

Bedford Select Board
Executive Session for the Purposes of Discussing Strategy
Related to the Purchase, Exchange, Taking, Lease or Value of Real Property, or Litigation
December 20, 2021

Select Board Members Present: Margot Fleischman, Bopha Malone, Emily Mitchell, Ed Pierce

Also Present: Town Manager Sarah Stanton, Fire Chief David Grunes, Mark Saccoccio (architect, Saccoccio and Associates), Facilities Director Taissir Alani

At 8:49pm, the Select Board entered Executive Session for the purposes listed above.

139 Great Road

Ms. Stanton reported that the initial appraisal for 139 Great Road is \$1.232 million. The property owner, Utah State University, has preliminarily said this sounds good. They will try to get approval from their board of directors within a few days. The total acquisition costs for the property are likely to be around \$2.8 million, including design costs.

Ms. Stanton reported that she has continued discussions with Elie Jammal, owner of 175 Great Road. He is insistent that \$7 million is the right price for his property (building only, not the land).

Architect Mark Saccoccio presented his evaluation and recommendations on the feasibility of 139 Great Road as the new fire station site. The Town also did a traffic study with Green International, looking at existing and future traffic counts and potential intersection improvements.

Mr. Saccoccio and his firm have done work with the Town over several years on other projects. The site is roughly 64,000 square feet (about an acre) and very rectangular. The site plan includes an apparatus bay, admin/office/bunk space, and some outbuildings. The design would need to accommodate the needs of the station and reflect the surrounding neighborhoods. There is a grade change between the road and the site. Administration and support would be a two-story building, including the bunk house. Parking would be in the rear, along with some open storage. There is a large mature tree at the back of the property that would remain, and could serve as part of a landscape buffer. Mr. Saccoccio feels the site is viable.

Ms. Stanton noted that Mr. Saccoccio evaluated the site with an eye to the abutters, including businesses to the west and two new residential homes to the east. She stated that in comparing the costs and benefits of 139 Great Road to 175 Great Road, Mr. Saccoccio felt that 139 Great Road was the better option.

Ms. Mitchell asked for confirmation that apparatus would still need to back into the new station. Mr. Saccoccio said yes, and noted that the apron is much bigger than the current station, so there may be fewer occasions where Great Road traffic would be stopped.

Chief Grunes stated that he had been previously concerned about this site, given its grade and shape. In talking with Mr. Saccoccio and reviewing the traffic study, however, he feels comfortable that the slope, grade, and line of sight are all manageable. More importantly, this site allows the department to keep its programs in the center of the community and meet its mission.

Ms. Stanton stated that, if the Select Board is amenable to 139 Great Road, staff plans to create a chart or graphic for public consumption that would provide information to residents and outline why other sites were removed from consideration. Ms. Fleischman 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. She feels it's important that the Board is comfortable recommending and explaining the benefits of 139 Great Road. 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.

Ms. Fleischman asked if the Board had any further questions before making any decisions to move forward.

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. Stanton felt that, given her experience thus far, she did not feel that successful negotiation with Mr. Jammal would be possible. She feels that the incremental benefit of 175 Great Road (9.5/10 on the site evaluation scale) over 139 Great Road (9/10) is not worth further delays, given the rapidly deteriorating conditions of the current fire station. 139 Great Road not only saves money, but it is also closer to the current station and has less residential impact.

Mr. Alani felt that Mr. Jammal would not be interested in 139 Great Road, as he could have offered to purchase it earlier.

Ms. Fleischman asked for further information on the overall cost of the project. Ms. Stanton reported that the overall cost has dropped by about \$10 million, due to the lack of eminent domain costs and the ability to start sooner. She recommends staying on the existing capital schedule for construction.

Ms. Malone concurred that 175 Great Road is a better physical site, but the additional costs and potentially acrimonious negotiations make it less attractive. 139 Great Road may not have been the first choice, but the Town would be starting off on a better, more harmonious footing. She likes 139 Great Road as a fire station site.

Ms. Stanton noted that Finance Committee has intimated that they will be less supportive of eminent domain at this point.

Ms. Mitchell asked about delays due to Historic District Commission requirements. Ms. Stanton noted that this site would not be subject to a normal Demolition Delay because it is in the Historic District and thus subject to decisions of the HDC. Mr. Saccoccio noted that this site would be consistent with a historic building, since it would be closer to the road and have a lot of doors. Ms. Stanton noted that HDC has been relatively easy to work with regarding the police station renovation.

Chief Grunes noted that one of his early concerns about this site was being able to fit a fire station within the fabric of that neighborhood. He feels that Mr. Saccoccio's preliminary design eases those concerns: the new building allows the department to meet its projected needs for the medium to long term, and it can fit into the fabric of the neighborhood. He is not sure how many more years the department can reasonably exist at the current station, and feels moving forward with a new station will help with retention and hiring.

Ms. Stanton noted that in earlier stages of this process, the Select Board at the time had urged against sites within the Historic District. She stated that we are in a different place now, however, and the opportunity to work with a property owner who is eager to sell is a real benefit.

Ms. Fleischman stated that her biggest concern was with the nearby intersection. She noted that the road does have a turn lane that she hadn't remembered, so it's wider than she had thought. She was also concerned about the unsignalized intersection with Hillside and Bacon. She found the traffic study reassuring in terms of opportunities to accomplish some of our existing bike/pedestrian safety goals as part of the project design.

Ms. Stanton said that Green International confirmed that we could implement additional improvements both at the Hillside/Bacon intersection and up the road to minimize disruption from the fire station. Some of that could be simple, such as striping; some may involve signalization. Previous concerns about grade, ice, and sightlines were not borne out in the traffic study.

Chief Grunes noted that there were only three sites considered that fit the required square footage and included taking only one property: 175 Great Road, 139 Great Road, and 26 Great Road. 26 Great Road was off the table (Fitch Tavern), so 175 and 139 were the only viable options left.

Ms. Stanton noted that being on the site also allayed some concerns, as it is wider and flatter than it may appear from the street.

Mr. Saccoccio noted that these concerns are very common for every station they work on; they do not raise particular red flags for him.

Ms. Fleischman asked Mr. Saccoccio to speak to aesthetics and how a fire station would fit into a residential area. He shared two examples of prior stations, in Waltham and Brewster, both of which fit with the aesthetic of the town and neighborhood. He did not feel that the Town would need to sacrifice aesthetics to make the site and station work. The only disadvantage of the site in his opinion is the shape, since it requires bringing the public further into the property than a square site would allow.

Ms. Stanton outlined the process going forward. If the Select Board votes this evening to move forward on 139 Great Road, we would work with Town Counsel and Utah State University on a draft purchase and sale agreement for executive session on 1/10/22. The Select Board would review the P&S in executive session, listing the address on the agenda, and would vote on the P&S in executive session. On 1/18 in open session, the Select Board would announce the intent to sign a P&S contingent on Town Meeting funding for 139 Great Road, and add a warrant article for land acquisition and design. We would schedule three public meetings (one for abutters and two for the general public, led by the Town Manager, Chief Grunes, and the chair and clerk of the Select Board) and a joint meeting of the Finance Committee and the Capital Expenditures Committee. The Select Board would need to make a warrant recommendation by 2/11.

Mr. Pierce asked Mr. Saccoccio to clarify the location of the new station in relation to the existing building. The existing building footprint would cover the apparatus bay and part of the admin/support area. Mr. Saccoccio noted that much of the site is already paved, so the station would not add much more impervious surface. Mr. Pierce asked how tall the building would be. Mr. Saccoccio showed an example of the new station in Dudley, which could be a model for this station. The Dudley station has 14' doors, with a total height of around 18-19' to the eave of the apparatus bay and around 30' to the peak of the roof. Ms. Fleischman noted that the current residential height limit is 35'. Mr. Pierce confirmed that we would need four-bay access to the Great Road. He asked if we would need to level the hill. Mr. Saccoccio said he would need to look further at the site to determine what would be necessary and possible; they strive to minimize adjustments to the grade.

Ms. Fleischman reminded the board that the goal tonight is to determine whether the Select Board wishes to move forward with the acquisition of this property. She asked Ms. Stanton if the property were already on the tax rolls; Ms. Stanton said it is not, as the university is tax-exempt.

Ms. Mitchell moved that the Town move forward with acquisition of 139 Great Rd and authorize the Town Manager to draft a P&S agreement to be discussed in executive session on January 10. Ms. Malone seconded. Roll call vote: Ms. Mitchell – AYE, Ms. Fleischman – AYE, Ms. Malone – AYE, Mr. Pierce – AYE.

Ms. Malone moved to adjourn the Executive Session. Ms. Mitchell seconded. Roll call vote: Ms. Mitchell – AYE, Ms. Fleischman – AYE, Ms. Malone – AYE, Mr. Pierce – AYE.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:46pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Emily Mitchell, Clerk of the Select Board