



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE  
MAYOR

To: Board of Alderman  
Re: Future Public Safety Building  
Date: May 22, 2018

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This memo explains the Administration's rationale for building a new public safety building, the process we used to select a location for the building, the potential building program, and how the new facility fits into the City's capital and long-range financial planning.

**The need for a new public safety building**

The Somerville Police Department (SPD) adopted 220 Washington St. in Union Square as its headquarters in 1985. Engine 3 and other Somerville Fire Department (SFD) staff and apparatus moved into the building at the same time.

The current facility does not adequately serve the needs of the SPD and the SFD. The building was never designed to function as a police headquarters or to house a fire department company, having served as a car barn for the MBTA prior to 1985. The building has also experienced several serious floods, one of which led to the relocation of Engine 3 staff out of the building into temporary trailers and later modular units on site.

Recognizing that a longer-term solution is needed to appropriately serve our public safety departments and our residents, the City began planning for the relocation of public safety into a new facility in 2016. The Capital Projects and Planning Department (CPPD) hired a consulting team (Weston & Sampson) to conduct a space needs assessment to compile quantitative and qualitative data about the existing facility and to understand administrative and operational goals and how those goals relate to spatial requirements. Based on this information, a space needs summary was developed indicating specific interior and exterior requirements. Individual sketches of key administrative, operational, and support spaces were developed including specific layout information for required furniture and equipment as well as technology, communications, audio/visual, lighting, HVAC, finishes, and privacy requirements. This information provides critical detail in identifying the program for a new SPD headquarters. Similar

CITY HALL • 93 HIGHLAND AVENUE • SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02143  
(617) 625-6600, EXT. 2100 • TTY: (866) 808-4851 • FAX: (617) 625- 3434 • [www.somervillema.gov](http://www.somervillema.gov)  
E-MAIL: [mayor@somervillema.gov](mailto:mayor@somervillema.gov)



information for Engine 3 of the SFD was collected during the process of designing and constructing the company's new modular units in 2015-2016.

### **Selecting a location for a new public safety building**

The space needs assessment indicates that a new SPD headquarters will require at least 77,000 square feet of space and a floorplate of at least 30,000 square feet. To identify potential locations that could accommodate this program, CPPD and the Planning and Zoning Division identified all parcels in Somerville that are at least 30,000 square feet.<sup>1</sup> They then selected from this list the most underutilized parcels. Weston & Sampson evaluated each of the resulting six sites against a uniform set of criteria to determine the best location for the new public safety building. These criteria include, but are not limited to, site access, whether the site can accommodate Engine 3 (in terms of size and location), estimated response times for Engine 3, the size of the site and the extent to which its shape accommodates public safety uses, environmental factors, and the estimated cost of development.

This site scoring matrix identified 90 Washington St., the current site of the vacant Cobble Hill shopping center, as the preferred location for a new SPD headquarters and Engine 3. In keeping with the recommendations from the [2016 Carlson Group Fire Study](#), the proposed new site for Engine 3 is to the east of Union Square, which will allow it to serve East Somerville, Union Square, and anticipated new development in Brickbottom, Boynton Yards, and Inner Belt. The median estimated response time for critical calls from this location is 3.98 minutes, well below the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard of 5 minutes, and Engine 3 will be able to respond to an estimated 92% of critical calls within 5 minutes. Additional key benefits of the site include its size (3.98 acres) and access and the fact that there are no existing tenants on the site.

### **Program for a new public safety building at 90 Washington St.**

At a minimum, the new facility at 90 Washington St. will house the SPD headquarters (including the e-911 call center) and Engine 3. As part of the design process, the City will investigate locating other uses at the building. For example, the City could consolidate all of our dispatch and call service operations in one location, which would include Fire Alarm and Constituent Services in addition to e-911. The City will also consider relocating Traffic & Parking to the new facility. These decisions will be made during the design process, and the rationale for these potential relocations will be discussed with the Board of Aldermen when we report on the recommendations from the Building Master Planning Committee in the fall. We will also examine whether the site can accommodate the spare fire apparatus and other fire uses currently located in Union Square.

In keeping with Somerville's goal to be carbon neutral by 2050, the City is proposing to build a net-zero-ready facility, which means, at a minimum, that the building will be ultra-efficient and only use electricity as its energy source.

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<sup>1</sup> While the City's preference is to locate the new SPD headquarters and Engine 3 on the same site, it did not restrict its search to sites located in the Engine 3 response area.

### **Financial implications of a new public safety building**

The City is requesting an authorization to borrow and appropriate \$8.745 million to acquire the 90 Washington St. site based on the appraisal ordered by the City and conducted by Mark Reenstierna of T. H. Reenstierna, LLC, which the City received on March 21, 2018. The City has included this amount in its revised Capital Investment Plan (CIP) project list in the critical category.<sup>2</sup> The construction of the new public safety building has been included as a critical project since November 2016. The associated debt service of these two expenses has been factored into the City's long-range financial model for the General Fund, and the City is exploring using the proceeds from the anticipated sale of D1 (where the police headquarters is currently located) to net down this debt service. We are available to brief the BOA on our projected long-term financial health at their convenience.

### **Items before the Board of Aldermen**

We are submitting three requests to the Board of Aldermen:

1. An order of taking for the acquisition of 90 Washington St.
2. Borrowing authorization and appropriation request for the acquisition of 90 Washington St.
3. Borrowing authorization and appropriation request for owner's project manager (OPM) and contractual project management services for the construction of a new public safety building. Massachusetts procurement law requires municipalities to hire an OPM for building projects estimated to cost \$1.5 million or more.

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<sup>2</sup> Critical projects are defined as those required to fulfill SomerVision and the USQ Neighborhood Plan. The current public safety building must be relocated to allow the development on D1 called for in the USQ Neighborhood Plan.