

PUBLIC FORUMS (4/12, 4/18, 4/24) FOR
FIRE STATION ARTICLES
FOR ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MONDAY, MAY 7, 2018

Articles 14 and 15:

- Article 14 asks Town Meeting to approve the purchase of the property at 55 Main Street (The Village Restaurant site) for the price of \$2.4 million, paid from available funds (sale of Conomo Point real estate proceeds). This article needs a 2/3^{rds} majority to pass and would, at Town Meeting, bind the Town to the Purchase and Sale Agreement in place.
- Article 15 asks Town meeting to approve funding for design and construction of a new fire station at the 55 Main Street site. The funding for this work will come from available funds (sale of Conomo Point real estate proceeds) and from a debt exclusion, in proportions that are still to be determine and that are the topic of current discussions with the Finance Committee. This article needs a 2/3^{rds} majority to pass.
- Approval of any portion of the funding that is to be borrowed, through a debt exclusion, is required at the Town Election on Monday, May 14th and requires a majority, at the ballot box, for approval.

The Need:

- The existing station lacks required space for both departments, which currently share the building.
- Current facility underserves town personnel – issues include:
 - No showers or lockers or other necessary amenities to clean up,
 - Insufficient ventilation for fire equipment stored in building,
 - Insufficient room to store and protect fire and police equipment,
 - Insufficient facilities for police operations (secure and holding areas).
- The existing station can support police operations with necessary renovations, but is not suitable for the fire department, simply because of the size and space limitations, including building area, door size and headroom for equipment.
- The Fire Department needs a new building to operate safely and efficiently.

Liabilities of the Town:

- Poor and insufficient facilities expose our personnel to risks they should not have to face, given the service they provide to the Town. Inadequate facilities force them to bring contaminants home on their persons and their equipment.
- Poor and insufficient facilities make it harder to retain and attract new members for the Town’s call fire department.
 - Essex is well served by our call department and rightfully proud of the services that fellow residents provide.
 - Annual costs of full-time fire fighters would be significantly more than the proposed building costs, as annual payments, and remain part of the operating budget permanently, if the Town cannot keep the call department as is.
- Insufficient facilities make it harder to retain a high-quality police force.
- State workplace standards are being revised to meet Federal OSHA requirements in early 2019, which are more stringent than current regulations. Enforcement is expected to be stepped-up as well.
 - The Town would be liable for fines for sub-standard conditions of which there will be several based on current conditions in the building,
 - Improvements and/or upgrades will be required to meet state guidelines, in addition to potential fines.

Background:

- The current Town Building Committee was formed in 2009. An ad hoc committee had already worked several years prior to that. Studies produced and available on the Town website include:
 - 2012 Town Building Feasibility Report,
 - 2017 Public Safety Building Engineering Siting Study,
 - 2018 Public Safety Building Options Renderings (completed prior to the availability of the Village Restaurant property).
- A Public Safety Committee was formed to evaluate both the Fire and Police Departments and report to the Town (more than just space needs). Their final report was completed in 2015 and is available on the Town website.
- The Fire Station has limitations on its location including the following:
 - Town center (1 mile +/- radius of current location),

- North of the river (causeway bridge),
 - Main road (non-residential road/neighborhood preferred),
 - Cannot be in a flood zone, have limited access and/or other issues that would restrict access or endanger personnel and equipment.
 - Minimum of approximately one acre to provide access, adequate building area and responder parking.
- Over the years that the committee has been meeting, the potential for acquiring an additional and suitable property has been a focus of their work. Owners with appropriate parcels have been approached by Town representatives numerous times over the years without success in finding an available and appropriate location – until the Village owners just recently reconsidered and made their property available.

Options Considered - with ‘pros or cons’:

- John Wise Avenue, adjacent to the Town Cemetery (not recommended)
 - Controlled by the Board of Public Works and needed for cemetery expansion,
 - Wetlands nearby with a sloping site (requires additional sitework, a two-story building with an elevator, and storm water storage below the parking lot),
 - Location is not preferred by the Essex Fire Department.
- Existing site at 24 Martin Street (not recommended and far too costly),
 - Temporary housing costs – with no feasible site yet found,
 - Relocation of Shepard Memorial Drive and force main under the road,
 - Known contaminated soils,
 - Demo costs,
 - Loss of value of existing structure, since rehabilitation and renovation of this building for the Police is most cost effective solution for that department.
- Memorial Park site option (not recommended):
 - The Town will lose this portion of the park and the view from Martin Street. The station will be close to the ballfield, which cannot be moved,
 - The building will need to be two and a half stories, with an elevator, two stairways and a structural, waterproof slab for fire equipment,
 - Substantial site work would be required, and new utilities would need to be brought in from the street,
 - Construction would be more expensive because of the limited site,
 - The building would need to be architecturally designed to on all four sides to complement (or not detract from) the recently renovated and historic Town Hall and Library,

- No additional parking would be available for responders,
- There would be no room for future expansion and the building would be designed to minimum area requirements to minimize the footprint in Memorial Park.
- 55 Main Street (The Village Restaurant location) – RECOMMENDED OPTION
 - The Riccis are hopeful that the legacy they leave to the town can include the preservation of this site for municipal use (please visit The Village and speak with them to learn more and understand their motivations),
 - Keeping the parcel in municipal use will prevent other potential uses that may not be as appropriate and welcomed in our downtown area,
 - Sufficient area for one-story building with mezzanine (no elevator required),
 - All necessary utilities are available at the building footprint,
 - The site provides sufficient room for responder parking and potential, future building expansion, as well as access to main streets,
 - The property includes potential for continued use for municipal parking, potential income from adjacent commercial rental properties (2 small antique stores are part of the property) and a lower portion adjacent to the municipal lot below.

Costs:

- Building option cost comparison – see accompanying cost chart – the recommended site is also the most economical, even with the property purchase.
- Funding will be a mix of available funds (proceeds from CP sales) and debt exclusion borrowing, with the final mix still to be determined,
- The loss of property tax from the commercial property would spread across all taxpayers – the owner of the average home in Essex, assessed at \$537,000, would pay an additional \$10.30 per year (approx.), with properties assessed above or below this value paying proportionately more or less.
- The loss of meals tax could be reasonably expected to be made up at other Essex eateries. Folks from out-of-town who came specifically to the Village may be lost, but others may be gained, as options become available in town.
- The Essex Water and Sewer department operates from year to year to provide the necessary services for the fees charged. That is, this department does not realize an appreciable surplus from any one water or sewer customer in a year's time. As such, any effect from the proposed change of use will be negligible.