

DPW Affordability is in Our Hands

submitted via email | March 4, 2025

To the Editor,

Last year, voters made their voices clear when we rejected a \$28 million cost for a new DPW. Yet, here we are again, with the executive branch (appointed committees and staff) now designing something that starts with a “3” - it’s currently projected at just over \$35M (and that’s \$65M with debt service). And they will not consider cost alternatives that are already vetted by the project manager and designer that **start at \$9 million less**.

I was inspired by Roberta Lema’s words to the Select Board recently: “If it doesn’t begin with a 1, it will end in zero.” That simple truth led me to one conclusion—let’s give it the force of Town Meeting vote. The voters control the budget, and we can and should send a clear message about what is affordable for a town of our small size. We owe it to ourselves to get a design within a budget we can afford.

I am grateful the Select Board heard us on the matter of site - and settled on Town Hall Hill decisively. The Select Board has also asked to hear from voters on this matter of cost. It’s time for citizens to do that - to take the bull by the horns and legislate what we know is affordable for Truro taxpayers.

I submitted a citizen petition article that dozens of our neighbors have already supported. It is our opportunity to let the Select Board and the Ad Hoc Building Committee know our definition of an affordable DPW and ensure our limited tax dollars are spent wisely.

By taking action now, we not only get ahead of the debate over costs by setting limits, we also provide clarity for advocates and decision-makers who will keep the process going forward with clearer budget parameters. That way, we can approve appropriations at ATM 2026 for a great DPW facility at a cost we can handle – and it “begins with a 1.”

Let’s stand together and make it clear: a responsible, affordable DPW plan is truly possible.

Sincerely,
Dennis O’Brien
Truro

Article XX: Non-Binding Resolution to Establish Cost Cap and Schematic Design Requirements for a New DPW - Petitioned Article

To see if the Town will, with respect Town Hall Hill (“THH”) as the designated site for the new Department of Public Works (“DPW”) Facility, establish a project cost cap not to exceed \$20,000,000 (Twenty Million Dollars) for the completion of the built DPW and site upgrades; and will prepare two schematic designs chosen for two of the four options preliminarily costed by Owner’s Project Manager (“OPM”), one option proposed by Weston and Sampson and the second prepared by the DPW Study Group. And further, to apply such funds as appropriated in Article 13, as amended, at Annual Town Meeting (“ATM”) 2024, to deliver two schematic engineering plans upon completion of this task.

It will be the responsibility of the Ad Hoc Building Committee for the Future Public Works Facility (“AHBC” or “the Committee”) to oversee this work and to report within four months or less to the Select Board for approval to continue schematic design and development of the most cost-effective of the two proposals under consideration at that time. And further, to identify and allocate such sums as may be required to complete this task from the funds appropriated and adopted for the completion of a schematic design for Town Hall Hill in Article 13, as amended, at ATM 2024. These sums may be applied to the hiring of an independent architect(s), engineer(s), or other professional(s) to assist the Committee, which the Committee is authorized to retain under existing agreements. This work is to be completed within four months or less following voter approval, consistent with and within the timeline approved by the Select Board for completion of a single, final schematic design, that is, by ATM 2026; or take any other action in relation thereto.

Requested by Citizen Petition

Petitioners’ Explanation: At STM and ATM 2024, voters approved and supported development and construction of a new DPW on Town Hall Hill and denied and/or excluded 340-344 Route 6 for this purpose as a site; and denied funds to develop plans for that site. On February 25, 2025, the Select Board identified THH as the site for a new DPW and thereby also made funds appropriated at ATM 2024 available for a process to deliver a schematic design. At STM, voters affirmatively supported a resolution to consider at least two concepts, a “monolith” or uni-structure concept as conceived by Weston & Sampson and a multi-building “campus plan” as conceived by the DPW Study Group. Voters also rejected costs for proposed DPW at \$28M and supported costs of around \$16.5M, a key gauge of acceptable cost for this project. At this time, four cost comparisons of concepts for THH have been developed by the OPM, with the most expensive being the “monolith” design projected at \$35.1M and the lowest being the Campus Plan designs at \$26M and \$27M, all respectively projections excluding debt service. Yet no consideration is being given to these lower cost options. This article is meant to send a clear message to the Select Board as a basis for directing and instructing the AHBC to produce a schematic plan that will cost under \$20M on Town Hall Hill, with one or more design deliverables that meet the DPW’s essential needs. The costs of advancing a second schematic design for comparisons of two options to a point where an informed choice can be made has been projected by the Project Designer to be approximately \$100,000 added cost for the second schematic and does not present a drain on the more-than-ample appropriation of \$2.8M (maximum) approved at ATM 2024.