

Boxborough Building Committee 2020

The Boxborough Building Committee (BBC) was appointed by the Select Board in 2016, shortly after the adoption of the Boxborough 2030 Master Plan, in accordance with a key goal and implementation action:

Boxborough 2030 context:

Goal 4.2. Maintain excellent municipal facilities and services.

Action 4.2.1.1. Continue to explore the creation of or finding locations for new Police and Fire Department facilities and Department of Public Works facilities.

Background: On the recommendation of the Building Committee the February 2018 Special Town Meeting approved purchase of the former Kaizen property for a DPW facility. With that major accomplishment, the committee resumed its search for suitable sites for fire, police, and dispatch. Since the current fire station is so severely deficient, we continued to give priority to finding a site for a new fire station. The preference was for a location along Mass Ave. From 2016 through the end of 2019 the committee evaluated thirteen sites along Mass Ave but found none that were both suitable and available for either fire or police facilities.

In November 2019, the committee concluded the most viable option for the town would be to use the town-owned parcel at 72 Stow Road for development of public safety facilities, and that future efforts should focus on it. Since it is town property, the committee noted that feasibility studies and development could proceed expeditiously. Further, site studies had previously been conducted by the Housing Board and revealed no showstoppers. Although not on Mass Ave, the location is nearby on a main town crossroad. At 13.4 acres, this property should be able to accommodate public safety facilities for fire, police and dispatch, and possibly other municipal uses.

2020 Accomplishments: During 2020 the Building Committee continued the efforts reported in the 2019 Town Report but under a revised charge. At their Jan 9, 2020 meeting, the (old) BBC voted to recommend to the Select Board development of the Stow Road property, and appointment of a new BBC with new charge.

At their Jan 21, 2020 meeting, the Select Board voted to appoint a new Building Committee with a charge to "... pursue development of the Stow Road property for public safety and potentially other town facilities..." A new building committee was appointed with a revised charge and membership expanded to represent community interests in additional uses of the property.

With the COVID-19 pandemic well underway, the committee began meeting by remote participation in accordance with the Governor's executive order of March 12, 2020. Our progress was slowed. On May 28 we elected Les Fox as chair and approved a detailed charter for consideration by the Select Board and recommended the town administrator be directed to prepare an RFQ for a feasibility study on 72 Stow Road. We also approved a presentation on a proposed feasibility study for annual town meeting, which was delayed to June 29 due to COVID-19. Due to the desire for more community outreach and more time to bring new BBC members up to speed on all the past work, the Board moved to pass over the feasibility study article at ATM.

On June 15, 2020, the Board approved a slightly revised charge clarifying that the BBC chair be elected from a Select Board member and the vice chair be elected from a FinCom member. The priority focus remains public safety facilities. At our Sept 29, 2020 meeting, Gary Kushner was elected vice-chair.

In November, the committee authorized the town administrator to engage HKT Architects and Pare Corporation Civil Engineers to carry out a site constraints study on the Stow Road site. The site soil and subsurface characteristics will be examined with test pits and/or borings. This will inform decisions and options for placement of a site septic system, and whether ledge is present. The constraints study will tell us what is

possible on the site considering the location of lot lines, setbacks, and nearby private wells and septic systems. A high-level site utilization study will be performed using current estimates of functional space needs, parking requirements, apparatus movements, sizing of a public water supply well, septic system, storm water management, and so on. The site constraints study will help us determine what additional uses might be possible with the site in addition to the public safety primary use. Contracts with HKT and Pare were executed in late December 2019. We expect the site work to begin by mid-January 2021. It is our intention to present the results of the site constraints study at the 2021 annual town meeting.

During the latter part of 2020, the committee worked on education and outreach – developing materials to help familiarize new members with all the past work, as well as to inform residents. We developed a narrative in the form of an FAQ (frequently asked questions) on a number of topics related to public safety operations and facilities. We established a communications sub-team to develop and publish information for residents via the town website, print media (eg., Bee and Buzz), social media (Facebook, etc), and video forums – BXB-TV government channel cable broadcasts and video-on-demand. The senior community was kept abreast of developments by the COA member of the BBC. The police and fire chiefs prepared video tours of both police and fire facilities to show how the buildings are used on a daily basis, and where and how they are deficient. All of the electronic media streams will be published on the town website live in early 2021.

Committee meetings have been attended regularly by a number of residents during the year. In 2021 we will include a “citizens’ concerns” section on the regular agenda and plan to hold a number of community forums – virtually while we must, but with the hope that we can soon return to in-person meetings.