



# TOWN OF PRINCETON

## Office of the Selectboard

6 Town Hall Drive  
Princeton, MA 01541  
(978) 464-2102 Phone (978) 464-2106 Fax  
[www.town.princeton.ma.us](http://www.town.princeton.ma.us)

Richard C. Bisk, Chair  
Edith M. Morgan, Clerk  
Karen G. Cruise  
[selectmen@town.princeton.ma.us](mailto:selectmen@town.princeton.ma.us)

Nina Nazarian  
Town Administrator  
[townadministrator@town.princeton.ma.us](mailto:townadministrator@town.princeton.ma.us)

July 27, 2018

### Selectboard Explains Next Steps for Proposed New Public Safety Building

Dear Princeton Residents:

We'd like to explain where we are, why the situation is urgent, and what we believe needs to be done.

At the 2017 annual town meeting, voters approved \$100,000 to engage a design firm to study the functions within four of our town buildings, the condition of those buildings and to recommend a plan. Comments we heard at the prior annual town meeting included residents expressing the need for a plan to deal with our deteriorating buildings. The four buildings studied were Bagg Hall, the Annex, the Public Safety Complex and Princeton Center School.

The Facilities Steering Committee (FSC) was formed and Jones Whitsett Architects (JWA) was hired to do the analysis and programming study, to come up with recommendations, and to prepare conceptual drawings with cost estimates. The committee met weekly for nearly a year and all meetings were open to the public. JWA's report identified major and minor problems with our buildings and recommended possible courses of action. There was considerable effort to reduce both the scope and cost of the proposed Public Safety building. The Selectboard (SB) and the FSC spent a good deal of time discussing how best to present the various options to the Town. Eventually we decided to include five articles on the town meeting warrant. The first three involved basic stabilization repairs to Bagg Hall, the Town Hall Annex and the current Public Safety Complex. These all passed by well over the margin required.

Due to many safety, regulatory and functionality issues, the next article asked for \$7,000,000 for the design and construction of a new public safety building to be built at the site of the Princeton Center School and to possibly include part of the existing building. \$6.5 million would come from borrowing and would be subject to a ballot vote for a debt exclusion. The remaining half million would come from our infrastructure stabilization fund and not be subject to any additional vote. After significant discussion, this article passed with the required two-thirds vote.

The fifth article asked for funds to design and construct an addition on Bagg Hall and to renovate existing spaces. It did not pass.

The ballot vote on June 25 to approve the \$6.5 million debt exclusion for the new public safety center did not receive the votes required and failed. This is what we heard some of you say:

1. We don't need a new public safety center.

2. The proposed building is too expensive. In fact, some believe we can build one for \$500,000.
3. I didn't realize that the Town was considering this. I need time and information.
4. Why was this just sprung on us with no notice?
5. I don't like the location. The Princeton Center building/site should be used for senior housing.
6. Water for firefighting is more important and has not been addressed.
7. Why do we need two fire stations? We should just add onto the East Princeton station.
8. Why do we need a fire department? Let's pay another town for fire protection.
9. A new public safety center won't make me any safer.
10. Someone else (the State?) should pay for it.

At meetings the following week, the SB discussed how best to proceed. We were very concerned that, shortly before the ballot vote, many voters received an email overstating the tax impact of the project (\$600 for the average home instead of less than \$300). Also, regardless of the ballot vote, the fact remains that our existing public safety center has many problems and needs to be replaced. Per JWA, the Public Safety Complex has reached the end of its useful life and poorly serves the needs of the town. It is not worth saving. The SB and the FSC agree that a new public safety building is still an important priority and we decided that the SB should continue to work with townspeople to present the project again.

Here are some of our options:

1. Do nothing. Wait until there's a crisis.
2. Revote the \$6.5 million debt exclusion in September when there is already a primary election scheduled. The only cost involved is additional ballots. Use the time until then to better explain the need and cost.
3. Use the \$500,000 already approved from the stabilization fund to develop plans and construction documents. This might help us get state funds. However, some residents might see this as underhanded and we want to be as transparent as possible.
4. Hold a special town meeting in the fall and specifically request that we use stabilization funds to develop plans and construction documents.

The SB agreed to focus on addressing as many of the voters' concerns and questions as possible and to bring a request for funds to complete just schematics and/or design and construction documents, to a special town meeting this fall. During the design process, questions of total cost will be vetted and the committee, working with an architect on the design, will meet publicly.

We have spent considerable effort lobbying the legislature for funding for the public safety building. As a result, this year's bond bill includes \$9 million for a public safety building. This was approved by the legislature and recently signed by the Governor. However, this alone does not get us the money. The Governor must agree to release the funds. We've been told that we are more likely to get funds if we have "skin in the game" and are "shovel ready" (i.e. have plans and construction documents.)

To help address the cost-related concerns of residents, the SB has been looking for recently-built fire stations and public safety centers that were constructed for less than \$450/sq. ft. We have only been able to find privately-built buildings that were later given or sold to municipalities. If you can find any examples of less expensive, publicly-funded construction, please give us the details.

We can't continue to kick this can down the road. Eventually, we will need to replace the current public safety complex. Until then, taxpayers will have to continue to put money into an inadequate and temporary building.

The SB encourages you to look at the materials provided on the Facilities Steering Committee page on the Town's website. If you need more information, please reach out to one of the members of the Facilities Steering Committee or Selectboard.

Thank you,

The Princeton Selectboard



Richard C. Bisk, Chair



Edith M. Morgan, Clerk



Karen G. Cruise, Member