

RECCOMENDATION TO THE SELECT BOARD FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS FACILITY COMMITTEE REGARDING THE NEXT STEPS TOWARDS A NEW DPW FACILITY

Approved October 19, 2022

On January 10, 2022 the Select Board approved the creation of the Department of Public Works Facility Study Committee (DPWFSC) "...to evaluate the options for the reconstruction or renovation of the DPW facilities located at 14 Forest Road including the Transfer Station." There was a call for community members to volunteer, and the at large members were approved by the Select Board to augment the specific positions called for in the charge. The members of the DPWFSC are:

Dean Charter, Select Board designee, committee chair

Roland Bourdon, Finance Committee designee

Erik Larson, Green Advisory Board designee

Mark Hald, Town Manager designee

Corey York, Public Works Director

Ann Chang, At Large Member

Robert Puffer, At Large Member, committee clerk

Ken Henderson, At Large Member

Fred Faherty, At Large Member

The Committee conducted eight public meetings, toured the present DPW Facility, toured the Westford DPW facility, met with representatives of Weston and Sampson regarding their 2021 Architectural and Engineering Study of the present DPW facility, and had a joint session with the Select Board and Weston and Sampson in July, 2022. All meetings and tours were open to the public and were noticed in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. Several members of the public attended the meetings and/or tours, and commented on specific issues. The Town Engineer and the Highway Superintendent attended some of the sessions to provide additional insights.

The Weston & Sampson report dealt specifically with the existing complex on the existing site. The committee did not give a great deal of consideration about placing a new facility on a new site. There are really obvious reasons for staying on the present site over the long term. Those reasons include:

1. The present site is geographically central to the Town, cutting down on loss of productivity and higher expense due to travel time.
2. The existing road network makes the flow of traffic and operations (including the Transfer Station) smooth and efficient.

3. All of the neighbors have moved into the area since the present operation began, and made home purchases with that understanding. Quite a bit of new development has actually occurred since the building opened.
4. Land in Acton is both expensive and scarce. Buying a new site would be costly, controversial, and would take property off the tax rolls.
5. The Dog Park Committee spent several years trying to find a much smaller site for something that should have been non-controversial. Siting an “industrial” size operation in a centralized location in town would be extremely difficult.

The Committee reached an overwhelming consensus regarding the recommendation to the Select Board shown below. Our charge was to complete our work by October, 2022, and then be available to provide additional input until the end of 2022. We would be available to provide our recommendations in a public forum, which probably should be at another joint meeting with the Select Board before the committee dissolves on December 31, 2022, as provided for in the Charge.

1. The present facility is undersized, inadequate, not in good condition, and inappropriate for present requirements. Published reports from 1969 show that the proposal for the present facility was scaled back by over 30% from the acknowledged need for a community of 14,000, much less than for a community of 24,000 (a 72% increase in population). Speculation at that time (over fifty years ago) was that the building would prove to be inadequate before the construction bond was paid off. In 1969 there were 83 miles of Town roads, with a very limited number of sidewalks. In 2022 there are 116 miles of Town roads, plus 54 miles of sidewalks. The maintenance of this infrastructure has required an expansion of both the work force and the equipment stock.
2. This is a very significant project, and should be pursued in a phased approach. The general practice for all of Acton’s major capital projects has always been to conduct a feasibility study, then a design and cost estimate, then construction after approval at Town Meeting. The Weston and Sampson report serves as the feasibility study, the review and recommendation by the DPWFSC serves to “ground truth” the observations of the Weston and Sampson report.
3. The Committee decided early on that the focus of our work should be on the DPW facility itself, and that a detailed analysis of the Transfer Station operations and possible upgrades should be deferred for financial, operational, and “political” reasons. That said, the unanimous agreement within the Committee was that eventually the Transfer Station and related facilities need to be addressed. The Committee was also unanimous that the Transfer Station should continue to operate, and there was vehement opposition to the idea of closing that station and going to universal curb side pick-up. There was also comment from the public in the meetings expressing satisfaction with the Transfer Station, and suggesting some improvements to the flow and the swap shop.
4. The Committee decided that the highest priority in the phased approach was to address the present fuel depot, which sits in the middle of the site, provides fuel for all Town and School District vehicles, and is composed of underground storage tanks that are close to the end of expected life of the tanks (although they are closely monitored by third party inspectors). Even

with the expected transition to a more electrified fleet, there will still be a need for fuel tanks over the next twenty years. These tanks will need to be moved in order to reconstruct the DPW building, and relocation/replacement of the tanks would serve a number of goals. Moreover, this prioritization of the tanks was an approved Select Board short term goal approved in July, 2022, and in October, 2022, (while this report was being drafted), the Select Board approved the use of \$250,000 from American Rescue Plan Act funds for the design and permitting of the DPW Building and Fuel Depot. This allocation was also recommended by the Finance Committee. Work on this portion of the project needs to be moved ahead immediately.

5. The Committee recognized that a more developed site plan needs to be produced, and recommend the funding necessary to move ahead with this. In addition to the obvious requirements of a site plan, it is important to make sure that a comprehensive site plan prevents “getting painted into a corner” as a result of any preliminary work (such as the relocation of the fuel depot. Public input at one session specifically noted the need to investigate possible off site contamination issues, such as in Coles Brook, and we feel that this should be looked into. The site plan will address present day requirements for stormwater management, as such standards were not in existence in 1969.
6. The overwhelming majority of the Committee felt that the Weston and Sampson report provided a good summary of the obvious defects of the present building and what sort of features were needed in a new facility. The specific issues the Committee called out as defects or needs included:
 - A. Safety and security of personnel, the public, and the equipment,
 - B. Inadequate physical space needs and the inefficiencies brought about by that lack of space,
 - C. Indoor Air quality,
 - D. Seismic concerns of an unreinforced concrete masonry unit (CMU) building,
 - E. Fire safety,
 - F. Traffic Flow,
 - G. Inadequate office spaces, inadequate staff/worker spaces (such as locker rooms for all genders, training and lunch room.
 - H. The opportunity to maximize energy saving features, such as solar and geothermal.

These, and other issues need to be addressed in the next phase of design.

7. The Committee recognized that the construction of a new facility will take years to design and complete. The site is very tight and most likely the majority of operations will need to be relocated to another site during construction. Planning should start early on to decide upon and secure a temporary location.
8. The Committee feels that the creation of a replacement DPW Facility is the highest priority physical infrastructure project for the Town of Acton, as the operations based therein impact the health, well-being, and everyday lives of every one of our 24,000 residents, and we recommend that the Select Board and the Town Manager prioritize and accelerate the project.