



PLANNING TO MEET NORTHFIELD'S **Public Safety Needs**

To the citizens of Northfield:

For years, this community has been discussing a new Safety Center. The needs are obvious to even a casual viewer: the current building is too small, has millions of dollars in de-

ferred maintenance, and has health and safety issues that would be costly to fix. Its location on a flood plain requires expensive flood protection measures if any substantial renovation is undertaken.

Three successive City Councils have made a new Safety Center a top priority. Then commissioned several studies assessing the existing building and the need for a new facility. The current Council appointed a citizen task force to review these studies and make recommendations about the type, location and cost of a new Safety Center. We also asked city staff to prepare detailed financial projection for the Council to use in establishing a Capital Improvement Plan. I'd like to talk about each of these steps.

The City of Northfield relies on expert advice from citizen volunteers in almost all areas of public life. Our boards and commissions are a vital way in which the public voice is heard. The Public Safety Center Taskforce – a group of two council members, the police and fire department chiefs, and seven citizens with appropriate expertise – thoroughly reviewed prior studies, demographic information, facilities recently built in neighboring communities, and a host of other issues related to the Safety Center. Those meetings are briefly summarized in this document, and full copies of the meeting minutes are available on the City's web site. Over a four-month period, the Taskforce members became experts in the details of how to best serve Northfield's public safety needs. The City Council is currently reviewing the Taskforce recommendation. We appreciate the expertise and service of our citizen volunteers. We hope the public will, too.

On the financing side, city staff members are helping the Council develop something Northfield has been lacking for quite some time: a formal Capital Improvement Plan. We are working toward a detailed plan that establishes a process for determining the highest priority projects and defines the available financial resources for the next several years. A new Safety Center will almost certainly be one of the highest priority projects.

There's no question that we are currently working through a difficult economic period. The City Council is well aware of our obligation to invest taxpayer money wisely. We are, after all, taxpayers and business owners ourselves. But there's also no question that Northfield must move forward to address its growing public safety needs. We owe it to the public to plan for the future, and we owe it to the professionals and volunteers who staff our police and fire departments to provide facilities and equipment that will let them do their work safely and efficiently. This will require a substantial and long overdue investment, but the cost of doing nothing is much higher.

Look closely at the existing building, and you will see what the Council and the Taskforce have seen: a building that has served us well, but which can no longer meet our needs. It's time for Northfield to take the next step to ensure the health and safety of our community, and those who protect it.

Sincerely,

Mary Rossing
Mayor



CHRONOLOGY OF KEY ISSUES in Safety Center Planning

1970

The current Safety Center was completed. The city's population was 10,232.

May 2006

Redalen Valuation Services, Inc., estimated the market value of the current Safety Center at approximately \$865,000. This valuation is an important benchmark in establishing the maximum amount the city could spend on renovations to the facility without triggering mandatory flood mitigation required imposed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

September 2008

Wold Architects and Engineers presented a *Facility Analysis for Public Safety Center*. The report documented approximately \$3.2 million in deferred maintenance, repairs, and code-related improvements. Virtually every element of the building requires significant maintenance or replacement.

January 2009

Wold Architects and Engineers presented a report titled, *New Public Safety Facility Study*. Key findings:

- A facility to meet the needs of Northfield's current population (19,859 in 2007) would require approximately 48,000 square feet — 19,000 sf for police, 12,500 sf for fire, and 16,500 sf for common areas, shared workspaces, and vehicle and equipment bays. (NOTE: the current Safety Center is approximately 18,645 sf.)
- To meet city zoning requirements and other regulations, a site of 5 to 5.75 acres would be required. (NOTE: the current Safety Center sits on a site of approximately 1.5 acres, with an adjacent parcel of about .75 acres. Most of the land area is within FEMA's Base Flood Elevation (BFE), more commonly known as the 100-year floodplain.)

January 26, 2009

The City Council authorized a Public Safety Center Taskforce to "research, analyze data and define facility space needs, building location, and financing and ultimately make a report clearly defining public safety needs to the City Council."

February 2, 2009

The City Council appointed eleven members to the Taskforce. See the FAQs for a list.

February 19, 2009

The Taskforce discussed the consolidation of police and fire services in a single location; the impact of regionalization of services on the City; and the scope of the deficiencies of the current Safety Center. They reviewed prior space needs analysis reports and identified items that could be classified as "wants," rather than "needs."

March 12, 2009

The Taskforce toured the current Safety Center to better understand the space constraints and condition of the facility. Among the issues discussed were the number of firefighters housed on-site, indoor parking for police vehicles used by on-duty officers, and the need for detention space. The Taskforce discussed the economic and operational impact of having a combined facility for police, fire, and emergency services, and the financial impact on the community.

March 20, 2009

The Taskforce toured police and fire facilities in Farmington, Prior Lake, New Prague, and Lakeville.

March 26, 2009

The Taskforce reviewed the tour, identifying features Northfield should consider including or doing differently. There was continued discussion of assumptions about the growth rate of the community, the cost of recently



completed police/fire facilities in the area. The City Finance Director led the group through a discussion of financing tools. The City Administrator reviewed ISO and PPC ratings for fire facilities, highlighting the performance of Northfield's volunteer fire department in these rating schemes. Wold presented a Site Evaluation Criteria chart.

April 9, 2009

The Taskforce applied the Site Evaluation Criteria to nine prop-

erties, eliminating four from further consideration. Four additional properties were discussed. (See the meeting minutes for a complete list.) Wold was directed to update the Site Selection Matrix to reflect these changes. The group renewed discussion of separate police and fire facilities; Councilmember Denison reported on discussions with other Council members indicating a desire to build both facilities, whether in separate or combined buildings.

April 23, 2009

The Taskforce reviewed the revised Site Selection Matrix; member Ray Cox withdrew the Northfield Construction site from further consideration. The group discussed a number of sites, balancing size, location, cost, and displacement of current occupants. There was discussion of the impact of selecting currently taxable properties.

April 30, 2009

The Taskforce continued its discussion of the four remaining properties under consideration. The Furlong GM Auto Sales site was made an alternate. The group heard a report of a discussion with MN-DOT regarding the cost of road alterations and signals, agreeing to include these costs in the estimates. There was further discussion of the size and cost of new buildings, versus renovation costs for the existing facility.

May 14, 2009

Taskforce member Ray Cox reported on a City Council work session. There was discussion about the need to present accurate information to the public. The group discussed the merits of improving a building in a floodplain, as well as how much renovation could actually be done. Further discussion of the Site Selection Matrix.

May 28, 2009

The Community Development Director provided a detailed report on the restrictions and cost of addressing floodplain issues. The committee received a report on the bonding process, including other capital projects under consideration. The group reviewed a draft recommendation document.

June 11, 2009

The Taskforce reviewed and finalized its recommendations to the City Council. All Taskforce members affirmed their support of the report.

June 22, 2009

The Taskforce presented its recommendations to the City Council:

- That the city construct a new, combined Public Safety Center of 47,500 square feet;
- That the city consider two sites for a new Public Safety Center:
 - The "Valley Co-Op" site located on South Highway 3, and
 - The "Cowles Property" site located on Riverview Drive; and
- That the City consider two financing options:
 - Voter approval through a referendum of the sale of \$10.4 million in General Obligation Bonds; or
 - City Council approval of the sale of \$10.4 million in Capital Improvement Bonds, subject to a reverse referendum.

The Taskforce further recommended a detailed review of the flood protection issues affecting the current Safety Center site.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Safety Center

Q: Why do we need a new Safety Center, and who decided?

A: The subject of a “new” Safety Center has been discussed for many years. The problems of the existing building (see “Recent Studies”) are well-documented. A citizen taskforce reviewed the issues and recommended building a new, combined police and fire facility. The City Council is considering the recommendation.

Q: Why can't we simply remodel or expand the existing Safety Center to continue to serve as a police or fire department?

A: That is still an option, but there are three issues: 1) the current building is too small to accommodate either department without remodeling and expansion; 2) renovation will be expensive, perhaps costing more than razing the structure and building new; and 3) any plan to renovate the existing building will require expensive flood protection to meet FEMA standards that were not in effect in 1970. (See the URS engineering report in “Recent Studies.”)

Q: Isn't the building worth reusing?

A: There are substantial problems. Simply put, for the past twenty years or so, the city has not made any significant investments in this building. About \$3.2 million in deferred maintenance and other repairs will be required just to bring the building up to code for continued service. That money will not add any space or improve the functional use and efficiency of the building. The additional renovation for police or fire use to meet Northfield's future needs may be as or more expensive than a new facility.

Q: What about the actual remodeling? If we do the deferred maintenance and deal with the flood protection issues, couldn't the building be reused?

A: The shell of the Safety Center is structurally sound, but at its current size, it is not large enough for either the police or fire department without some expansion. After a thorough review, a citizen taskforce recommended a new, combined police and fire facility.

Q: Who was on the Taskforce?

A: The eleven members of the taskforce included City Council members Kris Vows and Jon Denison, Police Chief Mark Taylor, Fire Chief Gerry Franek, and citizens Greg Colby, Fred Rogers, Jerry Anderson, Ray Cox, David Hvistendahl, Janelle Tappan, and Andy Yurok.

Q: Why didn't the Taskforce decide what to do with the current Safety Center building?

A: The Taskforce was charged only with verifying the space needs of the police and fire departments, specifying an operating plan (in this case, continuing to operate a combined facility), recommending a location, and recommending a financing strategy. They were not asked to consider the possible reuse of the existing building.

Q: Why does the fire department need more space?

A: The current building is simply too small to accommodate modern fire



The existing facility was built in 1970 to serve the needs of a community of about 10,000 people. Since then, Northfield has nearly doubled in size, and the complexity of police, fire, and emergency services has increased dramatically.

fighting and emergency rescue equipment. The three trucks used by the department in 1970 have given way to six major vehicles and several small vehicles. Parked nose to nose, they barely fit in the fire station bays, with no room for maintenance or repairs, or for fire fighters to prepare their equipment when responding to a call.

A new facility will substantially improve safety.

Q: What impact will a new facility have on the police department?

A: Since the current building was placed in service, police work has become much more technically demanding, public expectations of the police department have risen, and the number of officers serving the community has more than tripled. The current building simply can't accommodate the work the public expects the police to accomplish.

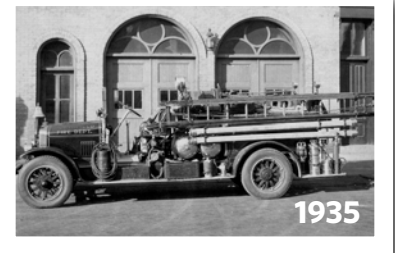
The main facility issues fall into four areas: officer safety, operational efficiency, the increasing complexity of police work, and adequate workspace. An example of a situation that reflects all four issues is the process of detaining an offender. Right now, the Northfield Police Department has no holding cells in which to place individuals during processing, creating risk of injury when offenders become violent. Officers spend valuable time transporting offenders to Faribault, Dakota County, and other jurisdictions, leaving the city with a reduced police presence during the transport. Standards of evidence collection and storage have become more stringent, the equipment more complex, training more frequent and demanding. A building meant to support a force of seven officers, with little or no modern technology, simply can't support 22 officers employing modern methods of policing.

Q: Aren't the proposed locations on South Highway 3 too far from the center of town?

A: Police officers currently patrol in vehicles; the location of the police station is not expected to result in any significant change in response times. The Fire Department currently exceeds national standard response times by a substantial margin. The proposed locations are not expected to change that significantly.

Q: What impact will building a new Safety Center have on my taxes?

A: If the City borrows \$10.4 million for the project, the expected property tax increase on a home worth \$220,000 (about the average for Northfield) would be about \$128-\$135 year. The increase would not take effect until 2013 or 2014.





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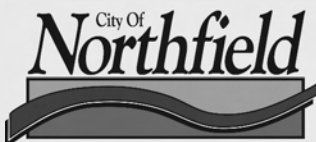
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*Historic photos courtesy of the
Northfield Historical Society.*

Recent Studies

For several years, a new Safety Center has been at or near the top of the city's list of capital projects, and the subject of much community discussion. The current facility was built in 1970 to serve the needs of a community of about 10,000 people. Since then, Northfield has nearly doubled in size, and the complexity of police, fire, and emergency services has increased dramatically. The City Council has commissioned several studies to determine how to best meet the community's needs.

Facility Analysis for Public Safety Center, Wold Architects and Engineers, September 1, 2008.

This study identified approximately \$3.2 million in deferred maintenance, improvements required to meet current building codes and Occupation Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, and repairs and upgrades required to maintain operations at the current level of service.

New Public Safety Facility Study, Wold Architects and Engineers, January 2009.

This study revisited a similar study from March 2007, evaluating the facility requirements of the Northfield Police Department and the Northfield Fire Department through 2030. The report recommended a combined police and fire facility of approximately 39,362 square feet.

Financing Options for Proposed Safety Center, Ehlers, Inc., May 19, 2009.

The Ehlers memo outlined funding mechanisms for a new Public Safety Center, including general obligation bonds, capital improvement bonds and Economic Development Authority lease revenue bonds. The impact on property taxes is nearly the same under all three scenarios. The estimated tax impact on a \$220,000 home would be an increase of approximately \$128–135 per year.

Public Safety Center Taskforce Report, June 22, 2009.

This study affirmed the general findings of the *New Public Safety Facility Study*, recommended construction of a combined Public Safety Center of approximately 47,500 square feet, at an estimated cost of \$10.4 million; identified two possible sites along South Highway 3; and recommended the City Council pursue either a public referendum to authorize the sale of general obligation bonds or the sale of capital improvement bonds, subject to a reverse referendum.



Review of Flood Protection Alternatives, URS Corporation, August 11, 2009.

The study concluded that a significant renovation or expansion of the existing building would require flood mitigation, and provided four options for addressing the issues. The least expensive option (\$111,000-\$171,000) would abandon the lower level of the building; the other options would provide some continued use of the lower level, at costs ranging from \$191,000-\$350,000. These sums covered *only* the cost of flood mitigation, not any renovation or expansion of the structure.

