

# Community Feedback on Police Station Project and Policing in Lexington

## Part 1: Feedback on Police Station Design

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### Introduction

From mid-March through the end of June 2021 two members of the Lexington Select Board conducted small group discussions focused on the Town's Police Station project and the future of public safety in Lexington. We received a wide range of responses from the community and appreciate the time and thoughtfulness participants brought to our process. This report outlines the general suggestions for how to proceed with the Police Station construction project. A follow-on report will explore community thoughts on the future of policing in Lexington.

### Background

The Lexington Police Station was built in 1955 and is now too small and in poor condition for providing its primary services and overdue for replacement. In 2011 the Town commissioned a study reviewing the state of the facility and the needs for a modern replacement. In 2013 the ad-hoc Townwide Facilities Master Planning Committee formally recommended advancing replacement of public safety facilities as the highest priority Municipal facility projects.

In 2016 Town Meeting appropriated funding for a feasibility study to replace the police station and in 2018 design funding was appropriated for rebuilding the station at its current location. In 2020 a national debate on policing emerged in response to George Floyd's murder in Minnesota. With this debate the Select Board chose to pause design development to allow the community to reflect on national and local issues.

To assess local issues, the Town held several public meetings where residents could voice their concerns in a large, public setting. The Town also commissioned Town Counsel (Anderson Kreiger, LLP) led by Carmen Ortiz, former US Attorney for the Boston District, to review our police policies for any unintended bias or discriminatory policies. In parallel, the Select Board undertook to engage with a cross-section of cultural, civic, and community organizations to better understand local perspectives on policing and, in particular, on plans for replacing the police station. Of the thirty-three groups that were contacted (see Appendix A for a complete list), twenty-two engaged in an informal but structured dialog. Two Town committees, the Commission on Disabilities and the Human Rights Committee, participated in public meetings following the same format as the small group meetings.

In addition to the meetings with the affinity groups, we offered meetings for any individual wishing to speak privately with two members of the Board on this topic and solicited feedback via email through our Public Information Officer (see Appendix C). We held 8 individual meetings with residents and received 34 substantive e-mail submissions from residents with feedback to consider.

## Small Group Discussion Format

Our experience with the early public meetings was that relatively few people felt comfortable expressing their experiences with or attitudes toward the Lexington Police Department. To encourage broader participation, our engagement with the community was limited to small-group discussions with no more than six participants from each affinity group at any meeting. Further, participants were told that their individual comments would not be made public and that any specific interactions described would be generalized to avoid identification. Our goal was to elicit honest and candid responses. All groups were given the option for follow-up meetings and individuals were encouraged to have a private follow-up meeting should they have sensitive information they wished to disclose without exposure to members of their affinity group.

## Questions Posed

All participants were prompted with the following questions in writing prior to the meeting and then guided through the questions during the interactive session:

We would like to ask you your thoughts about some of the following:

- If your group has taken part in [the Town Counsel and Carmen Ortiz] outreach efforts, how well this outreach is working – and working with your community in particular.
- What has your experience or that of members of your community been in their interactions with the police department?
- Do you have concerns about the current police department operations that might impact how we would build a new police station?
- Any other thoughts you might want to share about policing in Lexington?

## General Findings on Policing

Generally, community members were very supportive of our Police Department and of proceeding with replacing the police station. These attitudes were expressed in most of our discussions. Nonetheless, we heard some direct concerns and negative experiences from varied participants. While no broad underlying problems were identified and few participants called for extending the delay on the construction project, clear specific issues were listed and will be addressed in a parallel report.

## General Findings on Building

Feedback specific to replacing the police station was varied. Participants were clear that they want a station that serves the Police Department and the community. There was keen interest in establishing deeper community connections between staff and residents so that bonds were created. There is a desire for community policing where members of the community are known to the Police Department and individual officers are known in the community and that these connections be forged in positive contexts rather than having first contact occur in a stressful situation.

To serve this goal, the key concerns expressed were that the station be welcoming to the public. This means that public elements of the station should have less of an institutional feel, and that the spaces are accessible for all using universal design approaches that enable interaction. A number of suggestions were made that the Commission on Disabilities be involved throughout the design process.

There was strong advocacy for *flexibility* so that the station can meet changing needs over time and there was a desire that there be opportunities for public safety programs to be conducted in the building to draw the public into *community centric* interactions with the department.

*Timing* for the project weighed on many people's minds. Most of the comments we received supported moving forward with the project without delay. Some respondents, however, felt that it was important to rethink policing in Lexington first so that the station design would reflect these principles.

Several participants underscored the importance of making the building *inclusive* of all members of the public and staff. In particular there were questions about the separation of command staff from other functional units in the building. Similarly there was a call for gender neutral facilities throughout the building.

Finally, we received a variety of comments about the *functionality* of the police station - many of which have already been accounted for in the developing design. We note these below in case there are areas not provided for in the design of the station or consciously located elsewhere.

## Specific Comments Regarding the Building

In keeping with the commitment to confidentiality made to participants, the following comments have been generalized from our notes while we tried to preserve nuance and flavor. We have abstracted the comments into categories and present the information alphabetically without a presumption of priority.

### Accessible - Universal Design

- calming spaces (lighting) for people with neurological disorders
- FM amplification systems (for people with cochlear implants)
- low-noise low sensory environment for people with disabilities
- make sure the building is fully accessible
- noise management (reduction of square spaces that vibrate more)
- ramp is a nightmare
- support for people with disabilities

### Appearance

- current design is an expression of the (former) chief's vision; it is designed as a fortress (and in part should be) but not necessarily as much
- likes the colonial look

### Community Centric

- Center location is important
- community / training room
- community oriented spaces
- community room
- community space
- enhance interaction with the community
- facility that links community will help with coping with events (eg, national problems)
- friendly in a community facing way
- people's station

## Flexible

- access to social workers
- be flexible to allow meaningful number of embedded social workers
- community room is very helpful
- community supports new or rehabilitated station
- create space for human services department to be co-located
- current design has forward-thinking flexibility
- current design is large and flexible enough
- gender separation in holding cells
- it might be helpful to have some social services in the building to create more interaction
- meet Lexington needs
- more open spaces, more transparency, different staffing and more opportunity for community interaction should all be part of a meaningful and well considered design
- multi-disciplinary orientation
- resources for mental health, language, domestic abuse
- space for families to use
- space for handling mental health issues
- space for youth issues
- spaces that are family friendly

## Functional

- dedicated space for youth
- learning areas
- privacy for discussions with public
- private space for counseling
- space for animal control
- training facility is important
- wouldn't imagine that there would be a need for full time mental health personnel in the building

## Inclusive

- all bathrooms/locker rooms should be gender neutral
- bring department staff together and reduce separation from command staff
- locate command offices among staff
- support for non-gendered restrooms

## Timing - Building the Station Now

- build the station
- current design is major needed upgrade
- current station is really drab
- deteriorating building detracts from morale
- facility overdue
- full support
- like the FD, our public employees deserve a facility where they can work safely
- long overdue

- move forward asap
- need appropriate facilities
- not dependent on rethinking how policing should be performed
- station is completely separate from how we undertake policing
- support building

### Timing - Delay the Project

- challenge for residents to cope with cost of station
- develop policing principles first and then design with an intentional embodiment of principles
- do we need a new station
- concern that broader facility function might impact footprint and can't be known until we explore evolution
- rethink policing model before designing building

### Welcoming

- appealing lobby
- as inviting as possible
- balance pd safety with welcome
- design is welcoming
- display policing principles prominently in lobby
- inviting space
- meeting areas should be more comfortable
- more open
- more open space at entrance
- more welcoming, less institutional
- no lobby (should have)
- open and welcoming station
- place where people can be comfortable
- police department should feel like home
- signage, banners outside building
- spaces with a more positive vibe (could be color and décor choices)
- station should be more welcoming
- station walled off and opaque (currently, new station should not be)
- welcoming area is critical
- welcoming space
- welcoming station
- welcoming to public

## Appendix A - Cultural, Civic, and Community Organizations Contacted

Association of Black Citizens of Lexington (ABCL)  
Bangladeshi Americans of Lexington (BALex)  
Brazilian American Cultural Association (BACA)  
CALex (Chinese Americans of Lexington)  
Chinese American Association of Lexington (CAAL)  
Indian Americans of Lexington (IAL)  
Japanese Support Group of Lexington (JPLex)  
Knights of Columbus Lexington Council 94  
Korean-American Organization of Lexington (KOLex)  
League of Women Voters of Lexington (MA)  
LexFun!  
Lexington at Home  
Lexington Chamber of Commerce  
Lexington Historical Society  
Lexington Interfaith Clergy Association (LICA)  
Lexington Lodge of Elks # 2204  
Lexington Neighbors & Newcomers Club  
Lexington Police Patrolman's Association  
Lexington Retailers Association  
Lexington Boy Scout Troop 160  
LexPride  
LexRAP  
Lextinas  
Lions Club of Lexington  
PTA/O Presidents Council (PPC)  
Meriam Hill Association  
Muslim American Group  
Rotary Club of Lexington  
South Lexington Civic Association  
Simon W Robinson Masonic Lodge  
Town Meeting Members Association (TMMA)

## Appendix B – Town Committees Engaged

Commission on Disabilities  
Human Rights Committee

## Appendix C – Solicitation for Feedback

<https://www.lexingtonma.gov/home/news/select-board-seeks-public-feedback-policing-lexington>

# Select Board Seeks Public Feedback on Policing in Lexington

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Over the past several years, the Town of Lexington has been planning for the construction of a new police station. The Select Board has paused design development on the police station project to conduct public outreach on policing in Lexington.

Select Board Members have been meeting with cultural, ethnic, and social groups within the Lexington community to discuss this topic in small group settings. In the next step of this public outreach process, we are looking for the broader public to share their thoughts or

concerns with members of the Select Board directly.

### We are seeking feedback on the following questions:

- What has your experience been with the Lexington Police Department? (Positive and/or negative experiences)
- Do you have concerns about the current Police Department operations that might impact how we would build a new police station?
- Any other thoughts you might want to share about policing in Lexington?

### How to share your feedback:

1. For an individual meeting with two Select Board Members (Joe Pato and Doug Lucente), please email [selectboard@lexingtonma.gov](mailto:selectboard@lexingtonma.gov) or call 781-698-4580 to schedule a time. **This feedback would be kept confidential.**
2. If you would like to share feedback electronically, [please fill out this online form](#). Please write "Police Station Project Feedback" in the Comment Section. **Feedback submitted electronically cannot be kept confidential and would become part of the public record.**

**The deadline to submit feedback is June 15.**