

July 9, 2025

The Town of Bedford Select Board  
10 Mudge Way  
Bedford, MA 01730

### A BETTER PLAN

Dear Mr. Mortenson, Ms. Malone, Mr. Hanegan, Mr. Brosgol, and Mr. Parker:

**The current plan for the new fire station is a grave disappointment to an untold number of Bedford residents. I believe that the following plan would please virtually everybody – while at the same time better serving those who are now underserved. I hope that each of you will read this proposal and recognize a fiduciary duty to review and discuss its merits at your next regular meeting. That would do no harm, but, quite possibly, a world of good.**

This is a matter that pulls on everyone's heartstrings, and that will have a decisive effect on the image and value of the town itself. That makes it crucial to arrive at a solution where every resident's best interests will win, where everyone will be able to drive past the new fire station with pride, and where no one will feel the pain of sadness and regret.

Thomas Edison said: "Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time." **Perhaps the saddest result of settling for a consolation prize is that we deprive ourselves of the pleasures and benefits that might have been.** With that in mind, I offer this much more feasible and far superior alternative to the current plan.

The goal of a new fire station is to give Bedford's firefighters and the town's residents what they need and deserve. Therefore, if the following plan meets the department's and people's present and long-term needs better than the current plan, there is still time to let the people decide their future. It deserves a town-wide referendum at a Special Town Meeting in September where a thorough cost/benefit analysis would surely result in far more support than the current plan's 268 votes in March 2022.

**The elements are simple, and every objection will be overcome in the outline that follows.**

- The Town offers to build the American Legion a great new home at 139 The Great Road that is just steps from Veteran's Park and finds a temporary space for the transition.
- The Town builds a new building at 139 The Great Road with the same façade as the one that is being demolished and landscapes the property. The design would offer the Legion a greatly enhanced facility at no cost.
- The Town adapts and upgrades the existing firehouse plans to a lot of essentially the same shape at 357 The Great Road and converts 55 The Great Road to a substation.
- When the BFD Headquarters open, the town will have a ready-made, land and construction cost-free substation at 55 The Great Road.

The respective benefits include a far more functional and impressive fire station at the entrance to the town – where it would fit in with its surroundings (without all the drawbacks of the current unsuitable location); a cost-free, tailor-made new home for the Legion that brings with it the pride of having made the solution possible; the protection of the integrity of the town's priceless Historic District; and last, but hardly least, a functioning substation; all within a year of the projected late-2026 timetable.

**It is imperative that the Town stop seeing the new station separately from a long-term solution to protect Bedford's people. By building a headquarters at the east end of The Great Road, a substation becomes not only feasible but – when the millions of dollars in land and construction savings are credited in the overall balance sheet – a duty. That opportunity will soon pass.**

**There is good reason to think that spending \$40 million on the new station would critically delay the reality of a substation for years to come. That is a very bad idea. The way that the Town has massaged experts' findings in the past to keep delaying a substation – while ignoring firefighters' passionate, expert conviction that the matter has life and death consequences now – is deplorable.**

If, for instance, design and construction estimates for the new Legion Hall came in around \$3,300,000 and the \$1,700,000 purchase price was added to that, the town would pay approximately \$5 million for the land for the two stations and one fully functioning substation.

And the \$2 million spent on the project to date would not be a waste because the project manager, designer, and construction team have been identified, have a keen understanding of the variables, and would probably be glad to put that knowledge to work on a far more satisfying project.

---

### The Headquarters

- This configuration is very similar to Lexington's arrangement of stations at either end of Mass. Ave. Not only would that spread significantly improve EMS rescue times to the underserved northeast corridor, but it would enhance response time to a large swath of the residents east of Loomis Street and north of The Great Road – when seconds matter.
- The width of the 375 TGR property will accommodate four bays and a circulating driveway.
- The current Legion building includes a basement level. The space behind that footprint could accommodate a 75' x 120' extension that would include a third floor (as does the Bedford Plaza down the block) to house the training tower and abundant space to more than compensate for the fact that the lot is not as deep as 139 TGR.
- The angled parking along the east perimeter could face a public entrance on the side of the facility instead of in the rear. The wraparound driveway would be a big improvement over the current site.
- The existing lot to the west is always mostly empty and could allow for overflow parking when needed. The MBTA enclosure could be repositioned there. And the signalization would likely be a good deal less expensive.
- The outbuilding storage would be accommodated in a reconfigured 55 The Great Road station.

- The obvious fire station would remain a fire station.
- The new facility would fit into its surroundings, rather than overpowering and overshadowing them.
- In every way, this proposal is an objective improvement on the current firehouse plans.

### The Bacon Property

- Ownership for forty years by an out-of-state research entity allowed the once prime property to become lackluster. An application to restore the appearance from the street would sail through the HDC and would allow for the porch awning and plantings that once made the carriage house quite attractive.
- The savings in cost and time of not excavating the front yard would be substantial.
- Sparing the signature stone wall that the last Mrs. Bacon built to mark the outline of their domain would preserve the authenticity of the block.
- Selling the property to the Legion for \$1 would circumvent the Town's attempt to forestall other uses of the property. They could sell it back at some point and receive a perpetual lease.
- The Legion's cozy atmosphere could be recreated in the front, alongside a breezeway for summer dining, a fireplace, and a large flex-space hall for dances and rentals. The second floor could be studio apartments for rental income or provide additional Town office space.
- And a manifestly out-of-place facility would not overshadow the Bedford Center Historic District.

### Prospective Timetable

- August 2025 Identify the elements needed to implement the program.
- Late Sept 2025 Hold a Special Town Meeting. If the article(s) pass...
- October 2025 Start the process of adapting the fire station design to the new location.  
Request proposals for the designer and contractor of the new Legion Hall.
- February 2026 Present the design to the HDC and vote for Certificate of Appropriateness.
- March 2026 Begin construction of new Legion at 139 The Great Road.  
Demolish the existing Legion Hall and begin construction of new station.
- November 2026 Final touches on the new Legion. Dedication on Veterans Day.
- Sept 2027 Move into new Fire Department Headquarters. Establish Substation.  
Dedicate both on Bedford Day.

One of the concerns that keeps coming up in letters to the editor of *The Bedford Citizen* is a lack of community respect and harmony, as well as broad civic engagement. Some of that is part of a national malaise. But much of it can be traced back to the dreadful division that was fostered by the Town's campaign to impose and enforce the current site for the new fire station.

There is no way to measure how many people objected and were saddened by the project, but were not willing to let their lives get mired in the controversy – and still aren't – but would probably love this prospect. Or how many people are losing faith in the democratic process.

But this all hinges on whether the Town will find the way to provide a suitable temporary home for the Legion. And whether business-as-usual barriers are set aside.

Working together – as the Amish famously do to literally raise a sturdy barn in a single day – would soothe and inspire a weary community, because the celebration and harmony that comes with effectively collaborating for a shared goal is a great antidote for dissension and hard feelings.

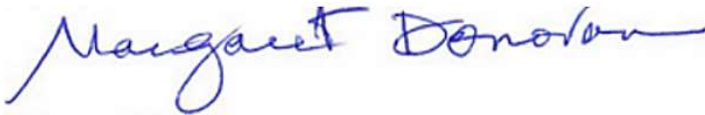
That would maybe be the biggest gift the townspeople can offer the town's firefighters and veterans – the guardians who know how important it is to sacrifice pettiness and unite in service for the good of all.

**There is nothing outlined above that isn't possible with unity and good will. The massive Empire State Building was built in the Great Depression in just fourteen months! Please take this to heart.**

The goal of a new fire station is to give Bedford's firefighters and the town's residents what they need and deserve. Therefore, if the outlined plan meets the department's and people's present and long-term needs better than the current plan, it deserves a town-wide referendum at a Special Town Meeting.

I doubt that anyone can find a single real downside to this proposal – or minimize a single one of the advantages. It makes sense in every way. Please give the citizens of Bedford the chance to reconsider the project – before it really is too late.

Best wishes,



Margaret Donovan

Copies to:

Matthew J. Hanson, Town Manager | Chief James Bailey | Captain Mark Sullivan | Lieutenant Mark Daly | Captain Scott Ricker | Captain John Daniels | Fire Station Building Committee Chair Jeff Cohen | Bedford Historic District Commissioners

Elizabeth Hacala | President, Board of Directors, *The Bedford Citizen*