



Maynard Fire Department

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Fire Chief
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Fire Station Project Status

Background: The existing fire station was looked at starting in 2007 (according to historical data found), by the sitting Public Safety Building Committee. At that time it housed the fire station as well as the police station. Besides the obvious need for space, the building was studied because it appeared to be nearing its end of useful life. The committee looked at the building for over 2 years according to the committee Chairman Michael Smith and Patricia Natoli Committee member (Guest Commentary, Beacon Villager, May 14, 2009). Part of this process involved hiring an engineering firm to look at the existing structure (Crowley Associates). The Public Safety Building Committees final report was presented to the Board of Selectman in August of 2008, and urged pushing forward a plan for a new facility sooner rather than later. The committee warned of escalating costs of at least 6% annually for every year the project is pushed off (they have in fact doubled). When President Obama took office he proposed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Part of this re-allocated funds from the existing Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program to Fire Station building grants. It was proposed that up to \$5,000,000.00 be awarded to each state for a single fire station project. The idea was to get the construction industry working again and upgrade infrastructure at the same time. At the time Maynard felt it was in a good position to apply for the grant. The Carrel Group (architectural firm) was hired to

"It is the mission of the Maynard Fire Department to protect the lives and property of the citizens and visitors of Maynard from disasters both natural and man-made, with compassion, motivation, teamwork, commitment and quality fire protection and education."

look at options and came up with conceptual drawings to be submitted for a grant. During the process it was determined that building the station on Rockland Ave was a good choice. Part of the methodology here was that the project needed to be shovel ready to meet the criteria for submission to FEMA, and with the town already in possession of the property, it met the criteria.

The proposal put together by the Carrel Group is a bit confusing from a research perspective. First, they determined the overall space need for the fire department was 17,380 square feet. Later in the same document they use 15,000 square feet as the benchmark and the plans ultimately drawn up and used for the grant submission were 16,000 square feet.

2014 to present: I first approached the Board of Selectmen on March 18th, of 2014 to address the needs of the community regarding a fire station. Prior to that there had been internal discussions with former Town Administrator on how to proceed. I had proposed putting together a building committee at that time and while there was talk of a permanent building committee being established, nothing was done at that point. Internal discussion and research continued to be ongoing. In March of 2015 the Assistant Town Administrator Andrew Scribner-MacLean and I addressed the Board of Selectmen as well as the Finance Committee regarding the community needs regarding the fire station. At that time we felt there were four different options based on internal discussions, research, interviews with industry professionals and past experience. The four options we proposed were:

- Adding on and renovating the existing fire station
- Adding on and remodeling the existing town hall
- Purchasing and remodeling the Walgreens property
- Building on the Rockland Ave site

Of these four options, internal discussions, research and past experience we felt that only two of these options were really viable. This pushed us to recommend choosing one of the following two options:

- Adding on and renovating the existing fire station
- Adding on and remodeling the existing town hall

There were very specific reasons why Rockland Ave and Walgreens were not seen as viable options. Let's look at Rockland Ave first. The building committee in 2009 felt that because the town is so small that the department could still meet response standards set forth by the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA). While that was true at the time, and remains true today, it is not an optimum site for a fire station for the following reasons:

- Not located even remotely to the center of the community or where a majority of our incident activity is. This makes for long and not so direct responses to certain parts of the community such as the Powder Mill Road, Parker Street and Waltham Street neighborhoods.
- This location is actually closer to Acton than a majority of Maynard
- Traffic wise, in my experience driving in to the community center from outer sections is more difficult than vice versa, that doesn't mean it's impossible or will cause us to be in violation of nationally recognized standards, but it does make it more difficult. If this were a sub-station supplanting a larger headquarters it would make more sense.
- I think the estimated costs of upgrading the intersections and roads around the fire station essentially negate the fact the town owns the land (estimate between \$375,000

and \$700,000). These are very rough estimates, but they don't appear to have been included in the original proposal.

In July of 2014 Walgreens vacated the property at 11 Main Street. In walking through the building it looked as though it could be modified to meet the community's needs for a fire station. Research put us in touch with a Real Estate Broker and ultimately in touch with the Harbor Group, a Multi-National Investment firm who owns the building. The assessed value of the property was 2.2 million at the time. The Harbor Group admitted they had over 9 million invested in the property. Furthermore they had a valid lease for Walgreens for the next 15 years that would garner them an additional 12 million through monthly payments during that time period. We had asked if they would be willing to work with Walgreens Corporate office to see if there was interest in buying out their lease at a lesser rate to make the purchase of the building palatable to the Town of Maynard. The Harbor Group agreed that it would be okay if we contacted Walgreens Corporate offices. We made our case to the Walgreens decision makers and they declined to discuss this as an option so we stopped pursuing this possibility. This past fall (after we had contracted an architectural firm discussed later on), the Harbor Group reached out to us again and asked if we were still interested in pursuing their building. While we had chosen a different avenue at that time, we were still interested in pursuing it but they wanted us to make an offer to them. At the time we were looking at purchasing adjacent property to the fire station (again discussed later on), and the numbers we were looking at were at or slightly above assessed value. We suggested that to the Harbor Group whose building was still assessed at about 2,400,000.00 and those discussions stopped. We did however ask the architectural firm working on our project, Dore and Whittier, to take a look at the Walgreens building plans to see if it was feasible were we to work out an agreement in the end. They spent some time going over the stamped drawings and concluded that a considerable amount of money would need to be

invested in this project and the vacant church next door would also need to be part of the project. Again this did not look like a viable route to pursue.

During our meeting with the Board of Selectman and the Finance Committee we were advised to look at adding on and renovating the existing fire station as the first option. Money was appropriated at the Annual Town Meeting for a Feasibility Study to do just that. We received multiple proposals by architectural firms wishing to conduct the feasibility study for us. We narrowed the firms down to three based on their proposals, experience with similar projects and experience in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We conducted interviews and saw presentations from the three remaining firms and Dore and Whittier proved to be the best fit for the Town of Maynard. As Dore and Whittier began the process of determining if our project was feasible, Assistant Town Administrator Andrew Scribner-MacLean and I met with the property owners adjacent to the fire station. We were negotiating a proposed sale of four different properties with three different owners. Although no real agreements had been made, we did have agreements in principle for three of the four properties and we were very close on the fourth. Our plan was to purchase these properties at or slightly above assessed value. Additionally there would have been an added cost of razing these structures. The cost of this was expected to be between \$900,000.00 and 1,000,000.00. As Dore and Whittier moved through their project one issue came up that really put the project on hold. This was hazardous materials remediation that in and of itself wasn't a problem. The problem that presented itself was that a trench would be needed around the structure essentially forcing the fire department to temporarily relocate to a temporary facility. The cost of this was estimated to be in the \$400,000.00 to \$750,000.00 range, based on other departments in the Commonwealth who have done similar projects. This fact, coupled with the cost of acquiring structures and the degree of renovation that would be needed, tipped the scale of this project in a direction we did not feel

was in the best interest of the community. We had Dore and Whittier stop at this point so we could regroup rather than continuing to spend money on a project we did not think would work in the long run.

In October of 2015 we again approached the Board of Selectman and informed them of where we were at. We recommended at that time that Dore and Whittier change their focus to looking at the Town Hall location and that was approved.

When we look at this fire station project we can break it down into multiple categories, the Proposed Town Hall Project, the plan proposed in 2009, the existing fire station and another offsite location. We need to weigh all these factors, including costs against the actual need for the community's fire station. If we look at the differences between the proposed town hall project and the plans for Rockland Ave, or what could be done at another site we can make a few comparisons. First, with the Town Hall project the only new space is the apparatus floor. It comprises about 8,900 square feet. I feel this is adequate space. The Rockland Ave project put it about 6,545 square feet. The fire department has items such as trailers with response equipment and utility vehicles that I don't think were properly accounted for in 2009. Additionally the 2009 project has no plan to address an elevator (needed for the ADA). The 2009 plan has inadequate space for a training area, plans review, gear storage and computer work space for report writing. It also doesn't have a server room in the plan. It does however have a larger space for physical fitness and the kitchen and dayroom facilities are a bit larger than the Town Hall Project. The other part of the Town Hall Project that needs to be considered is that we would be re-using existing space. In some cases the proposed re-use of that space is more than what we would need if we were building from scratch. For example the SCBA room in the lower level is about 4 times what is needed, but it is cheaper to re-use this space as is than make it smaller. Instead we'll use

it for additional storage. Another point to consider is that the Town Hall Project will essentially have two lobbies. The first will be where it is now; the second will be on the police station end to funnel traffic through secured areas for permits and meetings etc. If we look at the overall size of the Town Hall Project as proposed, it looks like we are at 25,000 for the fire station. Over 4,000 square feet will be used by other town departments or shared by multiple departments including:

- Existing bathrooms outside the Gianotis Room
- Plans Review (existing conference room)
- Plan Storage (outer vault area)
- Fitness area (shared with police)
- Tire storage area (added to apparatus bays)
- Existing Finance, Treasurer/Collector, Assessor, Retirement/Insurance offices will all be used by municipal services
- Vault will continue to be used for record storage

If we look at the existing fire station location, we can meet all of the needs of the community; however, it appears to be cost prohibitive based on:

- Cost of acquiring and razing adjacent properties (four)
- Feasibility of temporarily re-locating the fire station
- The cost of relocating the fire station

In looking at the plan as is proposed at the Town Hall location, I think this is the best option moving forward. If we look at trying to reduce the size of the project, the only place to do so is in the apparatus area and in my opinion that will hurt us moving forward. With all due respect to the existing plans that were to be used for a potential Rockland Avenue site, I think the

apparatus floor proposed was too small and we would have outgrown it almost immediately. Additionally those bays were proposed to be "Drive through", which would have allowed for a different configuration than what we are looking at now. Because we are working within the scope of an existing footprint, drive through bays is not feasible. Even if we look at another standalone site, the overall project footprint would need to be expanded to accommodate fire apparatus using drive through bays.

When looking at the cost of construction it is also not realistic to compare figures used in 2008, 2009 to cost's today. The documented numbers presented by the Carrel Group in their studies is about \$300.00 per square foot. In today's market we are approaching \$600.00 a square foot.

In looking at the whole project and all that has been proposed to this point, the most important factor remains the need of the community. When this discussion first began in 2007 there was a documented (Building Committee, Carrel Group, Crowley Associates and Resource Management Associates), need for an up to date fire station to meet the needs of Maynard's citizens at that time. We are now nine year's removed from those initial discussions and construction prices have doubled. The door for a federal grant has long since been shut but the need to provide the community with an up to date fire station remains.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Stowers

Fire Chief