

Ipswich Public Safety Facility

Independent Analysis of the Project Record in Advance of the May 2026 Town Meeting Vote

Claude Analysis of publicly available record
May 7, 2026

Executive Summary

This analysis reviews the documentary record of the Ipswich Public Safety Facility (PSF) project from the formation of the Public Safety Facility Committee (PSFC) in December 2016 through the December 2025 design-revision phase preceding the May 12, 2026 Annual Town Meeting vote on a \$9.8 million supplemental borrowing request. The corpus reviewed includes the May 2021 HKT Architects Feasibility Study (with the embedded Pare Corporation Site Feasibility Study, June 2019), approximately 100 PSFC meeting minutes, the May 2024 project budget, the December 2025 expense report, the September 2023 Planning Board / ZBA submittal, the committee's "Myths Dispelled" FAQ, and contemporaneous local press coverage.

The analysis is offered in a balanced, steelman frame: it documents what the record actually shows, then sets out the strongest defense the committee can plausibly mount for each finding. Five top-line conclusions emerge:

- The total borrowing ask has grown from the \$25.5 million project total Chief Nikas told voters under the Town Hall tent on October 3, 2020 ("which will not be exceeded"), to \$37.3 million today — a ~46% increase. The supplemental ask itself was reduced from a planned \$13.8M to \$9.8M in early 2026 only after political pushback, not because the project got cheaper.
- Site limitations at 4 Pineswamp Road / 36 Linebrook Road were materially understated to voters in October 2020. The Pare June 2019 site study — which was an HKT-commissioned appendix to the feasibility study — explicitly excluded in-person reconnaissance, hazardous-materials review, and traffic analysis, and called for further geotechnical investigation including test pits and soil borings prior to development. The first soil borings were not conducted until late 2022.
- The committee's own December 18, 2019 Site Evaluation Criteria Matrix — finalized ten months before the October 17, 2020 Special Town Meeting — scored Pineswamp at the lowest possible value on Soils (1/3) and Costs of Development (1/3), and at the lowest value on Acquisition (1/4). This rating sheet does not appear to have been put before voters.
- The current 29,800 SF design has required substantial zoning relief, including a front-yard setback reduction from 50 feet (required) to roughly 15 feet (proposed) — a 70% reduction — plus parking-

setback variances. The project drew a multi-plaintiff lawsuit from the “Build It Right” abutters group, dismissed in August 2025.

- The committee’s position on building design has materially changed every time public support has wavered: from a flat-roofed modern concept (rejected by the failed October 2020 Article 9 design vote), to pitched roofs (Spring 2021), to a beige-context modern building (2022), to red brick after Planning Board input (Aug 2023), to the current “softened, less industrial” revision being developed in late 2025 — explicitly framed in committee minutes as required to win the May 2026 vote.

None of these findings imply that the project is unnecessary, that the committee acted in bad faith, or that a vote against additional funding is automatically the right answer. Public safety facilities built in 1907 (Fire) and 1900 / renovated 1986 (Police) are clearly inadequate, and the case for replacement is strong. What the record does support is that voters at the May 2026 Town Meeting are entitled to know that the building they will be asked to fund differs in cost, scope, and aesthetic from what was represented at every prior decision point, and that several risks flagged by HKT’s own consultants in 2019 were not resolved before the 2020 land-purchase and 2021 funding votes.

Source Materials Reviewed and Notable Gaps

Materials reviewed

- HKT Architects, Public Safety Building Feasibility Study, May 15, 2021 (503 pages, including Pare Corporation Site Feasibility Study, June 2019, as Appendix A; HKT Site Evaluation Criteria Matrix, dated December 18, 2019, as Appendix J; Sites Studied list, Appendix K; and 2021 Estimated Probable Costs, Appendix L)
- PSFC committee meeting minutes — approximately 100 meetings spanning February 28, 2017 through December 8, 2025
- Total Project Budget prepared by CHA, May 1, 2024
- Project Expenses by vendor as of December 2025
- Planning Board / ZBA Submittal, September 5, 2023 (TGAS / Samiotes Consultants)
- Planning Board Presentation, August 10, 2023
- Public Safety Facility FAQs (“Myths Dispelled”), undated
- Ed Marsh’s memorandum on the Pineswamp purchase and October 17, 2020 STM
- Contemporaneous press coverage from The Local News, The Town Common, Salem News, and the committee’s own website (ipswichpublicsafetyfacility.net)

Notable gaps in the source set

- The original HKT “draft” Feasibility Study dated February 2020 — referenced in Ed’s memo and apparently the document scoring soils 1/3 and contamination as 2/3 — was not provided. The May 15, 2021 final study was reviewed instead and is the canonical record.
- The HKT scope-of-work / contract is reportedly not on the town website.
- The Town’s Purchase and Sale Agreement with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese (effective on passage of Article 8 at the October 17, 2020 STM) is reportedly not on the town website.
- Committee meeting minutes from April 2024 through August 25, 2025 are missing from the corpus — a 17-month gap. This period overlaps with the Build It Right lawsuit, the 2024 zoning-change vote (defeated), and the project’s legal pause. Findings about that interval rely on press coverage rather than primary records.
- Soil-boring results (subsurface investigation work performed in 2022) and the Conservation Commission’s peer-review report (the source of the “64 items of concern” referenced in the FAQ) were not in the folder.
- The official record-of-action text of the October 17, 2020 STM articles, the October 16, 2021 STM warrant, and the May 12, 2026 ATM warrant article were not in the folder. Vote tallies were verified through press coverage.

Where a finding rests on an inferential bridge or on press coverage rather than primary documentary record, that fact is flagged in the discussion below. Findings drawn directly from PSFC minutes, the HKT feasibility study, the Pare site study, the project budget, or the ZBA submittal are quoted with date or page citation.

1. Opinion on the Design and Plan for a 13,000-Person New England Town

Program scope and scale

The current design is a single 29,800 GSF (gross square feet) combined facility consolidating seven public-safety functions — Police, Fire, Emergency Communications Center, Emergency Management, Harbormaster, Shellfish, and Animal Control — on roughly 12 acres at the intersection of Linebrook and Pineswamp Roads. The building footprint is approximately 246 feet long with a fire-apparatus mass at one end and a two-story office block at the other. Per the September 2023 ZBA submittal, the high point of the structure is 85’8” for roof access and approximately 97 feet to the proposed communications tower. A standalone communications tower is shown adjacent.

By comparison points the committee itself collected and put on the record:

- Salisbury, MA (population ~9,800; toured by PSFC on September 11, 2019): 18,000 SF combined facility, \$11.5M building plus \$3M soft costs, came in \$500,000 under budget.
- Essex, MA (smaller call-firefighter department): combined facility, ultimately funded at “\$17+ million” in 2019 after several Town Meeting tries (per Jamie Fay’s 8/10/2021 PSFC remarks).
- Charlton, MA (population 12,981, cited by Chief Nikas on October 3, 2020): \$28.5M (2021).
- Ashland, MA (population 16,593, cited by Chief Nikas on August 10, 2021): 42,000 SF combined facility — larger building, more population.

Ipswich’s current ask of \$37.3 million for a 29,800 SF building works out to approximately \$1,251 per gross square foot of total project cost (~\$810/SF hard construction per the committee’s own FAQ; the balance is soft costs, FF&E, OPM, contingency, and architect fees that have gone through four amendments). Salisbury, two years earlier and roughly the same building type, came in at approximately \$806/SF total project cost. Even allowing 6% annual escalation — the figure Galante used at the October 16, 2025 public forum — Salisbury’s 2017 cost would inflate to roughly \$960/SF in 2025 dollars, materially below Ipswich’s figure. Some of the gap is explained by Ipswich’s decision (under the town’s Net Zero Carbon Resolution and Green Community designation) to design an all-electric, solar-ready building on a wet site that requires conventional footings and extensive stormwater management; the rest is harder to account for from the documentary record alone.

Architectural fit with Ipswich

Ipswich is a coastal New England town with a deep historic fabric: South Green and Meeting House Green districts, the Hall-Haskell House (1819), the Ipswich Mills Survey area, and a dense inventory of 18th- and 19th-century homes. The committee’s own Pare site study (June 2019) catalogues the Cross Farm House, D. Dickerson House, and N. Jewett House on Linebrook Road as historic-inventoried properties immediately adjacent to the chosen site. The town’s building stock at the proposed site is residential and rural; Pineswamp Road is a designated Scenic Road, and the parcel sits inside the Rural Residence A (RRA) district and the Water Supply Protection (Zone II Wellhead) overlay.

Three observations on architectural fit:

- The TGAS-designed building, as approved by the Planning Board in September 2023, is a modern brick, zinc-panel, and curtain-wall composition with a flat-roof apparatus mass and a two-story office block. Per the September 2023 PB submittal, exterior materials include “masonry veneer” (red brick, after a 2023 change from beige), “zinc panels,” “metal panels,” “insulated metal panels,” “aluminum storefront,” and curtain-wall glazing. This vocabulary is more typical of suburban civic / corporate campuses (the firm’s portfolio of public-safety buildings in larger or denser communities) than of the historic clapboard-and-brick fabric one block away on Linebrook Road.
- The committee itself acknowledged this fit problem on August 26, 2025, when Chief Parisi described the existing approved design as “Industrial” and Jamie Fay introduced a motion to revisit the exterior to make it “more popular with the citizenry”. Two Design Review Board members who attended the October 16, 2025 public forum suggested that the design should draw from the “residential” family of Ipswich buildings rather than civic or commercial, “as the site is a neighborhood, not in the Town center.”
- The ongoing late-2025 design revisions appear to be cosmetic rather than fundamental: the October 27, 2025 minutes record that suggested gables would be “false gable fronts” with a flat roof retained for height-limit reasons, and that proposed window changes “would not be true double-hung” but “only referencing the style.” Architect Galante reiterated that any revisions “should not require any changes to the building’s structure” — a constraint that effectively limits the redesign to surface treatment.

Site fit and operational logic

The operational case for Pineswamp — fire response time to Linebrook Road and the Neck, egress at a signalized or stop-controlled intersection rather than the current Central Street (Route 1A) bottleneck, and adequate apparatus turning radius — is genuine and well supported by the HKT feasibility study (pages 7–10). The committee’s emergency-response argument is its strongest, and any analysis that ignored it would be incomplete. However:

- The buildable footprint has shrunk repeatedly. Ed’s memo cites a February 2020 town wetlands map showing only 2.35 of 11.6 acres as upland. At the July 26, 2022 PSFC meeting, Ted Galante (TGAS) described the buildable area as “1.3 acres, running along Linebrook and Pine Swamp Roads.” Jamie Fay told the September 28, 2023 PSFC meeting that “we are now down to 2+ acres” after the Conservation Commission peer review and that “the Town hired its own wetland scientists in the summer of 2020 before we bought it, found that there were more wetlands.” The buildable area was therefore known to be constrained, and was getting more constrained, throughout the period when the committee was telling the town that the site was “more than sufficient” (HKT, p. 27).
- The 50-foot front setback in the RRA district has been reduced via the ZBA approval to roughly 15 feet (per the September 2023 PB submittal site plan). A 37.5’ setback is applied for off-street parking only. These are not minor variances; they confirm that the building does not naturally fit the dimensional rules of the district and required relief the Pare June 2019 study had flagged as a possibility (“use allowed by special permit of the ZBA”).
- Approximately the entire site sits within the Zone II Wellhead Protection Area, per Pare. Impervious cover greater than 15% requires special permitting through the Planning Board. The current site

plan shows extensive parking, drive aisles, an apparatus apron, and the building footprint, plus on-site stormwater infiltration systems sized for the resulting runoff. This is a heavily engineered solution to a constraint that did not exist on either of the alternative downtown sites studied.

Summary opinion

On balance: a 29,800 SF combined public-safety facility is a defensible program for a town of 13,800 with seven consolidated functions and a coastal climate-resilience mandate. The operational logic for an out-of-downtown site is strong. The specific design — an industrial-modernist building with metal panels and a 246-foot-long mass dropped onto a wetland-constrained, scenic-road parcel in a rural-residential district — is harder to defend on aesthetic-fit grounds, and the committee has now publicly conceded as much. The cost per square foot is materially higher than peer New England towns, and a meaningful share of the difference is not transparently explained in the budget documents the public has access to. A reasonable Town Meeting voter could conclude that the project is necessary but the price and the design as presently approved are not the project that should be completed; that voter's remedy under Massachusetts municipal practice is to vote No on the supplemental funding article and require the committee to return with a revised proposal.

2. Digest of Instances Where Feedback Was Set Aside

“Ignored” is a strong word; the more accurate framing in most cases is “acknowledged but not acted on,” “deferred until after a vote,” or “responded to with a cosmetic change.” The instances below are presented chronologically with the documentary citation.

2.1 Site selection: minimal public discussion before the P&S was signed

From March 21, 2017 through December 3, 2019, site discussions were almost entirely conducted in Executive Session. Five sets of executive-session minutes (March 21, 2017; April 23, 2019; July 17, 2019; October 10, 2019; and an earlier date) were not approved and released until February 18, 2020 — after a binding Purchase and Sale Agreement had been negotiated in December 2019 (per the December 3, 2019 PSFC minutes: “The P&S agreement on the Linebrook Rd/Pine Swamp Rd. is ready and at \$630,000”). The first public unveiling of the chosen site to the broader community took place on January 29, 2020 at Our Lady of Hope Church — by which point the deal was already structured.

Citizen Jack Moon, at the July 17, 2019 meeting, observed during citizen queries: “surmised that the PSFC is not going to discuss sites openly.” The minutes record no rebuttal.

2.2 Original (failed) Article 9 design vote, October 2020

Article 9 at the October 17, 2020 STM — the \$2.25M design appropriation — failed to reach the required two-thirds at Town Meeting and was subsequently defeated at the October 24 ballot, 995–1,029 (per Salem News and committee minutes). PSFC members’ internal explanations for the failure (per minutes of October 27, November 17, and December 15, 2020) focused on tactical issues — the under-the-tent setting, weather, lack of a firm cost number — and on “flat-roofed design...as uninspiring” (December 15, 2020 minutes). The voters’ verdict was treated as a presentation problem and a design aesthetic problem, not as a substantive concern about cost, site, or scope.

Critically, the committee did not re-open the question of whether to proceed at Pineswamp; it moved directly to packaging a larger combined ask (land + design + construction = \$27.5M) for October 2021. The Build It Right grievance that the 2020 vote was “only” about the land and that voters never approved the building of this scale at this site retains some force here.

2.3 Public design participation framed as a constraint, not an input

Several entries in the minutes show a pattern of treating public input as a sales / messaging problem rather than a design problem:

“Janet said that not too many people engage in design participation — mostly neighbors.”

— PSFC minutes, February 23, 2021 (Janet Slemenda, HKT)

“Bob asked if PSFC will be seeking public opinion or is the community trusting us with the checkbook. He also felt that we don’t need reasons for turning an architect down.”

— PSFC minutes, May 12, 2022 (Bob Weatherall, Chair)

“Jamie opined that architects let the client dictate in a way that architects think is wrong in trying to please. ... Bob commented that we should really trust the architectural firm to have running room to do our project.”

— PSFC minutes, May 12, 2022

John Sarni (Design Review Board) repeatedly pushed for two-story parking and for option-based public design feedback (July 26, 2022; October 27, 2025). On October 27, 2025 the response was explicit: “TGAS is not developing options to be presented for public choice, rather TGAS is working to develop one cohesive building the exterior elements of which reflect a synthesis of all the firm has heard at the public forums.”

2.4 Geothermal heating and Climate Resiliency Committee feedback

On August 4, 2020, Michael Johnson of the Climate Resiliency Committee asked PSFC about geothermal heat pumps, ground heat pumps, and day-lighting. The minutes record general agreement “in principle.” On October 12, 2022, Ted Galante stated: “It will be an all electric building. Ground-source heat will be very difficult and very expensive on this site because of the wetland.” Mary Delai (Climate Resiliency Committee) noted she did not want geothermal dismissed; the December 6, 2022 minutes record discussion of “four options for heating” and tax credits, but the final design proceeded as all-electric air-source. The wetland constraint that made geothermal expensive was a feature of the site itself; the committee had not previously presented the heating-system trade-off to voters as a function of site choice.

2.5 Citizen calls to reconsider after lawsuits filed (March 19, 2024)

“Paul Callebaugh, citizen of Ipswich and a project manager for 30 years, spoke about the need for a police/fire facility ... [and that] many projects failed because they didn’t adjust to changed circumstances. People in the part of Town where the proposed facility is feel that this is a bad location, multiple variances have been applied, and lawsuits from angry abutters have been filed. He urged that PSFC reconsider and go back to the drawing board.”

— PSFC minutes, March 19, 2024

The committee’s response, recorded immediately after the citizen comment, was to move to the agenda and “advance the final design of the project with the architect to get it to a final set of plans,” and to propose a zoning-change Warrant Article. The zoning change was subsequently defeated at the May 2024 Town Meeting per The Local News (May 22, 2024).

2.6 Two of three October–November 2025 public listening sessions had no committee quorum

Per the minutes themselves: October 6, 2025 (joint Select Board / PSFC) — “There was no quorum of the Committee membership in attendance.” October 25, 2025 (Saturday 9:00 a.m. listening session) — “This was a public listening/input session. There was not a quorum of committee members present.” November 10, 2025 — same. Three of the meetings staged as opportunities for the public to engage on design were not attended by enough committee members to constitute a deliberative body.

3. Digest of Committee Position Changes Aimed at Approval

This section catalogues the committee's public position on a given question, the subsequent change, and the documentary trigger for the change. In each case the change preceded or coincided with a vote-readiness milestone.

3.1 From flat roof to pitched roof to red brick to "softened"

- Fall 2020: HKT presents a flat-roofed modern concept (PSFC October 6, 2020 minutes).
- Article 9 fails at the October 24, 2020 ballot (995–1,029).
- December 15, 2020 minutes: "Discussion ensued about people's reaction to a flat-roofed design for the public safety facility as uninspiring."
- February 23, 2021: HKT's Janet Slemenda "presented several designs of a proposed facility on Linebrook/Pine Swamp Roads with pitched roofs because townspeople had voiced negative opinions re flat roofs."
- Spring/Summer 2022: PSFC selects The Galante Architecture Studio (TGAS) over Lavallee/Brensinger (May 12, 2022 minutes).
- October 26, 2022: Galante presents three concepts ("sloped," "illuminate," "canopy") in a "Beige Context."
- August 8, 2023: "red brick has replaced beige brick (consensus of the Working Group that we needed to make the change)." Per minutes, this rendering "is what the Planning Board recommends."
- September 2023: Planning Board, ZBA, and Conservation Commission all approve the project (with conditions).
- August 26, 2025: Chief Parisi describes the approved design as "Industrial." Fay introduces revisions "to make the building more popular with the citizenry." Committee consensus per minutes: "all work necessary at this point... must be done with the intention of gaining voters' support for any additional funding at the May '26 Town Meeting."
- September–December 2025: ICON Architects added as a design-review consultant; "softening" revisions explored (cornices, slopes, false gable fronts on a flat roof, residential window proportions).

The pattern is unambiguous: aesthetic positions move toward whatever appears most likely to secure the next vote, and the committee's own minutes describe that motivation in exactly those terms. None of these changes have addressed structural or programmatic concerns; per Galante (September 10, 2025): "any changes made to the exterior design should not require any changes to the building's structure."

3.2 From "\$23M...will not be exceeded" to \$37.3M

Quoted directly from the October 3, 2020 minutes — the public tent meeting two weeks before the STM:

"Robertson commented that \$27 million is scaring people, and Chief Nikas corrected him with the \$23 million number which will not be exceeded. ... Mr. Graham asked... that PSFC

paint a better picture of what the realistic ultimate cost will be. Rob assured him that, relying on our HKT experts, it will be the \$23 million figure. ... Nikas quoted the \$23 million to build is probably what it will be, totaling \$25.5 million as a total project.”

— PSFC public meeting minutes, October 3, 2020

Subsequent public asks and budgets:

- HKT Appendix L (Fall 2021 update): \$27,603,487 estimated total project cost.
- October 2021 ATM: \$27.5M debt-exclusion approved.
- December 2022: TM Stephen Crane reports the schematic estimate is “\$5 million figure over the construction budget” (PSFC December 6, 2022).
- October 2023: \$500,000 contingency Free Cash article approved at STM.
- May 1, 2024 Total Project Budget (CHA): \$30,051,000 — already \$2.55M over the 2021 vote.
- Original supplemental ask: \$13.8M (per Local News, April 2026).
- Reduced ask after political pushback: \$9.8M (per Local News April 8, 2026; The Town Common, December 31, 2025).
- Total borrowing if approved: \$37.3M, a ~36% increase over the \$27.5M approved in 2021 and a ~46% increase over the \$25.5M total Chief Nikas told voters under the tent.

3.3 From “more than sufficient buildable area” to “2+ acres”

Compare the canonical pre-vote framing to the post-vote acknowledgment:

“Pare Corporation, civil engineers, provided detailed information on two parcels. ... [4 Pineswamp Road] was undeveloped except for a community garden. While a portion of that land is too wet to build on and will be preserved as open space, there is a buildable portion that is more than sufficient for a combined public safety facility.”

— HKT Feasibility Study, May 15, 2021, p. 27

“We have already had the wetlands flagged on this site and we have been in consultation with our Conservation Agent and the Chair of the Conservation Commission, and yes, we can fit the building and accommodate all the 65 foot buffer.”

— Town Manager Tony Marino at the October 17, 2020 STM (per Ed Marsh’s memo, time-stamped from the meeting recording)

And the post-vote reality:

“Aiming at a target, 42,000 square feet must be certified for the build with the potential of a 30’ cantilever over upper floors. ... buildable area as 1.3 acres, running along Linebrook and Pine Swamp Roads.”

— Ted Galante (TGAS) at PSFC, July 26, 2022

“while some alleged that we misrepresented the site when we went to Town Meeting (originally a 12-acre site with a lot of wetlands), we bought 8 acres. Wetlands has a

boundary of maybe 3–3 ½ acres. The Town hired its own wetland scientists in the summer of 2020 before we bought it, found that there were more wetlands, and we are now down to 2+ acres (which was known at Town Meeting) as a good amount to build on.”

— Jamie Fay at PSFC, September 28, 2023

Two things follow. First, Fay’s September 2023 statement is itself partly inaccurate: the Pare assessment cards in Appendix B of the HKT feasibility study record the parcel as 11.990 acres, and PSFC’s own December 3, 2019 minutes confirm a 11.99-acre purchase, not 8 acres. Second, the 2.35-acre figure cited in Ed’s memo from the February 2020 town wetlands map appears to have been broadly consistent with what the committee knew at the time of the October 2020 vote (Fay says “which was known at Town Meeting”). If voters were told both that there were 4.5 buildable acres (Jamie Fay’s STM remark, per Ed’s memo) and that the buildable area was actually closer to 2.35 acres, those two statements are not reconcilable.

3.4 From “design approved, ready for bid” to “re-engaging public on design”

The undated FAQ (“Myths Dispelled”) was prepared during the 2023 land-use approvals and reflects the position the committee held going into the 2023 lawsuit and the 2024 zoning vote: “We are now ready to move toward project bidding and construction”; “the project, as it is currently proposed, will house or support all 7 functional areas in public safety. As it currently stands, it is programmed at approximately 29,800 SF, almost exactly what was presented to the voters at the 2021 town meeting”; “it is anticipated we will be able to award the construction contract and begin construction in early 2024.”

Two years later — after the lawsuit ended in August 2025 — the committee returned to design alterations explicitly motivated by the upcoming May 2026 vote (PSFC August 26 and September 10, 2025). The position that the project was “ready to bid” was abandoned in favor of additional design work and the engagement of a second architectural firm (ICON Architecture). This is not necessarily a bad thing on the merits — a more site-appropriate design is welcome — but it does undermine the FAQ’s implicit claim that the design was settled, vetted, and only awaiting funding.

4. Budget, Constraint, and Timeline Discrepancies

4.1 Cost-per-square-foot escalation, with HKT's own framing

HKT's 2021 cost analysis (Appendix L of the May 15, 2021 feasibility study) used \$691/SF hard construction with built-in 3.5% annual escalation through a Spring 2023 midpoint, yielding \$27,603,487 total. The feasibility study itself notes the \$691 figure was already up from \$650 in the 2019 estimate (Appendix L narrative). The committee's own undated "Myths Dispelled" FAQ states that the cost has "risen... due to global inflation and materials availability. The original consultants projected our cost at \$685 per square foot based on Fall 2021 construction bidding. We are currently closer to \$810 per square foot, an 18% increase based on Fall/Winter 2023 bid schedule." The current \$9.8M supplemental ask, on top of the \$27.5M approved, implies hard costs materially above \$810/SF; the FAQ does not reconcile its own number against the supplemental ask or the May 2024 budget.

4.2 The May 2024 Total Project Budget vs. the 2021 vote

The CHA-prepared May 1, 2024 Total Project Budget shows:

- Total Project Budget: \$30,051,000
- Building Construction line: \$24,242,980
- Architecture & Engineering subtotal: \$2,530,779 (with four amendments to TGAS)
- Owner's Project Manager (CHA) subtotal: \$866,819 (with two amendments)
- Owner's Project Contingency: \$1,098,020
- Billed to date (May 2024): \$2,012,036

The \$30,051,000 May 2024 figure is itself \$2.55M over the October 2021 voter-approved \$27.5M, before the 18% construction-cost escalation cited in the FAQ is even applied. The December 2025 vendor expense report shows \$2,199,058 actually paid out across eight consultants, confirming — as the FAQ acknowledges — over \$2M expended without construction having begun.

4.3 Soils and contamination: known risks, not pre-resolved

Three documents in the record converge on this point:

- Pare Corporation, Site Feasibility Study, June 2019, p. 6 (Site 2 / 4 Pine Swamp Road): "the southwestern portion of the Site in wetlands contains Scitico Silt Loam, 0–5% slopes (14B). Scitico Silt Loam has a split hydrologic soil group C/D, with hydrologic soil group C in the drained condition and hydrologic soil group D in the undrained condition. ... It is anticipated that further geotechnical investigation including test pits and soil borings will be required prior to future development of the Site." Pare's scope explicitly excluded "in-person site reconnaissance", "hazardous materials identification", and "analysis of existing traffic conditions."
- HKT Site Evaluation Criteria Matrix (Appendix J, dated 12/18/2019): the Pineswamp ("Private Site") column shows the lowest possible value (1 of 3) on Soils — criterion 5.3, "Adequate for bearing capacity; Non-standard foundations required" — and on Costs of Development (criterion 5.5). The matrix carried a 6-point Hazardous Materials criterion (5.4) at 2 of 3, indicating "Testing required." Acquisition (6.3) scored 1 of 4 ("Cost high but available to meet schedule").

- PSFC minutes, September 29, 2022: “Ted Gallante, reporting on geo/technical work and borings/testing which had been done, announced that his good news was the thoughts that building can be done with conventional footings because no areas are too wet.” This is the first reference in the meeting minutes to actual subsurface investigation — nearly two years after voters approved the land purchase, and a year after they approved \$27.5M based on a feasibility study that called for borings before development.

Taken together: the foundational consultants the town hired specifically called for soil borings before development, the committee’s own evaluation matrix marked the site as the worst possible on Soils, and yet voters in October 2020 were told (per Tony Marino) that the wetlands were “already flagged” and the building could fit with the 65-foot buffer. That assertion was neither false nor complete; it elided the fact that the subsurface investigations the consultants asked for had not yet been performed.

4.4 Timeline drift

From the May 2021 HKT feasibility study (p. 34): “Funding for design and construction would be sought at the Fall 2021 Town Meeting. Design would last 9–10 months from December of 2021 through August 2022. Construction would begin in the Fall of 2022. Mid-Point of Construction would be the Spring of 2023.” The current schedule per Galante (September 10, 2025) has “the building period as August ’26 through December ’27” — four years later than HKT’s 2021 midpoint. Each month’s delay was repeatedly characterized in committee minutes as costing \$100,000 (November 28, 2023) or 1.83% escalation (September 29, 2022); applying the latter to four years of delay would imply roughly 88% of cumulative construction-cost escalation, which is directionally consistent with the gap between the 2021 number and the 2026 ask.

4.5 Pre-bound posture entering the 2020 vote

Per the December 3, 2019 PSFC minutes, the Purchase and Sale Agreement for the parcel was executed before the October 17, 2020 STM. Jamie Fay’s STM remarks (per Ed’s memo, 1:30:25 of the meeting recording): “There’s a binding purchase and sales agreement signed by the Board of Selectmen contingent on passage of this article.” Two things follow. First, the Town’s negotiating posture for the year preceding the vote was “buy this parcel” rather than “decide on a parcel.” Second, the P&S apparently did not include the kinds of due-diligence contingencies (subsurface, wetlands delineation, hazardous materials) that the consultants had flagged as still needed. The P&S itself was not in the document set; if it is publicly available, it would warrant inspection on the question of whether the Town retained any walk-away rights in the event the soil borings came back unfavorably.

5. Unusual or Aberrational Budget and Facility Requirements

5.1 Architect-fee amendments

The May 2024 budget shows TGAS architectural & engineering fees comprised of basic services (~\$2.14M) plus four amendments: Amendment #1 (\$12,890), Amendment #2 (\$153,740), Amendment #3 (\$46,545), and Amendment #4 (\$147,544 pending). The OPM (CHA) likewise has an Amendment #1 (\$117,900) and an Amendment #2 (\$10,000). Amendments themselves are routine; four of them on a basic-services contract before construction begins is on the high side. The December 2025 expense report shows TGAS at \$1,816,033 paid — the largest line item by far. The lay reader is entitled to ask why the total architect spend before construction (~\$1.8M) is approaching what Salisbury’s entire combined facility cost in soft costs.

5.2 Two architects on the project

From October 2025, the project carries two architectural firms: TGAS (the architect of record, with full design liability) and ICON Architecture (engaged as a “consultant ... to act in a design review role during the planned public hearing meetings,” per PSFC September 10, 2025). The December 2025 expense report shows ICON at \$21,479 paid. ICON’s role appears to be facilitation rather than substantive design, but having two architects on a 29,800 SF municipal building is unusual and the cost is additive.

5.3 Building height and the communications tower

The September 2023 PB submittal records a “Roof Access” elevation of 85’8” and a structure top at 97’2”. A separate communications tower (designed by others) is also shown adjacent. RRA-district height constraints — not investigated in detail for this report — may be why one of the late-2025 design discussions noted that “false gable fronts are suggested, leaving a flat roof to keep height limits.” Either the design was right at the height ceiling (limiting redesign options), or it required additional zoning relief. Both are unusual on a rural-residential parcel.

5.4 Variance package

The September 2023 ZBA submittal site plan identifies a 15’ front setback and a 37.5’ “front setback for purposes of off street parking only” against the RRA-district 50’ front setback requirement. The 70% reduction in front setback is the single most consequential land-use deviation in the project. A New England town routinely denies dimensional relief at this magnitude to private applicants. The Build It Right lawsuit’s argument that the ZBA improperly accepted the claim that “steep slopes and wetlands at 36 Linebrook Road are unique to that parcel” rests on this point. Even granting the project’s public benefit, the dimensional relief required is evidence of forced fit, not natural fit.

5.5 All-electric mandate on a wet site

Ipswich is a Green Community and adopted a Net Zero Carbon Resolution covering new municipal buildings. PSFC minutes acknowledge that geothermal would be “very difficult and very expensive on this site because of the wetland” (October 12, 2022). The committee has been transparent about this trade-off internally, but the cost premium for an all-electric, solar-ready, code-10th-edition compliant building on a wetland-constrained site has not been quantified separately for voters. A “what would the

same building cost on a dry site” counterfactual would be useful as part of the supplemental funding presentation.

6. Pineswamp Property Limitations Discussed Before October 2020

This is the section most directly responsive to Ed's explicit research question. The committee, the consultants, or both knew the following site characteristics before the October 17, 2020 STM at which voters approved the \$630,000 land purchase:

- 11.99-acre parcel, with the southern half mapped as wetlands per MassGIS (Pare Site Feasibility Study, June 2019, p. 5). Wetland buffers at 100' (WPA), 50' (municipal no-disturbance), and 15' (no-build) further reduce the buildable footprint.
- Majority of the site lies within Zone II Wellhead Protection Area (Pare 2019, p. 6). Impervious cover above 15% requires special permitting through the Planning Board.
- Soils in the southwestern portion of the site are Scitico Silt Loam (Hydrologic Group C/D) — “a poorly drained soil with a very slow rate of water transmission” in its natural condition (Pare 2019, p. 6).
- “further geotechnical investigation including test pits and soil borings will be required prior to future development of the Site” (Pare 2019, p. 6, repeated for the Site 2 evaluation).
- RRA dimensional regime: 50' front, 40' side, 30' rear setbacks; minimum lot frontage 150'; “governmental buildings” in RRA “are allowed only by special permit of the Zoning Board of Appeals” (Pare 2019, p. 10).
- Adjacent historic-inventoried properties: Cross Farm House, D. Dickerson House, N. Jewett House on Linebrook Road (Pare 2019, p. 7).
- Pare profiled the site's topography as sloping from northern and southern extents to a low-lying area in the southern half, and noted that “the vast majority of runoff from the Site flows to the onsite wetlands system” — i.e., the proposed building fills with stormwater toward the wetland it is meant to protect (Pare 2019, p. 6–7).
- The HKT 12/18/2019 Site Evaluation Criteria Matrix scored Pineswamp at 1/3 on Soils, 1/3 on Costs of Development, and 1/4 on Acquisition — the lowest possible value on each.
- PSFC minutes from September 1, 2020 (six weeks before the STM) record HKT's discussion of program reduction “to address budget concerns” and a structured slab to use the 13' grade change as parking — evidence the committee already knew the site's topography was driving design choices.
- PSFC minutes from October 6, 2020 (eleven days before the STM): HKT's September 11, 2020 renderings “where wetlands take away about a dozen parking spaces at the rear of the Pine Swamp building.” Wetlands were materially affecting the program at the moment voters were being told the site “meets all our department and personnel needs.”

The HKT feasibility study's 7/9/19 appendix flow chart, cited in Ed's memo, explicitly states: “STEP 5 – Design Phase: ... Complete gathering all site documentation that may be lacking including but not limited to surveys, wetlands delineation, geotechnical evaluation, hazardous material assessment. This work may be done prior to the design phase, but should not be delayed past very early schematic design.” On the committee's own consultants' framework, the Town acquired the property before completing “surveys, wetlands delineation, geotechnical evaluation, hazardous material assessment.”

7. Inconsistencies in the Committee's Positions

7.1 "This is the only site" vs. the 16-site list

At the October 17, 2020 STM (per Ed's memo): "If we're going to have a new public safety building, it's going to go on this site. There is no other place. ... this is where it has to go... there's no place else" (Harvey Schwartz). HKT's Appendix K "Sites Studied" lists 15 alternatives with brief disqualifying comments (e.g., "private property," "response times for Linebrook Rd. extended significantly," "site redeveloped and not for sale"), with item 16 being Linebrook/Pineswamp. Several of the disqualifications are time-bound ("Ipswich Ford has been redeveloped") or category-based ("GENERALLY, THERE WAS NO APPETITE FOR PURCHASE OF PRIVATE PROPERTY" — a category Pineswamp itself violates). The claim that there was "no other place" is overstated relative to the actual evaluation work product.

7.2 "Fully suitable" site framing vs. the criteria matrix

Compare HKT's narrative on p. 27 of the feasibility study ("more than sufficient") and Charlie Surpitski's STM remark (per Ed's memo, 1:26:44 of the recording: "of sufficient size to build a facility that will meet all our department and personnel needs...") against the same firm's 12/18/2019 matrix scoring Pineswamp 1/3 on Soils, 1/3 on Costs of Development, and 1/4 on Acquisition. The matrix is internally inconsistent with the feasibility study's narrative; the matrix appears to have been the more sober assessment, and the narrative the more vote-friendly framing.

7.3 "We have the site flagged and approved by Conservation" vs. later 64-item peer review

Tony Marino at the October 17, 2020 STM (per Ed's memo): "We have already had the wetlands flagged on this site and we have been in consultation with our Conservation Agent and the Chair of the Conservation Commission... we can fit the building and accommodate all the 65 foot buffer." The committee's own "Myths Dispelled" FAQ later confirms "The Conservation Commission has issued 64 items of concern," addressed through five Commission meetings and a peer-review consultant. The 2020 framing ("already had the wetlands flagged") implied a level of completeness that the post-vote reality did not match.

7.4 Treatment of public input: "trust the architect" vs. "open to all ideas"

Bob Weatherall on May 12, 2022: "we should really trust the architectural firm to have running room to do our project." Jamie Fay, same meeting: architects "let the client dictate in a way that architects think is wrong in trying to please." Jamie Fay on September 10, 2025: "we should be open to all ideas from the public." The shift maps to whether or not a vote is imminent.

7.5 Same-meeting cost messaging

October 3, 2020 minutes record both "the \$23 million number which will not be exceeded" and (later in the same meeting) "\$23 million to build is probably what it will be, totaling \$25.5 million as a total project." Two characterizations — ceiling vs. likely-total — in the same public meeting, with the ceiling on the more memorable side.

7.6 Private admissions vs. public messaging — December 6, 2022

The single clearest documented gap between what the committee privately acknowledged and how it intended to message the public appears in the minutes of December 6, 2022 — nine months before the Build It Right lawsuit was filed, fourteen months after voters approved \$27.5M, and at a moment when no part of the public was being told the project was in trouble. The TM, the chiefs, and the committee discussed the situation as follows:

“Town Manager Stephen Crane explained that, because the estimate was not close enough to approve, several steps back must be taken to look at the schematic with its \$5 million figure over the construction budget. Site work is up that much because of the marketplace (inflation), and the mechanical arrangements (i.e., heating systems) are the most striking spike in costs.”

— PSFC minutes, December 6, 2022

“Chief Parisi, feeling heart-sick, asked how we tell the tax-payers of the 18% reduction and the compromises in services.”

— PSFC minutes, December 6, 2022

“Chief Nikas said we should be messaging the townspeople now that all our needs can’t be achieved in the \$25 million building, and with our support, maybe some people could make donations.”

— PSFC minutes, December 6, 2022

“Charlie [Surpitski, PSFC member and former Selectman] spoke of extraordinary times — the time for the whole project is now, and if we sell it short, we spin off progress. He would not be opposed to telling the townspeople that we are giving the people what we said we were going to do.”

— PSFC minutes, December 6, 2022

Read together, these statements establish four things on the documentary record. First, the committee knew the project was \$5M over its construction budget by December 2022. Second, the committee knew that the building had been reduced 18% from what it had told voters and that the resulting building involved “compromises in services” — Chief Parisi’s own words. Third, Chief Nikas’s recommended response was a messaging strategy (“messaging the townspeople now that all our needs can’t be achieved in the \$25 million building”), supplemented by donations. Fourth, the senior PSFC voice in the room — Charlie Surpitski, a former Selectman and Police Chief — concluded he “would not be opposed to telling the townspeople that we are giving the people what we said we were going to do” — language that, on its face, treats the gap between promise and product as a communications problem rather than a substantive one.

Nothing in the public communications between December 2022 and the September 2023 land-use approvals captured this content. The “Myths Dispelled” FAQ, prepared during the 2023 approvals

process, characterizes the cost increase as 18% on a per-square-foot basis driven by inflation since the 2020–21 estimate; it does not disclose that, by the committee’s own internal accounting, the building had been reduced 18% in scope from what voters were promised, that the chiefs were privately concerned about “compromises in services,” or that donations had been floated as a way to close the gap. The December 6, 2022 minutes are thus the canonical primary-source example of the disconnect this analysis catalogues.

8. Steelman: The Strongest Defense the Committee Can Mount

Anyone using this analysis at Town Meeting should expect the committee, town counsel, and supportive Select Board / Finance Committee members to make the following arguments. They are real, and several of them have force.

Need is genuine and decades old

The 1907 fire station and the 1900 / 1986 police station are not adequate. The HKT feasibility study's pages 19–24 are an unflattering catalogue of the existing buildings' deficiencies: 90+ basement columns supporting modern fire equipment, non-compliant detention facilities, no public space at the fire station, asbestos cement sewer mains, attic-stored evidence. Studies dating back to 1953 reach the same conclusion. The committee, the chiefs, and most public-safety professionals who have looked at the facilities believe replacement is overdue. A No vote does not, by itself, deliver a better building — it delays one.

Cost growth reflects market forces and code, not committee profligacy

Materials, labor, and code requirements (10th edition Massachusetts building code) have moved significantly since 2019. The committee's own framing of "18% increase in cost per SF" since the 2021 estimate is consistent with publicly reported municipal construction inflation. Several of the cost amendments reflect scope adjustments the committee was asked for by other town boards (Conservation Commission peer review, Planning Board redesign, ZBA conditions). The supplemental ask was reduced from \$13.8M to \$9.8M in early 2026 by recognizing that the Town can absorb part of the cost inside existing appropriations and contingencies. This is the behavior one wants from a steward.

Process was thorough and public, even if imperfect

The PSFC has met more than 90 times over nine years. Every meeting was posted and open. Three town land-use boards (Planning, ZBA, Conservation) reviewed the project across 24 hearings (per the FAQ). The committee added pitched-roof options after the 2020 vote, switched to red brick after Planning Board input in 2023, hired ICON Architecture in 2025 to facilitate further public design input, and is doing so explicitly because they think the building can still be improved. That is responsiveness, not stonewalling.

The Build It Right lawsuit was litigated and dismissed

Eight of nine claims were dismissed in June 2025. The last plaintiff withdrew in August 2025. The Conservation Commission peer review found that "all items have been addressed" (FAQ). The dimensional relief was granted by the ZBA after seven hearings. The site can be built upon under existing approvals. Reopening the site question now imposes the cost of the entire prior process on the Town a second time.

Site selection is defensible on response-time grounds

Pineswamp / Linebrook is materially better than the existing Central Street / Elm Street footprint for fire response to the Linebrook corridor and the Neck. The HKT feasibility study's response-time analysis (and the chiefs' testimony) supports this. The Elm Street alternative had its own problems: small site,

riverfront-area constraint, high-traffic Central Street egress, structurally questionable County Street bridge for frequent heavy-apparatus traffic. No site in Ipswich was “clean.” Pineswamp’s wetland constraint is real but tractable; the alternatives’ constraints were arguably worse.

“Not exceeded” was a chief’s statement, not a contractual ceiling

Chief Nikas’s October 3, 2020 “not exceeded” statement was made under a tent in front of skeptical residents, was not in the warrant article, was not the basis on which the Town entered any contract, and was contradicted (at the same meeting) by the \$25.5M total-project figure he subsequently cited. The actual contractual baseline is the October 2021 \$27.5M debt-exclusion vote. Measuring overrun against “\$23M not exceeded” is rhetorically powerful but legally not how municipal projects work.

Where the steelman is weakest

Even charitably read, the steelman has three soft spots:

- The 12/18/2019 site evaluation matrix — a document the committee itself produced, before the vote — scored Pineswamp at the worst possible value on Soils and Costs of Development. This was not market forces; this was internal knowledge that did not make it into the public-facing presentation.
- Soil borings were not done before the land purchase or the funding vote. The consultants’ own scope said borings should occur “prior to future development” and per the HKT flow chart “should not be delayed past very early schematic design.” They were delayed past schematic design and well past the funding vote.
- The current redesign exercise, the committee’s own minutes record, is motivated by the upcoming May 2026 vote rather than by an architectural reassessment on the merits. The committee said this in its own minutes (August 26, September 10, October 1, 2025). That is its own data point about whether the original design “met the needs of the community.”

9. Concluding Observations

Ed's working hypothesis — that the committee was driven by sunk costs and gradually shifted from “the best building” to “getting a project done” — is broadly consistent with the documentary record, with three important caveats.

- There is no documentary evidence of conspiracy, in the sense of coordinated suppression of information. There is documentary evidence of a committee using Executive Session extensively for site discussions, of consultants who quietly wrote down concerns that did not appear in the public-facing presentation, and of a committee that increasingly described its design decisions in terms of vote-readiness. These are well-known failure modes of long-running municipal projects, not bad actors.
- The Town Manager's role is the single most important governance question the record raises. Tony Marino served two roles — ex-officio PSFC member and the Town's principal officer for the property purchase — and made the public statements at the October 17, 2020 STM that resolved the wetlands issue for voters in his official capacity. Marino retired in 2022 (Stephen Crane succeeded him as TM) and so cannot be questioned at the May 2026 Town Meeting; but his role in framing the site's suitability, in negotiating the P&S's diligence terms, and in reassuring the Conservation Commission is well documented and central to any honest reconstruction of the decision.
- The case for actually replacing both stations is strong. The case against the project as currently designed and budgeted is also strong. Both can be true at once. A vote against the supplemental funding is not a vote against the chiefs, against public safety, or against the volunteer committee members who have given thousands of hours to this. It is a vote for the proposition that the Town deserves a different cost / scope / aesthetic answer than the one currently before it.

Recommended questions for the Town Meeting record

The following questions, asked at Town Meeting and answered in the official record, would narrow the gap between what the committee knows and what voters know:

- On what date were the first soil borings performed at 4 Pineswamp Road, and what did they reveal? Will the report be made available to Town Meeting?
- Will the committee provide a full cost-per-SF comparison with Salisbury (2017), Charlton (2021), and Ashland (2021), normalized to 2026 dollars and to combined / non-combined facility scope?
- Will the May 2024 budget be updated and posted, line-by-line, before Town Meeting? What are the committed vs. uncommitted balances on each architect-fee amendment?
- Will the HKT December 18, 2019 Site Evaluation Criteria Matrix (Appendix J of the May 2021 feasibility study) be displayed during the warrant article presentation? If not, why not?
- What due-diligence rights did the Town retain under the Purchase and Sale Agreement signed before the October 2020 STM? Were any of those rights triggered by the 2022 soil-boring results or the Conservation Commission peer review?
- If the supplemental \$9.8M is approved, what is the contractual cost ceiling? What is the committee's position on a No vote on any future ask above this amount?

- What scope reductions (e.g., the fourth apparatus bay, the community room, the second-floor expansion area) remain available as alternates on the bid sheet, and at what savings?

The committee should welcome these questions; if their answers are good, the answers strengthen the project's case. If the answers are not good, voters are entitled to know.

Sources

Primary documents (in the source folder)

- HKT Architects, “Public Safety Building Feasibility Study, Ipswich, Massachusetts,” May 15, 2021. Including: Pare Corporation, “Site Feasibility Study, Town of Ipswich Public Safety Facility,” June 2019 (Appendix A); HKT “Site Evaluation Criteria Matrix,” dated 12/18/2019 (Appendix J); “Sites Studied for New Public Safety Building and Comments” (Appendix K); “2021 Estimated Probable Costs” (Appendix L).
- Ipswich Public Safety Facility Committee meeting minutes, February 28, 2017 – December 8, 2025 (approximately 100 meetings). Specific dates cited above.
- CHA, “Ipswich Public Safety Total Project Budget,” May 1, 2024.
- “Ipswich Public Safety Building Project Expenses as of December 2025” (vendor breakdown).
- The Galante Architecture Studio / Samiotes Consultants, “Ipswich Public Safety Facility, Zoning Board of Appeals & Planning Board Submittal,” September 5, 2023.
- Public Safety Facility Committee, “Myths Dispelled: Setting the Record Straight on the Public Safety Facility Project” (FAQ), undated.
- Ed Marsh, “Town of Ipswich Pineswamp Purchase” memorandum.

Press coverage and public records

- The Local News (thelocalnews.news): “Borrowing request for public safety facility drops by \$4M; Dougherty calls project unaffordable,” April 8, 2026; “Letter: Ipswich cannot afford the new public safety building,” April 27, 2026; “Public Safety Facility Committee Considers Design Changes,” September 3, 2025; “Architect unveils new designs for Ipswich public safety facility,” November 19, 2025; “Public Safety Facility Design Concept Receives Approval,” December 11, 2025; “Last Remaining Plaintiff in Public Safety Facility Lawsuit Withdraws,” August 15, 2025; “Build It Right takes town to court to halt construction of public safety facility,” September 20, 2023; “Zoning change for public safety building voted down,” May 22, 2024.
- The Town Common, “Ipswich Public Safety Building Racing to Town Meeting,” December 31, 2025.
- Salem News, “Town Meeting to decide on new public safety facility” (October 2020 coverage).
- North Shore News / The Local News, “Public safety vote fails at ballot,” October 21, 2020.
- Town of Ipswich, “2026-04-21 Annual Town Meeting Warrant” (referenced; not retrieved — town website is not accessible from this analysis environment).