

These excerpts from recently-released Executive Sessions of the Bedford Select Board reveal that the Board fully recognized that 139 The Great Road is not the optimal site for a new fire station but failed to seek public input. Meanwhile, the expensive drawbacks to the current plan are becoming apparent. It is time for citizens to decide what makes the most sense. We must make sure we are not selling first responders and residents short!

Quotes from the minutes of the Select Board Executive Session – October. 25, 2021:

“Ms. Mitchell stated that she felt 175 Great Road was a superior location, given the flatness of the terrain and the fact that it already has a signal. The slope of the exit at 139 Great Road does create some concern, but if the acquisition process is easier and/or cheaper, that’s a compelling case.”

“Ms. Fleischman noted the complexity of the nearby unsignaled intersection with Bacon and Hillside, including a bike/pedestrian crossing with a rapid flashing beacon. She wondered if we would need to acquire the dentist office on the corner as well, to mitigate the geometric challenges of the intersection.”

“Ms. Stanton stated that Mr. Jammal had expressed interest in a land swap with the existing fire station, and asked whether the Select Board wanted that option on the table. Chief Grunes noted that such a land swap could counter resident concerns that acquiring 175 Great Road would be taking a commercial building off the tax rolls.”

“Ms. Mitchell expressed hesitation in offering the current fire station as a bargaining chip, given our current conversations about available municipal space for departments, committees, and community organizations. She also noted that the prospect of another bank in the current fire station space, next to the Town Common and in the heart of Bedford Center, might be a hard sell to residents.”

[This meeting occurred 15 months after the 2020 Annual Town Meeting proposal to purchase 175 The Great Road was postponed due to Covid. No other site or sites were brought forward for public consideration, or for Annual Town Meeting action, during 2021. Now, Town officials argue that the two Special Town Meeting articles to be considered on November 14th should be defeated because they will delay progress for a new fire station. The Board chose to put a site forward that has a number of significant logistical challenges, as well as substantial obstacles to Historic District Commission approval. The source of any delay is clear.]

Quotes from the minutes of the Select Board Executive Session – November 22, 2021:

“Chief Grunes reported that he spoke with DPW about a traffic study, and has engaged Green International to perform it, with particular attention to the grade and the potential need to signalize the intersection with Bacon and Hillside. He noted that 139 Great Road is not an optimal site due to its shape and grade, and he believes the Town would need conceptual drawings from an architect and engineer to help Town Meeting visualize the property’s potential as a new fire station site.”

[Town officials have downplayed the need for an intersection upgrade. These and other complications make the price of a 139 Great Road fire station more comparable to 175 Great Road in both costs and time. A lot more about this at the STM.]

“Ms. Fleischman asked whether the CVS building might be a new possibility, since CVS has announced the closure of many retail outlets.”

“Chief Grunes asked whether we are prepared to spend for 175 Great Road if negotiations for 139 Great Road are not successful or if public response is tepid. Ms. Fleischman added that our choice now is to negotiate for a more affordable property that we’re not as enthusiastic about.

“Ms. Mitchell stated that whichever property we choose will have political implications, and noted that it is crucial for the Select Board to be united behind the final choice. If we choose 139 Great Road, the argument will be for financial responsibility, with significant cost savings for the Town compared to previous options. If we choose 175 Great Road, the argument is for the ideal site for long-term investment and future needs.”

[Political implications had no legitimate place in this discussion.]

“Ms. Malone agreed that it made sense to continue moving forward on 139 Great Road for now, even though it’s not our first choice.”

Quotes from the minutes of the Select Board Executive Session – December 20, 2021:

“Ms. Fleishman noted that, while the Select Board has had access to all the information since 2015 that helped narrow consideration to 175 and 139 Great Road, the public has not.”

[A clear acknowledgment that the Select Board’s actions were kept secret from the public. Moreover, there is no mention of any other sites in the supposedly extensive search.]

“Ms. Fleischman feels that 175 Great Road is the better physical site, but it was not sufficiently better to warrant an additional \$6 million for acquisition.”

“Mr. Pierce agreed with Ms. Fleischman that 175 Great Road is fundamentally a better physical site. He felt comfortable recommending acquisition of 139 Great Road for \$1.3 million, but still holds out hope that there could be an opportunity in the future to acquire 175 Great Road as well, possibly with a land swap.”

“Ms. Malone concurred that 175 Great Road is a better physical site....”

Quotes from the minutes of the Select Board Executive Session – January 10, 2022:

“The Select Board agenda posted on Thursday will list [139 The Great Road] for the first time.”

[Note: The open (public) session vote did not occur until January 31, 2022.]