

## Plainfield Town Garage Study Group

The Town Garage Study Group was convened by the Select Board in April of 2014 to study the existing Town Garage facility. The initial objective was to advise the Select Board on actions needed for maintenance and repair, including correction of building code deficiencies. In addition, the group was to formulate a plan to implement any required work so that the building and site remain viable, providing a safe and efficient work environment for the next 30 to 40 years. The group was also directed to consider, and where appropriate, incorporate the concerns of the Plainfield Energy Committee, Conservation Commission, Planning Board and the Town Highway crew.

The Study Group based its analysis on the assumption that the Town would continue to use the existing site and buildings for its maintenance operations. Study Group members made multiple site visits, reviewed past engineering studies and committee reports, and gathered information from engineers, contractors, vendors, DES employees and others. Almost immediately we discovered major questions about the design and construction of the main garage building such that the central question became “fix or replace?” Much of our subsequent effort was directed to answering that question. Along the way there were opportunities to take immediate action on significant deficiencies that would be appropriate and/or necessary regardless of the eventual answer to the fix/replace question. Group members, in cooperation with Town employees, have overseen the installation of a new fueling station, a new well, septic system repairs, and a new floor-drain holding tank.

The work by this group revealed that the site, pending further investigation, and with some modifications, can likely continue to serve as the base of town highway operations with reasonable effectiveness and without undue negative impact on the neighborhood or natural resources. The Town could choose to only repair broken or damaged parts of the building, and not attempt to modify the structure or make it code compliant. This group has collected information on these items and they will total approximately \$56,166 over the next 3-5 years. This strategy would leave the community with a 33 year-old building that was in arguably good condition, with newly replaced siding and roofing, but several significant latent defects would remain (weak roof, walls vulnerable to wind shear, energy inefficient, poor air quality, etc.) The functional utility would remain the same. The expected operating costs would remain much the same. The expected maintenance would be that of a building 33 years into its expected life. Deciding not to correct known deficiencies may place Town employees and equipment at risk and would represent an on-going liability to the Town.

The Town could choose to make the building safe for employees and reduce liability by bringing it up to applicable building and life safety codes. This group has collected considerable information on specific work items and identified additional items that would require further engineering / design to meet this goal. Following this approach would leave the Town with a building in good repair, in compliance with codes and safer for our employees and equipment. In spite of reductions in energy cost from the improvements made to meet energy code, expected operating costs would likely increase because of the ventilation required. There are some items that would be very expensive to repair for the benefit they achieve. Expected maintenance would remain that of a building 33 years into its life. We have already identified \$102,974.00 to date and know that additional design/implementation work for HVAC could easily cost in excess of \$81,500.00 yielding a total cost of \$261,764.00 or more to execute this strategy. In addition, contingency and contractor’s overhead and profit will bring the total to well over \$300K.

The third approach would be to design and build a new facility. A new facility would be safe for our employees, code compliant, and energy efficient. Building new would provide the opportunity to create a building more suited to current and future needs. The expected operating cost might decrease, in spite of ventilation costs, because of the opportunity to make the entire building more energy efficient. The expected maintenance cost for a new building would be lower. Without a specific design, we have collected general square-foot-cost information for similar facilities built within our region which suggests that construction costs for a new facility could range from \$600,000 to \$1,200,000. With this broad range, it would be very important to thoroughly understand our needs before committing to this approach.

After substantial investigation and consideration of many alternatives, informed by and in consultation with outside design professionals, it is the consensus of this group that the Town will likely find it preferable to follow the third strategy and should therefore prepare to transition to a new facility within the next 5 years. Because either the “Major repair” or “Build new” approaches involve significant investment, it is clear that we should study our existing functions to see if they are well supported by our existing facilities and whether there are significant

benefits to be gained from new configurations or procedures. Understanding our present and future needs will lend confidence to our final decision.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Town has contracted with the NH Municipal Association to evaluate the current staffing, equipment and facilities of our Town Highway Department.

Note: For full details of our report, see the Plainfield website at <http://www.painfieldnh.org>.

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