

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 30, 2015
To: Planning Board, Town of Boxford
From: Kenneth Buckland, AICP, The Cecil Group
RE: Scope of Work for Comprehensive Municipal Facilities

The question posed was the best way to approach municipal facilities planning in town; particularly for the vacated town library buildings, the library space at Town Hall, and the Community Center/COA. This memo reviews the considerations that prompted this question and presents the recommended approach to answering the question.

Facilities Under Consideration:

The facilities to be considered have been identified as the following municipal, non-school buildings:

Library buildings and spaces: The East Library (the historic Cummings House with an addition) has been vacated, and the West Library is vacant. The Town Library, vacated from the East Library building, is now housed in the Town Hall but is located in a significantly smaller space than was available at the East Library.

Community Center/COA: The Community/Senior Center is a historic building, which has reportedly exceeded its capacity for community programs and COA offices, and requires maintenance and improvements.

Municipal Complex: The Municipal Complex consists of Town Hall, the Police Station, and DPW. The municipal property is also used for recreational fields, and includes a closed landfill. Town Hall and the Police Station are of relatively recent construction. Key facilities and issues in the use of the Municipal Complex are:

- The Complex is a multipurpose municipal facility with recreation fields and multiple buildings, located adjacent to the Spofford Pond School.
- Water treatment is needed for the existing public water supply, and that water supply is reportedly at maximum capacity for the existing uses. Town Meeting did not approve funds for testing for a new water supply on the northern side of the town complex.

- The relocated Town Library is now in Town Hall. The space is about one-third the size of the space vacated at the East Library.
- The DPW garage is undersized for the amount of equipment needing protection from the elements and may have reached its life span.
- The Police Station meets all current service needs.
- Development of the northern side of the municipal property requires a new access to be constructed. The conceptual designs for the access have been considered as complex and costly.

Fire Stations: No issues were identified for the Fire Department facilities.

Lincoln Hall: This community facility was recently renovated and is reportedly used often by different town, civic and social groups. The property operates with shared parking and a shared in-ground septic system. The current use of the building is considered appropriate.

Building Programs Under Consideration

The DPW Garage, the COA/Community Center, and the Library located in Town Hall are considered undersized for current and projected needs. The DPW garage does not house all of the equipment, exposing those pieces to the environment and reducing their life expectancy. The Community Center has had to add a shed for additional storage after a review of building egress conditions, and the COA reports crowded conditions for many of its events. The Library in Town Hall is at one-third of the previous space at the former East Library.

Several different programs have reportedly been developed for a senior center, the library, and a combined senior center and library. A study has been commissioned to determine the projected needs for seniors in Boxford. No space program was found for the DPW garage.

Making Decisions

To make decisions on the facilities, the needs have been identified as:

- Need for consensus building - Town Meeting action requires a 2/3 majority vote on capital budget articles. Residents need to be able to participate in a complete planning process to let their concerns be identified and addressed prior to official action.

- Need for consistent information and objectivity – People interviewed had different perspectives on the same subject. Presenting this information objectively would be valuable to answering questions and providing the basis for resolving issues. Objective assessments are reported to be respected more than the stakeholders for individual projects.
- Need for a comprehensive plan of investments - There is a perceived competition for the funding of projects. In addition, the capital budget for facilities needs to allocate funds and sources in ways that do not significantly impact taxes.

Recommendation: Comprehensive Municipal Facilities Master Plan

Recommended is a comprehensive facility master plan that lays out in one plan a concept for all the town facilities. The evaluations and conclusion of the study will create a Comprehensive Municipal Facility Master Plan for public buildings that will inform the Town's Capital Improvement Plan and serve the Town's needs for the next 20, or more, years.

The Comprehensive Municipal Facilities Master Plan [CMFMP] recommended for Boxford includes:

- Collecting and analyzing programmatic needs of the departments, as completed by others or generated for this plan;
- Completing existing facility assessments, particularly for the DPW Garage;
- Analyzing and preparing alternatives;
- Preparing, evaluating, and comparing project costs and financing;
- Establishing the priorities and a schedule for future capital building projects, and
- A public process that is open and educational in that it is interactive and provides information and answers questions.

Outline Scope for a Comprehensive Municipal Facilities Master Plan

Following are more detailed descriptions of the components.

1. Program Needs Assessment

The needs assessment should include space needs, location needs, parking requirements, access requirements, proximity requirements, and co-location requirements and opportunities.

- Develop an internal and external needs assessment program to gather data and input from various town stakeholders including residents, departments, businesses and others.
- Assess the needs of the community and each department or function including estimated growth requirements.
- Determine gross area requirements to meet the programmatic needs identified through the assessments, identify opportunities for shared space and space efficiency.
- Determine whether needs can be met on the current site or within the current facility. Study alternative site layouts, building plans or building locations within the Town to determine if existing or alternative sites have the capacity to accommodate the programs. Add a review of parking and access issues for each site.

Present options in order to move forward with developing alternative scenarios.

2. Alternatives Assessments

Prepare preliminary assessments for each option that includes the following:

- Pros and cons of the alternatives;
- Feasibility of the alternatives;
- Projected cost of each alternative;
- Effectiveness and benefits in reaching town objectives; and
- Relative importance/urgency of each of the identified needs.

Then review the results, modify the alternatives as needed, and run another assessment of the refined alternatives.

3. Property Dispositions

Determine appropriate disposition options for buildings if they are considered redundant or obsolete. Where current buildings or sites fall short of satisfying a defined programmatic need, analyze other town-owned sites or potential real estate within the

Town that could satisfy the defined requirements. The plan will also consider the disposition of current Town buildings or sites if considered redundant, past their useful life, or not functional for any municipal purpose or service, which could include service for historic value.

A real estate market study and/or a Request for Letters of Interest may help provide useful information on the value of a lease or sale option and will be considered.

Review opportunities that may arise with purchases/swap of town real estate assets such that they may provide improved solutions to department/facility relocations, and to include potential opportunities for public/private collaborations.

4. Costs and Financing

Construct spreadsheets with costs for financing and phasing all projects to show how the scheduling of projects can be used to properly phase construction and limit tax impacts.

Identify any known grants or alternative funding sources that may impact or influence prioritizations and plans.

5. Implementation Plan

Recommend a preliminary project timeline or schedule from appropriation through design, construction and phasing steps (if appropriate) for the projects. Develop implementation strategies and outline the regulatory approval steps that may be required.

Public Process for a Facilities Master Plan

To build consensus the recommended public process should include at least three steps of focused and organized public involvement:

- I. *Vision and Goal Setting* – A set of goals or guiding principles should be established because a long-term plan will require review and redirection over time, and a set of guiding principles will provide the bases for making those changes. The examples of guiding principles could be:
 - a. Financial – eliminating spikes in the tax rates and if possible stabilizing the amount of taxes paid for facility construction through bonds
 - b. Longevity – setting the time horizon of the facilities plan and the capital program

- c. Character – defining the type, style, and historic nature of the facilities
- d. Efficiency – where possible, reusing viable facilities instead of building new
- e. Sustainability – designing facilities for low maintenance, maintenance for life expectancy, and repurposing

This could be completed as both a public workshop session and an online survey response as a first step in the process of planning.

- II. *Review of Alternatives* – Presenting a set of reasonable alternatives, including the benefits and issues for each, to the public will provide an opportunity for public discussion of the alternatives in a comparative format. Alternatives would be developed after completing the Program and Facilities Assessments tasks.
- III. *Confirmation of Draft and Final Plan* – These steps would allow public review, comment and response in the Plan for adoption by the Town. The actual adoption could be through several different forums and ways but would be presented as a plan for implementation.

Next Steps

To initiate the planning believed needed for the Town’s municipal facilities, the recommendations are to:

- Set a goal to complete a Comprehensive Municipal Facilities Master Plan, and
- Hold a public session on *Vision and Goal Setting* to develop the framework for the plan, and add an online survey, and if possible a simple mailing or handout to expand awareness.

