



Frequently Asked Questions

The following are answers to Frequently Asked Questions regarding the proposed South River Road Police and Fire Complex.

1. Why do we need a new Public Safety Building?

Bedford has experienced significant growth and commercial development during the past few decades. We are a vibrant community with more than 23,000 residents and hundreds of businesses. The current Safety Complex at 55 Constitution Drive was originally designed as general office space and was retrofitted when the Police and Fire Departments moved into the building in 1994.

As a result, the Safety Complex no longer meets the needs of our community, and of our first responders. Staffing has increased to meet increasing call volumes, creating a space shortage. Both the police and fire operations do not meet modern standards required to ensure the health and safety of employees.

For example, separate holding cells are now required for males, females and juveniles, and there is no space to create these areas.

2. What impact has Town growth had on public safety?

Bedford's population was 12,500 in 1994 when the Police and Fire Departments moved into the Safety Complex. Bedford has grown to a current population of 23,704 – a 90% increase.

Police staff has increased from 28 to 65, while fire staff has increased from 21 to 40. However, fire call volume in that time has more than tripled (1,206 to 3,842) while police calls have increased fivefold (8,266 to 43,291).

The current Police Station cannot provide adequate space for the daily operations. The Fire Department needs a substation in the South River Road area to improve response times for over 29% of its calls. Both Departments are currently using workarounds to get the job done, but the additional efforts are unsustainable and not economically responsible.

3. If this is such a serious problem, why have we waited so long?

The Town has worked on addressing this issue for more than 20 years:

- In 2000, the Master Plan detailed the need to address calls in the South River Road area.
- Two further studies in 2005 called for a substation on South River Road to be constructed.
- In 2014, a bond proposal for the substation received 56.7% approval, but failed to acquire the 66% approval required.
- In 2015, a Safety Complex Space Needs Assessment was conducted to review options for expansion.
- From 2017 through 2022, the Town conducted a Town-wide Facilities Space Needs Plan and reviewed numerous sites for both a combined and a standalone Police Station and Fire Substation.



4. How did you select the proposed site?

Police and Fire leadership, Town officials, and Consultants with expertise in this area reviewed a number of options and provided their expertise and feedback. The main goals were to develop modern facilities for our first responders, improve response times to high-call areas, and to create the most cost-effective proposal for Bedford's taxpayers.

Following a comprehensive review of all options, Town officials decided to move forward with plans for a new police station and fire substation located in the South River Road area.

The Fire Department covers 33 square miles from a single location. A second fire station located in the South River Road corridor, the area with the highest call volume, will allow for improved response times and better outcomes. While the Police Station can be located anywhere, creating a shared public safety space meets the needs of both departments while reducing costs.

As we discovered with the construction of the joint Middle/High School, fiscal prudence and careful design can result in benefit to the whole community. The school is truly the heart of the community and helps to retain property values. Likewise, constructing a new Police and Fire building will improve public safety and help assure that homebuyers and business owners continue to seek out Bedford as their first choice to purchase a home or establish a business.

5. Why buy the property if you haven't already designed the facility?

Owning the land allows for a site-specific design to be generated and to improve the cost estimate of the facility. In addition, the Town has pursued acquisition of several other properties in the area but was not successful. Acting now meant the Town could secure enough land in a part of Town that is under intense development pressure. Reasonably priced tracts are becoming increasingly difficult to find in this area. The property itself is an investment and should the project not go forward, it could be resold.

6. Where did the money to purchase the land come from?

The Town purchased the land using Capital Reserve Funds approved for this purpose at the 2021 and 2023 Budgetary Town Meetings. In 2021, the Town Council recommended a deposit of \$2 million funded from unassigned fund balance. In 2023, a deposit of \$1.5 million was recommended from fund balance that which was offset by a deposit of the same amount as a result of the sale of 4 Sunset Lane.

7. How will this affect Fire Department Response times?

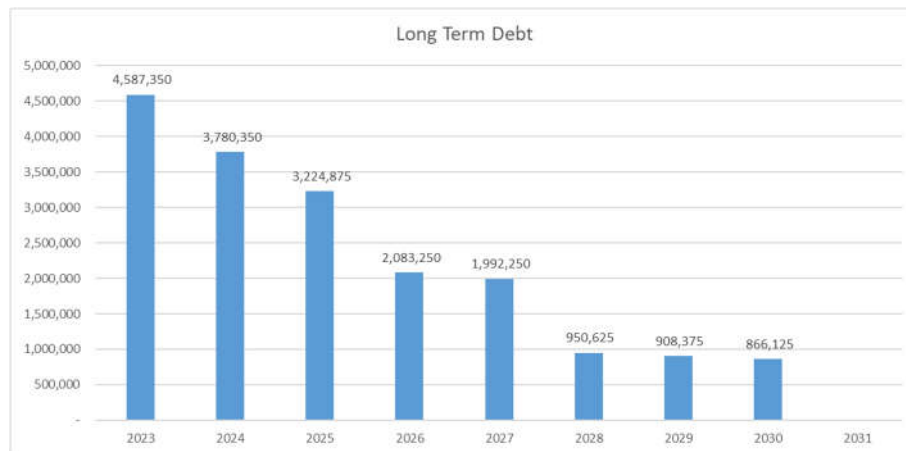
The new station will improve response time along the South River Road corridor, where roughly 29% of fire/EMS calls are generated. The response times for the remainder of the Town will remain consistent with current practice.



8. How much will this cost me?

The Town is currently still working on the conceptual design of the proposed police station and fire substation to establish a reasonable cost estimate. Tax rate impacts will be provided as soon as possible and prior to the anticipated bond authorization request in March 2024.

In addition, the Long Term Debt Service will decrease with previous bonds for the Roads Program being paid off in 2024 (net decrease of ~\$807,000), 2025 (net decrease of ~\$555,000), 2026 (net decrease of ~\$1,141,000), 2028 (net decrease of ~\$1,041,000) and 2031 (net decrease of ~\$866,000).



9. Why am I paying for a station that serves the commercial side of the Town?

That area also includes a number of residential senior facilities and services in those areas. Bedford has a long history of good community development, and has concentrated growth in commercial districts. This benefits all residential taxpayers, because commercial taxpayers do not utilize the same services at the same level.

10. Are there less expensive alternatives?

Developing a shared facility is the least expensive solution and will be designed to the specialized needs of the Police and Fire Departments. These needs cannot be fulfilled in the current building.

Municipal building projects, both here in Bedford and across the country, have been deeply affected by supply chain issues caused by the pandemic, and additional inflationary factors. Goods and materials cost more. Labor costs have increased sharply as the worker pool has become smaller.

11. What if we do nothing?

Doing nothing means the Town will not be addressing important public safety needs, creating a long-term detriment. There is no indication that costs of goods and services will decline in the near future. Also, the proposed site is an investment by the Town, and could be sold if the project does not move forward.



12. Does a new station mean that the Police and Fire Departments will be hiring more people?

The need for additional fire and police department staffing already exists independent of a new facility. The initial plan is to keep current staffing levels, but the Town will seek to add employees through the budget process over time. It is our goal to obtain a workforce that is in line with other communities of similar size and population.

13. What happens to the existing Safety Complex at 55 Constitution Drive?

The existing building will be retrofitted to retain the central Fire Department, the Building Division, and the Public Works Administration, and to add the Planning Department. This will allow “one-stop” permitting for residents and businesses. The Fire Department will still respond to calls for the western parts of Town from there.

14. The Police Department has been pursuing formal accreditation. Why can't the Police Department become accredited where they are now? Why are they doing this and why does it matter? What do we gain by being accredited?

One of the Police Department's major goals is becoming accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA). Accreditation is a process by which the Department will ensure it follows best practices in policies and procedures to meet 21st century standards.

Several facility-related issues impede accreditation, including problems with evidence handling and storage areas, lack of proper holding areas for male, female and juvenile suspects, and lack of proper interview areas. The Police Department strives to achieve the highest level of public safety and wants to follow the best standards of operation in accordance with generally accepted national, state, regional and local standards to best ensure the safety of our residents and police staff.

These standards do not mean that we must build the “best” police station in the country. However, the current facility is not set up properly to meet these guidelines.

15. How long will the new facility last?

The new station was programmed to meet Bedford's needs for the next 30 years. However, it is expected to last closer to 50 years because it is not anticipated that the population will continue to increase as rapidly as it has in the last 30 years.

16. What is the current versus the proposed square footages of the facility?

The Police Department currently operates out of 8,307 square feet. According to the programming efforts of our consultant experts, the Police Department should have approximately 29,000 square feet of interior space for a law enforcement agency of Bedford's size. The new facility is proposed to have 24,000 square feet of dedicated space with an additional 5,400 square feet of public and common space and 10,000 square feet for the Fire Department substation. The new station totals approximately 44,000 square feet.