

**MINUTES FOR EXETER FACILITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FAC)  
MEETING, THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 8, 2020**

**TIME:** 4-5:40 pm, Zoom Meeting

**Attendees:** Rob Corson, Chair; Kris Weeks, Vice Chair; Mark Leighton, Peter Lennon, Clerk; Town Planner Dave Sharples, Fire Chief Eric Wilking.

**Scribe:** Peter Lennon

(1) **Previous Minutes:** The FAC approved the Minutes of the August 27, 2020 meeting by a 4-0 vote.

(2) **FAC Recommendations to Planning Board on Public Safety and Public Works Garage Projects in FY 21-26 Capital Improvement Program (CIP):** Pursuant to its Charge from the Select Board to assist Town Leadership in setting facilities priorities and budgets, the FAC discussed drafting recommendations to the Planning Board on two high-profile CIP projects.

As described in the Draft CIP, these projects are the Public Safety Alternative Analysis and Design and Engineering (\$400,000 in FY 21, Total amount: To Be Determined), and the Department of Public Works (DPW) Facility Garage (\$150,000 in FY 21, \$4,962,000 in FY 22, Total: \$5,112,000).

Throughout their discussion FAC members reiterated their support for both projects in view of the serious limitations and deficiencies in the current Public Safety complex and Public Works garage.

Chair Corson asked Clerk Lennon to summarize and explain the recommendations in the draft letter to the Planning Board that was before the FAC.

Mr. Lennon said the recommendations were based on the separate site walks for each project and the discussions with the Department heads and their staff for each project.

**Public Safety Project:**

He said it was a consensus among the three FAC members (Weeks, Leighton, Lennon) at the Public Safety site walk that the \$400,000 sought in FY 21 for analysis, design, and engineering should be reduced to about \$150,000 and should be used only for an analysis of alternatives and feasibility study, with design, engineering, and construction following in a second phase in later fiscal years.

The FAC members at the site walk felt it was necessary, after the alternatives analysis and feasibility study identified the preferred facilities alternative, to obtain public input and Town stakeholder input on that alternative before design began. He said the members did not want to see a repeat of the process used for the FY 20 Parks & Recreation Renovation/Expansion with so much design up front. That project was rejected by the taxpayers in March 2020, and he said we did not want to risk the public safety project money, and thus cause a project delay, in a similar way.

Mr. Lennon indicated that separating the analytical work from the other project phases provided more opportunity to obtain public support by obtaining and considering their inputs and because the initial (FY 21) budget request was less.

Vice Chair Weeks said the Parks & Rec project was an example of a project for which it probably would have been better to have more of a feasibility study and to have more public input before going into the design phase. He said the Public Safety project and the Parks & Rec project were comparable as each was/is complex and involves several locations.

Given the prospect of varying opinions about the scope and location of new or renovated public safety facilities, Mr. Weeks said it was his hope that the several iterations of the feasibility study, plus the public input, would produce a preferred option that would be ready to move into schematic design.

**-- FAC's Goal: Give the Community the Information to Support Project --**

Mr. Leighton said that what hurt the Parks and Recreation project with the voters was that, during its design phase, it grew significantly and dramatically. He indicated that separating the Public Safety project's analytical/feasibility phase from its design and engineering phase was intended to give the Town a better opportunity to flesh out all the options, avoid unaffordable growth in scope, and help the community to choose an option, so that, with community support, the project is ready to proceed smoothly into the design and construction phases.

Chair Corson stated that the FAC's goal was to outline a process that gives the community the information it needs to support the project and thus provides the greatest chance for the project to obtain voter approval and move successfully through its design and construction phases.

Mr. Leighton indicated the FAC's recommended approach would get more information to more taxpayers earlier in the process so there is less chance they would criticize the project later. He suggested the process should be "an open book process" like the approach used to update Exeter's Master Plan.

Mr. Corson suggested that, in this way, the voters would know how they really feel about the project and that any debate about it might be more productive and positive, and less negative.

Vice Chair Weeks said there should be "in-person and on-line feedback" as part of the FAC's recommended course of action. During the feasibility phase, he said, the facilities options should be posted on-line, and community feedback solicited through the Town website.

Both Mr. Weeks and Mr. Corson addressed Town Planner Sharples concern that separating the project's study phase from its design phase might delay its initiation. Mr. Weeks suggested it was better to have public approval for the project before facing later decisions as opposed to "kind of rolling the dice" and risking voter rejection that could cause a delay of several years. Mr. Corson said he wanted to avoid the fate of other projects that "sit on the Capital Improvement Program for 10 years, lingering because they don't have enough public support."

Fire Chief Wilking was asked to address the Town Planner's concern about a project delay. He acknowledged that a slower, more deliberate approach costing less in the beginning might obtain more public support, but that he thought there might be a delay in obtaining construction approval from the taxpayers.

He said the Town staff did its best to develop the \$400,000 FY 21 request, that no one wanted to move so rapidly that the public or project stakeholders could not weigh in, and that having the

design/engineering funds would produce a schematic design to assist in estimating a firmer construction cost. If the analytical phase identifies a “chosen site,” why not have the larger dollar number in FY 21?” he asked.

That said, the Chief indicated his flexibility about the FAC’s proposal, saying that it would allow him to “continue the forward momentum” during the first year and that “no one wants another defeat” at the polls that could delay the project by a year.

Mr. Lennon and Mr. Sharples discussed whether the FAC’s recommendation actually would cause a project delay.

### **-- Ways to Avoid Project Delay --**

Mr. Lennon said his experience on the Budget Recommendations Committee showed that, given the 6-9 month expected timeline for the feasibility study, and if there’s a strong alternative selected about which the community had input, it still would be possible to ask the Select Board for design and engineering funds for FY 22 and not have a delay.

Mr. Sharples accepted that it was possible to present the chosen project to the Select Bard at the end of the budget process in January to avoid a delay. However, he expressed uncertainty whether that was a good procedure considering all the document preparation and other staff work needed to draft and issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) or a Request for Quotation (RFQ), to evaluate contractor responses, to select a winning bidder, and to negotiate a contract.

Mr. Leighton asked why it was not possible to issue an RFP/RFQ before the Town voted on a project, indicating this was a way to save time in the process. In his experience in facilities management, he indicated this is done frequently. Mr. Sharples said there was nothing preventing such an action. But he said he did not do this before getting voter approval to prevent Town staff and potential contractors from spending time and effort on a project that for some reason is not passed by the taxpayers.

Mr. Sharples said the Town’s process is a little different from the one Mr. Leighton referred to, and Mr. Leighton agreed. However, he indicated that the two FAC members that are architects might help streamline the RFP/RFQ for the first phase of the Public Safety project. He asked that the FAC be part of that process.

Chair Corson asked how the original \$400,000 request was generated and what deliverables would result. Chief Wilkng said the number was based on a conceptual idea of the project’s total cost and it was a consensus figure among him, Town Manager Russ Dean, Mr. Sharples and DPW Director Jennifer Perry. The goal was to build momentum among the stakeholders on the first project phase and not have a delay in the second phase.

Chair Corson indicated that a much lower number just for the analysis of alternatives and feasibility study was obtainable. Mr. Leighton reiterated there was a much better chance to have design/engineering and construction approved by the voters if the analytical work is done that provides the information to better satisfy the public. Such information would demonstrate there was a concrete, definitive approach to solving the Public Safety Complex’s current problems.

## -- Analytical Work/Feasibility Study Cost Estimate --

The FAC then discussed several possible costs for the analytical work before settling on the \$200,000 it decided to recommend as an initial figure.

Mr. Corson suggested that the deliverables from this sum might include an independent total project cost estimate, renderings and information that would be used to build a consensus for the project at the public feedback meetings, the evaluation of some number of project site locations, and defining the project's scope of work. He said defining the scope of work is "going to tell you what ultimately you need to include in the RFP, and that is going to drive the value (cost)."

Town Planner Sharples asked the FAC for its assistance in defining the deliverables that he could include in the RFP for the analytical/feasibility study phase, and Chair Corson agreed the FAC would help in that way. He said the Committee "could quickly come up with an outline for the feasibility study and what the actual deliverables package would look like." Mr. Sharples said the FAC's input would form the basis for the first phase RFP.

The Committee understood that Mr. Sharples would use the FAC's list of deliverables to identify a more concrete amount for the warrant that would be presented to the Select Board for its consideration. Mr. Sharples indicated he was not seeking to artificially "pump up the \$200,000 number."

Seeking final clarification, Mr. Sharples also asked if the FAC envisioned a two phased project, with the analytical/feasibility study in the first phase and design and construction in the second phases, to which the FAC answered in the affirmative.

Mr. Sharples also said he viewed the FAC's proposed recommendation as not really reducing funds but moving funds and tasks for design/engineering out of FY 21 and into FY 22. "We're still going to spend the \$400,000, it's just a matter of when," he said. Mr. Weeks agreed with that interpretation. Mr. Sharples indicated that he regarded the FAC's recommendation as taking funds from a FY 21 warrant article and, in theory, adding them to next year's warrant article.

Mr. Sharples also said he would work with Chief Wilking to examine whether the RFP could be issued before the March voting on warrant articles in an effort to keep the project on schedule.

**By a 4-0 vote the FAC approved a recommendation that the Public Safety project should be approved and revised as follows:**

- (a) the first phase to be funded in FY 21 should consist of an Analysis of Alternatives and Feasibility Study to identify a preferred facilities option;
- (b) a second project phase for Design, Engineering and Construction should occur in the following fiscal years;
- (c) the FY 21 budget request for the first phase should not exceed \$200,000; and
- (d) the FAC and Town Staff working together should define a specific set of first phase deliverables that will help identify a firmer cost estimate for FY 21.

**DPW Garage Project:** Vice Chair Weeks said the FAC still wanted to get a breakdown from DPW as to what the \$150,000 request for its garage project pays for, but that he was prepared to move the project forward at this meeting and have the number clarified as the FY 21 budget process continues this year.

The FAC discussed various items that would influence the final scope and costs of the garage project, including erecting a larger structure to accommodate a staff consolidation there and perhaps new DPW missions in the future, developing a site-wide master plan for the entire DPW complex at 13 Newfields Road, considering the new structure's role in protecting town assets, and expanding the solar energy farm already at that location.

Mr. Lennon indicated that the total garage project costs remain to be determined, and he observed that, at a minimum, the current costs included in the CIP have not yet been updated to include one-year's additional inflation for the garage building and probably five more years of inflation for the fuel island.

**By a 4-0 vote the FAC approved a recommendation that the Public Works Facility Garage should be approved under the condition** that a detailed breakdown of the tasks and deliverables from the \$150,000 in FY 21 be provided by Town Staff, and with the understanding that the total project cost estimate remains to be determined, and that estimate should be updated now to at least reflect later inflation factors.

- (3) **FAC Letter to Planning Board**: The FAC decided to send its recommendations to the Planning Board in a letter in time for the Board's CIP meeting on September 10, 2020. In addition to explaining the recommendations, the FAC forwarded for the Planning Board's information the Meeting Minutes for August 13, 2020 that included the Public Safety site walk and for July 30, 2020 that included the DPW garage site walk.
- (4) **Next FAC Meeting**: Chair Corson said the next Committee meeting would be on Thursday, September 24, 2020 and might include a tour of the recently completed Library renovation/expansion project.