



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **1. Why are we doing this and why now? What's different?**

The Town has a long history of trying to construct a fire substation in the South River Road vicinity. The need for additional staff has far outgrown the current space at the Safety Complex. The population of Bedford was 12,500 in 1994 when the Police and Fire Departments moved into the Safety Complex. Bedford has grown to a current population of 23,704 – a 90% increase.

	<u>1994</u>	<u>2022 (Most recent full year)</u>
Population	12,500	23,704 (US Census estimate)
Police Staff	28	55
Fire Staff	21	40
Fire/EMS Service Calls	1,206	3,842
Police Calls for Service	8,266	43,291

There is simply no more space in the current facility. The Town has reviewed the option of expanding the current building, but it is not feasible and would not add the necessary safety features that are required. The current Safety Complex at 55 Constitution Drive was originally designed as general office space and was retrofitted when the Police and Fire Departments moved into the building in 1994.

### **2. If this is such a serious problem, why have we waited so long?**

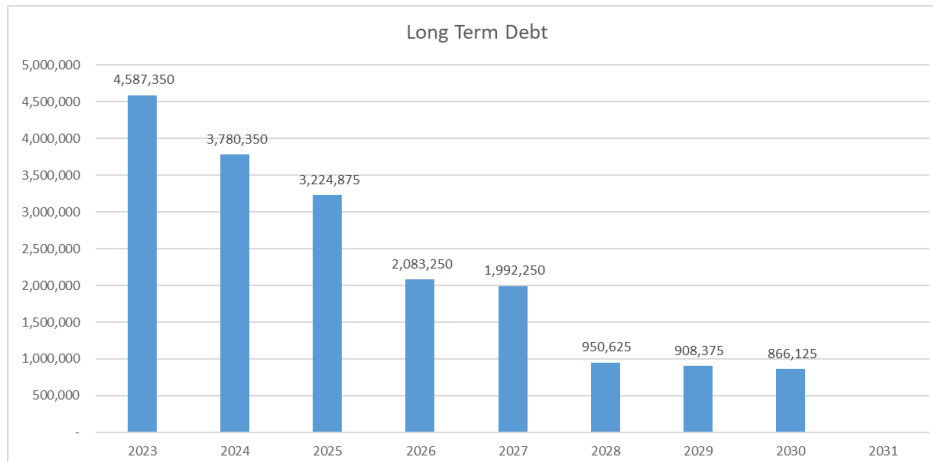
This effort has a long history. In 2000, the Master Plan detailed the need to address calls in the South River Road area and two further studies in 2005 called for a substation on South River Road to be constructed. In 2014, a bond proposal for the substation received 56.7% approval, but failed to meet the 66% approval required. In 2015, a Safety Complex Space Needs Assessment was conducted to review options for expansion. From 2017 through 2022, the Town conducted a Town-wide Facilities Space Needs Plan and reviewed numerous sites for both a combined and a standalone Police Station and Fire Substation. After conferring with professional consultants, police and fire leadership and Town Officials, a combined site along the South River Road corridor was determined to be the best option. The Town has purchased property on South River Road and needs to begin final design and construction of the new facility now. Additional delays will mean more issues and increasing project costs.

### **3. What if we do nothing?**

The current Police Station is a retrofitted insurance building that cannot provide adequate space for the department's daily operations. The Fire Department needs a substation in the South River Road area to improve response times for over 29% of its calls. Both Departments are currently using workarounds to get the job done, but the additional efforts are unsustainable and not economically responsible. The proposed facility is designed to serve very specific safety needs for both employees and the public. Police protocols have also changed, additional separate holding cells for male, female and juvenile suspects are required, and there is no space to create these areas.

### **4. What will it cost me?**

The Town is currently still working on the conceptual design of the proposed police station and fire substation, in order to establish a reasonable cost estimate of the facility. Tax rate impacts will be provided as soon as possible and prior to the anticipated bond authorization request in March of 2024. In addition, the Long Term Debt Service will decrease with previous bonds for the Roads Program being paid off in 2024 (net decrease of ~\$807,000), 2025 (net decrease of ~\$555,000), 2026 (net decrease of ~1,141,000), 2028 (net decrease of ~\$1,041,000) and 2031 (net decrease of ~\$866,000).



**5. Are there less expensive alternatives?**

Developing a shared facility is the least expensive solution and will be designed to the specialized needs of the Police and Fire Departments. It will include shared spaces and amenities wherever possible. There are specialized needs of modernized Police and Fire Stations cannot be achieved in the existing building. Unfortunately, there were other competing needs and this project was delayed. Inflation and supply chain issues have significantly impacted all construction since the pandemic. Developing a shared facility is the best way to reduce costs.

**6. Why did you already buy the property at 300 South River Road, if you haven't already designed the facility?**

Owning the land allows for a site-specific design to be generated and to improve the cost estimate of the facility. In addition, the Town has pursued acquisition of several other properties in the area but were not successful. Acting now secured enough land in this part of town that under intense development pressure. Reasonably priced tracts of land are becoming increasingly difficult to find in this area. The property itself is an investment and should the project not go forward, it could be resold.

**7. Where did the money to purchase the land come from?**

The Town purchased the land using Capital Reserve Funds approved for this purpose at the 2021 and 2023 Budgetary Town Meetings. In 2021 the Town Council recommended a deposit of \$2 million funded from unassigned fund balance. In 2023 a deposit of \$1.5 million was recommended from fund balance which was offset by a deposit of the same amount as a result of the sale of 4 Sunset Lane.

**8. Why is it located on South River Road?**

Bedford currently has one fire station located on Constitution Drive that responds to all emergencies in town, effectively covering 33 square miles from that one location. A second fire station located in the South River Road corridor, the area of highest incidence, will allow for improved response times and better outcomes. While the Police Station can be located anywhere in Town, the Town is trying to be efficient in co-locating the facilities where one larger facility is less expensive to construct and maintain than two separate facilities.

**9. How will this affect Fire Department Response times?**

The new station will improve response time along the South River Road corridor, where roughly 29% of fire/EMS calls are generated. The response times for the remainder of Town will remain consistent with current practice.

**10. What happens to the existing Safety Complex at 55 Constitution Drive?**



The existing building will be retrofitted to retain the central Fire Department, the Building Division, and the Public Works Administration, and to add the Planning Department so that all permitting activities can be completed at the same location for the first time. The Fire Department will still be responding to calls for the western parts of town from the existing Safety Complex.

**11. *Why am I paying for a station that serves the commercial side of the Town?***

There are a number of residential elderly facilities and services in those areas, and this will help with response times. Bedford has a long history of good community development, and has concentrated the commercial districts to the financial benefit of all residential taxpayers. The taxes generated from the commercial areas of town lower the tax burden of residents because they do not utilize the same services as residential areas.

**12. *Does a new station mean that the Police and Fire Departments will be hiring more people?***

The need for additional fire and police department staffing already exists independent of a new facility. The initial plan is to keep current staffing levels, but we will seek to add employees through the budget process over time. It is our goal to obtain a workforce that is in line with other communities of similar size and population.

**13. *We were here when the High School/Middle School project went through. Is this a similar situation? Is it being designed to reduce operational costs?***

The design of the combined High School and Middle School included common facilities shared between the two schools that saved costs, similar to what is being pursued with co-locating the Police Station/Fire Substation. The school is truly the heart of the community and helps to retain property values. Likewise, constructing a new Police and Fire building will improve public safety and help assure that homebuyers and business owners continue to seek out Bedford as their first choice to purchase a home or establish a business.

**14. *The Police Department has been pursuing formal accreditation. Why can't the Police Department become accredited where they are now? Why are they doing this and why does it matter? What do we gain by being accredited?***

One goal of the Police Department is becoming accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA), ensuring best practice policies and procedures are in place and validating that the agency is adhering to them. It provides clearly defined practices with predictable outcomes. Several facility related issues are impediments to achieving this goal, including problems with evidence handling and storage areas, lack of proper holding areas for male, female and juvenile suspects, and lack of proper interview areas. The Police Department strives to achieve the highest level of public safety and wants to follow the best standards of operation in accordance with generally accepted national, state, regional and local standards to best ensure the safety of our citizens and the staff of the Police Department. These standards do not mean that we must build the "best" police station in the country. However, the current facility is not set up to properly to meet these guidelines.