

November 4, 2023 | revised and distributed on November 6<sup>th</sup>

Matthew J. Hanson  
Bedford Town Manager  
By Fax and Email

Re: Open Letter to the Town Manager

Dear Mr. Hanson,

During the year and a half in which I have been closely observing and researching the new fire station controversy, one thing has stood out: Town officials have been engaged in selling the project to voters, not in presenting it for their consideration. Serious impediments have been glossed over and, when residents have raised concerns, their motives and characters have been impugned or maligned. How unfortunate since, in the end, everyone will either win or lose.

Shooting the messenger is not a good strategy for getting to the facts and having a fruitful dialogue. In this case, doing so divided the whole community just when it needed to come together to share a wealth of experience, insight, goodwill, and common sense that might have led to a meeting of the minds. Regrettably, as the record will show, that contentious tone was set by Town officials.

Now that Mike Rosenberg that Petitioners' Article 7 will be non-binding because "Town Meeting can't 'direct' the Select Board to take the actions listed in the article," I am left wondering. Could the article have been worded in a way that would have allowed Town Meeting to intervene?

Or, is Town Counsel advising that those who are massively indebted to pay for a project that they authorized in the first place but which may not prove to be viable have no legal say in the matter? If they may not "direct" the Select Board to take specific steps to avoid a potentially colossal mistake while it is still preventable then perhaps a new bylaw is in order.

I heard recently that when former Town Manager Rick Reed was confronted with criticism, he would often acknowledge in hindsight that "mistakes were made." If the need for a new station is an urgent public need, and everyone agrees that it is, what good can possibly come from refusing to *even consider* that mistakes were indeed made? And then find a way to fix them.

Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 7 proposes to place a safety net under a dubious high-wire act. The fire station project has a very uncertain future and a highly questionable past. The obvious result of declaring the article non-binding is that it will depress attendance, thereby once again distorting wide resignation on the part of thousands into the appearance of wide support.

As John Adams once said: "Facts are stubborn things..." I am in the process of distilling the findings of my many months of diligent research. This account is the only comprehensive narrative available

to anyone who wants to examine the project's factual history. It will be appended to this letter and then posted on SaveOurBlock.org where it will continue to be developed. There is much more that needs to be put on the record.

There has never been a reasonable discussion and debate based upon a common set of givens, but only a he-said/she-said food fight. That needs to end. If the account that follows seems harsh, that does not mean it is not true. It is lengthy because the history of the project is very complex and has been misrepresented and misunderstood for too long.

Since your understanding of the issue will play a decisive role in where it goes from here, I hope sharing the history of the project will provide some helpful insights. Though I am writing here only for myself, many town residents have told me they share my concerns.

I think that when you consider the facts and allegations in light of your experience as a Town Manager and as a Selectman, you will agree that our concerns are reasonable and that everyone should have the chance to consider them. That is the basis for Petitioners' Article 7.

The operative principle that discredits the Town's position on each of the issues I will discuss is that it is not possible to shade the truth and tell the truth at the same time...

The process that produced the current project was founded on two critical assumptions:

- 1) That 139 The Great Road was "the sole suitable site" for the new fire and rescue station.  
*The Bedford Citizen (TBC) 2/16/22*
- 2) That the Historic District Commission (HDC) would "bend the rules" protecting the integrity of the Historic District if necessary in deference to the public safety imperative.

But what if the Bacon property was not the only suitable site that would fit the needs of the new station? Then the HDC would not have the statutory authority to make an exception to allow demolition. Not everyone agrees on that, but the wording of the Legislature's Act of 1964 is precise. Its guidelines and its mandates are two very different things. Officials have blurred that material fact from the start.

If the two assumptions are not true, then the only pathway to a demolition permit would be if three commissioners vote to ignore the intent of the Act of 1964 that the Select Board appointed them to uphold and which they swore an oath to faithfully and impartially discharge.

As last Wednesday's meeting shows, the HDC is currently engaged in a good-faith effort to identify what elements could result in a design that might fit into its surroundings. But what if that simply cannot be achieved? Regardless of what the HDC decides in the end, approval was never guaranteed, and voters should have been told how uncertain approval was and is. That was a very shaky platform upon which to erect an urgently needed multi-multimillion-dollar project.

As it turns out, and I will show in the appended account, there were numerous viable alternative sites that were never properly considered, despite what the residents were repeatedly told. And only one of those alternative sites is in the Historic District – but surrounded by industrial neighbors on all sides.

If the town's administrators cherry-pick the facts they share with the town's residents, they are subverting the Open Town Meeting principles that voters overwhelmingly supported when surveyed earlier this year. That is what diligent research suggests has been happening. It's time for that to stop.

Don Corey has shared with officials his definitive reports on the history of the Bacon property and the extent of the problems that could be posed by the utility poles – with the hope it will influence current and future decisions and choices. This account is focused on past decisions and choices.

The topics that have been prepared so far are linked below and others will follow:

- [The Site Selection Process](#)
- [The Curious Timeline](#)
- [The Use of Executive Sessions](#)
- [Sketchy Due Diligence](#)
- [Ethical Lapses](#)
- [Town Meeting](#)
- [Factoring in a Substation](#)
- [Bedford TV](#)
- [Article 7](#)

Please ask yourself as you assess the evidence provided throughout whether the 2022 ATM 4-vote margin would have been likely if the true circumstances had been known by the voters.

Contemporaneous reports, letters, and comments posted in *The Bedford Citizen* certainly provide a good thread of information on the process. But that included passing along the news Town officials provided, while the only challenges to the official account appeared in short letters to the editor. However, investigative reports were not part of the factual landscape. The Town has definitely enjoyed the information advantage and still does.

To be fair, it is hard to imagine the hellish pressures of running a town during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the blatantly manipulative and opaque process that is documented below should now trigger an urgent reassessment of the current plans – and maybe that will clear the air and bring the community back together.

This will be posted on SaveOurBlock.org as “An Open Letter to Bedford's Town Manager” because many of the details presented here will be new to the public. I don't think anyone wants to make an error in judgment due to not having access to all sides of the issue.

The Historic District is something my mother put her heart into establishing. I believe that if it was worth her best efforts to help create it, it is surely worth my best efforts to help protect it. I'm sorry that my "meddling" has angered some people, but I have been driven by my fear that Bedford is losing its sense of fair play and respect for the law. I cannot imagine a time when Town management would have forced something on residents as is being done in this matter. In any case, what I have shared is either factually true or false. Where I reside can never change that.

I believe I have demonstrated why it would be improper to push ahead with the troubled plan before examining all the reasons it would be unwise to do so. If the Article were not non-binding, I would have urged you to support conducting the Article 7 vote by secret ballot, because that may be the only way any vote related to this issue could reflect the popular will.

Last November, Mark Siegenthaler identified the reasons he called for a secret ballot for Article 10 as: "the controversy surrounding the project, the degree of emotion felt by residents on both sides of the issue, and the desire for privacy in voting." He didn't seem to care that the same criteria applied to Petitioners' Articles 4 & 5 as well – and most critically, to ATM Articles 8 & 9.

The appearance that the Town's thumb was on the scale in both fire station votes last year has deeply alienated many residents. It was not a good look. Bonding issues have traditionally required secret ballots. Who can seriously doubt that in March 2022 that would have meant a difference of at least those 4 deciding votes? And then, what is advocated in Article 7 would have started moving forward two years ago.

Eight months later, the decision to withhold the protection of a secret ballot for Articles 4 & 5 was a high-water mark for blatant partisanship. The notion that, alternatively, seven residents would ask for a secret ballot in the face of inflamed passions and/or merely creeping impatience is a fallacy. The clunky process needs to be brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by March so that secret ballots are always there to preserve an honest outcome – especially in an Open Town Meeting.

If Bedford is ever going to heal, Town Meeting votes must be as truly representative as they can be, so that people will finally – win or lose – have faith again in the results.

As it stands, I expect that those who see and hear the compelling presentation and debate around Article 7 will be rewarded with an eye-opening evaluation of the risks that are involved in placing all the town's eggs in one basket – and the ways those risks can be constructively addressed.

Sincerely,

Margaret L. Donovan  
186 Pinehurst Avenue, 6E  
New York, NY 10033  
212-568-3898 / admin@mldonovan.com

cc: The Bedford Select Board Members  
The Bedford Historic District Commissioners  
The Bedford Finance Committee Members  
Interim Fire Chief Paul Sheehan  
Firefighters Local 2310 President Lt. Mark Daly  
Michael Seibert, Sponsor of Petitioners' Article 7  
Wayne Braverman, The Bedford Citizen

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### **The Site Selection Process:**

In the Select Board's YouTube video primer on Articles 8 & 9, Emily Mitchell told voters: *"If you explore that interactive GIS map on the project website, you will find explanations why other sites weren't selected. I can say with confidence that if there's a site in town within our radius for response time, we've looked at it."*

Eight months later, when Petitioners' Articles 4&5 were on the Special Town Meeting Warrant, Ms. Mitchell assured citizens: *"The process undertaken by the Select Board over more than ten years, was detailed, thoughtful, and appropriate."*

**The interactive map of "Site Candidates"** In fact, the much-vaunted interactive map of "Town Of Bedford Fire Station Site Candidates" was neither authoritative nor exhaustive.

Of the twelve so-called candidates (some of whom had no idea they were even in the running) four sites comprising five prized properties on The Great Road would never have been replaced with a fire station – including, of course, the Stearns Mansion and the Jonathan Bacon home. So, why were they ever called candidates? What was the point?

**1-9 Railroad Ave.** By the same token, why would one of the locations, in a prime spot for a station, that includes two lots totaling 68,500 square feet, be chosen and then ruled out for "needing to acquire multiple parcels to meet square footage required?"

That space, which has since been sold for condo units, is a quick jump to Great Road to travel North or West, or Loomis to travel East, and if there were an emergency at the Middle School or the neighborhood surrounding it, it could quickly be accessed via Railroad Avenue. In other words, it is not locked into a busy Great Road block. It was also assessed at a lower figure relative to most of the other properties.

But the Town decided it would make more sense to dig up a signature stretch of the Historic District – with a host of drawbacks that Executive Session minutes revealed were recognized by Chief Grunes early on, including the grade, the shape, and the fabric of the neighborhood – than to be willing to explore combining two parcels. That is disturbing.

**50 Loomis Street** How could anyone take seriously a map that pairs up The Bedford Professional Building at 50 Loomis Street with the residence beside it rather than the industrial space behind it? It would make for a far more appropriate station than 139TGR. And if a substation were factored in, 50 Loomis Street alone would make a great site – and offer the host of alternate routes to the Great Road mentioned for 1-9 Railroad Ave.

**Bedford Motel** Also dismissed was the 20 North Road location, with 50% more usable land than 139 The Great Road, making future growth a definite advantage over 139TGR. It is just a couple of hundred feet beyond the arbitrary Willson Park cut-off – but within the official “response circle” that extends half a mile from the current station and does not increase response time more than a minute to any part of the town. It also has multiple routes that can be used to avoid being locked into the Great Road.

The official reason for ruling it out was “due to not meeting response time requirements” but it is worth pointing out that it is closer to West Bedford, which is the part of town with the most calls and the biggest increase in calls over at least a decade. What’s more, the North Rd. travel time to the Middlesex Turnpike vicinity is on par with the other main routes.

And of course, if it met response times to begin with, how could that be the reason for disqualifying it later? Finally, it would pair up beautifully with an eastern substation.

Its assessed value (at the time) was comparable to 139 The Great Road and tax revenue lost would have been balanced by the tax revenue that would result from selling 139 TGR. Furthermore, concerns that it was at a so-called difficult intersection were never insurmountable and will now be remediated due to the Carlisle Road development.

**The Tot Lot** One other option that should be mentioned appears in an email Sarah Stanton wrote after she and Chief Grunes met with the Webber Ave. abutters in March of 2020. She said the residents “expressed a preference to build the Fire Station at our Town Complex, and asked for further detail of why that site was definitely ruled out.”

That shows a good example of why the so-called detailed, thoughtful, and appropriate process was disillusioning to many residents: A legitimate site that already belonged to the town should have been on any legitimate site map – along with the reasons it was ruled out.

How could the Stearns Mansion credibly be included while the Tot Lot wasn’t? Considering how ideal it would have been in terms of cost, size, and location, ruling it out should have included evidence that safety concerns could not be managed. And only then, ruling it out should have been the decision of Bedford residents – not the Town Manager’s Office.

Each of these sites, even the motel’s location on the outskirts of the Historic District – in an industrial zone – would have taken *far less time* to develop than the Town had any reason to expect would be required at 139 The Great Road. If that doesn’t rise to the level of a dereliction of duty, it surely comes close.

When the Select Board voted unanimously at the end of 2019, to acquire 175 The Great Road. the size and location made it eminently suitable, and it had the enthusiastic support of both BFD officers and the rank-and-file. After the negotiations did not pan out, the three “candidates” the Town had identified, underlined above, were all advantageously located, not excessively priced, and there was no reason to assume any of them would require eminent domain, so why weren’t the owners approached?

The fallacy of weighing 139 TGR against TD Bank and saying it would save \$6,000,000 dollars and a couple of years for eminent domain was offensive to those who knew better. TD Bank was neither the only alternative nor the most feasible alternative.

The way to really honor the town’s firefighters would have been to choose one of the four uncomplicated properties mentioned here as soon as possible and start building. As things now stand, at the design team town forum in June, Sean Schmigle said Bedford’s new fire station could be operational early in 2026, *if all of the pieces fall into place.*

Not a good bet. But all four of the alternate sites mentioned would have none of the complications and limitations of the current project and would have therefore resulted in a facility more responsive to the Fire Department’s wants and needs – without cannibalizing the Historic District. As Don Corey has explained, never before in the State’s history has a Select Board actually sought the demolition of a Historic District property.

### **The Curious Timeline**

The February 3, 2022, presentation to the Joint Meeting of the Finance and Capital Expenditure Committees, included a timeline that is strangely inconsistent with other accounts. As a lead-up to an Annual Town Meeting Warrant Article, the presentation’s accuracy and reliability at the Joint Meeting were especially important.

The timeline noted that in Winter 2021, the “Select Board requested staff to reevaluate sites, including historic and residential properties.” So, one of my first FOIA requests was for documentation of that search and the results. But I was told there were no records. Not one.

The next entry on the timeline was Summer 2021, explaining “Staff reached out to Utah State University, learned that they were preparing 139 The Great Road for sale.” But how, with 12 possible sites minus 4 ineligible properties minus TD Bank, could it have taken until the Summer to call one of the remaining 7 locations? And have nothing to show for the others?

The timeline then reports: Summer/Fall 2021 “Due diligence with legal, design, public safety, and traffic consultants. Real estate negotiation with Utah State University.”

But according to Executive Session minutes, on October 25, 2021, “Ms. Stanton asked for guidance from the Select Board for the next two weeks: should she contact the University of Utah to ascertain their interest, or continue pursuing eminent domain for 175 Great Road? Ascertaining interest at the end of October after reporting extensive due diligence and real estate negotiations in the Summer/Fall is obviously not accurate.

Then, at the next Select Board Executive Session on November 22, 2021, “Ms. Stanton reported that she and Chief Grunes spoke with the University of Utah about the possibility of acquiring 139 Great Road, and the university was thrilled by the possibility. Stewart Radiance Laboratory has been planning to move out of the building in March 2022 and was expecting to put the property up for sale; they would be pleased to sell to the Town.”

How Ms. Stanton could have delivered a presentation that was so clearly out of sync with actual events needs to be answered by those who worked closely with her on the project. But what is just as baffling is why there was no follow-up to the Select Board request at the beginning of the year that staff reevaluate the sites. Who worked on those efforts? Who did they contact? What did they learn? Why were no notations made on a log or emails written with updates on the progress?

Most importantly, why didn't the Town Manager's Office advertise in the Winter of 2021 when the “reevaluation” of sites began? The Town asserted a year later that “this is a unique property and that therefore advertising concerning this acquisition will not benefit the Town's interest.” But can anyone explain why it wouldn't have benefitted the Town's interest to “test the market” when the reevaluations ostensibly started in early 2021?

A records request for the means by which staff was asked by the Select Board to start the reevaluation in Winter 2021 is pending and now overdue. The online minutes for the Select Board begin in 2020, so perhaps the request was made at the end of 2019. But it is still not clear why the Town Manager's Office couldn't produce a single record of activity and Select Board minutes do not include a single report on the staff's findings for most of 2021. If voters had known that do you think that 4-vote-margin would have held?

### **The Use of Executive Sessions**

The widespread assumption that the Select Board had conducted a hands-on search behind closed doors was not true. In fact, even though the Select Board told staff to reevaluate sites early in 2021, the October 25, 2021, minutes were *the first time the Fire Station was even mentioned in executive session going back to January 2020!* So, if it was not discussed in executive session, when was it discussed?

On February 13, 2022, *The Bedford Citizen* reported: “Over the past five years, the Selectmen have evaluated all the proposed site locations in Executive Session.” But from January 2020 through to the end of October 2021 there was no evaluation of anything related to the new fire station taking place in executive session or anywhere else!

As Bill Moonan tried to explain at last year's STM, the Select Board relied too heavily on the Town Manager's Office. Unfortunately, his statement was repeatedly interrupted by the Town Moderator but what he said follows:

“First, I feel I should apologize, that as a Selectman, I did not try to force a more thorough discussion of the siting process. The Select Board was presented with a plan to have one central fire station located so that response time would not vary



by more than three minutes from current levels to any location in Bedford. The process involved drawing a half-mile circle around the current station, and deciding what locations within that circle, might be acceptable.

“While the Select Board was kept informed of the search process, the decision to pursue one or another alternative rested with Town staff who provided the Board with the reasons staff felt one approach was better than another. The Select Board never questioned these decisions with any vigor. With hindsight, that was very unfortunate. *If we had been more active in the process and had included the public from the outset, we wouldn't be here tonight.*” [Italics added.]

### **Sketchy Due Diligence**

The results of my research do not support the assumption that the Town did the due diligence that was required or that residents can rely on the official account of what has transpired. Instead, it appears that the urgency of building a fitting facility for Bedford's first responders seems to have been used to justify employing some highly questionable means to achieve it.

Beyond the irregularities in the site search, these two issues stand out:

Soil Samples- A Records Request could provide no record of a soil sample having been done either prior to the purchase or for at least a year after.

Utility Poles- A Records Request resulted in no records of the DPW being consulted about the buried wires – again, either prior to the purchase or for at least a year after.

Before presenting a project like this to the Finance Committee for a recommendation wouldn't it have been assumed that the Town Manager's Office would have cleared the prospect of changing the grade and moving utility poles with the Department of Public Works – before doing due diligence on “legal, design, public safety, and traffic consultants?” And certainly, before the real estate negotiation with Utah State University?

I know that when the wires were being buried, my mother's office at 138 The Great Road was virtually closed for lack of telephone service – for many weeks. And that was before everything was wired. Only imagine the potential disruptions and unintended consequences now! Neither moving the poles nor changing the grade may create problems, but how could anyone think it was proper to bring such an enormous purchase to the Finance Committee – or Town Meeting -- without first alerting them to all of the potential problems?

### **Ethical Lapses**

**The Select Board Handbook** Under the “Ethics” heading in the Handbook is the stated duty to “represent the entire community at all times.” But the Town's new fire station search became adversarial under Sarah Stanton. When many knowledgeable residents with

decades of experience in the town's self-governance objected to the opaque way the site search and procurement was handled, officials primed the pump of division and innuendo.

That was a flagrant breach of faith that effectively drowned out the voices of concerned citizens with legitimate concerns about the many good faith reasons to oppose the current plan. That resulted in a Town Meeting where people spoke as if convinced that a vote against the Bacon location was a vote against public safety and respect for the Bedford Fire Department in favor of narrow, selfish, interests.

Many of the town's legislators came in with minds made up. How else to explain why even after the compelling comment of 30-year member of the BFD Tom Piccirillo, who declared based on his experience as both a first responder and a licensed contractor that 139 The Great Road was not suitable for the new station, people continued to stand up and charge others with not caring about the firefighters or public safety?

And they still saying it! That level of emotionalism and irrationality has resulted in a cohort of apologists for the Town dismissing every red flag and insisting that any effort to tackle the situation would set the project back and result in a long battle for eminent domain. That is sheer nonsense. And that biased approach, implicitly supported in statements by the Select Board, is what is really setting the project back.

**Inconsistent Discipline** I should add here that the manner in which HDC Commissioner Karl Winkler flaunted his disregard for the rules at the 2022 Annual Town Meeting contributed to the division from the start.

The Select Board's handbook "governing the discretion and impartiality required of Town committee members" instructs Committee members to "[a]ssume a high level of integrity, striving toward fact-based and objective public statements and deliberations. Make decisions only after all facts on a question have been presented and discussed."

He was obviously free to vote for the acquisition but stridently announcing before the ATM vote that he would support it was a violation – and should have been swiftly censured by the Select Board. That would have made it clear that what is called for in the Committee and Select Board Handbooks is binding on all Bedford's public servants --- not just the ones who hold approved views.

But, Mr. Winkler was only mirroring the Select Board's stance. So, as it stands, the Select Board's silence was and is an endorsement of his infraction and the concept of transactional enforcement that does not serve the town well.

## **Town Meeting**

The official rationale that was mirrored over and over again in the ATM comments and often online before and ever since was based on the Town's insistence that there were no other viable properties. That naturally created frustration and bitterness on the part of the

many town residents who believed that was true. Long before the event, it should have been clear that the only way to have reached a trustworthy vote count under the supercharged circumstances was by secret ballot – and that should be acknowledged now.

Apparently, officials had no faith in the process, or they would have done just that. Particularly because Bedford traditionally holds bonding article votes by secret ballot. But when the hand-count tally was announced on March 29, 2022, and Article 8 only passed the 2/3 bonding threshold by 4 votes, a project that would easily exceed \$20,000,000 did not trigger a recount. Four seconds later the Town Moderator moved on to Article 9.

The vote on Article 9 was especially problematic. Carol Amick proposed 2 amendments. The first made the closing contingent on the Historic District Commission approval – the Town rejected that because it would have made Article 8 moot. But her second amendment to decrease the design phase funding from \$2 million to \$100,000 was clearly, without a doubt, in the public interest.

The straightforward motion was based upon the advice of two architects who were familiar with Bedford and believed that the schematic drawings the HDC would need to either approve or reject the project would require possibly 9 months and should cost no more than \$100,000 – maybe no more than \$60,000!

The Town’s reasoning for dismissing the huge savings was that the language of Article 8 was contingent upon the design funding! Even though passing the motion would have satisfied the purpose of Article 9 – to secure HDC approval in as accelerated a manner as possible – for a small fraction of the investment they were asking for, officials rejected it.

The reason was, incredibly, because it conflicted with their wording of Article 8. And then I think that voters followed suit because Carol’s involvement, backed by years in the State Legislature, dedicated service to the town, and who was fighting for the Historic District she and Bill love had already been written off by Town officials and reduced in every TBC report as [nothing but] “an abutter.” As far as I am concerned, what silly, insulting garbage!

If it was just a matter of logistics, a Special Town Meeting could have been called on the fly. But to re-word the two articles and hold an emergency STM a couple of weeks later in order to save 1,900,000 taxpayer dollars was somehow not advisable.

Why wouldn’t the Town jump at the chance to reduce design costs by 95% -- or even 50?

Why wasn’t the HDC consulted on what level of design was required to meet its needs?

Could it be that the enormous investment of time and money that would go into the full design phase was a key part of the strategy to pressure the HDC to comply?

## **Factoring In a Substation**

Even if building a substation is not immediately feasible, it is a seriously critical issue that should be figured in as a later phase of the overall building program. How is it possible to make such a tremendous investment while denying equal protection to the percentage of taxpayers who are now second-class residents? Without a substation being at least factored in, how is it possible to claim that response time matters?

In addition to Tom Piccirillo's moving comment about response time to East Bedford at Annual Town Meeting, the following comment appeared following a TBD letter soon after:

“If the town is going to strong arm the HDC into demo'ing that building, they might as well abolish the HDC and deny any historical relevance of the town.... but maybe that's the point. What's even worse is the fact that it's not even an ideal spot. Bedford Motel was not even broached by the town and all I kept hearing was “response time”. What standard is this “response time” and “center of town” dictated on? If we really had issue with response time, why are we not talking about the elephant in the room that is East Bedford (takes 8 min) to get out there. There are 3 big apartment complexes, 2 preschools, a growing commercial community and a multitude of accidents between Rt 3, Rt 3/62 cloverleaf and Burlington Road. These all present potential medical emergencies taking resources to the other end of town. “Response Time” cannot be applicable when talking about the difference between 139 Great and Bedford Motel and then be completely thrown out the window when discussing the whole East Bedford district. To the community as a Bedford Firefighter of nearly 15 years, the outpouring of support was much appreciated prior to this vote and I'm sorry that the narrative was “you have to vote YES if you truly support your first responders”. That couldn't have been further from the truth as this community has always shown the BFD love and support and we are truly blessed to serve this community.”

So why is a substation given short shrift? Instead of all the glib hearsay about double staffing, double operating expenses, and neighboring towns' response network a preliminary evaluation of all the issues involved is certainly indicated and would be really valuable.

I will add here that in 2015, Bedford EMTs got me over to Lahey when I was bleeding to death. I will never forget how grateful I was to see them arrive and can easily understand what a difference a few more minutes could be. So, it is deeply troubling that officials keep dismissing the substation dilemma that has been an issue for a long time as something that has no bearing on the matter of where to build the headquarters when the connection is inescapable. At what point does that become a dereliction of duty?

## **Bedford TV**

Finally, I should mention the unfortunately spotty public record. Every meeting related to the Fire Station project should have been recorded and preserved. Even now, Building Committee and Historic District Commission meetings are not often covered unless requested by a resident and there is a staff member available. And even though Bedford TV can post Zoom call videos, it seems that hybrid meetings are not allowed – at least for the HDC, who naturally want to conduct their business in person. So, Zooming is out.

When I requested BTV coverage of an HDC hearing some months ago it was finally approved by the Town Manager's Office – and when *The Bedford Citizen* report came out it was clear that no matter how conscientious and capable Mike Rosenberg clearly is, nothing can replace the value of monitoring the actual meeting itself.

It is disturbing to realize that so much of the public record of this tremendously consequential project has been lost – for no good reason. In the interests of transparency, I hope you will make preserving the record of the entire process a top priority by directing the resources needed to cover these events or at least arrange for hybrid Zoom calls to be available when Bedford TV is not.

## **Article 7**

I have presented clear evidence that material facts were withheld, misrepresented, or for whatever reason not shared with citizens prior to the vote on a bonding issue that was approved by a meager four votes. It is too bad that there was no way that the town's legislators could have been empowered to require that their elected officials act now to stop the bleeding of time and funds from a misbegotten project and develop Plan B.

But if the result of Mike Seibert's presentation of Article 7 is that delivering a truly wonderful station could actually happen much sooner than is now projected it will have accomplished a lot – binding or not. If the town starts pulling together using the famous Amish barn-raising model, the sky's the limit for the new Bedford Fire Station.

Two days before I came up to collect signatures at Bedford Day and then in front of Stop and Shop, *The Bedford Citizen* published a report based on an email I had sent to Wayne Braverman. I was incredibly surprised by the headline – “Petitioners’ Articles Intended to Derail Fire Station Project.” I left this comment:

“I don't think that trying to reroute a runaway train before it goes over a cliff qualifies as derailing it. The Bedford Citizen article on Sunday explained that HDC approval is not a “slam dunk” — and it never was. So why wasn't there a Plan B from the start? The statement of Bedford's Professional Firefighters Local 2310 is

a stunning testimony that Bedford needs to rethink the current agenda for many urgent reasons and fast. The upcoming Special Town Meeting is the best possible time to get this right. I have tried my best to help. That is why I will be sitting out in the rain all weekend.”

But there was another comment posted that is particularly worth repeating here:

“With all due respect, I remember when journalism didn’t use inflammatory rhetoric – much less headline it. To be clear I don’t know this lady. Don’t care where the station goes AS LONG AS the BFD is fully satisfied and has ALL their needs met. Recently, when I walked into the remodelled Dunkin Donuts on Great Road, I mentioned how great the new layout looked. The manager sighed. “Sure it looks nice, but it takes 2x as many steps for us to complete the same order. It’s awful. No one asked us – we could have told them.” This should not be political. Listen to the Firefighters Local 2310.”

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There are so many tired assumptions in this saga that are circulated over and over – and so many *sub-urban* legends out there to clean up, but that can only happen when the comprehensive narrative of the project is told and vetted. Going forward, the history above will be linked to *Millions of Dollars and No/Sense* on the homepage of SaveOurBlock.org and will continue to be developed because there is a good deal more that needs to be added.

Challenges to any assertions should be sent to [info@saveourblock.org](mailto:info@saveourblock.org). made will be taken seriously. The veracity of the facts and fairness of the conclusions is what will make this resource useful. I hope it will contribute to resolving the hard feelings now dividing the town I call home.