw, Karen, Charlene Nardi

Jim Ayres, OPM Steering Committee Chair, introduced the Committee members then gave a summary of the work done by the OPM Steering Committee over the last two years. This included the work that led up to the February 2020 Special Town Meeting which funded the study and schematic design of three scenarios on the James site and the outcome of the study. Jim briefly explained where the Committee began two years ago in their thinking and how they came to the place for recommending that the town move forward with the removal of the James building and the siting of the public safety complex building on that very location of the parcel.

Kevin Chrobak, Principal Architect Juster Pope Frazier, walked the group through each of the three scenarios. He detailed the findings, outlined the pros and cons, and highlighted the reasons for the recommended option of removing the Helen E. James building and constructing the public safety complex on that same location on the property. It was noted that the town achieves the most town goals from the recommended scenario.

Questions and Comments from people in attendance:

- Clarification: the town meeting hasn't approved the site already, right? **In February 2020, Town Meeting approved the funding of \$180,000 to do feasibility studies on the three scenarios on the Helen E. James. Site. It did not authorize moving forward with any of the three. That is the next vote.**
- I can't remember why the highway department site was ruled out. **The parcel is too small, has wetland issues, soil concerns, the driveway isn't owned by the town, and it would require moving the salt shed.**

- Could someone from the committee review for us what the James School currently costs the Town on an annual basis in upkeep, insurance, etc? **FY2019 the costs were just over \$40,000.**
- Will there be protection of the green space from future expansion or another new building? This building is designed to be usable for the next 25 to 50 years. **Another building would not fit on the parcel and creates wetland mitigation issues/costs. The plan is to honor Helen E. James in some form, utilize the green space, and to connect the property to the Green Way. What that looks like is still unknown and will be handled under separate projects.**
- Does this size building meet the need for projected growth in town? and for how long? **Yes, the Chiefs worked many hours with the architect to reduce the size of the building to reduce costs while still making sure it would support the program for the next several decades.**
- Did the town meeting decide affirmatively that it is untenable to repair or alter the old police and fire stations? The studies, prior Committees and the OPM Steering Committee have determined that the current buildings are not suitable in size and configuration for the operations of the emergency departments and it is not cost effective to repair them.
- Was the HEJ bldg ever officially offered for sale through a real estate agent? If not, why not? **No, it was not ever put up for sale. In order to do that the town would have to surplus the building. However, in reaching out to developers it was determined that the building would only be valuable if the entire lot was sold with the buildings and the lot is needed because it is the only viable lot for the public safety complex.**
- Have traffic considerations been made for when there is a call for the fire dept - in regard to the lack of sightline for East bound traffic. **The Fire Department has used that building for drills and training so they are used to pulling out of that location. In addition, buses have pulled out of that driveway for years.**
- Has the town considered voting to opt into Community Preservation Act (CPA) in order to leverage those funds, which might reduce the overall tax burden on town residents? **It has been acknowledged that the town should have opted into the CPA when it first came out. Now the percentage match is very low. The Town has discussed doing that now to support future projects. It is too late to impact this project.**
- What is the cost associated with shifting the new building closer to the Verizon building, and leaving the corner as green space so we create more prominent park? **There are wetland mitigation issues and the added cost is money being put into dirt. In addition, the building is then in the flood zone, at the lowest point of the site with a high-water table.**
- What will happen to the current fire houses and is there a cost to moving out of them? **The current fire and police stations will be sold for the highest price with the intent of getting them back on the tax rolls. Only a small amount is being carried for moving costs to the new building.**
- So, the committee didn't recommend repairing the existing buildings, but if the committee deems fire station inadequate because of the need for a larger parking spot for a bigger truck, has the committee explored options to park the truck at the big and underutilized nearby parking lot surrounding the bank? **No, the Committee did not look at that option. The lot is not owned by the town, fire trucks cannot be parked outside all year round, and the lot is not big enough to build a structure to hold the fire department fleet. In addition, the town is looking to consolidate the program into one location.**

- I suggest a 3 D rendering be shown of the building on the James site, and that the Townspeople be able to have input on the roof color, siding and trim color.
- If Eastbound traffic is stopped by the general store, with trucks barreling down Rt 9, it can be a problem. **Flashing lights were discussed as a possible option to help eliminate concerns; however, it is a 25-mile speed zone and buses have exited that driveway for decades with no known incidences.**
- A system with a flashing strobe like what is in use in Northampton that alerts drivers to an oncoming emergency vehicle could be installed to help with the traffic issue.
- It seems that this meeting has a similar number of participants as the all-committees meeting a few weeks ago. Is there consideration of a public meeting that could be outdoors later in the spring, and/or a recorded message prior to the next meeting to remind all of attendance. **The turnout on each of the Zoom meetings is comparable to the turnout last February 2020 when we were holding presentations in person. We are sending out mass emails to three different distribution lists. In addition, the Committee members were out in the community at four different locations on Saturday, However, the point is well taken and a town-wide call can be put out prior to the Saturday Zoom meeting.**
- Has there been a review of the town's budget across all departments to look for opportunities to offset the cost of this project? The Town department budgets do not have much fluff in them and there isn't a lot of room to cut. Generally, speaking all department heads are very conscious that any increase impacts the budget. However, the town has been saving for this project and will vote to use \$1 million dollars to reduce the borrowing. In addition, the town refinanced the 2012 bonds which will reduce the cost by \$400,000 over the next 12 years of the borrowing.
- The parking spot is within 100ft of the fire station, so I don't see how it would increase response time. It seems to me that \$5M for a new building is costlier than a parking lot spot and repairs to the buildings. Has the committee investigated the cost of a parking shelter in the bank parking lot? that is probably \$500k rather than \$5M. **No, the Town has not looked at private owned areas; however, the bank area is not big enough to house the fleet.**
- I would like to know that materials that last longer be considered and not eliminated just because of cost. Also the brick facade on the front of the public safety complex could be homage to the James school. **The materials chosen were those that fit the other buildings in the area, can easily be repaired for reasonable cost and keep the overall building costs down. Also, other materials create upfront costs in the bidding process, so while they may last a bit longer you still pay for them upfront, in the bidding and in repair costs. Metal roofs can be an issue over time because they move, snow slides become problematic.**
- Thank you very much for your work. this has been well researched and presented. I find the preferred opinion compelling.
- Following up on the earlier question about putting the building near the Verizon building- wouldn't that be the same building as in "option 2", which also includes the wetland mitigation? Would the building cost be the \$4.6M that's shown for option 2, in the newsletter? **Yes, but that doesn't include the removal of the James building in addition it sites the building on the lowest point of the parcel with a high-water table, in the flood zone. The best location for the building is on the highest point of the site.**

- The recent Facebook post of the Gazette article about this issue generated a huge amount of diverse comment. How can we make sure those voices are brought into conversations such as these? It feels important to me that this project reflects the input of our diverse population. I'd be happy to brainstorm with others who are interested in pursuing this idea. **The Committee has developed a FAQ sheet which addresses the comments made on Facebook that relate to the project specifically.**
- Thank you. Very well presented and organized.
- As was mentioned earlier, tearing down the James School will put at least \$41,000/year back into the pot because the Town will no longer be paying to keep it standing. If the existing stations are then sold (even if they only sell for a dollar), their upkeep costs also come off the expenses sheet.
- What happens if there is no majority vote for any of the three options? **There will only be one option presented at town meeting. It is a straight yes or no vote.**
- It would be helpful to see the committee estimate a budget for doing needed maintenance on the Police and Fire stations, putting a roof on the school and installing a fire truck parking garage in the bank parking lot. It's really always empty and quite large! At least worth asking the bank owner about it. I suspect that would solve our problem for less than \$1M, while preserving the architectural charm of this old town. The town meeting authorized a study but that should not constitute de facto rejecting aside of other options.
- Thanks for another informative presentation and for all the answers.
- Thank you to everyone has put in so much work.

The next steps

- Special Town Meeting outdoors behind the Anne T. Dunphy School on Saturday, April 3, 2021 at 2 p.m. A 2/3rd majority is needed to pass the article
- An all-day vote will be held another day following the special town meeting vote on April 19, 2021 from 10 to 7 p.m. A simple majority is required to pass the vote.

Future Meetings:

- Saturday, March 20th at 10 a.m. via zoom

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.