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### **Town Examines Sites for Fire and Public Works Buildings**

The Town of Amherst has identified two sites, which could serve as the future locations for a new Fire Department headquarters and a new Public Works facility. After years of study, the current Public Works facility at 586 South Pleasant Street has been identified as the best site for a new Fire Department headquarters. In addition, a 27-acre parcel of land on South East Street north of Stanley Street and Tamarack Drive has been identified as the preferred site for a new Public Works facility. The Town currently owns the site on South Pleasant Street. Amherst College owns the site on South East Street.

The need to address the decrepit conditions of the Central Fire Station downtown and the current Public Works facility have been well documented. While it was established that the current Public Works site on South Pleasant Street was the best location for a Fire Department headquarters, finding a location that was large enough to accommodate a new Public Works facility proved to be a challenge.

In the course of planning for both projects, the Town engaged with numerous property owners including our non-profit institutional partners. The Town was very pleased when Amherst College stepped forward and offered the Town the opportunity to explore locating a Public Works facility on 27 acres it owns on the east side of South East Street, with the undertaking of a proper dialogue with the surrounding community a part of the process. If plans move forward, the College has indicated that it would offer the land as part of a 99-year lease for \$1.00.

Town Council President Lynn Griesemer said, “After years of study and documentation, it is clear the Town needs a new Fire Department headquarters and Public Works facility. We have been working to find locations for over a decade. We are delighted that Amherst College has given the Town permission to explore the feasibility of locating a Public Works facility on land it owns. We are dedicated to working closely with abutters and neighbors as we explore this possibility.”

Neighborhood outreach in the South East Street/Stanley Street/Tamarack Drive neighborhood has already begun as Town staff have gone door-to-door to introduce the idea and to speak with and listen to neighbors one-on-one. Representatives from the Town attended a neighborhood association meeting and, on Saturday, were available at Kiwanis Park for neighbors and abutters to discuss the proposal and potential impacts the construction of the facility may have on them.

In addition, there will be two more opportunities to discuss this project with the general public at District Meetings hosted by District 2 Councilors Lynn Griesemer and Pat DeAngelis. The two general meetings will be on:

- July 8, 2019 6:00 PM at Fort River School Cafeteria, and
- July 23, 2019 6:00 PM at Fort River School Cafeteria.

All members of the public are welcome to attend. Town staff will make a presentation and there will be ample opportunity for comments, questions and answers. The Town has set up a special webpage that will house developing information on these two projects, which can be found here: [www.amherstma.gov/projects](http://www.amherstma.gov/projects)

Questions and concerns can also be directed to the Town Manager and the Town Council

- By phone at (413) 259-3002
- By email at [townmanager@amherstma.gov](mailto:townmanager@amherstma.gov) and [towncouncil@amherstma.gov](mailto:towncouncil@amherstma.gov)

#### Background Information:

The Town of Amherst has a long history of “making do” with its major facilities. The last significant new municipal building in Town was the Police Station built in 1989 – 30 years ago. For a generation, the Town has not addressed the significant needs it has in capital expenditures for public buildings. These needs include outdated fire and public works facilities, schools, fields, roads and sidewalks. This backlog must be addressed to meet the needs of a growing and changing community.

In recent years, the Town has taken tangible steps to address its roads and sidewalks. It is now poised, with careful financial planning, to address the capital investment in facilities for fire, public works, schools, and libraries.

A new fire department headquarters has been discussed for decades with the earliest study being presented to the Town in 1966 with additional studies being completed in 1983 and 2006. The deficiencies of the central fire station, built in 1929, are numerous from garage bays that do not meet the space requirements for modern fire and ambulance apparatus to living quarters for our firefighters that are abysmal. Professional analysis of response times and coverage areas identified the location for a replacement fire headquarters as being south of downtown on South Pleasant or West Street. Locations in East Amherst were not appropriate as not all fire apparatus can fit beneath the two train trestles on South East Street.

The department of public works has been operating out of an abandoned trolley barn that just celebrated its 100th birthday. The building is small – several DPW divisions are housed in buildings in other parts of town – and it has outdated facilities for our hard-working staff that maintain our water, sewer, parks, trees, highways, and sidewalks.

The Town established a DPW-Fire Study Committee to address the issues. Additional analysis confirmed earlier studies that recommended the fire station be relocated south of downtown and that a public works facility with adequate facilities for staff and needed acreage for operations was necessary. Vehicles worth hundreds of thousands of dollars are stored out of doors, shortening their useful lives.

During the past two years, the Town has explored multiple options – some that were identified by the studies and some that were developed independently. Every option was explored for suitability. Discussions were held with representatives of Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts.

After the Town identified the site on South East Street and determined it had met all the requirements for a public works facility – adequate acreage, central access, upland with buildable acreage – Town officials met with Amherst College officials. After much deliberation and consultation, Amherst College expressed openness to permitting the Town to explore the feasibility of developing a public works facility on this site.

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