



# ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT



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## NEWS

### Bristol to weigh land purchase at town meeting

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By Marin Howell

BRISTOL — Bristol voters will be asked at the town's annual meeting next week to OK the purchase of land to house a new Public Works Department facility.

The 4.7-acre parcel is located at the corner of Hewitt Road and Route 116. Article 23 on Bristol's Town Meeting Day warning asks for voters' approval to buy the land from Thomas and Pamela Lathrop for the purpose of constructing a new Public Works Department facility.

According to the warning, a down payment of \$17,000 (10% of the \$170,000 purchase price) would be paid at closing from the Capital Building and Maintenance Reserve Fund. The remaining \$153,000 principal balance would be paid over 10 years at a 6% simple interest rate, with annual payments of roughly \$24,000.

The department's current facility, at 80 Pine St., consists of seven buildings on 14.7 acres. Those buildings include the town garage and former village garage, built in the 1960s and late 1980s, respectively.

Town officials began exploring options for a new public works department facility in 2020.

Town Administrator Valerie Capels said that at the time Bristol officials were also considering a new site for the Bristol Police Department.

"The current Public Works facility is aging and no longer meets the current and projected needs of the Public Works Department," Capels told the *Independent* in an email. "Meanwhile, the Police Station is located in rented space on Munsill Avenue that is increasingly limited to meet their current needs. It was not then, but the property is now up for sale. The current rent payment amounts to more than \$40,000 per year — which could be about equal to a bond payment on a new facility that does meet their needs. The potential impacts to the rent if and when the property sells is uncertain. So, in 2020, it made sense at the time to explore the possibility of co-locating new DPW and Police facilities on already-town-owned property."

The town put out a request for proposals and selected Bread Loaf Corp. to conduct a building, site and needs analysis in the fall of 2020.

"We were very satisfied with Bread Loaf's site and facilities analysis," Capels said. "Things got stymied, however, by the subsurface soils analysis indicating that the soils associated with the former landfill in that area would either need to be replaced or reinforced with structural piers at a cost of an estimated hundreds of thousands of dollars. The selectboard wanted to consider other options rather than spend that amount of money on just soil remediation."

Town officials began looking into the housing a new police station on the town-owned land behind the fire station, and separately started exploring possible locations for a new public works facility.

Capels said that town officials considered various sites, and that around that time, the Lathrops were in the process of closing their Bristol wood products business, Exclusively Vermont Wood Products/Lathrop's Maple Supply.

“Long story short after many discussions, we ended up turning attention to the vacant 4.7 acre site next to their wood products buildings at Hewitt Road and Route 116,” Capels explained. “The site offers many potential options for energy efficient building designs and site layouts to accommodate the department’s operational needs. Discussions occurred over several months to arrive at agreeable terms, which is where we are today.”

Among the terms included in the purchase and sale agreement is voter approval at the March 2024 town meeting. Bristol voters will have a chance to discuss and vote on the land purchase from the floor at the town’s annual meeting on Monday, March 4, at 7 p.m.

If the purchase is approved by Bristol voters on Monday, Capels said next steps will include finalizing the purchase and engaging an engineering and design team to complete a thorough site assessment for water supply, septic capacity, site layout options, permitting requirements, and any other considerations.

“This will be an opportunity to invest in necessary and appropriate improvements to the Public Works Department’s facilities to serve the community for decades to come, and we expect to take the time needed for a deliberate, thoughtful and public process,” Capels said.

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