Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the Planned Public Safety Complex, Williamsburg, MA

1. **What is the history of this project?** Williamsburg’s facilities for police and fire department personnel and activities have been inadequate for years. In 2013, the first Public Safety Complex Committee was established to begin to estimate costs and look at various building configurations and building sites. The Helen E. James site was identified as the best site in their final report. In 2017, a Facilities Master Plan Committee recommended that the public safety departments be given the highest priority for a town project. An 8-member Owner’s Project Manager (OPM) Steering Committee was formed in January 2018 to begin full planning.

The OPM is a state-required arrangement to assure that a town gets the best possible results on a construction project. The Steering Committee and Select Board hired a firm to act as OPM on the town’s behalf and began serious planning. An architect was hired. All previous work was reviewed including options for siting. Once plans started to firm up, the Committee began communicating with residents through forums, posters, a newsletter, and individual conversations. The planning culminated in a town meeting on April 3, 2021 at which residents voted to adopt the recommended plan, which is to remove the Helen E James school building and to construct a new public safety complex on that footprint. This site was determined, after extensive review, to be the only location available at an affordable cost. At a second town meeting on June 7, 2021, residents voted to allow a Proposition 2 ½ debt exclusion for 5.1 million dollars to allow funding of the project.

Documents relating to the process mentioned above are archived on the Town website. The reader can also find links to previous committee reports and several other documents relevant to the existing facilities and to the planned public safety complex.

2. **Why is the new building right on the footprint of the Helen E. James school?** The school was placed on the highest and driest part of the site when it was built in 1914. Locating the new building there avoids costs and environmental impacts that would come from adding fill to lift the building out of the wetter part of the site. Costs for wetland mitigation will also be avoided.

3. **Are there any difficulties in removing the Helen E. James building?** There are some contamination issues such as asbestos in the floors, which will require hazardous material abatement procedures.

4. **Will the school be memorialized?** The short answer is yes. The exact nature of the memorial has not yet been determined. A medallion will be removed from the exterior and stored safely. A plaque will be placed in the future green space honoring Helen E. James. It is possible that some bricks can be salvaged and used in some fashion. The large Norway maple tree to the east of the existing building will have to be removed but it may be possible to make some wood available for commemorative engraving. Citizen input will be welcomed on the topic of honoring Helen E. James and the building she donated.
5. Can anything else be removed from the school to save and use? The short answer is no. Removing outside decorations will negatively affect the structural integrity of the building. Because of liability issues to the Town, the school is secure now. Once the demolition contract is signed, everything within and attached to the building becomes the property of the contractor and nothing further can be removed.

6. What will happen to the existing trees and hedgerows? An initial landscape plan is being prepared with recommendations on removing and on planting vegetation. Many of the trees on the site are Norway maples, a non-native plant that was often planted in the past for its fall color. This is now considered an undesirable invasive species and several of those will be removed because they are in bad shape and potentially hazardous. We will have an opportunity to add native plants and other species with positive environmental benefits for birds and pollinators and for human enjoyment.

7. But what about the large tree to the east of the current building? The early plans were to put up adequate fencing to protect the tree. However, it is the Town Arborist’s opinion that the tree is in poor condition and shows too little vigor to be able to withstand the effects of construction. While it might live a few years, its long-term viability is very low. It may also be more costly to remove it after the building is constructed.

8. How will the building site interact with the Greenway location and a future Town park? This is yet to be determined, but coordination with the Greenway committee is underway. Plans for the Town park or green space will be developed in 2022 as a separate project.

9. What will happen to the current fire and police stations? The Town hopes to sell these buildings to private individuals and therefore add them back to the tax roles.

10. What energy efficient measures will be used in construction of the building? In addition to following the energy codes, we are taking every opportunity within cost constraints to be energy efficient. That includes smart selection of building materials and energy source and making the front bay doors partially insulated instead of all glass. We hope to be able to afford radiant floors in the building. Solar panels will not be part of the original construction but the roof will be made ready for future installation. A whole building "blower door test" will be preformed to ensure the building is as tight thermally as is possible, per Energy Committee recommendations.

11. What exterior lighting will we see during emergency use and regular use? While good lighting is needed for safety, we are aware of both the need to not impinge on abutters’ comfort and of the negative effects of artificial lighting at night. Lighting design will take both factors into account.

12. Can the public attend committee meetings? Certainly. The committee generally meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 6 pm via Zoom. The Zoom link is on the town web page within the posted meeting agenda, [https://www.burgy.org/public-safety-complex-building-committee-pscbc](https://www.burgy.org/public-safety-complex-building-committee-pscbc)