

Frequently Asked Questions
Public Safety Complex
Williamsburg, MA
April 2022

1. What is the history of this project? Williamsburg's facilities for police and fire department personnel and activities have been inadequate for years. In 2013, the first Public Safety Complex Committee was established to begin to estimate costs and look at various building configurations and building sites. The Helen E. James site was identified as the best site in their final report. In 2017, a Facilities Master Plan Committee recommended that the public safety departments be given the highest priority for a town project. An 8-member Owner's Project Manager (OPM) Steering Committee was formed in January 2018 to begin full planning.

The OPM is a state-required arrangement to assure that a town gets the best possible results on a construction project. The Steering Committee and Select Board hired a firm to act as OPM on the town's behalf and began serious planning. An architect was hired. All previous work was reviewed including options for siting. Once plans started to firm up, the Committee began communicating with residents through forums, posters, a newsletter, and individual conversations. The planning culminated in a town meeting on April 3, 2021 at which residents voted to adopt the recommended plan, which is to remove the Helen E. James school building and to construct a new public safety complex on that footprint. This site was determined, after extensive review, to be the only location available at an affordable cost. At a second town meeting on June 7, 2021, residents voted to allow a Proposition 2 ½ debt exclusion for 5.1 million dollars to allow funding of the project.

Documents relating to the process mentioned above are archived on the Town website. The reader can also find links to previous committee reports and several other documents relevant to the existing facilities and to the planned public safety complex.

2. Why is the new building right on the footprint of the Helen E. James school? The school was placed on the highest and driest part of the site when it was built in 1914. Locating the new building there avoids costs and environmental impacts that would come from adding fill to lift the building out of the wetter part of the site. Costs for wetland mitigation will also be avoided.

3. Are there any difficulties in removing the Helen E. James building? There are some contamination issues such as asbestos in the floors, which requires hazardous material abatement procedures.

4. Will the school be memorialized? Yes, though the exact nature of the memorial has not yet been determined. A medallion will be removed from the exterior and stored safely. A plaque will be placed in the future green space honoring Helen E. James. We will attempt to salvage some bricks for future use. Early plans for the Norway maple tree that was to the east of the existing building were to build protective fencing during construction, but the tree was

in poor condition and showed too little vigor to be able to withstand the effects of construction. While it might live a few years, it's long-term viability was very low. It would also be more costly to remove it after the building is constructed. The tree has been removed but will supply wood for commemorative plaques.

5. Can anything else be removed from the school to save and use? The short answer is no. Removing outside decorations could negatively affect the structural integrity of the building. Because of liability issues to the Town, the building is secure now. Once the demolition contract is signed, everything within and attached to the building becomes the property of the contractor and nothing further can be removed.

6. What will happen to the existing trees and hedgerows? An initial landscape plan was prepared by a contractor, with recommendations on removing and on planting vegetation. Many of the trees on the site were Norway maples, a non-native plant that was often planted in the past for its fall color. This is now considered an undesirable invasive species and several of those were removed because they were in bad shape and potentially hazardous. We will have an opportunity to add native plants and other species with positive environmental benefits for birds and pollinators and for human enjoyment.

7. How will the building site interact with the Greenway location and a future Town park? This is yet to be determined, but coordination with the Greenway committee is underway. Plans for the green space will be developed in 2023 as a separate project.

8. What energy efficient measures will be used in construction of the building? In addition to following the energy codes, we took every opportunity within cost constraints to be energy efficient. That included smart selection of building materials and energy sources and making the front bay doors partially insulated instead of mostly glass. We hope to be able to afford radiant floors in the building. Solar panels will not be part of the original construction but the roof will be made ready for future installation.

9. What exterior lighting will we see during emergency use and regular use? While good lighting is needed for safety, we are aware of both the need to not impinge on abutters' comfort and the negative effects of artificial lighting at night. Lighting design has taken both factors into account.

10. When will demolition and construction happen?

The contract bids were received March 30. They were reviewed and the contracts signed. We anticipate work at the James site will be in June of this year.

11. Can the public attend committee meetings? Certainly. During construction the committee will generally meet once per month at 6 pm via Zoom. The Zoom link and schedule are on the town web page with the posted meeting agenda, <https://www.burgy.org/public-safety-complex-building-committee-pscbc>

Residents can also provide comments and feedback at any time by contacting a member of the committee or the Town Administrator. Contact information is at the link above.