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# Ground broken for Holden public safety building



By Lisa D. Welsh TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF  
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HOLDEN — Police Chief George Sherrill is too much of a gentleman to say “I told you so,” but he believes the historic ice storm that brought the town to a standstill in December demonstrated how much a new public safety building is needed.

“I made this pitch over and over again that our 30-year-old police headquarters wouldn’t hold up in a major emergency. It was so clear and evident in December that what we had was inadequate,” Chief Sherrill said. “We needed an epicenter for all the departments to work out of. That would have helped us so much during the storm.”

Chief Sherrill began advocating six years ago for new headquarters for the town’s police, fire and emergency medical departments, the result of which was to be the focus of yesterday’s ceremonial groundbreaking of a 34,500-square-foot, \$10 million structure on

Main Street.

"If we ever have a major disaster, now we'll have a state-of-the-art communications and emergency center, but first of all, this gives us a first-class facility with the best available technology for day-to-day operations to work out of," he said.

Instead of a makeshift emergency headquarters in the basement of the Municipal Light Department — which lacks cell phone reception and computer data plugs or ports for the use of laptops — the new public safety building boasts multiple dispatch consoles and what Fire Chief John Chandler said moves public safety "from a crammed cubbyhole to state-of-the-art equipment."

"If there's an emergency, I could just pick up my phone, radio and computer and plug it in right next to Chief Sherrill and the town manager so everyone knows what's going on," Chief Chandler said. "And it raises the professionalism of the department in ordinary circumstances."

Chief Chandler also credits the new structure with improving the town's EMS services and bringing to town the new ambulance service that begins July 1.

"Public safety is important and sets a tone for a town," he said. "It's hard to put a lot of those things into words, but it really helps to improve the department."

The complex features training towers and classrooms, where public safety personnel can train instead of visiting other fire departments or finding available meeting space. It has an upgraded emergency generator, a geothermal heating system, a carport and a snow-melt system underneath the driveway and at the main entrance so that quick, emergency response doesn't have to wait for shovels.

Architects Kaestle Boos Associates took great effort in making the design of the big, new building fit into the small-town surroundings.

"It resembles a barn, similar to a popular landmark in town," project architect Paul McAndrew said.

"It's on the main strip, where there is no distinct architecture in the area, so we borrowed from a historic structure," he said. "We felt the form of the building fit well into the surroundings."

Mr. McAndrew said that for obvious reasons, it was important to have the fire station face the main street, so that firetrucks could pull out on the apron.

The public safety building committee has had members who served their term and left before the project came to fruition. Christopher A. Lucchesi, the current chairman, said the end result will be a culmination of the work of many and that the three votes taken at town meeting and other setbacks during six years

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have worked in the town's favor.

"This is a \$12 million construction project that we're getting for about \$10 million, because with the economic environment we got unexpected low bids," Mr. Lucchesi said.

Also, the geothermal heating system is expected to save about 30 percent of heating and cooling costs for the life of the building.

"Upon completion in the fall of 2010, this facility is going to make sure that the public safety facility needs for this community are met for a very, very long time," Mr. Lucchesi said. "The people of Holden should be proud. I'm happy to be part of where we're going in Holden."

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