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Public safety plan finally passes

Improvements require \$15.5M debt exclusion

By Jean Laquidara Hill TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

HOLDEN— The third time was a charm.

The thrice-requested approval for building new public safety facilities passed 2,221 to 1,956 yesterday, completing the two-step process for constructing and funding new quarters for police, fire and emergency medical personnel. The town meeting voted last week to build a new public safety facility. Yesterday's ballot vote was for a \$15.5 million debt exclusion to pay for the facility.

The measure had failed twice before, in 2004, and in 2006 when town meeting voters agreed to build the new facilities, but ballot voters denied a debt exclusion to pay for the project. The debt exclusion failed in 2006 by a vote of 2,371 to 1,549.

As Police Chief George R. Sherrill waited at the town clerk's office last night for results, he said he was hoping for the best but had prepared himself for the worst. In either case, he said before results were in that he was grateful to the Public Safety Building Committee.

When Town Clerk Kathleen M. Peterson finished counting votes from the last of the five precincts, she smiled and told Chief Sherrill and Lt. Donald A. Ball the news.

"It passed," said Ms. Peterson.

"I think it passed because people realized the longer it took, the more expensive it got," Lt. Ball said.

"I'm happy, so happy," Chief Sherrill said, praising the Public Safety Building Committee and crediting Chairman Christopher A. Lucchesi and Vice Chairman Harold Lane with bringing together a diverse, initially disagreeing group.

In a telephone interview, Fire Chief John Chandler III said: "It's certainly a huge boost to morale and that's a plus. This is a vote of confidence for the call guys, for the full-time guys and also for the Explorers who are an important part of the department."

"I just would like to say for myself and the whole department we're overwhelmed and overjoyed for this. It's great to see the town come out. We certainly appreciate everyone coming out. This vote to me has always been about a lot more than a building. This allows us to grow and to take on EMS and do a lot of nice things for the town of Holden."

"Chris Lucchesi as chairman did an excellent job of leading the committee and bringing us all together and we were able to come up with a proposal that was accepted and that's all that counts," Chief Chandler said.

"I can't thank the voters enough," said Chief Sherrill, noting that the community agreed to build the new facility during difficult economic times. The facility will house police on the lower level, fire on the upper level, and also accommodate emergency medical services. Currently, emergency medical services are private, but the town may take over the services.

The current fire station will be renovated to provide space for the Fire Explorers and the lesser-used fire equipment.

Mr. Lucchesi credited the voters. "I just think the voters of Holden took pride in their community today. All the committee could ever do is mail a recommendation. The town stepped up," he said. "We were extremely sensitive to the citizens and we tried to put forward a proposal that was acceptable to the community at these difficult times," Mr. Lucchesi said.



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"I'm so proud of our community," he added.

The facility is expected to add \$112.29 a year to the average property tax bill of a house assessed at \$301,000.



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