

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Community Meeting to Discuss Westwood Fire Station Project

September 9, 2024

Westwood residents are invited to attend an informational meeting on Monday, Sept. at 6 p.m. at the Main Library to learn more about the proposal to build a new fire station headquarters – FS1 – for the town.

“Our current main fire station was built back in 1948 when the department was run entirely by volunteer firefighters,” said Westwood Fire Chief Steven Lund. “And while the station has served our town for many years, a quick look around shows the many deficiencies which have become a danger for our firefighters.”

Lund highlighted the bays on which fire trucks are parked. The floors below are decayed and are held up by steel scaffolding in the basement. The building also does not have sufficient space to address modern safety regulations. Firefighters returning from a fire scene must decontaminate and store their gear on the main apparatus floor just behind where the trucks are parked. “This is a serious health risk to our firefighters,” said Westwood Assistant Town Administrator and HR Director Molly Fitzpatrick. “Specifically, this storage issue is a cancer risk that we want to mitigate immediately.”

At a special town meeting in early 2024, residents voted to allocate \$2.1 million – funded from free cash – for the development of design and bid documents for FS1; the Select Board had already voted to allocate \$1.4 million in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds for the balance, contingent on Town Meeting’s vote. After that a working group was formed to guide the project ahead.

The public meeting on September 16 will be the first in a series of community forums designed to update residents on the status of the project, present new information and answer questions from the public. This meeting will cover the history and status of the project. Chief Lund and Fitzpatrick will also discuss the various safety upgrades and general improvements that are standard in a modern station, things like adequate and separate living quarters for male and female firefighters, an updated training area and an expanded EMS space.

“A working group formed earlier this year was responsible for overseeing a feasibility study that identified the current location on High Street as the best location for the new station, based on response times, topography and available space,” Lund said.

Residents will vote whether to approve funding to build FS1 at next May’s town meeting. Between now and then, town officials want to make sure every resident has the opportunity to learn about the project and have their voices heard.

“It is important that residents come to the September 16th meeting to learn about this crucial project,” said Fitzpatrick. “We’ve spent the last few years prioritizing our schools, and our residents were deeply involved in the process. A new Fire Station Headquarters is a public safety need, and we hope residents will be as involved with this process as they have been with the schools. Our priority is to create awareness about this project and inform people why it needs to be done now.”