



**Bedford Village Fire District
Responds to the
November 21st, 2019 letter from the Concerned Citizens of Bedford (CCB)**

Regarding the concerns raised by the CCB in their November 21, 2019 letter to the community, the Commissioners of the Bedford Village Fire District respectfully submit the following clarifications:

“Within a week of the April 30th, 2019 vote and defeat of the proposed new firehouse at 550 Old Post Road, the four active Fire Commissioners hired a public relations firm, a new architect, a pre-construction manager, and reaffirmed contracts with their three separate attorneys and their land planning firm. Their expenditures this year towards the two votes will approach one half of our fire taxes (over \$400,000).”

The narrow defeat of the original proposal in April sent the BVFD several clear messages – primary among them was that the project was too big and too expensive. As such, the BVFD set to develop a REVISED proposal that was smaller in both size and cost, while providing a safe, modern, and future-focused workspace that enables the all-volunteer corps to provide the highest-quality life-saving services.

In order to meet those objectives, we made some key investments and changes to the project team. These investments and changes were funded by a dedicated capital reserve account years in the making. Specifically:

- *We did additional soil testing to plan for the building’s foundation.*
 - This in-depth analysis revealed that the very expensive 65ft. pilings that were originally proposed were no longer necessary for the building’s foundation.
- *We originally hired Thompson & Bender, and then Wise Oak Strategies to oversee communications on the REVISED project and the process.*
 - One of our key learnings in April was that the BVFD didn’t effectively communicate the details of the project to the community as well as it might have. There had been much misinformation disseminated by project opponents and, for this go-round, we want to ensure that the community has the accurate information needed to make a fair decision on the project. To that end, we originally hired Thompson & Bender but replaced them in early September with Bedford-based Wise Oak Strategies, to provide communications support to the District.

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- Wise Oak Strategies is offering a large percentage of their time *pro-bono* to the District, including the services of a professional Creative Director/Graphic Designer.
- *We replaced the original architect (H2M) with Sullivan Architecture.*
 - The CCB and others didn't share the BVFD's comfort level with H2M's work, especially given H2M's history on a recent project in a neighboring community. As such, we made the decision to entrust the project to Sullivan Architecture – a White Plains agency with deep experience with firehouse/emergency services projects and led by John Sullivan, a long-time Bedford resident and former member of both the Town of Bedford Planning Board and Historic Building Presentation Commission.
- *We hired well-respected Arris Contracting to provide pre-construction planning.*
 - This decision was made for two primary reasons 1) to identify ways to value-engineer the project ensuring the REVISED plan was as cost efficient as possible 2) if the project were to be approved by the community, Arris' deep expertise could be leveraged to ensure that the project remained on budget and cost overruns could be avoided.
- *Specific to this project, we re-affirmed contracts with two legal teams - Hollis Laidlaw & Simon P.C., and Hawkins Delafield & Wood .*
 - It is usual practice for fire districts to hire project counsel for a new firehouse project, and required to hire a bond counsel.
 - Hollis Laidlaw provides counsel on the project.
 - Hawkins Delafield provides counsel on all issues related to the financing of the bond.
 - Kornfeld Rew, which specializes in fire district law, is the BVFD's law firm of record for usual business, so this contract is ongoing, paid for from the District's general operating budget and completely separate from the project.
- *Recognizing that any new proposal would need to carefully consider the impact to the environment, we extended the contract of Naderman Land Planning & Engineering .*

Since April, these additional investments of \$202,000 have generated a total project savings of more than \$5.5MM – a more than 2,000% return on our investment.

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“Again, the Bedford Village Fire District has declared itself the lead agency of the project which means they have no oversight, other than our vote.”

It is typical for a fire district to serve as Lead Agency for this type of project. Following NYS law, the BVFD provided appropriate notice to all “involved and interested agencies” and ample time for any formal objections to this status – *none were received*.

Serving as lead agency on the project doesn’t preclude oversight OR full accountability. Indeed, all decisions and actions made by the BVFD in regard to this project must comply with all laws and standards - and we must answer to all “involved and interested agencies.”

Additionally, the BVFD’s own commitment to full transparency and accountability to the community is well demonstrated by the multiple public meetings, information sessions, backup materials on the District website, email responses, one-on-one meetings, and responses to FOIL requests provided by the District to ensure the community has full, complete and accurate information to evaluate the proposal.

“The revised plan envisions a new firehouse of approximately 20,000sq. ft. with a forty-foot elevation, at the same residential location: the starting cost is now estimated at \$15,717,000.00

This information is somewhat accurate. What the CCB doesn’t mention – and is demonstrated in the chart below - is that the building in the REVISED proposal is significantly smaller and less expensive than the building that was originally proposed.

	ORIGINAL PROPOSAL	CURRENT PROPOSAL	DIFFERENCE	% CHANGE
Total Project Cost	\$21,225,000	\$15,717,000	(\$5,508,000)	-26.0%
Building Cost	\$14,900,000	\$10,600,000	(\$4,300,000)	-28.9%
Square Footage	24,678 SF	20,189 SF	(4,489 SF)	-18.2%
Site Footprint	13,610 SF	12,637 SF	(973 SF)	-7.1%
Height	48 FT	39 FT	(9 FT)	-18.8%
Volume	430,515 CF	293,316 CF	(110,199 CF)	-27.30%
Bond Amount	\$17,500,000	\$14,750,000	(\$2,750,000)	-15.7%

As was demonstrated on multiple occasions and confirmed by the CLC’s independent analysis, the site originally proposed for this project (550 Old Post Road) is the best site – both logistically and financially – for the new firehouse/emergency services

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department and that renovation of the current space was both economically and practically prohibitive.

“If the bond is passed by a public vote, it will be funded by nearly doubling your current fire taxes.”

According to the Bedford tax assessor, the impact of the \$14,750,000 bond represents a median FIRE tax increase of \$253.14. While \$250 per year is not an insignificant amount of money, if we consider it as a day-to-day expense, it is more costly to buy a large cup of coffee than to invest in the long-term safety of the community!

It is also worth noting that this bond will ONLY increase the fire tax portion of your property tax bill (1.5% in 2019); it will have NO impact on the school tax (67% in 2019) or any other services funded by our property tax dollars.

The chart below gives each property tax-payer in the District a truer sense of the impact of the proposed bond on their own property tax bill. Please note the chart references “assessed value” (not appraised value), which can be found on your tax bill and/or obtained from the Bedford Tax Assessor’s office.

ASSESSED VALUE	MIN INCREASE	MAX INCREASE	MEDIAN INCREASE
≤\$50,000	\$0	\$179	\$89
\$50,100 - \$75,000	\$181	\$269	\$232
\$75,100 - \$100,000	\$269	\$358	\$307
\$100,100 - \$150,000	\$358	\$533	\$428
\$150,100-\$250,000	\$539	\$888	\$666
\$250,100 +	\$895	\$8,448	\$1,147
Typical Assessed Value - Increase			\$253.41
Impact per month			\$21.12
Impact per day			\$0.70

“The estimated cost will again not include interest on the bond, furnishings, a new tanker (or any apparatus) or noticeably increased operating costs and maintaining the new ten acre site. There will be no funding for the important items that will be needed for improved EMS services.”

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Prior to addressing the specific points in this statement, it is important to clarify the confusion the CCB and others may have around the fact that there are MULTIPLE SEPARATE BUDGETS/FUNDS managed by the BVFD:

- The REVISED PROJECT BUDGET - \$15,717,000
 - \$14,750,000 would be funded by the bond
 - \$967,000 is funded by monies set aside into a “new building fund” from the general operating budget by the District over the past several years.
- The YEARLY TAX LEVY – Approx. \$1MM in 2019
 - These are the funds that come from the fire tax portion of our property taxes.
 - A part of these funds cover all operating costs of the Bedford Fire Department, including EMS equipment, firefighting equipment, medical supplies, pagers, radios, building and site maintenance, apparatus maintenance and repair, fuel, training, insurance, uniforms and protective gear, and administrative supplies, among other expenses.
 - Also from the Yearly Tax Levy, the District makes annual contributions to reserve funds (currently 3, detailed below), thereby allowing us to self-fund future necessities without debt. In 2019, approximately \$300,000 of our tax levy went into reserves for future.
- CAPITAL RESERVE FUNDS - these are comprised of monies set aside over the years as part of the District’s budget for restricted use (as indicated below)
 - An Apparatus Acquisition Fund - approx. \$1,013,642
 - Use of this fund is restricted for the purchase of new apparatus - if a new building is approved, next up is a tanker!
 - Building Reserve Fund - approx. \$993,289
 - Use of this fund is restricted for use on the new firehouse/emergency services project (see above).
 - Repair Reserve Fund - approx. \$33,232
 - Use of this fund is restricted for major repairs of the apparatus and the facility.

Given the above...

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A bond amount doesn't include interest (just like your home loan amount doesn't include interest) - however, **interest on the bond is accounted for in the impact per household calculation (i.e. median \$253.00/per year).**

Furnishings are indeed included in the cost estimates – \$315,000 has been allocated for FF&E (furnishings, fixtures and equipment) from the total project budget (\$15,717,000). The costs of the furnishings have been significantly lowered from the April project (by more than half) for several reasons:

- Many furnishings from the old facility will be taken to the new facility and used there, precluding the need to purchase new ones.
- The REVISED project leaves some non-essential areas unfinished, so we have room to grow and evolve in the new space
 - As additional monies are secured through the general operating budget and fundraising efforts – NOT a second bond request – those areas will be finished.
 - NONE of the unfinished areas will impact the Department's ability to be fully functional on Day 1 for our normal operations in the new site.

Funding for a tanker and any major repairs of any/all apparatus comes from the appropriate capital reserve fund (as referenced above) and WILL NOT come from another bond. These purchases are planned for years in advance, paid in full in cash, and funding is restricted exclusively for this purchase. Currently, the District has \$1,013,643 in its equipment/apparatus reserves budget; approximately \$750,000 is allocated for the purchase of a tanker, assuming the new project is approved, and we have a place to put it.

Our professional team anticipates operating costs of the new building to remain comparable to those of the current site. This seems counterintuitive, since the proposed space is larger than the current space... but the space is efficient (heating, cooling, etc.) in a way that the current firehouse can never be.

Of the 10 acres in the new site, we will only actively impact three. Both landscaping and the site are being designed to be as low maintenance as possible.

BFD ambulances are – *and will continue to be* - better stocked than most. The supplies that our EMTs use for their life-saving work have always been incorporated into the

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general operating budget; that will continue to be the case regardless of whether or not this new proposal is approved by the community.

“Additionally, the plan is to abandon our current firehouse on the Green, offer it for sale and to the “hope” of a good future use.”

As Bedford residents, we share the CCB’s sentimentality over the firehouse’s long and storied presence on the Village Green. It has been the home of the Bedford Fire Department for almost a century and adds a unique and beloved aspect to our historic village. Unfortunately, though, it would be both irresponsible and foolish to allow nostalgia to supercede safety and practicality, neither of which are possible in the current site.

Because the firehouse (34 Village Green) is owned by the BVFD, the District has an obligation to the taxpayers to sell the building for the highest price possible – and ultimately, it will be up to the new owner to decide on the building’s best use. That said, there are absolutely no reasons to assume its next owners won’t cherish the space and its historical meaning - especially as they will have to work within the restrictions of the Historic District.

There is interest in the building, and there have been numerous ideas floated to us already. We look forward to actively engaging prospective buyers if and when the bond passes.

“The desire of the CCB is for the taxpayers of Bedford Village to provide our EMS and Fire volunteers with funding to sustain and improve their services to our Community in a pleasant and safe environment. Importantly, we also wish to preserve and safeguard the character and



vitality of our Village. Without question, the Village is in need of a modernized fire facility. In the case of EMS vehicles, this would also mean having the latest electronic and medical equipment on board, as they become available. Moreover, an attractive soft compensation plan might be proposed to attract more and well qualified personnel. We are following the NYS proposed bill that is in Committee (S.5564/A.7655) that would give full state income tax exemption to volunteer EMS/Firefighter personnel.”

We appreciate that the CCB recognizes the need for the best resources, especially a safe and modernized facility from which to provide our life-saving services.

As referenced above, the electronic and medical equipment used in our EMS vehicles are planned for and paid from our general operating budget each year– so the proposed project does not jeopardize this priority in any way, whatsoever.

If passed, the NYS proposed bill (S.5564/A.7655) providing state income tax exemption to volunteer first responders would be welcomed by our members, who give so generously of their time, skill and compassion to the community. Unfortunately, though, this accommodation would not address any of the efficiency, functionality, or safety priorities of the REVISED proposal. They are really two completely separate issues.

“The Concerned Citizens of Bedford Committee is opposed to the proposed plan for reasons of the size, cost, lack of addressing future needs, and its lack of sensitivity towards the local residents.

Every aspect of this REVISED proposal was intentionally developed to address Bedford Villlage’s emergency services needs now and well into the future. The building plan provides longevity of design and functionality and the unfinished spaces can accommodate growth and innovation in the sector. Moreover, providing a safe and practical space from which to work will support volunteer recruitment and retention, and enable us to circumvent the national (and expensive!) trend away from all-volunteer departments.

After the initial proposal was narrowly defeated in April, two key leaders of the CCB joined the Community Liaison Committee and were extremely helpful in supporting the Bedford Village Fire District in developing a REVISED proposal that addresses the overwhelming majority of the concerns raised by the community. Indeed, we feel proud

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that the REVISED proposal before the community now is truly a collaboration that serves Bedford Village as a whole in the best way possible.

Additionally, at the very good suggestion of a local resident at a public information meeting and should the proposal be approved by the community in January, we look forward to convening a community group to help us address the breadth of implementation issues as the project gets officially underway. This will prove yet another opportunity for the decisions made around this project to incorporate the opinions and priorities of the community.

December 2019