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## Front Page March 20, 2008

### Public safety building is 'out of the gate'

Approved on 3rd try  
**BY MELISSA MCKEON MMCKEON@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM**

HOLDEN - Police Chief George Sherrill took one brief look back Monday night - at "six long years" of waiting for a new space for public safety.

And then he turned to the future.

"We're out of the gate now," he said. "We're into the race."

A majority of voters, 2,221 to 1,957, at a St. Patrick's Day ballot election approved a debt exclusion for \$15.5 million to build a combined police and fire public safety building on the site.

It's the third vote on a public safety project. The first two, in 2004 and 2006, went down to defeat at the ballot box where funding is approved. All three proposals succeeded with town meeting voters.

So what was different this time?

Holden Fire Chief John Chandler thinks a combination of factors that made this proposal pass.

"I would say that it was really the determination to make it pass by a lot of key groups," Chandler

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said. "The backing of the board of selectmen and the finance committee was really important. If either one of them hadn't backed it, that would have killed it."

He also lauded the dedication of the Public Safety Building Committee.



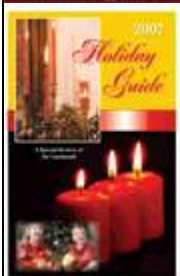
"Everyone on that committee was convinced that this was the right project at the right time," he said.



Also possibly helping were the firefighters holding up signs on weekends and a phone bank to get out the vote.



A few financial considerations might have helped sway voters, Sherrill said. A faltering economy, while it makes folks hold their wallets tighter, can also work in favor of projects like this: hungry contractors may submit competitive bids. The news of a \$500,000 grant from the federal government for communications equipment may also have helped, he said.

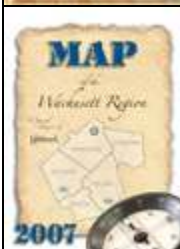


And in the office where the finances are planned, Town Manager Brian Bullock is pleased as well that the project passed and will be taking advantage of historically low interest rates.

"This is the market to be in," Bullock said.



Sherrill is convinced the community has finally recognized the necessity of replacing two aging buildings. The fire station, built in the 1950s, can no longer fit the state-of-the-art equipment required. The police station, built in the 1970s, has been retrofitted so many times there's no room left to do it again.



Both Sherrill and Chandler have voiced concerns that the morale of employees working in substandard conditions would cause the departments to begin losing personnel. Chandler wondered how he would keep morale up if this third proposal failed.

Both chiefs now are taking a breather.

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"I'm so relieved," Sherrill said.

### Grass roots effort key

Those close to the project lauded the grass roots effort to get out the vote and talk up the project. An organization called Citizen Advocates for Public Safety was organized to get the word out about the benefits of the proposed building.



"The grass roots had a lot more grass," Selectman Joseph Sullivan told the select board Monday night after Bullock announced the results of the vote.

### Links

Contact Info

PSBC Chair Christopher Lucchesi said the committee's efforts to listen to the community and get the word out also contributed to this proposal's success.

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"I think that we demonstrated that we were very sensitive to the input we received," Lucchesi said. "We listened to everybody who came [to the meetings]. I'd like to think that resonated through the process."

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Lucchesi said he's proud of how hard the committee worked to meet its mission and come up with a cost-effective solution.

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Committee members combed previous projects, considered numerous sites and two separate buildings and squeezed the building down by nearly 5,000 square feet from previous proposals. The project also will included 9,000 square feet of space at the old fire department for storage and town use.

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They also kept the mission simple, and let the community do its job.

### Poll

The Red Sox in 2008 will ...

- Win the World Series
- Will lose in the ALCS

"Our job was to come up with a recommendation," Lucchesi said. "The citizens of Holden made their decision. I'm proud of my community."

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Noting the opposition to the project, Selectman David White, also a member of the PSBC, said he hopes that the past can remain the past.

"As a community, I hope that we can heal and say, 'This issue is over with, let's get together behind it,'" White said.

As chair of the committee Lucchesi will now segue into the building committee. He's already thinking ahead.

"Now, we're faced with a whole different set of challenges," he said. "We've got to be pretty judicious in what we do."

Lucchesi said getting the plans right from the get-go will be key to keeping the project on budget, a goal he's keeping at the forefront.

A second committee organized just late last year is studying taking over ambulance service for the town, which is now run by an outside contractor, AMR of Worcester. That committee is recommending the town purchase ambulances and run its own service with its own personnel. Observers note their recommendation would have been hard to promote if the public safety building hadn't passed and the committee had to find space to house ambulances.

Sherrill and Chandler, too, are rolling up their sleeves and looking forward to the next stage.

"Now the real work begins," Chandler said. "But it's going to be fun."