

FIRE STATION RENOVATIONS/REPLACEMENT PROJECT INITIATIVE

The conversation about improving the Town of Brookline's five aging firehouses began quietly in April of 2018. At that time, most of the buildings were approaching a century old structure originally built as simple garages with small living quarters attached. They were designed for a workforce that looked very different than today's and offered none of the protection or standards now expected in a modern workplace. Over the years, the firefighters who lived and worked in these spaces described them as outdated, cramped, and "devoid of reasonable health and safety standards."

As these concerns grew more visible, the Town gradually recognized that it had a duty to provide a safe and equitable environment for all its employees. Firefighters, like any other TOB employee, were entitled to facilities that protected their health, supported their daily operations, and complied with the same standards upheld elsewhere in the organization.

Initial planning efforts focused on two core objectives. First, the Town needed to reduce occupational health risks for all fire department personnel that were increasingly difficult to ignore. Second, the Town had to ensure that the fire stations provided functional living and working spaces that met all local, state, and federal safety requirements.

That recognition became unavoidable after station inspections and scientific evidence were presented by the Fire Union's Vice President, Cripe. The data made clear that the existing buildings were not only outdated but posed genuine health hazards. These findings, combined with years of inadequate planning and deferred maintenance, forced the Town to confront the urgency of the situation and move toward immediate corrective action.

Further legal review revealed that the Town was also out of compliance with several federal laws designed to protect workers, especially pregnant and nursing employees. The **PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act (2022)** expanded the requirement for employers to provide appropriate lactation accommodations. The **Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) (2022)** reinforced the need for reasonable workplace adjustments related to pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions. Additionally, aspects of the **Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017**—specifically, the provision disallowing tax deductions for settlements involving nondisclosure agreements—highlighted the increased scrutiny and accountability surrounding workplace safety, discrimination, and equity issues.

Together, these factors underscored the necessity of renovating or replacing the Town's fire stations. What began as a conversation about outdated infrastructure evolved into a broader acknowledgment of the Town's responsibility: to protect its firefighters' health, adhere to modern safety standards, and ensure equitable treatment for every employee who serves the community.