

Groundbreaking held for Walpole Fire Station

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Two loud blasts from the fire horn atop the old Walpole Fire Station on Stone Street Thursday evening signaled the building's retirement.

The new, \$14.2 million fire station will be built in the same location as the old one, and local officials gathered Thursday in front of a crowd to formalize a groundbreaking ceremony.

"We're thrilled that the project is officially off the ground now," Selectman Chairman Eric Kraus said. "With 5,200 calls a year, we needed a facility that can accommodate everything our department needs to do."

The new station is expected to have six bays and significantly more space than the current station. Officials say the new building should be completed by April 2019.

"It's much-needed," Fire Chief Timothy Bailey Jr. said. "This facility was very cramped, very tight."

The new building will be the third fire station in the same location since 1902, Kraus said, with the current building constructed in 1954. Bailey pointed out that the department was a smaller, call fire department at that time and has since grown considerably.

"As the department's responsibilities and staffing have grown since 1983, the new facility will alleviate the overcrowding that currently exists in our outdated station," Kraus told the crowd, "and it will provide much needed work space for our personnel to perform their essential duties."

The station had been a shared public safety building until 1983, when the police moved out, and it became solely a fire station.

The windows of the old station had been pulled out a few days prior to Thursday's groundbreaking, the interior packed up, and the fire department's equipment and trucks moved to the temporary station next to Blackburn Hall. The temporary office of the fire department moved into 944C Main St., formerly home to Dalton's Package Store, at the end of January. That storefront was offered to the department at no cost by local businessman Tony Lorusso, Town Administrator Jim Johnson said.

The station will not require a tax override.

"I'm equally as pleased that we didn't place the burden on the town and the taxpayers," Kraus pointed out.

After the horn sounded, officials posed for photos with shovels over a pile of dirt atop the fire station's paved driveway.

Demolition of the old building hasn't taken place yet. Johnson in early April said asbestos abatement needed to be carried out first, and that is expected to take about a month.