



# POLICE COMMISSION

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MINUTES OF TOWN MEETING  
BETHEL POLICE COMMISSION  
THURSDAY, APR 9, 2015  
MUNICIPAL CENTER 1 SCHOOL ST, GENERAL PURPOSE ROOM

HEAD TABLE: POLICE COMMISSION CHAIRMAN MIKE DUFF  
POLICE CHIEF JEFFREY FINCH  
POLICE CAPTAIN DAVE BRUCKENTHAL  
TOWN COMPTROLLER BOB KOZLOWSKI  
BUILDING COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN JOHN MENT

ATTENDING: COMMISSIONER RICHARD KOLWICZ  
COMMISSIONER ANTHONY RUBINO

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TOWN OF BETHEL  
TOWN CLERK

Chairman Duff called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Chairman Duff stated the purpose of the meeting as information sharing to let the public know the position of the Bethel Police Commission concerning the proposed Police Headquarters building and then open the meeting to public comment and questions.

Chairman Duff read from a prepared statement as follows:

The Public Site and Building Committee has been at this project since December of 2002. They have done an extraordinary job and the police commissioners and every member of the Police Department are deeply appreciative and grateful for their praiseworthy accomplishments.

The Public Site and Building Committee has presented to us plans for a structure that gives the Police Department efficient internal operations and excellent site selection, yielding a good solid foundation and excellent access to all parts of the community.

The Bethel Police Commission feels this building, at this site, is exactly what we need to address today's needs and the needs of the foreseeable future. By foreseeable future I mean 15 to 20 years. But I envision this structure will service the community efficiently for the remainder of this century.

Consequently we are dedicated to soliciting from our taxpayers, from our neighbors, from our community their support to acquire the necessary funding in order to build this new police station; which we hope will be functioning with efficiency and serving the community well into the future.

Our present police station is functionally obsolete. It has been so since the first day the Department moved into it. Expansion of the present building and correction to the built-in deficiencies commenced upon the day of occupancy.

Bethel should build a facility that meets our present needs without fear of having to spend a great deal of money for something that is less than what we need. The Public Site and Building Committee and the Police Commission have considered refurbishment and expansion at the present site; however the cost would be excessive and we would end up with something sitting in a floodplain, not meeting the needs that we have today nor in the foreseeable future. I would consider that a waste of money and would not support such a project.

During those deliberations it was obvious that the present site is in a flood plain and an unknown amount of asbestos is in the walls, ceilings and wiring. Now there is no problem in construction that cannot be overcome with good engineering; so long as you're willing to pay the cost. In this case that cost would be more than building new. Federal and State guidelines for construction in the flood risk areas have been established to help ensure taxpayer dollars are well spent on infrastructure that can better withstand the impacts of flooding. Those guidelines have increased the cost of construction in flood risk areas to a point that is prohibitive. Consequently the idea of refurbishing was set aside.

It must be noted, at our present police station, there has been at least three occasions, because of high water levels, that raw sewage has backed up into our police station. This is intolerable. We have been in this building about 40 years or more and anticipate waste backups again. I must also mention that our present facility lacks storage space and sufficient locker room facilities; there is general overcrowding and insufficient sanitation facilities.

Our next police station should be built on good solid ground that gives us effective access to the community and internal functionality that meets our present needs and those of the foreseeable future. The selected location off Judd Avenue meets those requirements and it has the financial advantage of being Town owned property.

We have learned a very expensive lesson too many times in Bethel. We seem to build buildings that always start out designed to meet the needs and then after cost-cutting end up with a building that is inadequate and soon in need of repair. How many times must we learn the lesson "penny wise dollar foolish".

At this point I would like the Comptroller to give you information concerning the financial impact of this project, after which we will try to answer all those questions and address those concerns presented to us this evening.

If indeed compelling evidence or argument is presented, the Police Commission has a responsibility to review its position as soon as possible.

Comptroller Bob Kozlowski:

The comptroller addressed the financial impact of the project. A \$13.7M 20 year 3% rate bond would start in 2017, and with a debt service of \$3M per year this falls within the range that mitigates an increase in taxes.

The floor was opened to public comment.

Bill Hillman, 86 Walnut Hill Rd

Mr Hillman criticized the failure to fully disclose total debt service which within the next few years will include monies to be spent on needed school repair and construction.

Mr Hillman asked what the \$400K reduction since the first referendum entailed. Also what other items bring the cost up to \$13.7M since the actual construction costs are \$9M. The last referendum was "ill timed" and would better be scheduled during the November municipal elections for better turnout.

Chief Finch detailed which construction cost cutting items were involved in the cuts as well as the "soft costs" for furniture, fixtures and equipment as well as relocating the dispatch center

John Menti also addressed soft costs and the cost of demolishing the old structure.

Pat Rist, 10 Shelter Rock Rd

Ms Rist criticized citizens who did not take advantage of the offered police department tours. The old building only received "band aid surgery" over the years. A new larger, more substantial building is needed. The public should not make their vote determined by any last-minute flyers full of "misinformation".

Frank Infurchia, 3 Honey Hollow Dr

Mr Infurchia took exception to any "misinformation" in his flyer to which he dedicated considerable research. While a new building is needed, the "scope" of the project exceeds what is necessary based on the police building vs population size of surrounding towns. The need for the proposed size has not been demonstrated. Also the beauty of the school park would be ruined. Probono work by the architect taints the objectivity of the bidding process.

Cynthia McCorkindale, 19 Elgin Ave

Ms McCorkindale questioned to-date expenditures for studies, architectural work and the like. Ms McCorkindale asked that a more accurate detailing of costs be made. She requested follow-up on a previous request to Mr Duff concerning costs of temporary facilities while the new building is under construction. Why the cost went from \$10M in June to \$13.7M in October. The word "project" should encompass the building in its entirety.

Chairman Duff answered that no temporary facilities would be needed since operations in the old building would continue until the new building is ready. The apparent increase in cost between June and October was because the June number was only for the building while the October number included soft costs.

Building Committee Chairman Menti stated that costs will be further broken down if and when the project is approved and ready for presentation to the Board of Finance.

John Kelly, 74 Walnut Hill Rd

Mr Kelly favored a location closer to the center of town, closer to the Municipal Center. We "hobbled" ourselves by concentrating only on the Judd Av property. This property is and will be needed by the School system.

Matt Knickerbocker, First Selectman 1 School St

Mr Knickerbocker corrected several misquotings. It is irrelevant to compare the proposed project to police departments in other towns. They are undersized as they stand due to changes in community policing and Federal and State mandates. Mr Knickerbocker offered Berlin CT as the closest comparison to Bethel in demographics who are currently attempting to fund a \$19M police building. The proposed property is not within the school park but rather in an adjacent area as demonstrated in a display in the front of the room. Any traffic impact will be minimal, 12 cars at most in the day shift and they do not all move out together. The only future for the existing building within the established flood plain is to be torn down.

Ferdinand Miller Jr, 1 Farmview Dr

Mr Miller stated the need to build the new structure in order to continue to keep and attract quality personnel, sworn officers and civilian employees. Though not required for civilian employees, hepatitis shots are necessary nonetheless as seen from his experience in fighting two sewage floods during his tenure as a civilian employee of the Department as well as the danger of infection inherent in the small closet nature of the various rooms and narrow hallways.

James Cristos, Officer, 49 Plumtrees Rd

Off Cristos stated the unsafe working conditions. The building is indeed falling apart. Policing has changed since the construction of the existing, internet crime being one such area. The physical structure of a new facility must be up to the task. Anything smaller than the current proposal would require additions in the future which would ultimately be far more costly. Strongly recommended was the offered tour of the existing facility.

George Bryce, Sergeant, 49 Plumtrees Rd

The International Association of Chiefs of Police have standards for space needs which makes comparisons used in Mr Infurchia's flyer "completely wrong". Everything is "bandaided" together and this could affect the quality of how the Department helps victims of crimes, which includes people beyond Bethel. This goes beyond the desire for a better work environment. A centralized location is essential. There is an "obligation that at a minimum we provide these facilities". Citizens must decide if a victim, what quality of a police facility would they want.

Pat Stites, 12 Codfish Hill Rd

Ms Stites stated her taxes have nearly doubled in the past 15 years and asked the question posed by other senior citizens, why not "make do or scale down".

Ms Stites asked what other projects such as this one are going to come along. Is a structure three times the current size really necessary?

Chief Finch stated the square footage is based on architectural standards. This is planning for 20 to 30 years into the future. Per the Comptrollers comments the affect on taxes is insignificant.

Alisa Volpati, 21 Judd Av

Ms Volpati's concerns are for increased traffic on Judd Av. Once a week pulling out of the driveway results in a near accident. She is also concerned with the visual impact of the building.

Art Dehoff, 8 Hickok Av

Mr Dehoff agreed that a new police facility is needed but asked that in the future more notification be given for meetings such as this. The final cost should include the cost of the demolition of the old building. Mr Dehoff asked about other competing bids.

John Menti stated that wherever the location ends up the project will be open to competing bids. Mr Menti added that executive order from the White House has changed the whole scene concerning wetlands because a structure has to be built 3 feet above the flood plain and with a 100 foot setback the existing location is untenable.

Frank Kissim, 5

Mr Kissim proposed an alternate structure all steel and concrete modular construction in a row, modules added on in the future as needed. Why burden people today with something 20 or 30 years in the future may never be needed.

Cynthia McCorkindale, 19 Elgin Av

Ms McCorkindale stated she is exploring all possibilities for cost reduction and asked about regionalization for dispatch, utilizing State resources for computer forensics, the need for so many cells in the face of increased computer crimes.

Chief Finch stated that regionalization was actively pursued by Bethel and surrounding towns and was found to have no cost savings and towns would lose local control in providing services. To the second point the Chief stated that Bethel was one of the first to have computer forensics because the State is routinely 18 months behind in their case analysis. To the third point Chief Finch stated that all contingencies of prisoner detainment have to be allowed for and the current 4 ½ cells is not enough. The Chief stated that cuts can be made but when you cut you lose quality.

James Murphy, 4 Judd Av

Mr Murphy asked what is "plan B" if the referendum fails again. Also what are the details on the proposed tower, an item Mr Murphy was not aware of.

Chief Finch stated the alternative is to develop a plan "C" or drop the whole project to the detriment of the town.

John Menti described the tower as small because of the already elevated site. It would be just above the tree line needing only line-of-sight with the Spring Hill tower.

Bruce Cornwell, 4 Buckboard Hill Rd

The Fire Department works "closely and well" with the Police Department. The Police Department is the Fire Department's dispatch center, which in effect is the center of all

activity. These facilities will be so much better in the new configuration. Mr Cornwell asked about paramedic accommodations.

Capt Bruckenthal commented that paramedics are "part of the Bethel Police family" and will continue to utilize the facilities 16 hours per day as they do now. Currently communications have no backup in case of equipment failure. In the new building there will be second position in case the first fails.

Andy Infurchia, 3 Honey Hollow Dr

Mr Infurchia asked what studies have been done by the Police Department concerning crime and building size.

Chief Finch stated building size is based on architectural studies, standards based on services offered and town size. We went to professionals, the architects, who specialize in in public service and police structures. A separate adjunct, KDA, does their cost analysis based on architectural specs. We rely on their training and expertise rather than contracting studies of our own.

Comm Duff added that the mission of police departments have changed over the years by State and local mandates. Currently dispatching responsibilities having tripled (fire, EMS, police) along with prisoner areas are not up to today's standards. We are not going to "bias our building based upon the building size of another police department who already consider their existing facility insufficient".

Bob Legnard, 11 Evergreen Dr

Mr Legnard recounted the original police department on Greenwood Av when he moved to Bethel. His feeling is the current building was not built on the right location. We have to learn from this and do it properly this time fulfilling the needs of officers who put their lives on the line every day to make us safe. It is too easy to say we will not spend the money. We have to be confident of a proper response to meet our needs.

Bill Slifkin, 15 Katrina Cir

Mr Slifin asked that costs be broken down for each area; communications, range, administration and the like. A new police building is desperately needed.

Larry Crabas, 15 Kellog St

Mr Crabas pointed out the difficulty of projecting 40 plus years into the future using today's dollars.

Art Dehoff, 8 Hickok Av

Mr Dehoff asked about soft costs, namely was there a cap in place.

John Menti stated that currently we have estimates.

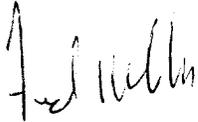
Capt Bruckenthal stated that the \$13.7M is the top number, the "worst case scenario". The project total could come in less.

Bill Hillman, 86 Walnut Hill Rd

Mr Hillman thanked the Commission for calling this meeting and enlightening the public.

At 9:35 Comm Duff called the meeting to an end.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ferd Miller".

Ferdinand Miller Jr  
Secretary