

August 17, 2026

Dear Chair Goldstone and Members of the Select Board:

On behalf of the West Falmouth Village Association, I respectfully urge the Select Board to remove from the capital plan the proposed \$75,000 Fire Stations Location Assessment and the related plan to consolidate the North and West Falmouth fire stations.

Falmouth has studied its fire station configuration for decades. Most recently, the 2020 McGrath Consulting study specifically evaluated North and West Falmouth and modeled a combined station. The Town then appointed a citizens advisory committee to review that study and potential station locations.

We have studied this issue. What we have not done is solve the underlying problems.

In 2022, after considering the available information, the Select Board adopted a policy supporting a six-station system and directed the Town to prioritize sufficient staffing to operate it. At the April 2023 Annual Town Meeting, Articles 5 and 6 supported funding for 14 additional firefighter positions specifically so that the new Hatchville station **and all five existing fire stations could be staffed on a daily basis**. The funding required a Proposition 2½ override, which Falmouth voters approved in May 2023.

Yet staffing remains a challenge.

If Falmouth continues to struggle to recruit and retain firefighters, we should identify and address the reasons for that problem. Reducing the number of stations may make a staffing shortage easier to manage, but will fewer stations provide adequate public safety?

Public safety must determine our staffing needs; staffing limitations should not determine the level of public safety we provide.

Response time must remain central to this discussion. The 2020 consultant's analysis of an optimally located combined North/West station found that only approximately 47% of incidents in that area would fall within the four-minute travel-time standard established by the National Fire Protection Association. Falmouth invested in the new Hatchville station because geography and response times matter. We should not solve a response-time problem in one part of town only to create one in another.

The capital plan before you not only calls for \$75,000 for the study, but it also has placeholders for \$1 million for land acquisition for Stations 3 and 4 and \$950,000 for station design and construction, with the ultimate construction cost still to be determined.

The capital plan identifies enormous known needs throughout Falmouth: staffing shortages in critical departments; aging public-safety and public-works facilities; major school building needs; roads, sidewalks and other public infrastructure; and a substantial backlog of maintenance and repair across Town-owned properties.

Falmouth does not lack for problems requiring our attention and resources. We have studied this one and there appears to be no circumstance where a combined station does not have a negative impact on public safety.

The North and West Falmouth stations themselves are examples of needs we already know exist. For years, significant investment in both facilities has been deferred while the Town anticipated eventually replacing them with a combined station. The result is two aging Town-owned public-safety facilities and firefighters working from buildings that have not received the investment necessary to provide safe and appropriate working conditions. It was precisely because of these conditions that WFVA advocated for Community Preservation funding for repairs to the historic West Falmouth station. We appreciate the Select Board's willingness to move that effort forward. Rather than allowing deferred maintenance to become a self-fulfilling justification for consolidation, we should invest in safe and appropriate working conditions for the public-safety employees serving our community.

The West Falmouth Village Association respectfully asks the Select Board to remove this project from the capital plan and prioritize the problems we already know need to be solved.

Our residents deserve timely emergency response. Our employees deserve safe, well-maintained facilities. And our taxpayers deserve to see known needs addressed before we pay to study the same question again.

Respectfully,

Tammy Gilbert, President

On Behalf of the West Falmouth Village Association Board