

TOWN OF LEE
SELECT BOARD MEETING
Thursday November 2, 2023 @ 6:30PM
LMHS • 300 Greylock Street • Cafeteria

Minutes

Members Present: Bob Jones, Gordon Bailey, Sean Regnier

Members Absent: None.

Others Present: Admin Brittain, Chief DeSantis (Police), Chief Brown (Fire), Lenny Tisdale (DPW Superintendent), Zachary Sorrentino (Highway Supervisor), Matt Kollmer (Building Commissioner), Brian Humes (Jacunski Humes Architects LLC)

The meeting began at 6:30pm.

1. Existing Facilities

Fire:

Chief Brown began by speaking about the EMS/Ambulance Garage/Fire Dept. Headquarter building located at 177 Main Street. He stated that the building is structurally unsound and they have found that the building has a lot of decay. The building is currently stabilized parttime and he stated that they do not want to put money into the building if a new building is in the future. The EMS building is out of room for current storage needs, secure medical records storage, cannot handle the increase of medical supplies on premise, and has insufficient office facilities for management. The educational areas in the building are also undersized with the classroom comfortably seating only 30 at this time. The classroom is shared by Fire, EMS, Police, and the DPW for OSHA training. Currently the classroom is used for overflow storage space. Chief Brown added that there is also a lack of meal prep and break areas for crews that are on 24-hour duty; they currently eat, rest, and work at their computer stations. There is a lack of appropriate locker and laundry facilities, and no separation of the living area and the decontamination area, which is a very unsafe environment.

Chief Brown stated that the Central Fire Station, located at 179 Main Street, was originally built as a two-bay station to house horse-drawn units. He stated that the center door was later added where the staircase used to be to get to the second floor. All fire truck apparatuses need to be custom ordered because of the size of the building. Trucks have only a four-inch clearance between walls, and doors to the trucks cannot be opened all the way once in the garage. Chief Brown stated that an average fire truck is between 9'6" and 10', and all of the Town of Lee's trucks need to be under 9', which adds costs. Chief Brown stated that the Town is building fire trucks to fit the building and not the community needs.

Chief Brown continued, stating that the Central Fire Station has unsafe crew conditions as well. The crews are forced to store firefighting garments adjacent to the fire trucks, which exposes the equipment to carcinogen and diesel contamination every time a truck is started. The ceiling height of the building is so low they cannot put a diesel evacuation system in the building, but because no one lives in the building full-time, OSHA allows it. The building does not have fire alarm system, adequate decontamination areas, and is not ADA compliant.

Police:

Chief DeSantis began by giving a short history of the Lee Police Department. He stated that the Town constructed a single jail cell back in the 1800s. He stated that the department was formalized in Town Hall and has been there ever since. In 1992 the department was renovated in Town Hall to

move fully from the basement to having admin offices on the first floor. Thirty-two years later, it remains the same, although full time staffing has increased by 35%.

Chief DeSantis explained the need for a new station. He stated that the current location has an inadequate staff workspace and public service area, there is unsecure cruiser parking, there is a significant operational liability, and noncompliant holding cells. He stated that the storage areas are beyond capacity, and there is not enough employee locker space. A small room is currently used to serve multiple agency needs such as interviewing suspects and victims, a staff breakroom, a backup computer workspace, and a firearms cleaning area. As many as six officers work in a small workspace at once. The walls in the space are paper thin which does not help with protecting any statements given. Chief DeSantis added that the evidence storage areas are lockable but severely undersized and are also mixed in a space that is accessible to Town Hall staff.

He stated that there is no secure cruiser parking and when they need to book a prisoner, they need to walk right up Main Street crossing paths with citizens and Town Hall employees, go through sets of stairs and five doorways to get to the booking area and holding cells. The largest liability is the holding cell area. Currently, officers monitor prisoners remotely (video and audio) and do a physical check every 15-30 minutes. The holding cells are on a separate floor from the officer work area, and there is no sprinkler system and only one exit out of that area. The holding cell area fails the annual state inspection with the Department of Public Health for conditions and suicide risks.

Chief DeSantis also mentioned that the officers do not have a proper place to clean or store firearms or other sensitive equipment. The male locker room cannot be assessed without going through the holding cell area. He also added that there is a risk of security and safety for Town Hall employees and the residents that sometimes come upon active police officers.

2. Feasibility Study

Brian Humes, Jacunski Humes Architects LLC, introduced himself as the architect that has been hired for this project. He stated that he has been designing public safety buildings for over thirty years and has over ninety facilities that he can put his name on. He stated that he has been working closely with the Town, Police, and Fire for about a year and a half.

Mr. Humes stated that the feasibility study is a four-part process. They need to determine the current needs of the departments and any needs that develop into the next forty years. He stated that the departments need to eliminate any wants they may have and boil it down to the needs for a successful project for the community. Future growth is factored into these needs. He stated that the proposal tonight is for a public safety building that will house Police, Fire, and Building Safety.

Lenny Tisdale, DPW Superintendent, stated that the Quonset Hut was the original DPW facility and was built in the 1940s. The current DPW garage was built in the 1970s. Both buildings satisfied a need back then, but today everything fits tight and is run down. He stated that there is a life expectancy on a butler building and the Town has exceeded that by at least twenty years.

Zachary Sorrentino, Highway Supervisor, stated that the main problem they currently have is storage space around the building. They are only allowed "x" amount of materials because it is so close to the Housatonic River. He stated that the butler building is also used to store items for other committees such as the Youth Commission. Currently, if the mechanic needs to work on a vehicle, all of the bays need to be emptied to give the mechanic enough space.

Admin Brittain stated that the Airolidi Building also has a lot of decay and deferred maintenance.

3. Location Study

Admin Brittain stated that plan is to keep the public safety facility downtown. In order to do this the Airoldi Building, EMS building, and current DPW garage would be demolished. DPW would be moved to a new facility on Route 102, currently owned by Casella. [If the Town were to build the available facility on Route 102 they would end up paying twice as much as it is to purchase. The facility is turn-key.] The Town would purchase a property from the Biasins near the current Airoldi Building. The Town would also find a new use of the Central Fire Station, such as the VFW, food pantry, or Historical Commission. The current Police Department would be repurposed for Town Hall use. The Building Department would move to the new public safety building, and would allow Land Use to have its own office once again.

Chief Brown stated that they looked at a total of fourteen sites for the new public safety building and narrowed it down to a final four. They needed to find a space that was suitable in size and location. As the study went forward, they found that flood plains were a major issue. When the facility on Route 102 became available for purchase, the idea of moving the DPW there and keeping the public safety building downtown came to be. The downtown location would revitalize the west side of downtown, almost all of Lee could be reached by a six-minute response time, and the area is out of the flood plain by enough.

Dave Forrest, 660 Greylock Street, asked if they have considered the difficulty of having a fire apparatus get to Main Street via Railroad Street. Chief Brown stated that they have not done a formal study on it, but he does not believe it would be an issue. They already do it every day with the ambulances and 6-9 tractor trailers use that same exit to get to and from Dresser Hull with no trouble. The fire apparatus will not be as big as a tractor trailer. Mr. Forrest stated it will be even harder when summer traffic is around. Chief Brown stated that the fire trucks currently pull onto that same Main Street with summer traffic with no issue.

Gail Ceresia, 161 West Part Street, asked if they have considered building the facility where one of the Town parks are, such as Marble Street. Admin Brittain stated that one major thing they wanted to do was to stay on a major corridor for accessibility and not go into a residential area.

4. Proposal

Brian Humes stated that the site plan is between the Post Office and Dresser Hull. He stated that the Town will want a public safety facility that is in an area with high visibility. He stated that they want to avoid residential areas because these facilities run 24 hours a day, 365 days a week and they cannot predict when any noise will happen. Mr. Humes stated that a central location is also good for visitors who may need to stop there for directions or emergency services. He stated that every other site they looked at had draw backs, but this site offers amenities. Mr. Humes added that a downtown location also gives businesses a strong desire to stay downtown; there is a feeling of security.

Mr. Humes stated that the biggest concern is to be sure they meet building codes. The current buildings met code requirements when they were built, but they do not meet today's standards. The new facility will meet all current codes and standards and will be energy efficient. Massachusetts building codes call public safety facilities *essential*; they need to be able to withstand any natural disasters. There is also a synergy to have one building that houses both departments rather than two buildings.

Mr. Humes stated that the architecture will fit the community aesthetic. The facility will have a pitched roof and a colonial/traditional architecture to support the downtown area. There will be a masonry base to protect the bottom of the wall from any snow or ice conditions, and fiber cement siding which is maintenance free, long-lasting, durable, and cost-effective. The fire doors will be 14'

high and wide to meet road standards and the building will include a training tower for the Fire Department.

The first floor offers a sally port for the Police Department for a safer transport from cruiser to prisoner processing. The second floor will offer space where evidence can be handled properly so there is no liability and offers living quarters for fire fighters on 24-hour shifts. There is space for administrative offices for the Building Safety department and the building will also offer a community room that can hold between 75-100 people. Most importantly, this proposal only includes what is necessary for the departments. He stated that the Chiefs have not requested anything other than necessity to provide safety and wellness for the public safety workers and the public. There is also room for any future expansion.

Admin Brittain stated that the overall benefits include a revitalization of the west side of downtown, a new DPW, Police, and Fire facility, new opportunities for the central fire station, removal of poor, outdated, energy-inefficient structures, and will be the first capital project in over twenty years.

5. Approval Process

Admin Brittain stated that this will first need to go to Town Meeting where it will need a 2/3 debt exclusion vote because it will require a bond. If it passes Town Meeting, it will need a majority vote at Town Election in winter/spring 2024. If it goes through, the project could begin as early as fall 2024. Moving the DPW would be the first phase.

6. Funding

Admin Brittain stated that some options for funding include a bond, grants (economic development, safety), state funding (SB-1599), interest from the settlement fund (adds up to over \$1 million a year with current interest rates), and MEMA/FEMA.

Cost:

Construction:	\$22,961,530.00
Contingency:	\$5,750,000
Soft Costs:	\$4,440,000
DPW Facility/Relocation:	\$3,500,000
Total:	\$36,651,530.00

Admin Brittain stated that the maximum tax effect will be \$312 per tax bill/\$624 a year for an average home. If we use the interest from the settlement fund, it would be \$173 per tax bill/\$346 a year.

Admin Brittain closed out by stating that they will be offering tours of the current facilities for the public on November 16, 2023 from 4pm-7pm (starting every half hour).

He also added what would happen if the Town did not move forward with this project:

- A new stand-alone Police Station would be \$10-\$12 million
- Extensive renovation of EMS building and Airolodi building
- Continue to order custom fire trucks
- DPW would stay at current location

7. Questions/Public Comment

Peter Bluhm, 75 Orchard Street, stated that he is a member of the Master Plan Committee, which plans to have their new Master Plan document complete by the end of the calendar year. He stated that a section of the Master Plan includes public services and facilities and the first two things the Committee listed were fixing the Police and Fire stations. He stated that there is also a need for more meeting space. He congratulated the Select Board and Town Administrator for anticipating what the Master Plan Committee is inventing.

Gail Ceresia, 161 West Park Street, stated that she likes the idea but not the location. Chief Brown confirmed for Ms. Ceresia that the ambulances would also be housed in the firetruck bays.

Cornelia Kalischer, 15 Beartown Mt Rd, asked if the idea of shared fire services with Stockbridge was still in the works. Admin Brittain stated that they are still working with Stockbridge but they did find that one facility for two towns would not allow required response times.

John Davidson, 233 West Park Street, asked if the tax projections take on any new growth. Admin Brittain confirmed that they did not, but there will be new growth with the Eagle Mill project. He stated that today he shared the worst-case scenario.

Another resident asked if there was any consideration to creating an access to Main Street just for emergency vehicles via where the current EMS building is. Chief Brown confirmed that had been talked about.

Donna Toomey, 230 Mandalay Road, asked how long they are calculating the settlement funds interest out for, stating it will change once settlement money is spent. Admin Brittain stated that there would be a yearly vote at Town Meeting and it will be listed as free cash specifically for the bond payment.

Kathy Hall, 50 Birch Street, asked where the VFW will be housed if the Airolodi Building is demolished. Admin Brittain stated that they have discussed that it could move to the Central Fire Station or the current Police offices in Town Hall.

Harold Armstrong, stated that there is a current limitation of fire trucks. If the new facility bays are 14'x14' the Town could get any truck they want, including a ladder truck. He believes this project is great for the future of the Town.

The meeting concluded at 8:07pm.

Submitted by:



Sabrina Touhey
Exec Asst TA/BOS

Approved on: 11/07/2023