

Legitimate need for fire station

By Michael Smith and Patricia Natoli

The Maynard Public Safety Building Committee (PSBC) would like to inform Maynard voters about some of the issues to be addressed at special Town Meeting on Tuesday, May 19.

The PSBC spent more than two years developing not only the recently opened police station, but the disposition of the existing fire station. The police did not move out only because they were squeezed for space. From the first day Maynard residents heard about the proposed police station, we have emphasized the existing station is nearing the end of its useful life in terms of the building itself, the building systems and space for existing and future vehicles.

Our committee presented its findings to the Selectmen in August 2008, before the bottom fell out of the economy, and before we had any notion of a Federal stimulus bill. Our final recommendation was and still is to build a new fire station on town-owned land off Route 27 across from Christmas Motors. When the economy faltered, Selectmen decided not to back a warrant article to ask the taxpayers for funding. The PSBC was therefore simply to get their findings out to the public as a matter of public record, and that would have been the end of that. But once the federal stimulus bill became public and we became aware \$210 million was earmarked for construction of fire stations, the possibility of a new station was revived with the same program and in the same location.

The amount of research, fieldwork and programming the Public Safety Building Committee put into determining the

too numerous to detail. So we have been holding public information meetings and the recent open house at the fire station. We will be holding another information meeting tonight, Thursday, May 14, at the Maynard Public Library, at 7 p.m. A PDF draft of our presentation is also available at our Web site: www.maynardpublic-safety.com.

We looked at numerous scenarios for renovating the existing or adding to the existing building, building a new station on the existing site and relocating the fire station to a site and building. In terms of cost, and providing the needed space for current and future equipment and personnel, it became clear a new station was less costly and would result in the best facilities for the greatest number of years.

The proposed site on Route 27 is town-owned, has adequate space for the building, parking, and training areas, has been surveyed and found to be outside any wetlands and outside of the town's water well-heads, provides quick access directly to Route 27, and is a "shovel ready" location. (The site is immediately ready to be worked on.) Due to Maynard's small size this proposed location still meets NFPA recommendations for response times (four minutes or less on 90 percent of the annual responses).

Bob Nadeau's letter in this edition explains requirements and the funding process. What we would like to emphasize is the fact that we have the proverbial "once in a lifetime" opportunity to receive 83 percent of the funding for a new station from the federal government. Maynard has the opportunity to finance \$1 mil-

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Articles make financial sense

By Bob Nadeau

On Tuesday May 19, Maynard holds a special Town Meeting (the day after the annual Town Meeting May 18) to vote on a number of important articles. I would like to explain the rationale for Articles 14 and 15, which asks for funding for two purposes related to the construction of a new fire station. Article 14 asks voters to fund up to \$1 million of the local share of station construction only if Maynard receives funding for a new station under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA, otherwise known as President Obama's stimulus bill). Article 15 asks for schematic design funding for the new station.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The ARRA funds a Fire Grant Program that makes up to \$5 million available to communities for the construction of a new fire station. It is a competitive program and Maynard would apply for the money. Like any grant program, we are not guaranteed funding, but have as good a chance as any community and these articles are requesting funds so that we are in the most competitive position possible and have the strongest application we can submit.

The majority of Selectmen voted to place Articles 14 and 15 before voters on the special Town Meeting warrant. Article 14 asks the town to commit up to \$1 million toward the construction of the estimated \$5.95 million station, which the Public Safety Building Committee has been working on for the last year and which would be located off Route 27 north, by Rockland Ave. Committee mem-

bers will explain the station at Town Meeting and have held public meetings to describe the process and the need for the new station.

This money in Article 14 is only spent if we receive the federal grant. Because Article 14 requests a debt exclusion, we need a special election to approve money if the article is approved. The cost of the election is \$7,000. No other funds are expended from Article 14 unless we receive the federal grant. Therefore, should we receive the federal grant, the town will commit only \$1 million toward the project and the feds would fund \$5 million. At no other time have we seen a program to fund public safety facilities, and having the feds potentially pay up to 85 percent of the cost is frankly unheard of. This is why selectmen felt this was an opportunity the town could not afford to pass up given the extreme need for a new fire station.

As many of you have heard, the feds want shovel-ready projects. If Article 14 is approved, the Maynard proposal will have many things going for it to make it a competitive application, including: a need to replace a deteriorating facility with one that will not impact the health and safety of its firefighters; a commitment of money by the town to pay a local share; control of a site by the town; approved zoning of the site; permitting in place (which will be completed if Article 15 is approved); mutual aid benefits of the new station; critical facilities that need protection (FEMA, the state crime lab, state fusion center, Nadeau, Page 9

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lion to get a \$6 million fire station. So what would this cost taxpayers? Article 14 is for a \$1 million debt exclusion. A \$1 million debt exclusion would cost the average taxpayer \$25 per year the first year, declining each year after that until the loan is paid off in 20 years. The \$87,000 of Article 15 would pay for the building design and the cost to hold a public vote that would be required to put Maynard at a competitive advantage. This money comes from the fire department's ambulance

receipts and therefore will not increase anyone's tax bill by a single penny. That fund is very healthy and can absorb the \$87,000.

Perhaps the most important point to make is that if Maynard approves Article 14 but does not eventually receive federal funding, the \$1 million will NOT be appropriated and bonded and there will be no cost at all to taxpayers. And if Article 14 is approved it still has to pass a ballot vote via special election in late June. That gives everyone more than a month to gather more information before

making their final vote

There are no guarantees, but from what we know about the stimulus we believe that with approval of Articles 14 and 15 Maynard is in as good a position as any other applicant to receive this funding. Please come to the Special Town Meeting on Tuesday. This is an unparalleled opportunity for Maynard.

Michael Smith is chairman of the Maynard Public Safety Building Committee; Patricia Natoli is secretary of the same committee.

Rare funding opportunity exists

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National Wildlife Refuge); a trained, full-time force; among others.

But design is a key component of competitiveness. The further along we are in design, the more competitive we will be so that we can begin construction as soon after receiving an award as we can. Article 15 asks for \$80,000 for schematic design (as well as \$7,000 for the special election if Article 14 is approved). This funding does not come from taxes, rather it comes from ambulance receipts. No programs or services are affected with the use of these funds because they can only be used for ambulance related costs. A new station qualifies as this type of expense.

This is a key to the project. Maynard has a history of approving design funds for projects so committees can come before Town Meeting to present the full project. We would not expect Town Meeting to ap-

prove a project based on vision alone; you want to see what we are talking about.

So, like the recent police station; the Fowler School; past police and fire stations proposals; the Rockland Avenue wells; the former White's Pond water treatment plant; and the current High School feasibility study, we are asking Town Meeting for funds that can be used for detailed design of the proposed fire station so that we can show the federal government that we have a detailed concept that is ready to be built. Some of the projects I just mentioned were not ultimately approved. Sometimes that happens and Town Meeting just doesn't like the idea. I can assure you though that no Town Meeting would approve construction of a project without the study or design to back it up. Neither will the federal government. No design? No chance of getting federal funds, it's as simple as that.

The concept is simple. We

need to show local commitment to the project and a local share to meet the funding of the project in order to make the project's competitive as possible. Article 14 shows our support for the project financially if we get the \$5 million award. We also need a more complete design than we have, to show the feds we are ready to go and make our application for funds as competitive as possible. Article 15 shows our support for that design.

This opportunity to have the Federal Government pay up to 85 percent of a badly needed fire station, is unprecedented. The majority of the Selectmen feel these two articles give the town the best chance to be in a competitive position for these funds so we can build a critical public safety facility and give our firefighters the tools they need to protect our town.

Bob Nadeau is chairman of the Maynard Board of Selectmen