Public Safety Building Information Session

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why did the Town of Valdese purchase a piece of Property on Pineburr Avenue to build a new Public Safety Facility when property on Main Street could have been donated to the Town at no cost?

   Due to its smaller size and topography, the cost to develop the donated property on Main Street for a new Public Safety Facility would cost more than purchasing property on Pineburr Avenue and developing it for a new facility. The additional cost on Main Street was related to more extensive retaining walls, site grading, constructing an access drive to Main Street, and modifications to the Main Street – Laurel Street Intersection. These additional requirements which were not necessary for the Pineburr site were estimated and the Main Street site total estimated cost for comparison came in at approximately $620,000 more than the Pineburr alternative.

2. Why locate a Public Safety Facility on Pineburr Avenue outside of the immediate downtown area?

   Due to a lack of available properties large enough for a facility, the Pineburr property was available for purchase. This location provides fire department access to Laurel Street leading north and east to an area of town where the fire department currently responds to many calls. The Pineburr location allows easier access for maneuvering fire equipment from Main Street onto Laurel Street than compared to access to Laurel Street from the Rostan property on Main Street.

3. Why do we need more operational space?

   Additional space is necessary based on current industry standards for operations of comparable fire and police operations, including requirements established by the North Carolina Building Code, American Disabilities Act, etc. The overall space needs were developed and tabulated in the initial Space Needs study that began with early architectural evaluations by Stewart, Cooper, Newell Architects in 2018.

4. Can the existing Public Safety Building be renovated rather than build a new Public Safety Facility?

   The existing Public Safety Building can be renovated; however, it will be costly to renovate and not gain any space for additional operational needs that is provided in a new facility design.

5. What is the cost to renovate the existing building compared to a new facility?

   The Opinion of Probable Cost to renovate the existing Public Safety Facility is approximately $6,484,199. The Opinion of Probable Cost for a new facility is approximately $7,048,050 (includes demolition of Pineburr Mill).

6. The existing Fire Department has four Apparatus Bays, and a new facility is planned to have four Apparatus Bays. Why not keep the existing building?

The four bays of the existing facility provide two drive through bays and two back-in bays and is limited to store seven vehicles. A new facility provides four larger drive through bays which can be used as eight back-in bays to store eight vehicles and provide greater flexibility. The new facility design is allowing for one additional bay to be added in the future based upon anticipated growth and vehicles.

Further, the existing facility's overhead doors are smaller than most modern installed doors which limits the size and type of future equipment that could be stored. Also, space to maneuver around vehicles in the existing bays is tight, and limits access to vehicles making regular apparatus and equipment checks and maintenance more difficult.

7. Why not separate the police and fire and build a smaller new facility for either police or fire and renovate the existing building for police or fire?

   A cost savings is created by housing both departments in one facility, by sharing mechanical systems and common areas.

8. What is wrong with the existing Public Safety Building?

   The existing facility is composed of three buildings built in 1926, 1975, and 1978. There are structural issues placing the buildings at risk which need to be addressed. The exterior walls are compromised and need at minimum structural repair. If structural repairs are made the building remains non-compliant as a Category 4 Essential Facility. It is possible to renovate the building into a Category 4 Essential Facility, but the interior will need to be demolished so that evasive structural renovations can occur. The interior can then be upfitted as new space; however, interior space will be reduced due to the additional structure added within the building. The existing building currently does not provide adequate space to support efficient, secure, and safe operations for public safety services.

   Building systems such as plumbing, electrical, and HVAC receive constant maintenance. Equipment and parts are aged and becoming obsolete. The police and fire departments have evolved and outgrown the space provided within the original design. The building is overcrowded in many instances with spaces being used for multiple functions creating risks. Some of their space needs are not provided which compromises safety for building occupants. Interior finishes are degraded and in need of replacement. Only a portion of the building is supported by an emergency power generator.

   The existing facility can be renovated to address the issues noted above, but it will be an expensive venture to update a facility which will still not provide the space needed to support the operations of fire and police.

   Finally, as has been discussed at length, the exterior walls are structurally compromised and in need of extensive repair or complete replacement to bring the building's structural integrity up to current seismic standards.

9. Can the existing Public Safety Building be repaired?

   The building can be repaired in accordance with the North Carolina Existing Building Code, but it will only meet the original built condition. It will not meet the structural requirements of a current day Category 4 Essential Facility as required by Chapter 16 of the North Carolina Building Code for all fire and police

stations or other emergency related facilities that must be protected during natural disasters. The building will need to be thoroughly renovated to structurally comply with current day facility and seismic category requirements.

10. Why is the proposed new Public Safety Facility so much larger than the existing Public Safety Building?

    A Space Needs Assessment was conducted with the Police and Fire Departments at the beginning of the project's scoping phase in 2018 and continued with subsequent architectural evaluations through 2020/2021 to determine their current operational needs and anticipated future 20-year needs. From this evaluation, a building program was developed to identify space sizes to allow department operations based on current industry standards. A new building plan was developed to address the 20-year needs. The plan was reduced in size to reduce cost and does not fully address 20 -year needs. The reduced plan mainly addresses space for current needs yet some of the current needs are not provided within the existing building.

    The Space Needs Assessment posted on the Town of Valdese website in October 2021.

    Not every town has the same space needs for a police department and/or fire station. The same industry standards are normally applied to address space needs pertaining to the function. A town in a neighboring community, with a smaller population of approximately 3,500 has a new police station based upon space needs approximately 10,000 square feet and is planning to build a fire station based upon space needs of approximately 22,800 square feet. The proposed Valdese Public Safety Facility is approximately 24,500 square feet somewhat smaller compared to a smaller town's facilities at approximately 32,800 square feet.

11. Are there any environmental, health, safety, and welfare issues with continued use of the existing Public Safety Building?

    There is evidence that asbestos remains within the building and will need to be abated. The fire department must manage several risks. Turn-out gear is stored within the Apparatus Bays which creates a health hazard due to vehicle exhaust being absorbed into the turn-out gear and its link to carcinogens causing cancer. Breathing tanks are being filled within the Apparatus Bays risking contamination from vehicle exhaust. Ice machine is located within the Apparatus Bays risking contamination from vehicle exhaust. Currently access from the Apparatus Bays into office and living areas are not controlled by ventilated airlock vestibules. Vehicle exhaust can enter the office and living areas. These issues are addressed within the new building design to provide a safer working environment for police and fire fighters.

    New facility will be designed with general ventilation, carbon monoxide detection, and a vehicle exhaust system in the Apparatus Bays. Current building bays do not have any type of ventilation and are limited in width and height reducing the ability to retrofit a vehicle exhaust and general ventilation systems.

    Apparatus Bay floor drains into the storm drainage system rather than drain through a sand/oil separator into the sanitary sewer system. Truck and floor washing hence spill into the environment untreated and violating environmental regulations.

The structural condition of the building is compromised and at risk due to exterior load bearing wall damage. The walls are broken beyond their original structural condition and need repair to return to their original design. The facility will need to be modified with additional steel bracing to comply with current day requirements as a Category 4 Essential Facility.

12. What will be provided within the new Public Safety Facility which is not provided in the existing Public Safety Building?

The police will be provided with a secure area to bring arrestees into the building and not compromise safety of building occupants. Arrestee interview, processing, and holding areas will be provided within an isolated secure area and not allow entry into the building proper. Space is provided for documenting and tagging evidence, evidence collection, and proper segregated evidence storage.

More office space is provided for both departments. Storage space is more efficiently provided for fire department so that turn-out gear, ice machine, and breathing tank filling can be provided within an isolated controlled environment protected from vehicle exhaust.

Apparatus Bays are larger with larger bay doors for easier vehicle access and exit of building and greater accommodation for future larger equipment. Bay space is larger allowing more flexible work around vehicles and equipment.

Currently police conduct large training events off site. Fire is limited to approximately 20 people within their training room. A new facility provides a larger Training Room which can be shared by Police and Fire accommodating up to 40 people. Currently departments have thirty-five members who would attend these trainings. This will allow Police to remain at station and fire can conduct inter department training on site as well comfortably conduct department meetings.

Fire currently has 1 shared bunk room, 1 shower facility, and 1 shared locker room for male and female firefighters to share. New facility will provide individual bunk rooms and gender separate locker rooms and restrooms to accommodate male and female fire fighters working together.

Currently departments use the recreation center for fitness training. A new facility will provide a fitness room to be shared by police and fire. With fitness room on site, fire and police can remain at the facility and work-out sessions become more flexible. Adequate storage locations for police weapons and equipment is necessary for employee and public safety. The proposal for a new facility would include locker rooms which would provide safe storage options for police.

Police and Fire share a Lobby, Training Room, and Fitness Room within the new facility design; however, police and fire operation areas are totally separate to comply with CJIS (Criminal Justice Information System) requirements. This is not the case at the existing facility.

13. What are the projected life spans of repair, renovation, and new construction?

A renovated building that includes seismic retrofit to a Category 4 Essential Facility may extend the life span of 40 years if properly maintained. A new facility is anticipated to project a minimum 50-year life span as a Category 4 Essential Facility.

14. Why were temporary repairs presented to Town Council in 2018 not implemented?

Town Council concluded that a more permanent solution was important to pursue. Town Council encouraged staff to research long term solutions to ensure employee safety and financial responsibility of tax payer dollars.

15. Do all three buildings have the same structural issues? If not, why demo all - could old town hall be saved and used for police - build smaller new location for fire?

    Some of the same structural issues are present in varying degrees of severity within all three buildings. The 1978 building shared by police and fire appears to be the most compromised structure. The 1975 old town hall has similar issues but could be salvaged, repaired, and renovated for police, but the old town hall is too small so there would need to be an addition to the old town hall section to provide the additional required space.

    In this scenario a new fire facility will need to be constructed first. The police will need to remain at present location while the center 2-story building is demolished following fire department's exit from the building. The building demolition will be necessary to create space for an addition to the old town hall since police require more space than town hall provides. There will be challenges renovating the old town hall since there are 3 interior bearing walls which support cantilevered beams supporting the roof structure. Once old town hall repairs, renovations, and addition is complete, police can move into new facility and the old facility can be demolished.

16. If construction of a new facility is based on the future, approximately 20 years, how have the public safety departments grown since the current building was built? What were the determining factors for this growth?

    The proposed new facility does not address all 20-year needs. The 20-year need design was scaled back to help control cost. The proposed design mainly addresses current needs which are not being met within the existing facility.

    Police and fire shared with other town functions a two-story building approximately 4,200 square feet in 1926. The building later expanded to approximately 5,600 square feet. In 1978 the facility expanded again into what is now 16,818 square feet. As the town has grown over the years, public safety services have expanded to address the growing needs of the town. Personnel and equipment have increased to address growth. Public Safety services have expanded over time. Various types of training have developed requiring space to equip public safety providers with educational and physical training needs. As fire equipment and vehicles are replaced, sizes continue to increase in size as equipment capabilities increase. History has identified health risks associated living within a fire station environment. These risks can be addressed with more space and mechanical means. Police departments require additional space to provide a safe and secure environment for occupants, evidence collection, and evidence storage.

    The old town hall was built around 1975 and contains approximately 3,200 square feet but is currently vacant and unused by fire or police.

    In the early 80's, the fire department responded to less than 100 calls per year, which were fire related only. In 1985, the department began the First Responder program which increased the call volume. Now, the department also responds to rescue emergencies, hazardous materials releases, service calls (trees

down, child/animal locked in vehicles, smoke detectors, etc.), plus conducts fire inspections according to state law requirements, more fire education, fire investigations, hydrant maintenance, and Safe Kids/car seat checks. Training and certification requirements have increased tremendously over the last 20 years.

The police department was originally built to accommodate eight officers. Currently, the department has increased to 13 fulltime officers, one administrative assistant, and ten reserves. The department utilizes meeting spaces in facilities not directly controlled by the police department (ex. Town Hall Community Room). The North Carolina training standards has increased requiring additional training for officers annually.

17. What is the estimated cost for demolition of the current Public Safety building and former Town Hall? When would this occur? What will happen to the land it occupies?

    An estimated cost to demolish the current Public Safety Facility is $175,000. These funds are planned in the CIP for 2024-2025. Demolition plans could be set for once new construction and a complete move of both departments is finished. A portion of the demolition cost could also be recouped by selling the land the current facility occupies.

18. Have other buildings and locations been explored prior to the comparison of Pineburr vs. renovation of the current facility?

    Prior to the Pineburr site, studies were conducted for a new facility to be located on property at the intersection of Main and Eldred. Prior to that, studies were conducted to add and renovate the existing facility at its current location and included the possible renovation of various other buildings within the downtown area for various parts of Public Safety.

    See information posted on Town of Valdese website in October 2021 for additional information.

19. Why move locations to an area surrounded by residential? On average, how many times a day would the citizens living nearby hear sirens?

    The abandoned industrial site was chosen mainly due to a lack of available properties large enough for a new facility. Currently there are houses across the street from the existing fire station and residents in Old World Bakery apartments, Baker apartments, and apartments/residences on the second floor of Main St that get affected every time the trucks go out.

    Siren events can be heard on average one to one and a half times per day. Some days there may be eight calls, some days none. During a siren event there may be up to four vehicles leaving the station with flashing lights and sirens. A lot of medical calls are dispatched as "routine traffic" so lights and sirens are not engaged.

20. What is the anticipated budget impact for operations and maintenance of a new facility?

    A new facility will be more energy efficient which has the potential to reduce facility operating costs. With the increase in square footage, there is an anticipated slight increase that would occur with electricity and gas usage.

21. Will the USDA fund a renovation project of the existing public safety building?

Yes, renovations are eligible improvements for USDA funding just like new construction.

22. If the USDA funds are used on the existing facility, will any "special" requirements need to be met?

    Yes, if USDA funds any renovation of the existing facility the entire facility will have to be modified to comply with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements.

23. Will the term of the loan to USDA be a 30-year loan or 40-year loan?

    The standard loan term whether renovation or new construction is 30 years. If the Applicant's local economic factors from US Census Data like population, median household income, etc. demonstrate financial need and the project's life cycle exceeds 40 years a 40-year term is possible.

24. What is the likely rate of interest for a USDA loan?

    Rates are adjusted by the USDA quarterly and follow the bond market. The rate for USDA loans through 12/31/21 was 2.125% APR. The rates are subject to change depending on application date.

25. If USDA funding is not utilized, what other options for funding exist?

    Local private lending is an option. Staff has inquired about private lending for a renovation project and it is possible, however, terms of repayment are much different from the USDA terms. Local private lending would be available for 3.1% APR and repayable over a 7-year term.

26. Why not tear down the existing public safety building and construct a new facility on the same site?

    Because the architectural needs survey results indicate that more square footage is needed currently that is feasible to be located on the current public safety site. Also, using the existing site would require the creation of temporary operations facilities for both the fire and police departments for the duration of demolition and reconstruction.

27. How will the fire and police departments respond to calls from the Pineburr property? Is the Pineburr location response time adequate?

    Police access could utilize Pineburr to the east or west as well as out to Ribet in the north and west. Fire access out is likely to utilize Ribet but could return by either Ribet or Pineburr. Chief Moss and Chief Stafford have both verified that response times from the Pineburr site would be adequate to cover the Town's corporate limits.

28. Can the demolition of the existing mill building on the Pineburr property be included in the overall project financing through USDA?

    Yes, demolition costs are eligible for the overall project work, including disposal of any hazardous materials found in the building. The current plan is to bid demolition in the main project to be completed concurrently with the other construction activities but bid the demolition as an add-alternate to give the Town the opportunity to omit the demolition work if the project's construction costs are more than the budgeted funds.

29. What is the estimated cost for demolition of the existing mill building on the Pineburr property?

Preliminary estimates of the cost to demolish the existing mill building are approximately $450,000 and that cost has been included in the current new facility project budget.

30. Will the Town have to abate any hazardous waste at the Pineburr location?

No, all environmental inspections have been performed and came back clear for any hazardous waste.