

Introduction: This document is a chronological list of dates and decisions regarding the proposed Cabot Public Safety Building which will be built in Cabot, Vermont. The Cabot Selectboard felt it was incumbent upon them to write this document and that it be printed and disbursed prior to Town Meeting to educate the public on the critical importance of this facility and to dispel any misconceptions about the need and costs of the building.

A non-binding article #13 was petitioned to get a sense of what voters felt regarding this building: “Shall the voters of the Town of Cabot approve construction of a new Volunteer Fire Department building at 2466 Main Street (between 2506 and 2454 Main, the old Gochey/Marcotte property Cabot, Vermont).

We hope that after reading the following information, you will vote yes to support our continued efforts for finalizing the funding needed.

Cabot Public Safety Building FAQ

Information on the background, history, and decision making process of the proposal



Background: Pre-2023 Flood

When did discussion of a new Public Safety Building begin?

After several years of informal discussion, the Selectboard formally created the Cabot Public Safety Building Working Group in March 2018.

Why was there a need for a new Public Safety Building?

The Town of Cabot's Fire Station was constructed in 1962, with additions made in 1970 and 1992. By 2018 the building was nearing the end of its useful life and multiple code violations were known. Fire Department and Cabot Emergency Ambulance Service attempted to address the most serious issues, however, these temporary fixes could not address larger compliance issues with applicable law and standards, including National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, HIPPA, Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) and Vermont OSHA (VOSHA) regulations, as well as other occupancy requirements.

Who made the decision to purchase the 2466 Main Street property?

In February 2018, the Selectboard authorized the purchase of the property and existing structures for \$95,000, well below the market rate for the property. Some funds were re-allocated from that fiscal year's Fire Department budget, other reserve funds, and a portion of a CCIF grant to the Town of Cabot. The demolition of the structure on site and remediation of the land was approved in late 2022, with work completed in early 2023.

Why was the 2466 Main Street property selected as the site for a Public Safety Building?

Other sites under control of the town were considered, however, concerns with Agency of Transportation (AOT) minimums for turning radius onto public highways, proximity to the center of town, access to town water and sewer lines, availability of three-phase power supply on site, and location outside of a flood plain or areas unsuitable for a load bearing foundation had to be considered. This led the Selectboard to the conclusion that the 2466 Main Street location was best suited to meet these requirements. Additionally, keeping the town's emergency apparatus centrally located and near key infrastructure (i.e. Cabot Creamery, Cabot School, etc.) and on a paved road was a priority with equal response times to the community was a priority.

What was the role of the Public Safety Building Working Group?

The Working Group engaged with outside contractors to develop an initial design for the building and overall site plan for the use of the 2466 Main Street site. The Working Group held additional public meetings, including engagement with the neighboring property owners. The Working Group felt this was necessary after an initial vote to authorize building the new Public Safety Building narrowly failed in August 2018. The final meeting (held years after that vote, with significant changes made to the plan) was held on June 1, 2023, and featured the presentation of a design and site plan for use of the 2466 Main Street property. The identified need for a modern station has been in the town plan for two-decades.

The Working Group did not have any authority to actually approve the design, contract for services, or arrange for the funding of the structure – those decisions were for the Selectboard or voters to make through budget and/or any potential bond votes.

Background: Post-2023 Flood

Who made the decision to condemn the Fire Station and on what grounds?

After the catastrophic flooding event in July 2023, the State Geologist conducted an assessment in town and concluded that there was “active movement” of the land/streambank immediately behind the Fire Station and that it was significantly unstable. Added fill that was utilized after the May 2011 flooding incident had begun to fail, and marking flags, installed by the Geologist, slipped over the embankment.

Inside the Fire Station, cracks formed in the floor and foundation of the building, corner bracing in the structure began to buckle, and central I-beams in the bays were noticeably leaning toward the Winooski River.

On July 28, 2023, the building was “red tagged” or condemned by the Vermont Department of Public Safety, which required the relocation of Cabot Fire and Ambulance apparatus to other locations without any prior notice to the organizations. *No town officials were involved in the decision-making process*, rather, Cabot had to adhere to the State’s determination that the building was unsafe to occupy.

Why was a temporary station necessary?

After the Fire Station was condemned, Cabot Emergency Ambulance Service relocated the ambulance to the Goodrich Farm in East Cabot. Cabot Fire relocated the Rescue and Tanker to private residences, and the Engine to the town garage on a temporary basis.

The fire apparatus all need to stay in climate-controlled locations – two of the trucks carrying water that cannot freeze without substantially damaging the trucks, to say nothing of needing to be able to flow liquid water during a fire. The Rescue truck does not carry water, however, the equipment on board, including the hydraulic pump for the jaws of life, does not perform well if kept in below freezing temperatures.

The lead time for a permanent building was estimated to be in excess of 15-18 months, which required an interim solution. During the winter of 2023-2024, the Engine and Tanker shared space at the Town Garage at significant inconvenience to the Highway Department, and response times were impacted negatively. The Rescue was garaged at a private residence until the temporary station opened in April 2024.

Why wasn’t Cabot Emergency Ambulance Service included in the temporary station?

The Town of Cabot was informed that FEMA relief funding could not be utilized to support a private organization's operations. The promised payments for the temporary station and Public Safety Building were conditioned on the buildings being reserved for municipal use.

Financial Responsibility for the Public Safety Building and other Measures

What commitments were made by FEMA to the Town of Cabot?

FEMA representatives made many promises to the Town of Cabot, including payment for the demolition of the old Fire Station, building of a temporary station, and a permanent Public Safety Building. These commitments were made in July 2023 and reported upon in the August 2023 Cabot Chronicle.

What involvement did FEMA have in the planning for a Public Safety Building?

In addition to approving the temporary building design, FEMA provided input upon the design of the Public Safety Building once they committed to funding. This resulted in additional requirements being added, including a substantial increase in office space and a requirement that the building could be used as an emergency shelter – necessitating dedicated space for kitchen area and rooms that could be used as sleeping accommodations. This greatly increased the prospective cost of the project and triggered additional engineering fees.

Other NFPA and State standards also influenced modifications to the plan originally presented to the public on June 1, 2023.

Did the Public Safety Building Working Group have any further role in the planning?

No. The Working Group's role was superseded by the Selectboard itself as it coordinated the Town of Cabot flood response. No meetings were subsequently held. Various members of the Selectboard frequently met with Fire Department representatives, attended planning meetings with Connor Contracting, FEMA, and State officials on the design work, site plan development, environmental assessments, and permitting for the use of the 2466 Main Street site.

Is FEMA still committed to funding these projects for the Town of Cabot?

FEMA attempted to step back from its robust commitment to financially assist the Town of Cabot after the July 2023 flooding - to only include costs relating to replacement/demolition of the old fire station and temporary building. The Town of Cabot, with buy-in from the State of Vermont, appealed that decision. The State Emergency Operation Center has taken over many of FEMA's responsibilities after the 2023 and 2024 flooding events and is engaged in this process.

FEMA has received and approved all three appeals (demolition, temporary building, and Cabot Public Safety Building) utilizing the documentation submitted by the Town of Cabot. This has successfully opened the door to FEMA freeing funds to be applied toward all three projects. However, work remains to be done by FEMA in updating their documentation and finishing their internal processes. Accordingly, the total amount of funding from FEMA to the Town of Cabot is unknown at this time.

FEMA has made payments to the Town of Cabot for culvert and road repairs after the flooding. FEMA has backtracked from its position in 2023, (notably, FEMA representatives were at the December 5, 2023, meeting when the Selectboard unanimously approved the concept for the Public Safety Building design.)

Presently, the demolition of the old Fire Station and some costs associated with the temporary station remain in the process of FEMA reimbursement and were initially satisfied by the Town of Cabot's line of credit with banking institutions.

As of February 2025, FEMA has asked for a comparative estimate of placing a public safety building at the site of the old Fire Station. The initial estimate, with State of Vermont input, exceeds the estimate of the current plan at 2466 Main Street - based upon the need for complex stream bank stabilization and compliance with applicable State, Federal, and NFPA standards. However, the footprint of the land is inadequate to make such a venture feasible.

Are other funding streams available?

Yes. The Town of Cabot secured \$5.1 million in grant funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to support a new Public Safety Building. This grant, however, requires *a percentage of matching funds* (intended to be FEMA funds) to be applied to utilize the full amount of the grant. The Town of Cabot has been exploring State sources of funding to cover any excess costs or cover costs in conjunction with any monies actually committed by FEMA. *The goal is to construct a Public Safety Building with minimal direct financial commitment from Cabot taxpayers.* The USDA funds are not tied to the FEMA funds; however, *they are specific to the 2466 Main Street site* and plan is currently being finalized.

This means if the 2466 Main Street site were to become unavailable reapplication to USDA would be required. However, based on the current political environment in Washington DC, it is highly unlikely that a new grant would be awarded to Cabot — meaning *the \$5.1 million in grant funds would be lost.* This would shift the cost of a Public Safety Building directly to Cabot taxpayers.

The Need for a Public Safety Building

Why isn't the temporary station suitable as a permanent Public Safety Building?

The simplest answer is that it was never designed to be a permanent Public Safety Building, rather, it is a shell that was intended to get equipment into a climate-controlled environment as quickly as possible. The State waived several requirements, including a sprinkler system, since it was expected that the Fire Department would relocate within 15 months. That waiver for occupancy is due to expire in April 2026 and may be subject to limited one-time extension.

The cost of retrofitting a sprinkler system is likely to exceed \$1 million, based on the need to extend a main waterline to the building and then install the systems inside the building. There is presently no grant funding identified or allocated for such expenses, meaning Cabot taxpayers would bear these costs. Total costs of a retrofit could be several million dollars, making it far less economical than the current proposal for the Public Safety Building.

Additionally, the temporary station has no room for a decontamination facility, nor was it designed to meet the air quality control requirements for all new permanent firehouses implemented by NFPA and adopted by the State of Vermont. Other requirements relating to a fire station or public safety building were not incorporated into the design because of its temporary nature and the emphasis on timely completion of the project. *The costs to bring the building into compliance would be placed on Cabot taxpayers - with no grant funds or other sources available at this time.*

Ultimately, the structure at 137 South Walden Road will be available to the Town of Cabot and reuse once a permanent Public Safety Building is completed – without the need to retrofit these fire department specific features into the building.

The first day of operations from the temporary station in April 2024

Is there a final design and cost estimate for the Public Safety Building?

No, the Selectboard has not approved a final design in combination with a final cost estimate and breakdown of the funding stream for the proposed Public Safety Building. The delays in securing funding have led to some revisions needing to be made to the design as regulations have changed or been updated (for example, a lithium ion battery storage area must be added to the building's design and further installation of infrastructure to meet the new energy code that has recently come into effect).

Who has the final say on this – the Fire Department or the Selectboard?

The Selectboard. The Fire Department is a department within the town, just like the Highway Department. The Chief and members answer to the Town of Cabot, led by the

Selectboard. *The Fire Department lacks the authority to independently contract, commit to construction, or approve a design.* To that end, the Fire Department budget is controlled by the Selectboard and voter approved budget, and all expenditures are disbursed by the Town of Cabot Treasurer.

What is a Public Safety Building going to cost me, as a Cabot taxpayer?

The primary goal of this project is to *source funding completely from outside sources.* The current funding plan can be viewed in this manner (1) FEMA will pay to replace what we had, and (2) USDA funding will help bring it up to today's codes and standards.

The Selectboard will assess if any town funds are needed, but early estimates suggest multiple funding sources and donations will cover all costs, minimizing or eliminating town expenses. Any bonding by the Town of Cabot would be subject to a vote.

As part of the planning group, the Fire Chief has been fully committed to eliminating any town tax burden for this Selectboard led project — the goal is to achieve a zero-cost outcome for the Town of Cabot by leveraging all available options for the public safety building since the path and timeline for a Public Safety Building was forced by the 2023 flood.

Won't a new, large Public Safety Building cost taxpayers a lot to maintain?

The Public Safety Building is being designed to modern energy efficiency standards with the goal of a 70-year lifespan. Additionally, if fully funded by outside sources any incremental increases in maintenance costs will be far, far lower than the cost of a bond and interest to attempt a retrofit of the temporary building or starting over at an alternate site without USDA grant funds.

Where to find current information regarding the Public Safety Building?

The Selectboard will have the most current information. The Fire Chief is one of the technical advisors to the Selectboard. These advisors (officials from State agencies, Federal agencies, contractors, architects, etc.) meet weekly as this process moves forward.

In summary, we hope this information has given you a picture of all the steps involved in building a Public Safety Building that will have multi purposes:

- Fire Department that houses all required apparatus to protect our homes and businesses in Cabot and meets today's state and federal standards.
- A future place for EMS (Cabot Ambulance Services).
- Training Facility for all public safety personnel

- Emergency shelter and operation center for future climate events.

Please vote YES on Article #13 to give the Selectboard encouragement and support in their ongoing efforts to build this important facility.

Thank You-Cabot Selectboard