

Public Safety Building Update

By Fire Chief B. Michael Thurlow

Construction on the new public safety building continues to proceed very well and slightly ahead of schedule. All of the various construction trades are now fully engaged with nearly 100 workers on site at any given time employed by a variety of subcontractors. Our General Contractor, Landry/French Construction, continues to organize those efforts and assure the work of all those subcontractors is coordinated and performed safely.

One of the most visible components of the project started this past week with the delivery of the communications tower. Over the next two weeks the tower will be assembled and erected in sections with the aid of a large crane. Antennas and cabling will be added and routed into the Network Operations Center (NOC) which is a large space on the service floor. The NOC houses all the radio, 911 phone system equipment, business phone, and computer network infrastructure for the entire facility.

Safe, reliable, and effective radio communications is absolutely essential to police, fire, and EMS, as well as all of the town's operational departments. This new tower was designed to improve the overall communications systems that our first responders use all day, every day.

The tower at our existing public safety building is only 100' tall which isn't adequate to meet current needs in our large community. Unfortunately the elevation of the new public building site is lower than our existing building which would negatively impact radio signal strengths. To combat that difference in elevation we chose to locate the communications tower on the highest spot on the site which is adjacent to the main entrance and public parking area.

To provide proper emergency responder radio coverage the new tower will be 180' tall with the tips of the primary antennas at 199'. That was important to eliminate the need for an FAA required beacon had we designed a tower higher than 200'.

The tower will contain over 15 different antennas of various types and designs to handle radio, microwave, and various communication needs from police, fire, EMS, EMA, public works, sanitary district, school department, as well as Old Orchard Beach police and fire (whom we provide dispatch services for).

In addition to these critical communication antennas the design team made sure we followed the Town's ordinance in terms of providing co-location opportunities for cellular antennas. We designed the new communication tower with the capacity to host up to five different cell carriers.

As many of you who live or work in the Oak Hill area know, cell service is marginal at best, and non-existent inside some of our school buildings. The public safety departments needed to have a tall and robust communications tower to meet our needs, so designing it with the capacity to accommodate cellular antennas, was a reasonable incremental increase that will allow the town to follow its own ordinance as well as collect long-term rental revenues from cellular service providers.

The Town Manager will be negotiating a contract for professional services to engage the various cell carriers to see if there is interest in co-locating on this tower as required by local ordinances instead of constructing new towers in this area of Scarborough.