

## **We are Back in the Building! Now Get Us Out of Here!**

We are finally back in the “Public Safety Complex”, which doesn’t really fit its name anymore since our fire department has decided not to return to the building. They are keeping their offices permanently at their Park Street station. In case you missed it, here’s what happened:

After testing confirmed a massive presence of mold in the building in December, we were granted a combined \$210,000 from the Finance Committee and at a special town meeting in February to fix the problem. We then moved into two temporary trailers in our front parking lot in March with the promise of returning to the building by the Fourth of July. After an extra three months and an additional \$15,000 appropriation to the cause, we finally made it back into the building on September 29, 2014.

Now that we are back in our building we already need to start the process of getting out. Yes, you read that correctly. During the long process of testing and remediation over the last several months, we learned about some of the flaws of our beautiful building that was originally built in the late 1800’s (and where I attended first grade on the second floor):

- Our HVAC system is obsolete. The “two-pipe” system that went out of fashion decades ago was not replaced during remediation. We simply couldn’t afford it. The HVAC system was a major cause of the mold problem. All of the HVAC wall units were removed during remediation. Unfortunately, we had to replace them with the same type of unit due to financial constraints.
- The original system of fresh-air intake in the building was removed during the renovation from school to public safety complex in the 1980’s. This is unhealthy and has not been fixed.
- There is a lack of insulation in our walls. This was not fixed during remediation. When air is removed from the building via the exhaust and without a system of fresh air intake, air is pulled from the outside through the walls and leaky windows, bringing in moisture, which leads to mold.
- Experts and remediators at the building during and after remediation stated that there is no way to remove all of the mold from our building due to its age. They also stated that it was only a matter of time until the mold came back.

Those are just some of the major concerns. We are now running three large dehumidifiers in the basement. We replaced the 25-year-old carpet that was frayed and

dirty and tested positive for mold spores. But we were on a budget. Lower-end carpet and flooring was used. The walls have not been painted. The old leaky windows remain. The best HVAC system fixes were not chosen for financial reasons. There are multiple other overdue expensive fixes, such as our emergency generator.

There was some talk at Thursday night's combined Selectmen/Finance Committee meeting about the state of our aging municipal buildings. Another important theme of the night was getting important town information to the residents. I'd have to agree that many of our residents are not completely informed of everything that is happening within town government. Over the course of last seven months, a large majority of the Pepperell residents that came into our trailer asked us why we were in the trailers, what was happening in the building, or why we chose to "remodel".

Selectmen Green has mentioned at multiple meetings that we need to do something with our aged municipal buildings. He is right. Deferred maintenance due to reduced budgets has caught up to us. The question is now how to proceed and, of course, how to fund whatever decision is made. Funding for a feasibility study to examine this exact issue was part of the two failed overrides. So, now what?

Is it time to retire the Public Safety Complex? What about the town hall? Or the library? Is the Fitzpatrick School an option? Do we want to renovate another old school? A new building would be the best choice as far as function and efficiency, but many people want to hold on to the Fitzpatrick School. It seems too big for just public safety. Should town hall move there too? Do we really want to move town hall out of the historic building it is in? Will the public support funding any of these choices? How do we get this information to residents?

At the start of the mold remediation, Town Administrator Moak stated and continues to suggest that we need to be out of our building in 5 years, 7 at the most. Even if we start right now, that schedule seems aggressive. However, we can't start now because the feasibility study funding was defeated. For now we are just happy to be out of the parking lot trailers, but we do wonder what the future will bring.

What do you think?

– Chief Scott