



# CITY OF Boca Raton

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**DATE:** October 6, 2026

**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Mark Sohaney, City Manager 

**SUBJECT:** Police Department Headquarters – Recommended Referendum, Ballot Language and Path Forward

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In advance of the October 13 Workshop, this memorandum summarizes the work completed regarding the Police Department Headquarters and provides my recommendation on the proposed March 2027 referendum and subsequent location decision.

The need to replace the City's existing Police Headquarters has been evaluated over many years. The facility is aging, undersized, and increasingly constrained in its ability to support the operational requirements of a modern, full-service police department.

Following the March 2026 referendum, I directed staff to reassess the project, including its scope, cost, operational requirements, potential locations, and continued provision of police services downtown. That work has included project scope and cost reductions, additional site and operational analysis, community engagement, polling, and independent review of the proposed financing by the Financial Advisory Board.

## **RECOMMENDATION 1 – LOCATION-NEUTRAL BALLOT LANGUAGE**

I recommend that Council use ballot language that does not identify a specific location. Under this approach, voters would first decide whether to authorize up to \$125 million in GO bonds to replace the Police Headquarters and associated facilities. If voters approve the referendum, Council would determine the location through a proposed public process consisting of a Workshop on April 12, 2027, followed by consideration at the regular Council meeting on April 13, 2027, with an opportunity for public comment.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2 – BALLOT LANGUAGE INCLUDING LOCATIONS, IF COUNCIL PREFERS**

If Council prefers to identify locations in the ballot question, I recommend language specifying a central Police Headquarters near Spanish River Boulevard and I-95 and a downtown police station near 2nd Street and 2nd Avenue. Under this approach, Council would establish the location direction before adopting the referendum resolution. If voters approve the referendum, subsequent Council consideration would focus on implementing the identified locations and refining the project scope, design, and delivery.

Both recommendations provide a path to a March 2027 referendum with the same maximum bond authorization. Council will determine which approach to pursue, may modify either recommendation, and retains responsibility for approving the final ballot language and project direction.

## **COUNCIL ACTION REQUESTED**

At the October 13, 2026, Workshop, I request Council direction on the proposed \$125 million bond authorization and whether to proceed with Recommendation 1, using location-neutral language, or

Recommendation 2, identifying a central headquarters and downtown police station. That direction would allow staff to prepare the referendum resolution for Council consideration on October 27, 2026.

The proposed schedule and subsequent Council actions would be adjusted to reflect the approach selected. The recommendations and dates in this memorandum remain subject to Council direction.

## **BACKGROUND AND HISTORY**

The need to address the City's Police Department Headquarters is longstanding and predates the current proposal. The current headquarters was constructed in 1986 and expanded in 2001. At the time the headquarters opened, Boca Raton had a population of approximately 58,821, and the Police Department had approximately 145 personnel. Today, the City's population is approximately 103,062, and the Department has approximately 331 personnel.

As the City and Police Department have grown, the operational requirements of modern policing have also changed substantially. Technology, evidence and records storage, security, training, specialized investigations, emergency communications, and command and control now require capabilities that did not exist, or existed at a significantly different scale, when the headquarters was constructed 40 years ago.

Over the past two decades, the City has conducted several planning efforts to assess its police facility needs, including space studies, expansion and renovation options, alternative locations, and replacement headquarters concepts. Key milestones include:

- **1965:** Original police facility constructed at the current downtown location.
- **1986:** Current Police Department Headquarters opens at 100 NW Boca Raton Boulevard.
- **2001–2002:** City capital planning identifies the need for a major expansion of the existing Police Headquarters.
- **2007:** A Police Department space needs study projected approximately 125,000 square feet would be needed by 2020, excluding potential future annexations.
- **2014–2017:** Planning shifts toward the expansion of police operations at 6500 Congress Avenue and other locations.
- **2018–2023:** The City continues evaluating public safety facility needs and potential locations as part of its long-term capital planning. The 2020 pandemic significantly affected the project's progress.
- **2025:** The City updated its space needs assessment and completed pre-design planning for a new Police Headquarters. In September, City Council approved placing a \$175 million General Obligation bond referendum on the March 2026 ballot.
- **March 2026:** Voters do not approve the \$175 million bond referendum for a new Police Headquarters and related public safety support facilities.
- **May 2026:** City Council acknowledged the continued need for a new Police Department Headquarters and provided direction to pursue a \$125 million bond referendum in March 2027 for this purpose, with the location to be identified at a future date, considering public input.

Following the 2026 referendum, staff reassessed the project and reduced its scope to focus on the Police Department's current operational needs rather than anticipated future needs. That work resulted in the revised Police Department Headquarters proposal currently before Council.

## EXISTING POLICE HEADQUARTERS – FACILITY NEED

The existing Police Headquarters was constructed approximately 40 years ago and is aging, undersized, and no longer adequately configured to support the Police Department's current operational requirements.

Several factors contribute to the need for a long-term replacement:

- **Space and Operational Constraints:** The headquarters does not have sufficient space to accommodate all Police Department functions. Specialized units, staff, evidence, records, and equipment are currently located across multiple City facilities, separating functions that increasingly need to operate in a coordinated manner.
- **Command, Control, and Communications:** Modern policing requires integrated communications, technology, information sharing, and real-time decision-making. These capabilities are particularly important during major incidents and emergencies when command staff and specialized units must coordinate operations.
- **Security and Resiliency:** The existing headquarters is not hurricane-rated and must be evacuated during a major hurricane, limiting the Department's ability to operate from its primary headquarters during an emergency.
- **Technology and Specialized Functions:** Technology, evidence, and records storage, security, training, and specialized investigations require space and infrastructure that were not contemplated when the headquarters was constructed approximately 40 years ago.

Additionally, a recent building assessment documented additional conditions within the existing facility.

### Building Assessment Executive Summary

Based on the findings of this assessment and the professional opinion of the CSAA and its team, the City should strongly consider replacing the existing Police Headquarters as a long-term solution.

Renovating an older building presents challenges that can affect the final result, including low floor-to-floor heights, existing building layout, and fixed column and bearing-wall locations. Unforeseen conditions that are not shown on the existing drawings can also lead to construction delays and costly change orders.

As a general industry planning guideline, when renovation costs approach or exceed 50% of the cost of a new building, replacement should be strongly considered. The investment levels in this assessment indicate that the cost of renovating and modernizing the Police Headquarters has exceeded this threshold.

Based on our experience with similar projects and discussions with general contractors, the cost of renovating an older facility can approach the cost of new construction. Even after this investment, the City would still have an older building limited by its original size, layout, and construction.

The City should, at a minimum, plan for Level 1 repairs within the next three to five years. Several major building components will need repair or replacement, especially the existing roof. As the building continues to age, these repairs will become harder to delay, especially with cost escalation. The City should consider these upcoming costs when deciding whether to continue repairs to the existing building or proceed with a new facility.

For these reasons, it is our professional opinion that replacing the Police Headquarters is the better long-term investment for the City.

## COUNCIL FACILITY TOURS/FIRSTHAND ASSESSMENT

Council Members have toured the existing Police Headquarters and other Police facilities to observe current conditions and operations firsthand. The tours provided Council an opportunity to see the space and storage constraints, aging infrastructure, evidence and specialized operational areas, emergency communications and command functions, and the manner in which Police operations have been adapted to the limitations of the existing facilities.

These tours provided Council with firsthand context regarding the facility and operational conditions documented through the City's assessments and planning efforts.

## PROJECT SCOPE AND DUE DILIGENCE

Following the March 2026 referendum, staff reassessed the project, focusing on the Police Department's current operational requirements and opportunities to reduce the overall scope and cost. The reassessment included a review of the proposed space program, individual facility components, operational requirements, and opportunities for value engineering.

The resulting proposal is materially different from the project presented to voters in March 2026. Key changes include:

- **Bond Authorization:** Reduced from up to \$175 million to up to \$125 million.
- **Facility Size:** Reduced from approximately 165,000 square feet to approximately 100,000 square feet.
- **Planning Basis:** Shifted from a facility designed around projected needs through 2045 to one focused on the Police Department's current operational needs, while allowing for future expansion.
- **Cost:** The revised project is currently estimated at approximately \$121.08 million, reduced from \$190 million, supporting the proposed bond authorization not to exceed \$125 million. Staff estimates the actual cost of building at \$65 million to \$90 million.
- **Project Scope:** The proposed headquarters reduction from approximately 163,000 to 94,000 square feet, a 42% reduction, focused on immediate operational needs and staff readiness, rather than projected needs over 20 years. The revised concept estimates the site development of 8 acres or less, including supporting facilities, site improvements, design, furnishings, technology, and relocation.

The current conceptual program includes approximately 100,000 square feet for a police headquarters and firing range, as well as emergency communications, evidence storage, and related police facilities and equipment.

The reassessment evaluated what is operationally necessary to support current Police Department functions rather than carrying forward all elements of the previous proposal. The resulting scope reflects additional analysis of operational requirements, facility size, and cost following the March referendum.

## LOCATION ALTERNATIVES AND ADDITIONAL DUE DILIGENCE

As part of the project reassessment, staff considered multiple City-owned properties and potential locations for the Police Department Headquarters. The review considered site capacity, existing and planned uses, operational requirements, cost, constructability, security and resiliency, continuity of operations, future expansion, public access, and the ability to maintain police services downtown.

The locations and alternatives considered included:

- **Central Headquarters / Downtown Police Station:** This alternative would locate the Police Headquarters near Spanish River Boulevard and I-95 while maintaining a downtown police station near 2nd Street and 2nd Avenue. Council's consideration of this alternative should include the central site's capacity and operational suitability, the scope of services maintained downtown, and the combined cost of both facilities.
- **6500 Congress Avenue:** The property accommodates multiple City functions, including Fire Administration and City Council facilities. Development of a Police Headquarters at this location would require the relocation of existing functions and would present operational disruptions, staff safety and security considerations, limited opportunities for future expansion, and hurricane-resiliency concerns.
- **6551 Park of Commerce Boulevard:** The property was acquired by the City to accommodate staff and other City operations and was determined not to be conducive to Police Department operational requirements.
- **Banyan Training Facility:** The property serves as the City's Fire Rescue training facility. Fire Rescue's operational footprint for training has expanded, and the balance of the site has been dedicated to Fire Rescue.
- **Glades Road property south of FAU (Serenoa Glad Preserve):** The property is designated as a preserve area.
- **Palmetto Park Road property south of Paradise Palms (Cypress Knee Slough Preserve):** The property is designated as a preserve area.
- **Downtown / Eight-Acre Study Area:** Staff evaluated a horizontal-build concept encompassing approximately eight acres in the downtown area east of 2nd Avenue. The study area includes the existing Police Headquarters, BACE Building, adjacent parking areas, Downtown Library, Brightline station area, and certain privately owned properties. Because much of the area is already occupied by public and private uses, the analysis evaluated the additional property, relocation, infrastructure, street, and site modifications necessary to accommodate a horizontal headquarters configuration.

Following questions raised during Council and community discussions regarding whether a horizontal downtown solution could accommodate the Police Department's operational requirements, staff conducted additional due diligence on this alternative.

That analysis identified several significant considerations:

- More than \$20 million in estimated site pre-development hard costs, including real estate acquisition, power distribution modifications, and relocation of Police personnel during an approximately four-year period. This did not include additional soft costs for planning, engineering, and legal fees.
- Reduced street connectivity is associated with the closure of the eastbound portions of 2nd and 3rd Streets.
- Limited opportunity for future expansion, with less than six acres available for the Police Headquarters and associated functions.
- Site configuration challenges resulting from existing uses and the integration of Police facilities within the broader downtown area.
- Proximity to the rail corridor and associated derailment risk. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) documents provide a Risk analysis methodology for derailment and hazardous-material release risks, while federal rail risk criteria specifically consider emergency response capability and areas of high consequence (49 CFR Part 172, Appendix D). For a headquarters beside the tracks, the practical concern is that a rail incident could threaten personnel, restrict access, or

interrupt police operations precisely when the community needs those services most. The FRA also recognizes that blocked crossings can hinder emergency response.

- Hurricane evacuation considerations. The Current Police Station is within Palm Beach County hurricane evacuation zone E.

This additional work provided a more complete understanding of the feasibility, cost, operational impacts, and long-term considerations associated with a horizontal downtown build and supplemented the broader review of potential locations.

## COMMUNITY ADVISORY PANEL AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

As part of the post-referendum reassessment, the Community Advisory Panel (CAP) facilitated two Community Conversation sessions on August 5 and September 2, 2026, to gather community input regarding the Police Department Headquarters. Approximately 200 residents participated. Discussions addressed facility needs, potential locations, funding considerations, community priorities, and public safety needs.

Residents received information directly from the City Manager, Police Chief, Public Works & Engineering Director, and Deputy City Manager/CFO, followed by facilitated roundtable discussions led by CAP members. Key themes included:

- Residents generally acknowledged the need to replace the existing Police Headquarters.
- Residents wanted more detailed information regarding the proposed facilities and project scope before another referendum.
- A central Police complex was viewed as a viable option, while many residents emphasized the importance of maintaining a significant Police presence and services downtown.
- Some residents expressed a preference for the location to be determined before another referendum.
- Participants supported continued opportunities for direct engagement with senior City staff through the Community Conversation format.

### Community Polling

To supplement the Community Conversation process, the City engaged an independent third-party research firm to conduct a scientific survey of likely March 2027 voters. The dual-mode survey was conducted August 1–16, 2026, with 256 respondents and a sampling error margin of  $\pm 6.1\%$  at the 95% confidence level. Key findings included:

- **Facility Need:** 53% believed there was at least some need for a new Police Headquarters, and 56% initially supported building a new headquarters. After respondents received additional information about the existing facility and the Police Department's operational needs, 77% supported building a new headquarters.
- **Location:** Both concepts initially received majority support, with 64% supporting a central headquarters with a downtown police station and 59% supporting a downtown headquarters. When asked to choose between the alternatives, 54% preferred a central headquarters with a downtown police station, 24% preferred rebuilding the headquarters downtown, 18% opposed building a new headquarters, and 5% were unsure.
- **Operational Priorities:** Maintaining emergency 911 response and ensuring the Police Headquarters can remain fully operational during a hurricane were among respondents' highest-rated priorities for a new facility.

The community feedback and polling informed the City's continued reassessment of the project, including additional consideration of project scope, cost, location alternatives, and the feasibility of a horizontal downtown build.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND PATH FORWARD**

### **FINANCIAL ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATION**

The Financial Advisory Board (FAB) reviewed the proposed financing approach for the Police Department Headquarters and unanimously voted to recommend that the City Council place a general obligation bond referendum on the March 2027 ballot, authorizing the issuance of bonds not to exceed \$125 million, with a term not to exceed 30 years.

Consistent with the scope of the FAB, their recommendation was limited to the financing approach for the project. The Board did not make a recommendation regarding the location of the Police Headquarters, the project scope or design, the construction cost, or the project timing.

The FAB's signed recommendation is attached to this memorandum.

### **RECOMMENDED FINANCING APPROACH**

I recommend using General Obligation bonds to finance the replacement of the Police Headquarters and associated facilities.

Under either recommendation, the recommended bond issue would not exceed \$125 million, with a maximum maturity of up to 30 years, and would be payable from ad valorem taxes on all taxable property in the City.

Based on preliminary bond sizing and current market conditions, Financial Services estimates a debt service millage rate of approximately 0.1904 mills, resulting in an estimated annual cost of approximately \$100.92 for the average residential property. These estimates are preliminary and will vary based on taxable value, homestead status, market conditions, and the amount and timing of bonds ultimately issued.

If Amendment 3 is approved, the estimated debt service millage rate would increase to 0.2113 mills and individual property impacts would change based on the revised taxable value structure under the increased homestead exemption. Financial Services will continue to refine these estimates as additional information becomes available.

Long-term financing allows the cost of this major public safety capital asset to be paid over the facility's useful life by those who benefit from the services delivered by these new facilities.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1 – LOCATION-NEUTRAL BALLOT LANGUAGE**

In coordination with the City Attorney's Office and Bond Counsel, staff developed proposed ballot language identifying the purpose of the bonds, the maximum authorization, repayment terms, and accountability requirements. Under Recommendation 1, the location decision would proceed separately following voter approval.

For Recommendation 1, I recommend the following ballot language:

***“Shall the City issue general obligation bonds, in one or more series, not exceeding \$125,000,000, solely to finance the replacement of the City’s aging and undersized police headquarters with a new headquarters, emergency communications center, evidence storage, and related facilities and equipment, subject to annual independent audit, bearing interest within maximum lawful rates, maturing not later than 30 years from issuance, and payable from ad valorem taxes levied on all taxable property in the City?”***

The proposed ballot language does not specify a location for the Police Headquarters. If the referendum is approved, the location would be considered separately by City Council through the public process outlined later in this memorandum.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2 – BALLOT LANGUAGE INCLUDING LOCATIONS**

If Council prefers to identify locations in the ballot question, I recommend the following language for Recommendation 2:

***“Shall the City issue general obligation bonds, in one or more series, not exceeding \$125,000,000, solely to finance the construction and equipping of a new centrally located police headquarters near Spanish River Boulevard and I-95 and a new downtown police station near 2nd Street and 2nd Avenue, bearing interest within maximum lawful rates, maturing not later than 30 years from issuance, and payable from ad valorem taxes levied on all taxable property in the City?”***

This alternative identifies both the central Police Headquarters and the downtown police station as purposes of the proposed bond authorization. Before Council adopts the referendum resolution, staff will confirm the combined scope and estimated cost of both facilities, including associated site work and equipment, and the City Attorney’s Office will review the final ballot wording.

If Council selects this alternative and voters approve the referendum, subsequent Council consideration would focus on implementing the locations identified in the ballot question and refining the project scope, design, and delivery.

## **FINANCING AND LOCATION – CONSIDERATIONS FOR EACH RECOMMENDATION**

Recommendation 1 separates the financing and location decisions. Voters would first determine whether to authorize the financing necessary to replace the Police Headquarters. If approved, Council would determine the location through a dedicated public process. Recommendation 2 identifies the central headquarters and downtown police station locations before the referendum, allowing voters to consider the financing and identified locations together.

The principal decisions are:

- **Financing:** Whether voters should authorize up to \$125 million in General Obligation bonds to replace the Police Headquarters and associated facilities.
- **Location:** Which location best meets the City’s long-term operational, financial, and public safety needs, and whether Council should establish that direction before the referendum or following voter approval.

The March 2027 referendum would ask voters whether to authorize the City to incur the debt necessary to proceed with the project. The location decision requires consideration of operational requirements, site conditions, cost, constructability, continuity of operations, security, resiliency, and community input.

During community engagement, some residents expressed a preference for the location to be determined before another referendum. Recommendation 2 responds to that preference by identifying locations in the ballot question. Staff also completed substantial analysis of the location alternatives, including additional due diligence following the March 2026 referendum.

Recommendation 1 allows voters to consider financing independently and preserves a separate Council process for selecting the location after voter approval. Recommendation 2 provides voters with location information in the ballot question and directs subsequent project development toward those identified locations. Council's direction will determine which sequence is used.

## PROPOSED POST-REFERENDUM PROCESS – RECOMMENDATION 1

If Council selects Recommendation 1 and voters approve the referendum, I recommend that Council consider the location through a dedicated, publicly noticed process in April 2027. The proposed schedule includes a Workshop on April 12 and consideration at the regular Council meeting on April 13, with an opportunity for public comment. This process would provide Council and the community an opportunity to review updated location analysis, project costs, operational requirements, and public input before Council acts.

The proposed process would include:

- **March 2027 – Municipal Election:** Voters consider whether to authorize up to \$125 million in General Obligation bonds for the replacement of the Police Headquarters and associated facilities.
- **April 12, 2027 – City Council Workshop:** Council conducts a comprehensive review of the location alternatives, including updated due diligence, site and cost considerations, operational requirements, community input, and staff's recommendation. The Workshop would be publicly noticed and open to the public.
- **April 13, 2027 – City Council Regular Meeting:** Council considers the Police Headquarters location as a dedicated agenda item. The public would have an opportunity to provide comment before Council considers and takes action on the location.
- **Following Council's Location Decision:** Staff proceeds with final project development, design, permitting, procurement, financing, and construction based on Council's direction.
- Under Recommendation 1, this proposed process provides a defined timeline and public forum for the location decision following voter approval. Under Recommendation 2, the April process would be adjusted to focus on implementation of the locations identified in the ballot question.

## NEXT STEPS AND SCHEDULE

The proposed schedule for Council consideration, the referendum, and subsequent project decisions is as follows:

- **October 13, 2026 – City Council Workshop:** Council discusses the proposed referendum and financing approach and provides direction on Recommendation 1 or Recommendation 2, the ballot language, and the subsequent public process.
- **October 27, 2026 – City Council Consideration:** Council considers the resolution authorizing the March 2027 referendum and establishing the ballot language.
- **March 2027 – Municipal Election:** Voters consider whether to authorize up to \$125 million in General Obligation bonds for the replacement of the Police Headquarters and associated facilities.

- **April 12–13, 2027 – Proposed Post-Referendum Process:** If voters approve the referendum under Recommendation 1, Council considers the location through a Workshop and regular Council meeting with an opportunity for public comment. Under Recommendation 2, subsequent Council consideration would focus on implementation of the identified locations, with the schedule and agenda adjusted accordingly.

## CONCLUSION

The need to replace the Police Headquarters is an operational and public safety infrastructure issue that has been evaluated extensively. Facility assessments, Council tours, project scope and cost reductions, location analysis, financial review, community engagement, polling, and the Financial Advisory Board's review have established a substantial record for Council's consideration.

I recommend proceeding with a March 2027 GO bond referendum authorizing up to \$125 million. Recommendation 1 uses location-neutral ballot language and provides for Council to determine the location following voter approval. If Council prefers to identify locations in the ballot question, Recommendation 2 specifies a central Police Headquarters and a downtown police station. Council's direction will determine the approach, final ballot language, and subsequent project process.

**TO:** Mark Sohany  
City Manager

**FROM:** Jeffrey Pinder, Chair  
Financial Advisory Board

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation on Resolution Authorizing General Obligation Bond Referendum

Pursuant to Division 7, Section 2-201(d) of the City Code, the Financial Advisory Board (FAB) is required to submit written recommendations to the City Council on all proposed bond issuances and refunding agreements.

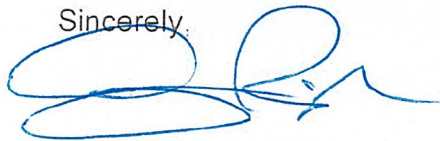
At its September 28, 2026 meeting, the FAB reviewed City staff's proposal to recommend approval of a City Council resolution to place a General Obligation (GO) bond referendum in the amount of up to \$125 million on the March 2027 municipal election ballot. The referendum would seek voter approval to issue bonds to fund the design and construction of a new police department headquarters and supporting facilities.

If approved by voters, the City would be authorized to issue GO bonds backed by ad valorem property taxes. Effectively, residents would be voting to permit a potential increase in their property tax rate to cover the debt service associated with this critical public safety infrastructure project.

After thorough discussion and consideration of the City's financial outlook and debt capacity, the Board voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council adopt a resolution placing the proposed GO bond referendum on the March 2027 municipal election ballot in an amount of up to \$125 million for a term not to exceed 30 years. The Board's recommendation is limited solely to the proposed bond authorization and should not be construed as a recommendation regarding the location of the new police headquarters, the project's final scope or construction cost, or the timing of design or construction, as those decisions are outside the FAB's purview.

In keeping with its advisory responsibilities, the FAB anticipates issuing a follow-up recommendation regarding the bond issuance itself if the referendum is approved and bond terms are developed.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Pinder, Chair  
Financial Advisory Board