

Q: How was the size of this facility determined? Some other towns are servicing smaller sized departments with smaller buildings.

A: The Town of Boxborough retained an architect to work with the departments to determine the deficiencies in their current facilities and to determine their space needs. Programming is a process where the architect reviews the departments' operations and determines the physical infrastructure required to support those operations. For this project, an initial space program was developed and later refined with input from the Space Needs Advisory Group. The existing police and fire stations are currently lacking critical spaces necessary for efficient operations. The proposed space program satisfies the departments' current space needs while planning for modest growth in the future.

Comparisons with other towns is complicated. Some facilities are built for only police or fire whereas Boxborough is planning a combined public safety facility that will also include an Emergency Operations Center/Community Meeting Space/Training. Other considerations when making comparisons with other Towns are whether there are additional sub-stations in that Town that service public safety needs, type of apparatus needed to serve needs (ladder trucks for vertical and horizontal reach, boats for water rescues, tender trucks if the community does not have public water available, ATVs for rescues in inaccessible sites, etc.).

Q: What is the difference between "Hard Construction Cost", "Soft Construction Costs" and "Total Project Cost"?

A: Hard Construction Costs are costs paid directly to a general contractor to build a building and develop a building site. These are often referred to as "brick and mortar" costs.

Soft Construction Costs vary from project to project and include things such as Architect/Engineering and Owner's Project Management Fees, site acquisition costs, legal fees, printing costs, hazardous material abatement, permitting costs, Clerk of the Works, furniture and equipment costs among others. These costs are typically in the range of 25% to 30% of the Hard Construction Costs, but could be higher or lower depending on project complexities.

Total Project Costs are the sum of Hard Construction Costs and Soft Construction Costs.

Q: What is meant by the term "escalation"?

A: Escalation is a term used to explain the change in value for various costs over a period of time. In construction, this would include changes in the cost of materials and labor that go into a building project. Escalation rates vary from year to year, however the average for New England from 2005 through 2014 was approximately 5.74%.

Escalation figures are factored into cost estimates for building projects to anticipate cost increases between the planning date and the actual date of construction.

Historic escalation figures are also used when comparing a current project with projects done in the past. For instance a \$5.00 million building completed in 2006 would cost \$8.03 million to complete today based upon historic escalation rates.

Based on projected escalation figures, a delay to this project of just one year could cost the Town approximately \$750,000.

Q: Why is it so much more expensive to build a public building than a private commercial building or home?

A: In Massachusetts, public construction projects must adhere to certain public bidding laws and prevailing wage rates. Prevailing wage laws for public projects establishes a minimum wage rate for all construction workers on these projects. Prevailing wage rates are generally higher than competitive markets.

In addition, a public safety facility is considered an “essential facility” according to the Massachusetts Building Code. Essential facilities must be built to a higher safety standard to remain operational during a natural disaster or catastrophic event. This also increases the cost above typical commercial construction.

Q: Can you explain what contingencies are?

A: Contingencies are a responsible planning tool to protect and limit the Town’s fiscal exposure. At this preliminary planning phase, the estimated hard construction costs are based on historical data for similar projects in Massachusetts. Soft construction costs are also based on historical data for similar projects as well as factors unique to your project. Estimates built during the preliminary planning phase are conservative to account for unknown variables that will be clarified as design progresses. Contingencies expressed as a percentage are included in the estimate to account for these unknown variables.

Q: Why is the Total Project Cost so high?

A: The estimated Total Project Cost is carefully constructed based on projected hard construction costs, including prevailing wage rates and contingencies as well as soft costs. The projected hard and soft costs for this project are comparable to similar recent public safety construction projects in communities in Massachusetts.

Q: Can we save money by renovating the existing fire and police stations?

A: The existing fire station no longer meets the needs of a modern full-time fire department. The 60 year old building was originally constructed for a call department with substantially smaller vehicles and equipment. Deficiencies include undersized apparatus bays, inaccessible training areas, lack of appropriate administrative spaces and living quarters. It would be cost prohibitive to renovate and add to the building to meet current operational needs, including modern apparatus. Renovation would require updating the building to meet current building codes including seismic, accessibility and energy.

The existing police station may have met the needs of the department when it was built 25 years ago, but does not meet the needs of a modern police department. Today, the department lacks critical evidence collection and storage spaces, an armory, interview/interrogation rooms, record storage space, IT infrastructure including E911 and administration space. The building does not meet accessible standards. Renovating the police station would require updating the building to meet current building codes including seismic, accessibility and energy. Due to site constraints driving the location of an addition, none of the proposed renovation plans reviewed by the committee met the basic operational needs of the department.

Q: Do we really need both police and fire departments in one building? Could we build a new fire station and add onto the existing police station to meet the current needs?

A: Combining the police and fire departments in one building allows the departments to share space reducing overall building square footage and cost. Shared resources will include the Training Room, mechanical spaces and systems, stairs and elevators, lobby, Dispatch, meeting spaces and public toilet facilities.

The committee investigated the option of a new fire station and an addition with renovations to the police station. This option does not allow the departments to share the resources described above. Because these spaces would need to be duplicated in each building, the cost was projected to be more than that of a new facility.