

OLD COLONY MEMORIAL

New Central Station doused

Town meeting votes no to building \$30 million fire headquarters

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PLYMOUTH – The town might need a new fire headquarters, but Town Meeting members don't think now is the time to build it. They voted overwhelmingly Thursday night against the \$30 million proposal for a new facility on Long Pond Road, citing bad timing and lack of information in the proposal.

Town Meeting also decided against spending \$500,000 for a new public safety communication tower, again citing a weak economy brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. The project would have provided improved communication services for fire, police and EMS services.

On the second night of the virtual Annual Spring and Special Town Meetings, Article 8 for the new fire headquarters to replace Station 1 on Sandwich Street was defeated soundly with 109 of 123 members voting against it. Several representatives spoke against the measure, which would have required a property tax override vote by residents in a future town election.

The current headquarters requires major renovations. Last fall, firefighters had to be evacuated after roof repairs caused dust, mold and debris to rain down throughout the facility, making conditions uninhabitable. The Fire Department proposed building a new Central Station with headquarters on Long Pond Road at a former town maintenance barn.

"Normally, I am an advocate for projects like this," said Town Meeting Rep. Donna Curtin of Precinct 3. "I think Chief Ed Bradley did a good job in explaining the need. However, it has not been established to me that this is the appropriate solution. I think the cost, location and timing are not right. I am voting no."

Richard Nealey of Precinct 15 pointed out that the \$30 million figure did not tell the whole story. That was just the amount of money the town wants to borrow, he stated.

"By my calculations, we will have to pay an additional \$23 million in interest over 30 years," he said. "That would add \$78 to the tax bill for residents in just the first year."

Several members complained that not enough detail was included in the proposal. Many wanted to know exactly what the town would be getting for \$30 million, especially at a time when tax revenues are down and the economic forecast is uncertain.

"I learned a long time ago not to make a paper agreement on a napkin," said Gerald Sirrico of Precinct 3. "I think this is what we have here. I think it's premature, it's a lot of money, and the plan has not been well presented."

Others said they had been told by residents that they were concerned about the cost of this project and the impact that would have on the tax rate.

"I've spoken to a lot of constituents across the town and they are in extreme opposition," stated Everett Malaguti III of Precinct 1. "This is a lot of spending and borrowing at a difficult time. It will put a burden on taxpayers."

"I'm voting no," added Cheryl King Fischer of Precinct 6. "We need more documentation about what will be done. I know firefighters can't stay where they are now, but the town needs to go back to the drawing board with this plan and present it again in the fall or next spring."

A few members spoke in favor of the project, citing the necessity for a new fire headquarters and station in a central location that can easily access all parts of town.

"I'm a 40-year veteran firefighter in Quincy," said Joseph Barron of Precinct 13. "This community is growing dramatically and it needs a facility like this."

"I'm in favor of this," said Patricia McCarthy of Precinct 5. "We have a great need for this fire station and the cost factors are only going to keep going up."

Some members said they were bothered by the location of the proposed headquarters. Many were concerned about it adding to the already heavy traffic congestion on Long Pond Road near Exit 5 on Route 3.

"It's a bad site," said Jeanne Patenaude-Lane of Precinct 4. "I don't like the location. It needs to be moved to a better spot."

After defeating this article, Town Meeting debated the communication tower. Again, members were concerned about cost at a time when town finances are uncertain because of

the economic downturn due to the pandemic.

"This is not the right location and time," said Alan Costello of Precinct 10. "We need to find a better location. This tower is a financial loser for taxpayers."

The vote was closer this time with 49 voting in favor and 72 against with one abstention.

Town meeting will resume at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 18. The virtual session will be carried live on PACTV's government channels at Comcast 15 and Verizon 47, as well as online at its streaming channel at www.pactv.org/live