Emphasize the Public in Safety Facility

Together We Build, November 13, 2026

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

The public has not "seen a preliminary concept floor plan for the new Public Safety Facility. Yet the town has entered into a $1,500,000 final design contract for the project." This is paraphrased from a letter submitted to the trustees for public comment prior to the Tuesday November 10, 2026, board meeting. Those of us trained in, and with extensive experience in, designing large buildings, public spaces, urban, residential and landscape design, are gobsmacked that our elected public officials and the staff tasked to represent the public have hurtled full throttle into a phase of a project which should be in the thoughtful design and conceptual brainstorm stage. Perhaps they are inspired by the wrecking ball school of design based in Washington D.C.

In Architect Thomas Beck's opinion, "Design Programming, "Schematic Design" needs to include public discussions about the current staffing and future staffing levels. Which then leads to other questions. Such as the number of police vehicles we currently own have versus needed and future number of vehicles needed. Do they really know what spaces they need in the new building? What good designers do is drill down to the core. How much space and what is the space for, what is the function of that space. Will there be any space dedicated to bringing the community together, and improving police community relations?

What good designers do is drill down to the core. When designing a public space, the public being the stakeholder here, the public should be included in the full scope of conversations about how this public facility serves the public.

Space dedicated to bringing the community together, and improving police community relations? We are not diving into studies here, but in general we have heard over time that police departments that have robust communications with their public enjoy lower crime rates, and better serve the communities which they serve. We are especially reminded of the impact of kindness when we live in a nation with unmarked thugs grabbing citizens off the street for what they look like.

On July 10 2026 we wrote "New EP police facility RFP should require renewables including solar." (https://www.eptrail.com/2026/07/10/together-we-build-new-ep-police-facility-rfp-should-require-renewables-including-solar/.)

In that article we press for the adoption of renewable energy in the design of the new facility. "Will the new police station be zero net energy? Is the new police station going to be solar powered with backup batteries to run during grid emergencies? Is the new police station going to meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards? Will the police station have a space for the local ham radio operators, just in case most communication goes down? Will the police station be built with sustainable materials and long-lasting materials?"

In that article we also looked at several examples of other public safety facilities which integrate solar. Building renewables into the original design for our new Public Safety Facility will pay back the stakeholders, the public, exponentially over time.

Bentonville, AR, has a "restorative justice" program using a cooking class for both a first time offender and the arresting officer, in which they cook together and then sit down and eat the food they prepared together. That kitchen facility was at the public library, one of the buildings Thomas toured when the AIA (American Institute of Architects) had its national conference in Bentonville.

Another public facility experienced with the AIA in Arkansas was a courthouse designed from the ground up to "include" the public. From the appearance to the daily function, the building was designed to tell the public that this was their justice system, their community building, their neighborhood.

This is the link to the Town of Estes Park info for the Public Safety Facility project. (https://estespark.colorado.gov/publicsafetyfacility)

In the report delivered to the trustees at the board meeting of November 10, 2026, it is stated that “Public outreach is a critical part of this project.” The two tracks the writers visualize is educating the public about the “need and scope of the facility” and land use concerns. The most condescending phrase in the report is the statement “Public engagement will be focused where it can make a difference, including how the facility fits its surroundings.” This verbiage says to the public, stay in your lane. The important functions of this facility are beyond your pay grade. You can have a say about the color of the building but leave it to us to design the guts. Words matter.

Our schedule did not permit attending the November 10 board meeting. Thankfully the meetings are both live streamed and recorded. We were able to review the presentation before our deadline for this article. The Mayor at the start of the meeting, just prior to the public comment period, emphasized how important the public’s input is to the board, and to him personally. During the presentation Trustee Brown brings up concerns of the public about the project, leading to Chief of Police Ian Stewart firmly issuing an open invite to the public for engagement and open dialogue. The Town contact page is https://estespark.colorado.gov/contact.

In the Town Board Meeting recording of November 10, 2026, two hours and thirty-eight minutes into the meeting the report regarding the Public Safety Facility project begins. This link starts at 2:38:01. https://youtu.be/Ty0qe10Bgyc?t=9481 The presentation and discussion lasts just under a half hour. We encourage you to review it for yourself.

The way this project is being handled is “not normal procedure for the design of a large public facility.” The industry gold standard for good building design is to allow for informed public conversation about the pros and cons of the project. We are not talking about justifying the existence of the new facility. We are talking about its public function, about the possibilities for good that can be embraced in this rare public infrastructure project in Estes Park. We are the voting citizen public stakeholders, and we insist this project include us. We believe we should have a say in what is included in the building design and insist that renewables and solar be included in the architectural design. The public should insist we have input in the Schematic Design not just minor revisions to the completed design.

The next study session and board meeting are scheduled for December 8th. The link for public comments is on the page https://estespark.colorado.gov/boardsandmeetings. Comments must be submitted no later than 4pm on the Monday December 7. And/or attend the meeting!

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