Town of East Haddam
Moodus Firehouse Renovation Committee
August 29, 2024
Public Hearing

The Public Hearing started at 7:00 p.m. at the Municipal Office Complex.

ATTENDANCE
Craig Mansfield, First Selectman Irene Haines, Kevin Rutty, Dave Stein-Silver Petrucelli, Eric Cantar-Silver Petrucelli, Don Angersola-Director of Operations, and approximately 12 townspeople.

Absent: Walter Parkus

The Public Hearing Presentation is located on the East Haddam website.
https://www.easthaddam.org/events/31966/

Craig Mansfield outlined the committee's mission to improve the Moodus Firehouse, located on WF Palmer Road. The committee's role involves collaborating with the fire department and other stakeholders to develop schematic designs and specifications, secure grants, and hire architects and engineers. Their approach includes assessing the current facility, addressing structural and operational needs, planning the budget, and ensuring the project is financially sustainable. The goal is to create an efficient, resilient building that integrates modern technology, stays on budget, and serves the community effectively for many years to come.

David Stein from Silver Petrucelli highlighted significant structural issues with the current firehouse, including water damage, material deterioration, and an outdated design that fails to meet modern energy codes. He explained that repairs to the existing building would be inefficient and unsustainable. The proposed new firehouse, approximately 14,000 square feet, is designed to address these shortcomings by incorporating separate apparatus bays, living quarters, modern amenities, and energy-efficient features. The project emphasizes daylighting and long-term sustainability, aiming to create a durable structure that will serve the fire department and community for at least 50 years.

Craig Mansfield discussed how the design of the new firehouse was refined from an initial proposal of over 19,000 square feet to a more efficient 14,000 square feet, balancing the fire department's needs with budget and space constraints. He highlighted the collaborative effort to streamline the design, eliminating unnecessary features like additional circulation space and a gym, to focus on essential elements that meet current standards and regulations. The revised design aims to support the fire department effectively while remaining financially and practically viable for the community.

Kevin Rutty highlighted that the new firehouse will address current safety and functionality issues, enhance community resilience, and improve property values. It will comply with modern codes, reduce risks, and provide better training facilities. Additionally, the building will include sustainable features to lower long-term operating costs.

David Stein discussed the current construction costs for the new firehouse, noting that recent economic shifts and supply chain issues have affected material prices and project budgets. Despite improvements, costs have increased from earlier projections due to rising construction expenses and the need to incorporate modern standards and long-term sustainability features. The project cost is approximately $780 per square foot, with an overall estimate of around $940 per square foot when accounting for soft costs, demolition, and contingencies. Mr. Stein emphasized that these figures are based on industry trends and include provisions for future cost escalations, aiming to deliver a durable and compliant building that meets current energy and building codes.

Craig Mansfield outlined the committee's next steps, including exploring potential grant opportunities. He noted the possibility of future grants for firehouses in 2025 and mentioned that USDA funding could offer a favorable interest rate for financing. The committee is focused on keeping abreast of available grants and preparing the project to be "shovel-ready" to improve chances for funding. Upcoming steps involve gathering feedback, presenting to the Board of Selectmen, and developing detailed construction drawings. The project will eventually be reviewed in a second hearing, with discussions on bonding and tax implications. Following these steps, the proposal will go to a town meeting and referendum for final approval. Mr. Mansfield emphasized that the investment, though substantial, is essential for building a long-term asset that will effectively support the fire department and community.

Audience of Citizens

Marybeth Mordecai expressed gratitude for the committee's thorough presentation and hard work. She mentioned having experience on building committees and acknowledged the detailed and challenging nature of such projects, offering thanks to the team for their effort.

Rob Smith expressed concerns about incorporating a clear story in the building design, noting that while it adds an attractive, historic element, it can be inefficient by allowing heat to escape and creating cold spots. He stated that the minimal benefits of natural lighting provided by a clear story might not justify the additional cost, especially given the efficiency of modern LED lighting and daylight bulbs. He suggested that the potential issues with heating and circulation could outweigh the advantages of the clear story, as it may lead to increased heating costs and inefficiencies.

Responsive to a question by Mr. Smith, Mr. Mansfield replied that arrangements had been made with Public Works to temporarily use their garage for the firehouse, with the condition that trucks requiring environmental protection or water would be kept outside. This solution is intended as a short-term fix.

Mr. Smith suggested building the new firehouse on one of the nearby properties and using the existing firehouse location for a land swap. He proposed constructing the new firehouse first, keeping the current building operational until the new one was ready, then demolishing the old structure and negotiating a land exchange with adjacent property owners.

Jeff Miller asked about the proximity of the Company 1 Firehouse, which is only about two miles away from Company 2. He questioned the need for two firehouses so close together and asked whether Company 1 would still be in use. He also expressed concerns about the operational efficiency of having multiple stations within such a short distance. Mr. Rutty emphasized the importance of maintaining operational efficiency during storms that isolate different parts of town, noting that Moodus was crucial

due to its proximity to high-risk areas such as schools and the town hall, and its significance for the town's response capabilities. Mr. Mansfield explained that neither Company 1 nor 2 was suitable for consolidating all firehouse operations due to insufficient space. A study from 2012 also found that expanding the Company 1 property was impractical due to wetlands and other constraints, and purchasing adjacent land, which was not currently for sale, would be necessary but unfeasible.

Responsive to questions from Mr. Miller, Mr. Mansfield clarified that both firehouses are staffed daily with a mix of volunteers and personnel, especially during major events when all firehouses are manned. In instances where Company 2 is deemed unsafe, personnel are temporarily relocated to the senior center. The department has procedures for equipment deployment, considering the potential for simultaneous emergencies in the town. Multiple pieces of equipment, including duplicate trucks and engines, are necessary to handle such demands efficiently.

Mr. Casner expressed strong support for considering alternate sites for the firehouse, particularly favoring Company 1 due to its central location in town. He stated that the current site is problematic because of its tight layout and hazardous intersection, which poses a risk both to the fire department and the public. Mr. Casner suggested that acquiring nearby properties, including recently sold ones, could offer better space and visibility. He emphasized the importance of selecting a more suitable and safer location to ensure the long-term effectiveness and safety of the firehouse. Mr. Mansfield responded by highlighting the importance of keeping the firehouse in the Moodus area due to its high population density and the concentration of key facilities like schools and restaurants. He noted that East Haddam benefited from quicker mutual aid responses from neighboring towns compared to Moodus. He addressed concerns about expanding Company 1, mentioning previous studies that ruled out this option due to space constraints, wetlands, and septic issues. He acknowledged the validity of the points raised about the site selection and assured that these would be considered as the project moved forward.

Melanie Kolek expressed gratitude for the comprehensive presentation, highlighting that it addressed her concerns as a long-time town resident and fire department member. She commended the committee for focusing on both protecting the town's investments in the fire department and addressing ongoing repair issues. She supported the idea of keeping Company 2 due to its alignment with Moodus revitalization and its central location relative to the town's population. She also noted the significant value of the equipment at Company 2, arguing that investing in its protection is a practical decision.

Mr. Mansfield thanked everyone for attending and assured them that more information would be provided as the project progressed. He emphasized the aim to advance the project to a "shovel-ready" stage and to collaborate with the town's finance department to determine bonding and financing. He stated that the goal was to communicate these details effectively to residents and move towards a referendum. Ultimately, the project will aim to enhance the fire department's facilities to better serve the community.

Respectfully Submitted;

E. Ruth Ziobron
Recording Secretary