

Town of Princeton, Mass. – Dec. 29, 2017 – 10:00 AM

Selectboard – Meeting – Town Hall

Present: Chair Jon Fudeman, Richard Bisk, Edith Morgan w/ TA Nina Nazarian. Also, Facilities Steering Cmte. Chair Karen Cruise and Vice Chair MaryJo Wojtusik.

Discussed priorities – The goal of the FSC (Facilities Steering Committee) was to determine a “Needs Assessment and Four Buildings Master Plan,” using reports from Jones Whitsett Architects (JWA). The Select Board started conversation by noting that the public safety bldg. probably ranked fourth in priority of the four being assessed in their view. Jon F. pointed out that tax bills were up for FY’19 because of recent tax re-valuations and that three things to consider for the ATM in May are 1) what we need; 2) where to put facilities and 3) what people want.

Karen C. stressed the need for a marketing plan and warned about push-back if public safety facilities aren’t considered the first priority.

Options for Public Safety facilities – It was mentioned that the JWA study suggested dealing with public safety first. The P.S. complex has structural issues and needs a new venting system and other items in order to meet current building/safety codes. The group considered a variety of thoughts for public safety:

- Since Station II is in better condition, could it become primary housing for vehicles and equipment.
- Replace the two stations with single, new station at Krashes Field, perhaps supplemented with mutual aid for outlying areas that are closer to neighboring fire departments.
- Apply short-term solution for Fire Dept. with rolling equipment such as tanker trucks and various fixes to the water supply.
- Reuse Annex for public safety garage space.
- Merge Bagg Hall with public safety complex and move town offices within complex or to another site.
- Demolish Princeton Center and build new P.S. complex in its place—JWA noted the façade could be saved at about the same cost.

Major hurdles outlined – Group reviewed challenges to moving forward on consultant’s suggestions:

- Town Hall campus is very tight; a central location is critical. Police Dept. has less than standard minimum of space, and chief has stated major need for a holding cell.
- Plan to upgrade venting system at Fire Station I is on hold because future of this building is uncertain, risking air quality and safety of staff.
- Fire Dept. facing major needs: Lack of sufficient water for fires; trucks/equipment to haul water; fire fighter recruitment is an increasing challenge and buildings do not meet code.
- Lack of grant funding available for anything except fire dept.
- Town often loses P.S. staff to bigger communities after spending resources on extensive training.
- Adding more debt to town’s liability won’t be popular and many public discussions will be needed for raising taxes.

Locations & needs considered – Group shared several concepts:

- Merge P.S. facilities with a community center. Bagg Hall may be considered for community center and there is unused space in the P.S. buildings in and near the Annex.
- Since the JWA study outlined what’s lacking in P.S. facilities, it was suggested to focus on bare minimum and fix that first.

- Princeton Center was mentioned as prime real estate that could be used for any number of departments.

- The global capital needs of the Fire Dept. are complex that it may need its own engineering study.

- Convert Annex for a community center and stabilize Bagg Hall as first step.

Issues around funding discussed – Group agreed that when town funds its own projects there is little hope of reimbursement from grants. Other points were brought up:

- What can the town afford in future debt, as bond payments will soon cease on two major projects resulting in a massive drop-off by 2025. According to Karen Cruise who referenced the work of the ad-hoc long term financial (citizens group), the bond rating may be impacted when town reaches debt obligation of around \$4 million.

- JWA framed the needs of the Fire Dept. and the chief agreed, but cost is too high and town officials are concerned. Suggestion was to scale down the list of needs.

- Grants are more likely for projects that are “shovel-ready” and that means architectural/engineering plans already completed to a certain degree. Other argument stated that—in the past—funding has often been raised for plans but no source of funds outlined for actual construction, and projects went nowhere.

- According to Phil Gransewicz major spending should occur as soon as possible while interest rates remain low.

- Conclusion is that taxes will go up or services will be cut.

Several solutions noted – The group agreed on a number of potential strategies:

- Jon F. offered to speak to Fire Chief John Bennett personally about financial realities, aiming to scale down list of needs and subsequent priorities.

- Tackling several small projects initially would show success and increase confidence in bigger, capital projects. Edith stresses that a community center could be a first step to open the gate for remaining projects.

- Free up the Town Hall campus by using available space at P.C. and Krashes. Also, JWA concluded that the Fire Dept. had unused space that could be re-purposed.

- Renovating Bagg Hall for different uses or changing floor plan may require Mass Historical Commission approval or input.

- One idea is sharing community center with a neighbor such as Hubbardston, which has same need for one.

Group reported that much energy has been spent encouraging citizen input, and the F.S.C. meets weekly now on Tuesdays. A survey is always possible but “what to ask” is the issue. Several individuals objected to the use of terms such as “marketing,” “appeasing” and “analysis” as potentially being a turn-off to residents, rather it should be a conversation and effort to inform and discuss proposals with residents.

Adjourn 11:45 AM

Respectfully submitted, Marie Auger, admin. assistant

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