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**Front Page** December 27, 2007

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**\$500,000 for Christmas**  
 McGovern plays Santa to public safety  
 BY MELISSA MCKEON MMCKEON@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM



**Congressman James McGovern, flanked by Holden Police Chief George Sherrill and Fire Chief Jack Chandler, announces the \$466,500 grant on December 21.**

HOLDEN - Christmas came early for Holden last Friday, as public safety, town and state officials stood together outside the police station to hear U.S. Congressman James McGovern announce that the federal government's Omnibus budget, passed this week, included a \$466,500 windfall for communications equipment for a future Holden public safety building.

With a new year bringing what officials believe will be a hard sell - a the third try at a new public safety building for the town - the funds McGovern announced seemed like an unexpected present.

"Thrilled," was Town Manager Brian Bullock's feeling. "It's a lot of money."

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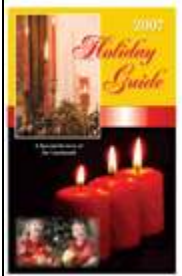
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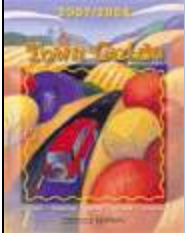
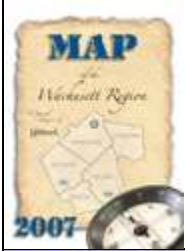
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"It's a tremendous thing for the town and the police and fire departments, and the Public Safety Building Committee," Fire Chief Jack Chandler said.

"I'm extremely happy," Police Chief George Sherrill said. "We've never received this type of federal subsidy before."

The funds are



IIF Trustee Deborah McDonnell lauded the work of police and EMTs and pledged support of the project, while Holden Fire Chief Jack Chandler (right) looked on at Friday's press conference.

earmarked for "communications technology enhancements," and might include furniture, equipment and training for everything that falls under the large umbrella of communications.

And though it is hoped the money will fund equipment for a new public safety building, it will be available to police for that purpose no matter the outcome of the upcoming vote.

Where to fit that much equipment in the current police station would, however, be problematic.

Little can be done in the current police station, where the space squeeze means existing communications equipment is stored in a converted closet, the chief noted.

As Sherrill prepared for Friday's press conference with McGovern, getting DPW to clear enough snow to fit all the attendees in the small front parking area, he reflected on the setting.



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McCain, Edwards, Huckabee, other

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"It's fitting that we're going to have to hold this [press conference] outside," he said. "We don't have the space inside."

"I'm not sure you could fit a half a million dollars of anything in this building," McGovern said at Friday's press conference. "Anyone who visits can see that these facilities are inadequate."

McGovern and everyone who stepped to the podium, lauded the work the town's public safety employees do in the cramped stations. All the more reason, McGovern said, to make sure they have what they need to do the job.

"They've been operating under severely strained conditions for quite some time and they need upgrades to continue to meet the challenge," he said.

And not just equipment upgrades.

"I believe the town of Holden deserves a 21st century public safety facility," McGovern said.

"The federal government and the state government need to be better partners."

One local official who spoke has personal cause to be grateful to emergency services personnel.

Infrastructure Investment Fund Trustee Deborah McDonnell stepped to the podium, not just as a representative of a group that's pledged support to the public safety building project, but as the wife of Kenneth McDonnell, who suffered injuries in a bicycle accident in Oakham in October.

"The police and EMTs saved his life," she said.

To save lives, officials said, communications need to be state-of-the art. It's the one area where even recent purchases quickly outlive their usefulness, Chandler said.

"The technology changes, the radios we have are expensive and after five years, they're pretty much obsolete," he said.

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If a public safety building is approved, the nearly half million windfall would take a little bite out of the \$15.5 million price tag for the 35,000-square-foot building on the brink of being presented to the town.

Public Safety Building Committee members will make their proposal to the town early in 2008 after a year of planning and examining sites for a building.

A complex combining both police and fire is planned at the site of the current fire station. The station would be retained as overflow space, ambulance storage or another town use.

But this third try, officials admit, faces some of the same challenges as previous attempts. The price tag and the tax impact were key factors in dooming two previous projects at the ballot box.

Finance committee and Infrastructure Investment Fund trustees have voted to support the project, and carved out two recommendations to help ease the impact. The fincom recommended using the expected \$750,000 in revenue from the sale of the old police station to reduce the debt incurred for a new building. The Infrastructure Investment Fund trustees pledged to pay \$5 million over 20 years toward the project's debt. It is the largest project the fund has ever supported.

The nearly \$466,500 grant to cover the communications piece of the project, though not overwhelming, is certainly a help, said Public Safety Building Committee Chair Christopher Lucchesi.

"It doesn't seem like it's a lot of money in the grand scheme of the project," he said, "but the reality is that it does have an impact."

How much of an impact?

Bullock said the nearly half million earmarked for communications would reduce the \$122 tax impact to about \$116 a year for a home valued at

just over \$300,000 - the average tax valuation of a Holden home.

Sherrill has a list of possible grants, both state and federal, that he's investigated to see if the town might take advantage of programs to help public safety, particularly in the area of facilities challenges.

But those efforts have resulted in disappointment.

"The state and federal government really don't do much when it comes to bricks and mortar," Bullock said.

If a new public safety building isn't approved, and no space can be found for new equipment in the town's aging buildings, the money might languish unspent. McGovern said that if the town doesn't use the money for a long period of time, it will be rescinded.

#### *Clarification*

The Landmark reported on December 20 that the town would borrow only \$10 million for the building. The Town of Holden would need to borrow the entire \$15.5 million for a public safety building; Infrastructure Investment Fund revenues would be used to repay \$5 million of that debt.