

Boxborough Building Committee 2019

The Boxborough Building Committee (BBC) was formed in 2016, chartered with seven voting members and jointly chaired by members from the Boxborough Select Board (SB) and the Finance Committee (FinCom). The BBC was charged with evaluating needs for Police, Fire and the Department of Public Works (DPW) and recommending a comprehensive plan to address the facility needs of all three departments.

On recommendation of the building committee, the February 2018 Special Town Meeting approved purchase of the former Kaizen property for a DPW facility. This year, the DPW completed some modest renovations to improve the office and common areas and is now productively enjoying their new home.

Early in 2019 we pursued acquiring a site for a public safety facility at 1320 Mass Avenue. This former Cisco property had been acquired by Lincoln Properties. During the prior year, the BBC had the town's engineering firm carry out a paper feasibility study for this site. Several issues had been identified but the committee believed these could be addressed in the context of Lincoln's overall plans for their Boxborough holdings, in view of certain changes to the Office Park zoning that were being considered by the Planning Board. However, the Select Board was not able to conclude a satisfactory development agreement with Lincoln Property that would lead to mutual success consistent with town objectives. The BBC ceased all further investigation of 1320 Mass Avenue after the May Annual Town Meeting.

For the remainder of the year the BBC continued to evaluate potential sites for public safety facilities, with preference for locations along or near Mass Avenue. The committee next evaluated the property at 1300 Mass Avenue. This property has an office building with about 60,000 square feet on two floors, with ample parking. Despite the high assessed value, the committee felt it was worth considering, and wanted to understand the issues and costs for repurposing for public safety. HKT Architects was contracted to carry out a feasibility study for adaptation of the site for public safety facilities. HKT analyzed the costs and pros/cons of three different approaches, including demolition. The results of the feasibility study were presented to the BBC in November 2019. None of these approaches appeared desirable or compelling: 1) the renovation expenses would be very high due to the need to meet stringent Level 3 building codes for public safety, 2) there would still be significant remaining uncertainty about risks around wetlands and the aging septic system, and 3) about \$70,000 per year would be removed from the tax rolls.

As a companion to this feasibility study, HKT also presented a very high-level cost estimate for new public safety facilities on the town-owned land on Stow Road that is currently in the custody of the Housing Board. Previous civil engineering studies that had been carried out by the Housing Board were reviewed. The Fire and Police Chiefs walked the site and were favorably disposed. The Building Committee concluded the Stow Road site is presently the best viable option, and that future efforts should focus on it. The Stow Road parcel is large enough to accommodate more than public safety facilities. Therefore, the BBC recommended an expanded building committee be established to consider the bigger picture. The new building committee will have a priority focus on public safety facilities but have an expanded scope to consider other beneficial municipal needs.