

ARDSLEY HIGHWAY GARAGE Q & A

The Ardsley Board of Trustees approved the acquisition of two parcels of property located at 220 Heatherdell Road, just across from McDowell Park, with the intention of building a highway garage on the site. We wish to address questions about the acquisition, the intended use and the process.

1. Why was there no public discussion about the purchase of property for a highway garage?

The reason that acquisition of the Heatherdell property was not discussed publicly was both legal and strategic. The New York State Public Officers Law, where requirements for open meetings and public discussion of municipal business are set forth, specifically exempts discussions concerning acquisition of real estate by a municipality. Discussion of a specific piece of property under negotiation is held in executive session and then voted on in public. The purpose is to permit the municipality to protect its negotiating position and to protect it from speculators and price manipulation.

Announcing contract negotiations would invite speculators, bidding up the price, and is consistent with how any interested property buyer would act. We believe the Village's best interests were served by following this process. Further, as noted below, the Village had been searching for a suitable location to relocate the highway garage when this property came on the market. The Village acted quickly to assess the suitability of the parcels, and when the reports came back positive, the Board felt it was a rare opportunity to acquire the parcels.

There have been, in fact, a number of public discussions about a new highway garage, identifying appropriate parcels and assessing the Village's needs. The initial discussions were held during annual budget and capital plan worksessions held in public. Monies have been allocated to the highway garage since the Village's 10-year capital plan was first drawn up in the 2015-16 fiscal year. The Village borrowed funds in 2015 for professional services related to the building of a highway garage. These can all be found in the public record.

2. Why does Ardsley need a new highway garage?

The current highway garage sits on NYS Thruway Authority property in an area approximately 627 feet by 31 feet of "usable" area. On this area sits the garage that is 163 feet by 26 feet, a salt shed that is 57 feet by 30 feet, a storage container that is 30 feet by 10 feet, and an equipment shed that is 10 feet by 6 feet. The DPW's actual needs are for a garage of approximately 14,000 square feet, along with a salt storage barn, a fuel station, truck and employee parking, and associated site improvements.

The garage was moved to its current location in 1978 as a “temporary” site until a more suitable location could be found. The Village uses the property under permit from the NYS Thruway which could require the Village to relocate at any time. This would force the Village to find another location within a short timeframe.

The current facility is inadequate, inefficient and in poor condition. Approximately 80% of the highway vehicles and heavy equipment are kept outdoors, which requires additional ongoing maintenance and shortens the life span of the equipment. The mechanics “bay” is greatly undersized and requires a great deal of additional time to maintain vehicles. Office space for the foreman and deputy foreman is completely inefficient. And the Village needs to provide a safe and sanitary working facility for its employees in accordance with good labor practices.

3. Why can't the Village find another location for the new highway garage?

For many years, the Village has sought to find a site for a new garage. The Village has reviewed the feasibility of a number of sites that have proven to be unavailable or inappropriate as a highway garage site. The Village reported the results of its extensive search efforts as an attachment to the report filed by the Village's planning consultant. These sites include the following:

Town of Greenburgh property at 9A and Secor Road: After investigation, it was determined that this is dedicated parkland which cannot be used for any other purposes.

State property south of the Waterwheel development on 9A: This lot is not adequately proportioned for use as a highway garage site and there are significant steep slopes.

Rebuilding on the current site owned by the New York State Thruway Authority: We could be forced to vacate with 30 days' notice; the site is small and not conducive to efficient highway operations.

Portion of the OLPH school property: This property is in a floodplain and the property owner declined to sell off a portion of the property.

Property on the south end of the Village on Lawrence Street: This land is outside the Village boundary and not suited for a highway garage.

Given the fact that there is almost no developable land in Ardsley, and no parcels substantial enough to support a DPW garage, we do not believe there are other suitable locations in the Village for a garage. It is not enough to ask why we want to build the garage on the Heatherdell property; we must ask where else could it be built. We found no satisfactory answer to that question.

4. Why can't the Village just share the Town of Greenburgh highway garage on Sprain Road?

The Greenburgh garage is presently not adequate for Greenburgh's own needs. There are at least 15 sanitation trucks parked outdoors, and the Greenburgh DPW commissioner could give no assurances that they would be able to accommodate Ardsley in the coming years. We do not believe that facility could adequately provide the vehicle and equipment storage that the Village requires.

This arrangement also presented significant operational and coordination issues. During emergency situations and routine maintenance operations, both the Town and Village would need to access the same space and resources that are currently used solely by the Town. When a snowstorm hits, Town and Village trucks will be vying for the same materials at the same time. When vehicles break down, as often happens during storms because of the intense use, both the Town and Village would be relying on the same maintenance space to make repairs. Road and outside maintenance operations would also be performed during the same time periods, making the sharing of those resources and that space inefficient. The Village believes that Town needs would get priority, Town officials would set schedules for their benefit, and allocation of resources such as salt, sand and other materials would put the Village at a disadvantage. We have no way of knowing how these resources would be accounted for on a regular basis or during emergencies.

Every Ardsley resident knows that the Department of Public Works and the Sanitation Department do a great job with limited resources and under difficult circumstances, particularly during storms and snow emergencies. We believe that their ability to perform would be severely compromised by a move to the Greenburgh facility.

5. How much additional traffic would be added in the area?

Village highway operations involve a total of 16 staff when everyone is working. Four staff members provide daily sanitation services on two trucks. The trucks head out in the morning and return in the afternoon, with occasional trips back to the highway garage for equipment and materials. Other staff typically leave the garage once in the morning, only to return in the afternoon, and much of their work is performed using small pickup trucks, not heavy duty vehicles. There are two mechanics at the garage who service vehicles and equipment. Other than when these vehicles leave at 7:00 AM and return at 3:00 PM, there is little more than sporadic pickup traffic in and out of the garage during the day. Sanitation vehicles pass this way during the day already. Whether the Village runs the highway operations from this site or a shared site with the Town of Greenburgh, the few vehicles operated by the Village would pass through the same area. We do not foresee any increase in traffic impacts to the surrounding area. It's fair to say that there is more traffic from the vehicles used to maintain the Town Park than will be generated now or in the future by the Village.

6. Isn't the Heatherdell property unsuitable for a highway garage?

The property on Heatherdell Road has been fully investigated through the Village's due diligence efforts, including a preliminary environmental review. This property has turned out to be an appropriate site for the new highway garage based on its location, size, lack of severe environmental impediments and its development capabilities.

While the area is zoned residential, the immediate neighbors are McDowell Park, across the road, which is a ball field that generally is not used when DPW is operating, and Anthony Veteran Park. A site visit revealed that the Park is several hundred yards from the property, and the Park property adjacent to the site is used to store maintenance equipment. The Town has used the parking lot of its Park to store building materials and sanitation vehicles, which would be more unsightly than anything the Village is planning. The site sits almost directly adjacent to the Sprain Brook Parkway, which is visible and within earshot to the east. The owner of the property had not found a buyer after several months, and we believe the proximity to the Sprain Brook Parkway makes it unsuitable for continued residential use. The western edge of the property consists of wetlands and a pond, creating a further buffer, none of which will be disturbed.

7. *How can the Village rezone the property to suit its needs?*

The Village will not be rezoning the property. The question that arose during due diligence is whether the Village would need to seek a variance for this use since a highway garage is not a permitted use in a residential zone. (In fact, a highway garage is not a permitted use in any zone in the Village.) We have concluded, upon consultation with our planning consultant, that the Village does not need to obtain a variance to build a highway garage in its own municipality. The Village is granted immunity from the use restrictions in the Village Zoning Code under State Law. The consultant's report was entered in the public record and the Village Board adopted a resolution based on the planning consultant's report at its September 5 meeting.

8. Why does the Village want to put up an "ugly" highway garage next to the Town Park?

While we answered the question above about the suitability of the building in this location, we wish to point out that the building has not been designed yet. The Village is working on a request for proposals for professional services to design and manage the construction of the building. Village officials are aware of and sensitive to the concerns over aesthetics and will make every effort to provide for a building that fits in appropriately in that location and allows for effective and efficient highway operations. Existing vegetation will be retained to the extent possible, and if needed, additional trees and shrubbery will be added.

