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MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL TRI-BOARD MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN, BOARD OF FINANCE AND PERMANENT BUILDING COMMISSION
OCTOBER 15, 2026
6:00 P.M.
Suffield Middle School Auditorium
83 Mountain Road, Suffield CT

Selectmen present: Colin Moll, Klaire Bielonko, Kathy Dunai, Kathleen Harrington and Pete Hill

Board of Finance Commissioners present: Eric Harrington, Mike Haines (6:20 p.m. arrival), Brad Belcher, Brian Kost and Tom Frenaye

Board of Finance Commissioners absent: Candace Forsman, Chris Childs and Mark Sinopoli

Permanent Building Commissioners present: Kevin Goff, Glenn Neilson, Cathie Ellithorpe, Joe Sangiovanni, Henry Miga, Billy Gozzo and Marty Page

Permanent Building Commissioners absent: Brian Baril

Also in attendance: Amanda Moore – Director of Finance, Jeff Wyszynski – Tecton Architects, Jeff McElravy – Tecton Architects, Tony DeLuzio – Colliers Project Leaders and Scott Pellman – Colliers Project Leaders

First Selectman Moll called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Public Comment

Robin Shlosser – 148 N. Stone Street
Matt Bruton - 114 Broadleaf Circle
Rachel Tyson – 44 Redstone Road
Neil Hornish – 864 Thrall Avenue
Rick Sotil – 426 S. Grand Street
Maureen Sattan – 36 Windbrook Drive

Presentation and discussion of the Permanent Building Commission's recommendation to the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance in regards to the Facilities Master Plan: Suffield Middle School and Fire House 1.

The Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance, and Permanent Building Commission (PBC) met to review the PBC's recommendations for major capital improvements identified through the Town's Facilities Master Plan. Representatives from Colliers Project Leaders and Tecton Architects presented their findings following an extensive evaluation of Town facilities, building conditions, safety requirements, educational needs, and potential project alternatives.

The PBC explained that its work involved more than two years of review, including facility visits, discussions with Town departments and building users, and analysis of the urgency of repairs and the consequences of deferring improvements. The Middle School and Firehouse Headquarters were identified as the two highest-priority projects. The purpose of the presentation was to provide the boards with the information necessary to evaluate the recommendations, understand the anticipated costs, and determine how the projects could be financed alongside other Town needs.

- **Firehouse Headquarters Project**

Tecton and Colliers presented on the existing Firehouse Headquarters, explaining that the facility has limitations involving apparatus space, building layout, firefighter health and safety, equipment protection, and the separation of contaminated areas from clean living and working spaces. The presentation illustrated how modern firehouse design provides adequate clearance around apparatus, improved storage for protective gear, and better separation between vehicle areas and firefighter living spaces.

The consultants explained that they had reviewed alternatives for improving or renovating the existing facility and constructing a new firehouse at the Town annex property. Following site analysis, departmental discussions, and comparisons with other fire stations, the proposed building program was reduced to approximately 13,600 square feet. The single-story design was intended to avoid the added expense and space requirements associated with stairs and elevators while providing four apparatus bays and the necessary administrative and support areas. The estimated cost of new construction at the annex site was approximately $17.92 million. The proposal would place the new apparatus bays in a configuration intended to improve access and circulation. The consultants recommended constructing the new facility at the annex location and leaving the existing firehouse available for future consideration.

Discussion focused on whether the existing building could be renovated at a lower cost and whether the proposed facility was appropriately sized for the department's operational needs. Members also considered the long-term benefits of improved firefighter safety, equipment protection, and working conditions. Questions were raised about whether a new facility would improve recruitment and retention and whether the anticipated benefits justified the additional expense.

- **Middle School Project**

Tecton presented the findings of its review of the Middle School, originally constructed in 1964 and subsequently modified through additions and renovations. The consultants identified aging building systems, roof and exterior envelope concerns, accessibility and life-safety issues, and limitations involving ventilation, natural light, acoustics, and classroom layouts. The existing configuration also presents challenges in supporting current educational practices and providing flexible instructional spaces.

Three alternatives were reviewed: capital improvements, comprehensive renovations and additions, and new construction. While capital improvements would address major repairs and

building systems, they would not resolve existing educational and layout limitations. Renovations would require extensive work while maintaining school operations and carry additional risks associated with existing conditions. New construction would better accommodate modern educational needs and could incorporate energy-efficient systems, including geothermal heating and cooling and solar panels. Members questioned cost estimates, reimbursement eligibility, contingencies, construction escalation, and the potential to phase improvements over 10 to 15 years. The consultants emphasized that estimates were intended to compare alternatives on a consistent basis, rather than to establish a final construction schedule.

- **Project Cost Estimates and State Reimbursement**

The boards discussed the impact of state reimbursement on the Town's cost for the Middle School project. The consultants explained that reimbursement depends on eligible construction costs, allowable square footage, and state program requirements, noting that some expenses may not qualify. Members questioned the reimbursement assumptions and eligibility of proposed work. Discussion also addressed construction escalation and contingencies, with renovations generally requiring higher allowances due to uncertainties in existing building conditions. The consultants emphasized that estimates would be refined as the project scope and state application process advance.

- **Financial Analysis and Long-Term Capital Planning**

Board of Finance Commissioner Brian Kost presented a financial analysis examining the long-term impact of the Middle School and firehouse projects on the Town's finances, including borrowing, debt service, operating budget growth, revenues, and competing capital needs. Members emphasized that the projects must be evaluated alongside other priorities, including school improvements, road and bridge repairs, fire department equipment, and other Town infrastructure needs.

Discussion focused on the potential impact of increased borrowing on debt service, operating budgets, financial flexibility, and taxpayers through property taxes and future mill rate increases. Members questioned whether the Town could advance both projects within the proposed timeframe while maintaining other capital commitments. Options discussed included phasing construction, postponing the firehouse, limiting operating budget growth, and adjusting the timing of other capital expenditures. Members also considered the Town's borrowing capacity and the need for additional financial modeling to evaluate sustainable spending levels under different budget and revenue assumptions.

The discussion highlighted the competing risks of proceeding with and delaying the projects. While moving forward would place additional financial pressure on taxpayers and the operating budget, postponing improvements could lead to further building deterioration, increased repair costs, and continued operational inefficiencies. Members emphasized the importance of balancing facility needs with other capital priorities, minimizing the impact on taxpayers, and maintaining sufficient financial capacity to address future needs and unforeseen expenses.

The boards recognized that there was no cost-free option. Deferring major improvements would not eliminate the need to maintain and eventually replace aging facilities, while proceeding with all recommended projects would place significant demands on taxpayers and the operating budget. Members emphasized the importance of balancing immediate needs with long-term affordability and maintaining sufficient financial capacity for unforeseen expenses.

- **Board Discussion and Next Steps**

Members thanked the PBC and its consultants for the extensive work completed and the information provided, noting that the presentations gave the boards a basis for further discussion regarding the recommended projects, their anticipated costs, and the Town's ability to finance them.

The boards will continue evaluating the Middle School and firehouse recommendations, including opportunities to refine project costs, maximize state reimbursement, phase capital improvements, and establish a sustainable borrowing and financing schedule. Further consideration will also be given to the Town's other capital needs and the potential impact on future operating budgets and property taxes.

No final decision was made to authorize either project. The boards indicated that the discussions would continue over the coming months as they determine the appropriate scope, timing, and financing of the Town's major capital improvements.

Adjournment

Selectman Dunai MOTIONED to adjourn at 8:52 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary