

Harford Executive Cassilly Exploring Plans for Comprehensive Public Safety Complex; Former HEAT Center in Aberdeen to be Repurposed to Support Workforce Development

BEL AIR, Md., (Aug. 31, 2023) - Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly today announced plans to explore construction of a comprehensive public safety complex to train and serve local law enforcement, fire, EMS, and allied agencies. The decision is based on recommendations from an independent study that also found the nearly 30-year-old former HEAT Center in Aberdeen, which was once proposed as a training center and precinct for the Harford County Sheriff's Office, to be inadequate for modern public safety needs.

The study was conducted by Manns Woodward Studios (MWS), a nationally recognized and award-winning architectural firm specializing in the design of public safety facilities and campuses.

MWS also reported that prior cost estimates to renovate the HEAT Center as a training center and precinct for the sheriff's office were "grossly underestimated" and actual costs approached that of completely new construction. In addition, MWS identified multiple shortcomings at the site, including significant concerns with program alignment, the cost and complexity of structural compliance, associated crime prevention through environmental design principles, energy efficiency, training integration, limited space, and overall value. In response to these findings, the county executive will be repurposing the county-owned HEAT Center to fill immediate needs for training space to support workforce development and to replace existing leased spaces as part of the administration's effort to reduce county spending on commercial leases. The HEAT Center is not currently occupied but was originally built for higher education classrooms.

As recommended by MWS, a comprehensive public safety complex would not be limited to serving one agency. It would include a new, modern precinct for the sheriff's office, new EMS station, and joint public safety training center to support the training for multi-agency responses often called for in modern public safety. The complex would provide joint training with state police and municipal police departments, the volunteer fire companies, EMS providers and allied agencies. The new facility could also include an indoor firing range, garage, and mock buildings for tactical training.

The Cassilly administration is working to identify a central location and would follow a multi-year, phased-in approach to funding within budget constraints.

"In my first budget as county executive, I put the proposed HEAT Center project on hold until my administration could get a better understanding of our fiscal position and whether it was the most appropriate site and plan to meet our public safety needs now, and in the future," County Executive Cassilly said. "I would like to thank MWS for their recommendations. It is their view that modern public safety often requires a multi-agency approach, and I intend to explore having these

agencies train together in a state-of-the-art complex to facilitate interoperability and reduce costs. Most importantly, our goal will be to help deliver the highest quality public safety response for our citizens."