

Minutes – Public Hearing – August 8, 2012  
Groton Center Fire Station Committee  
**DRAFT – Not Approved**

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm

Committee Attendees

Susan Daly, Vice-Chair  
Michael Bouchard, Clerk  
Val Prest  
Steve Webber

Advisors:

Mark Haddad  
Fire Chief Joseph Bosselait

Approximately 20 members of the public were present.

The accompanying presentation was used as the vehicle for public discussion. Questions from the public were taken during the presentation. Mr. Haddad was the lead presenter.

Alix Chace disputed the statement that abutters were solicited for membership on the Committee. Mr. Haddad detailed activities soliciting abutters.

Alix Chace stated that abutters were misled concerning the size of the fire station, stating that abutters were told this was to be a 6,000 square foot building. Mr. Haddad stated that 6,000 square feet had never been a stated size of the building. In particular, it was pointed out that there was a mailing to every household in Groton before the Spring Town Meeting detailing the facts and figures, as then known, on the fire station. That mailing identified an 18,500 square foot building, along with costs, site selection criteria and a recommendation to purchase the Lawrence Homestead Trust (LHT) site as a fire station location. Mr. Petropoulos, member of the Board of Selectmen and formerly chair of the Fire Station Committee, concurred from the audience, and further stated that 18,500 square feet was the working number to evaluate all three sites considered in the Spring of 2012. The Lawrence Homestead Trust site was recommended to Spring 2012 Town Meeting.

Mr. Haddad stated that there is a purchase and sale for the LHT site in the amount of \$350,000 was still being negotiated. He expected that it would be concluded within the next month. \$200,000 from ambulance receipts and \$150,000 from the Town's operating budget would be used as the funds to purchase the property.

Mr. Haddad presented a 5 year financial projection detailing source and use of funds town government operations, pay for existing debt service, and allocate funds to cover a projected Town's share of the anticipated Lost Lake Sewer Project and the new center fire station. Funding would be available within the levy limit. No proposition 2 ½ override would be needed.

Mr. Prager, Chairman of the Finance Committee, from the audience, stated that the financial projections being stated were not a "slight of hand". These are real numbers. Taxes will go up to pay for the station even though a proposition 2 ½ override may not be necessary.

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The Town has contracted with Architectural Consulting Group as the Owner's Project Manager (OPM), as required under Mass General Law Chapter 149 Section 44A ½. They serve as the "eyes and ears" of the Building Committee. The fee of \$300,000 includes OPM services and a Clerk of the Works (CoW) service. The CoW supervises construction on a daily basis when the contractor is on site. He/She monitors weather conditions, deliveries, contractor practices, material specs, etc.

This project, should it go forward, is to be funded on three phases. The first phase, Feasibility, was completed by the Spring, 2012. This phase was funded from the general fund of the town. The project is currently in Phase 2, Design / Development, which is being funded by a vote of the Spring 2012 Town Meeting. This phase is budgeted at \$800,000 for architectural design, site design and mechanical design services. The third phase, should the project go forward, will be the Construction Phase. This phase would be funded by a vote of a future town meeting, anticipated for January, 2013. The amount of money requested would be based upon contractor responses to bid documents.

Mr. MacDonald, abutter, asked how "no net storm water runoff increase" would be managed. Ms. Collette, Groton's Land Use Director, from the audience, explained the permitting and water volume calculation process. Under Groton's bylaws, no net increase in runoff is permitted. The site will consist of several water management techniques, including grading, swales and berms. Mr. MacDonald challenged the process citing the runoff issues at the fairly recent Groton Residential Gardens development. Ms. Collette did point out that Groton Residential Gardens was built under a "40B" regulation, which allows the developer to ignore many local regulations in favor of state regulations. Mr. MacDonald asked if there was recourse if basements flooded as a result of the fire station project. Ms. Collette indicated there was recourse. The Earth Removal Stormwater Advisory Committee will conduct hearings on this storm water plan. All abutters within 300 feet will be notified. The hearings will be open to the public. Audience was also encouraged to sign up for fire station notifications at [www.townofgroton.org](http://www.townofgroton.org) to receive specific notices and general information.

Mr. Bouchard presented results of the site walk held July 24. Member of the Historic Districts Commission, Planning Board, Fire Station Committee and neighborhood attended. A bucket truck was on site to demonstrate the height of the building at 47'. The property was staked with an outline of the building's footprint. Issues examined included building height, location and size, location of driveway, grade of land/water runoff/need for retaining walls and the location of the driveway. It was announced that the building height which had been planned for 47' has been lowered to 35', in conformance with "R-A" zoning.

Questions were asked concerning the need for training facilities. Ms. Daly explained that in-town training at a central location reduces costs and improves service. Cost is reduced in that personnel and equipment expense to travel out of town (Stow Firefighting Academy, other towns) is eliminated. Service is improved in that the training personnel are local to the alarm with their equipment and can respond faster.

Questions were asked concerning the size and cost of the building. The building is sized with a 6000 square foot apparatus bay and 12 square feet of operations support , administrative area and living quarters. Comments stated that the size of this building was excessive, and much larger than what was originally proposed. Some people commented that a 6,000 square foot building was proposed, while others compared the size to the proposal of a 16,000 square foot facility on the 279 Main Street site (that site was rejected by Town Meeting in Spring 2011). The Committee stated that the proposal for this building has consistently been in the 18,500 square foot range, and was not aware of any 6,000 square foot proposal. The 18,500 +/- square foot specifications comes from a detailed analysis of the fire station program conducted by C&R Architecture + Design with the fire department. The Committee stated that the plan was to build a station that would be adequate for the next 50 years. Member of the audience suggested that we don't know what cost issues will present themselves during the next 50 years, and this is a building that will be costly today and more costly in the future.

Alix Chace wanted to know why a building design was being finalized when the Committee was biased. It was pointed out that the Committee's job was to design a building as the Spring Town Meeting voted to both purchase the LHT site and appropriated \$800,000 for architectural and associated design services. The Spring Town Meeting voted 170 to 44 (approximately 3% of the Town's registered voters) to purchase the site, and two-thirds majority vote to authorize architectural services.

Scott MacDonald stated that the number of police and fire first responders at town meeting was intimidating, possibly outnumbering the other attendees by 3 to 1. Ms. Daly responded that the first responders are interested in this issue but do not want to intimidate or appear to intimidate the public at large. There are 35 responders , including career and on-call personnel, and their intention and duty is to provide fire and EMS services. Ms. Daly did not know if all first responders were present at the town meeting, or how many police officers were present. It was also stated by an audience member that the vote to acquire the site occurred at 11:27 pm (after 90+ minutes of discussion), and that the lateness of the hour and that only 3% of the electorate participated in the vote, did not amount to informed consent of the town for the vote.

Mr. Prager related that the Finance Committee had met on August 7 and discussed some aspects of the fire station project. While the Town has approved monies to purchase the site and the architectural services, the Finance Committee has taken no position on the project. The Finance Committee will be investigating:

- Are there adequate facilities in other buildings to house fire department activities?
- Why has the square footage increased from 16,000 to 18,780 (current specification)
- Can the building be built in a modular fashion to reduce current costs?
- Can this question and the Lost Lake Sewer funding question go to a town ballot?
- The Finance Committee recognizes the limitations of the current center fire station building, and that it is inadequate. The new building proposal appears to be a "10". Will a "7" or "8" suffice?

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Can it be built in a modular fashion? Can it be smaller? Perhaps there should be a financial constraint on the building.

Ms. Eliot, Selectman, from the audience, stated that the increase to 18,780 square feet was a modification as a result of a comprehensive professional assessment as to the fire department needs.

Ms. Daly also stated that the fire department has pared the building size from 21,000 square feet suggested by the data for the assessment study, and that she believes the building is currently an “8”.

Steve Webber, Fire Station Committee member (and also a Finance Committee member), asked on behalf of Finance Committee members if Groton planned to host other towns for training at the proposed facility. Could the Lost Lake Fire Station be incorporated into training and pare back on the center fire station? Ms. Daly and Fire Chief Bosselait commented that the Lost Lake Station was requested to have a community room. The fire department does conduct training at the Lost Lake station. Sometimes there is a scheduling conflict with the public, and sometime there are logistical conflicts with the users of the basketball court (i.e. parking). EMS training used to be done at the Public Safety Building, but that training room is now the Emergency Operations Center. Aside from these types of issues, the major benefit of central training is the training time can be devoted to the training exercises, and not diluted by equipment movement and personnel travel times.

Mr. Webber asked the amount of training required, and if it is required by state or federal regulation.

Ms. Daly and Fire Chief Bosselait commented that the training is required by state and federal regulations. They further commented that training is in addition to call members' fulltime jobs, and requires a significant commitment from the members. It is important to maximize the impact of training opportunities. Fire issues are getting much more complex and a large body of knowledge is required. Val Prest, Fire Station Committee member, commented that in the “travel training” model, that the specific training required is not always available in a convenient place, impacting attendance, travel time, training effectiveness and overtime pay.

The meeting concluded with a recap of the project status and the plan to go forward. The plan is to ask town meeting to rezone the LHT fire station parcel to “Public Use” and to extend the sewer district to this parcel. Should the project continue to go forward, it is anticipated that a Special Town Meeting will be called in January, 2013 to vote on funding the construction of the station.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Minutes by Michael Bouchard