



CITY OF MELROSE

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

PAUL BRODEUR
Mayor

City Hall, 562 Main Street
Melrose, Massachusetts 02176
Telephone - (781) 979-4440

August 16, 2023

Dear members of the Melrose community,

Today I am pleased to share with you the news that I have sent to the Melrose City Council an order requesting that a question be placed on the November election ballot asking the voters of Melrose to approve a debt exclusion for our public safety buildings.

This is the culmination of years of effort spanning several administrations to address this critical need, and I am grateful to everyone whose hard work made this possible. First and foremost, I want to acknowledge the tremendous effort that has been made by the Public Safety Building Committee, which included representatives of our police and fire unions, City staff, and talented residents who put in countless hours to help move this project forward. Without their dedication, we would not be at the place where we are today – discussing the financing of this project – and I'm deeply grateful to all of them for fulfilling their charge of analyzing the needs of our public safety buildings.

The specific language I have offered to the Council would pay for the cost to borrow funds for renovating or replacing three of the four public safety buildings: the Melrose Central Fire Station, the Melrose Highlands Fire Station, and the Melrose Police Station. While the ballot question cannot by law include the cost of this project, we estimate it to be \$95 million. I recognize that this plan differs from what the Public Safety Building Committee has recommended, which would be to renovate or replace all four buildings at a project cost of approximately \$130 million, and I want to tell you why.

I am fully committed to fixing our dilapidated public safety infrastructure. However, as Mayor, it is my responsibility to look at the full picture of all the City's needs and make sure that we have the financial resources to meet them. While public safety buildings are clearly our top priority, there are other projects on the horizon that we need to plan for as well. Among these are significant future costs to renovate several of our elementary schools that we expect to be made clear through the school space needs study, as well as millions of dollars of non-school bonded capital projects that we expect to see recommended by the Collins Center when their Capital Improvement Plan report is completed.

The cost savings from holding off for now the replacement of the East Side Fire Station is substantial. At our current average single-family home value, the estimated tax impact to an average residential property owner of the three-building project would be approximately

\$641/year for most of the life of the bond. By contrast, the estimated impact to the average homeowner of a four-building project that included the East Side station would be approximately \$875/year for all but a few years of a 30-year bond. These are estimates, subject to change based on various economic factors, but they do provide an important point of comparison between these two options.

I believe that the reasonable and prudent path forward is a debt exclusion for three buildings instead of four. That is not because I think the East Side Fire station is in great shape – clearly it is not. However, I do believe there are more financially feasible ways of addressing its deficiencies without replacing it at a cost of \$35 million. I am recommending this in the interest of addressing the much more dire state of the other two fire stations and the clear need for a modern police station while also balancing the other financial needs of the City.

I also believe that this is the plan with the best chance of community support. In talking with people around Melrose, I have heard near universal agreement that we must fix our public safety buildings and we must do so now. At the same time, many are understandably concerned about the City's future operating budgets, especially as it relates to our schools, and our overall fiscal health given the constraints of Proposition 2 ½.

The need to replace our public safety buildings is abundantly clear. We simply cannot expect our first responders to provide modern public safety services in aging and obsolete buildings, some of which were built over 120 years ago. This is an unsustainable situation, and the status quo cannot continue. The three-building project will accomplish the most critical parts of this goal in a fiscally responsible manner. \$95 million to build two new buildings and renovate a third represents an unprecedented investment in our City's public safety infrastructure I am excited to see it move forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. B. A.", written in a cursive style.