

Town of Newfields - Public Safety Building Committee
Meeting Minutes
8/19/2026

Members present: John Hayden, Tom Grella, Brian Knipstein, Bill Meserve (left at 6:29pm), Jack Steiner, Fire Chief Jeff Buxton, Police Chief Wayne Young, Police Lt. Bill Blais and Select Board Representative Hoby Harmon.

Opening and Introduction

Chair John Hayden called the meeting to order at 5:30pm. The committee then welcomed representatives from SMP Architecture, who had been invited to discuss their qualifications and approach to assisting the committee with development of a proposed public safety building

SMP Presentation and Project Approach

Jason LaCombe and Anthony Mento of SMP Architecture provided an overview of their firm and described their experience with public safety facilities throughout New Hampshire. They emphasized that their process is highly collaborative and intended to provide the town with sufficient information to present a well-supported proposal to voters.

SMP outlined a phased approach beginning with a kickoff meeting, goal setting, site evaluation, needs assessment, programming, conceptual design development, and cost estimating. The presenters stressed that the ultimate objective is to provide voters with a proposal that is both operationally sound and financially realistic. They emphasized the importance of involving the committee, public safety leadership, and the community throughout the design process.

Project Timeline

SMP noted that the committee is working within a compressed schedule due to the March 2027 voting timeline and the requirements of the SB2 process. The firm stated that while the schedule is workable, prompt decision-making and regular committee meetings will be necessary to maintain progress and avoid rushed decisions later in the process.

Site Evaluation and Constraints

Discussion then shifted to the proposed town-owned site. SMP representatives reported that their initial walkthrough suggested significant site challenges, including wetlands, drainage concerns, and areas of low elevation relative to the roadway. They noted that survey and wetland delineation work was already underway and that additional information

from the town's engineering consultants would be important before a final determination regarding suitability could be made.

Committee members explained that alternative locations had been explored previously, but no viable options were available to the town. The current site remains under evaluation because of its location, road access, and availability.

Needs Assessment and Facility Programming

SMP described its approach to developing a needs assessment through meetings with police and fire department leadership and staff. Discussion focused on identifying current deficiencies and future operational requirements, including:

- Police and fire administrative space
- Apparatus storage
- Training facilities
- Emergency Operations Center (EOC) functions
- Community meeting space
- Evidence and booking functions
- Fitness and wellness areas
- Shared-use spaces between departments

Committee members explained that both departments enjoy a strong working relationship and that maximizing shared space was considered a priority wherever practical.

Participants also discussed creating a public-access meeting room that could function both as an EOC and a community space while maintaining security within the remainder of the facility.

Building Size and Long-Term Planning

The committee and SMP discussed preliminary space needs, with estimates placing the building in the range of approximately 12,000 to 15,000 square feet.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on balancing current needs against long-term growth. SMP advised against overbuilding for speculative future expansion but recommended planning for reasonable staffing and equipment needs over the next 20 to 25 years. The firm also discussed design strategies that could permit future expansion without creating large areas of unused space in the initial facility.

Budget Development and Estimating

SMP described its budgeting methodology, emphasizing that construction costs represent only one component of a complete project budget. The firm explained that legal expenses, bond counsel, contingencies, permitting, and other project-related costs should also be incorporated into the overall funding request.

The discussion included SMP's preference for involving a construction manager early in the planning process to improve cost certainty, provide independent estimating, and help manage project risk. SMP stated that their projects have historically remained within approved budgets and that they have not had to return to voters for additional appropriations on prior projects.

Committee Authority and Procurement Process

John Hayden clarified that the Public Safety Building Committee serves as a subcommittee of the Select Board and has limited authority. The committee's charge is to investigate options, develop recommendations, and present a proposal for consideration by the Select Board and ultimately the voters. The committee does not possess independent authority to obligate the town to major contracts beyond established purchasing thresholds.

SMP expressed concern that changing project teams after the planning phase could create risks related to cost estimating and project continuity. Committee members acknowledged those concerns but reiterated that future contracting decisions would ultimately rest with the Select Board and accordance with town policy.

Public Outreach and Community Engagement

SMP stressed the importance of public outreach throughout the planning effort. The firm recommended a series of public meetings and presentations to educate residents about deficiencies in the current facilities, explain project needs, and gather community feedback before presenting a warrant article.

Committee members agreed that successful voter approval would depend on residents understanding both the operational need and the proposed solution. Ideas discussed included open houses at existing facilities and public presentations showing examples from similar communities.

Committee Deliberation Following SMP Presentation

Following the departure of the SMP representatives, the committee discussed the interviews conducted with the finalist firms Turner Group, Placework and SMP, compared

their qualifications, municipal experience, budget estimating approaches, and public safety facility experience.

Selection of Consultant

Following discussion, a motion was made by Brian Knipstein to select SMP Architecture as the consultant to assist the committee in developing a concept, needs assessment, site evaluation, and project cost estimate for a proposed public safety facility. Jack Steiner recused himself. The motion was seconded by Tom Grella and carried.

Select Board Discussion

The committee agreed that questions regarding procurement, construction management, and project delivery methods should be brought before the Select Board for further guidance and discussion. SMP representatives may be invited to participate in a future Select Board meeting to explain their recommended process.

Public Comment

During public comment, residents asked questions about the proposed site, wetland impacts, environmental reviews, neighborhood impacts, and the status of ongoing engineering and environmental investigations.

Tom Morgan noticed flagging being done at the site and asked about the site evaluation process. Gwen Morgan acknowledged the town has a need for this project, but expressed concerns about the suitability of the site due to its proximity to wetlands, residential neighborhood, and potential impacts on wildlife. Michael Street lives on Piscassic Rd. next to the possible site and expressed concern living next to a public safety building. His family enjoys the woods behind his property, which was purchased 7 years ago.

During public comments around 7pm, the town experienced a Town wide power outage so the online streaming stopped.

Committee members explained that environmental studies, wetland delineation, surveying, and civil reviews remained underway and that no final determination had been made regarding the site's suitability for development. The committee also reviewed the factors that led to selection of the current site for evaluation, including its size, municipal utilities, road access, and proximity to town services. It was noted that the current police and fire facilities are already within residential neighborhoods. The committee explained previous unsuccessful efforts to use other sites, and pointed to the Primex assessment reports documenting critical health and safety issues at the current facilities.

Approval of Prior Minutes

The committee approved the minutes from the meeting on August 12, subject to a correction of a company name reference. Tom Grella made a motion to approve the minutes which was seconded by Brian Knipstein and carried unanimously.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for September 2nd, 2026 at 5:30pm.

Adjournment

Brian Knipstein made a motion to adjourn. Tom Grella seconded the motion which carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:11pm.