

# Op-Ed: EMS Project Needs a Building Committee

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Easton has been blessed with a dedicated and professional corps of volunteers who provide outstanding service to the town through our Emergency Medical Service. For many years they have continued to maintain the highest standards while dealing with the frustrations of operating out of a building that is rapidly reaching the end of its useful life.

For several years replacement of their headquarters has been at the top of the list for the next major capital project in town, but we have not been able to provide the funds required. With the announcement of funding through the federal American Recovery Plan all the current candidates for the Board of Selectmen as well as myself as chair of the Board of Finance have come out in favor of using those funds to provide a new home for EMS.

Recently there was a lengthy article in the Courier covering this issue, but it did not give the full picture. In a June 23 letter to the Courier, Ira Kaplan, a candidate for the Board of Finance (BOF), stated, correctly, that Dr. Bindelglass at the April 6 BOF meeting expressed support for using ARP funds for a new EMS HQ. He also included a quote from Dr. Bindelglass as follows - "EMS Commission has been tasked with coming up with some preliminary ideas."

In late July, at Dr. Bindelglass's request, I attended a meeting in Town Hall to discuss the project. At the start of the meeting I said that as a meeting of town officials the meeting should be properly warned, open to the public, and minutes submitted to the Town Clerk. I was told that the meeting actually was not called by the selectman or the EMS Commission but by the private Easton EMS Association that functions as a support group much like the Friends of the Library or the Easton Learning Foundation and therefor not subject to the Freedom of Information regulations.

I accepted that statement but gave my opinion that this project has widespread support in town and would only benefit from seeking public input. During the meeting it was brought out that discussions were taking place with a nearby property owner for a parcel that includes a building. The initial asking price was \$2 million but had been reduced to \$1.4 million with some side conditions. Work had been done with an architect to reconfigure the interior space in the existing building. I strongly urged that the group not become fixated on one parcel and that the first priority should be to have a design that fits the mission, not try to fit the mission to the building.

Easton has taken on many major capital projects over the years, and they have all followed a standard methodology. The first significant step is for the selectmen to recruit volunteers for a Building Committee and provide them with a charge defining the general scope of the project. The committee then proceeds to develop a firm list of requirements, hires an architect, works with the architect to develop bid specifications, oversees the bidding and contractor selection, and supervises the actual construction, all while obtaining funding approval for each step as needed. This is how we have built everything from schools to the 9/11 Memorial.

It is now six months since that April 6 BOF meeting and that first critical step has not been taken. So far anything that was done has been done behind closed doors. Basically, we have delayed this critical project for half a year while the building has literally been falling apart. Our EMS volunteers and paid staff deserve better. In my experience in the corporate world, when a project as fully supported as this one shows

so little progress for so long there is normally a change in leadership.