

As the police chief for Durango, I'm often asked why we need a new building to house the city's police department. Most people think as long as they see police on the street, responding to calls, everything is fine. Unfortunately, not all is fine. In order to provide these services an incredible amount of preparation is needed behind the scenes, outside of the public's eye. An efficient police department is only as good as its facilities, and our facilities are in very poor shape. Ultimately, the quality of our buildings affects the performance of our officers on the street. I am incredibly proud of the work they do, and the care with which they do perform their duties, but they, as well as the community, need help.

Well-designed public safety facilities require a complex layering and balancing of needs serving the community for 50 plus years 24/7/365 days a year. These spaces must be secure, yet visually transparent and open to the public. They must be flexible to technological change, yet highly functional to present needs and must be efficient to operate while contributing to employee wellness. Very few, if any, of these goals are being met at our current facility, which was built in the 1940s as a car dealership.

The Durango Police Department repurposed the building in 1962, when Durango's population was roughly half what it is now. We had only 11 officers and staff at the time when Durango was a sleepy little town of 10,530. Today we have 57 sworn officers and 19 professional support staff handling on average 35,000 calls for service annually. The town has become "discovered" and is a magnet for a wave of people leaving urban areas. As such, we are increasingly having to deal with big-city issues such as homelessness, mental care, drug abuse and increasing rates of property crime. None of this was anticipated to be handled by a building designed for selling cars.

The existing building which houses the Durango Police Department is 14,553 sq feet and offers no secure onsite parking spaces for our 76 staff members. A 2015 master facility plan conducted by the Blythe Group noted that "the police department is dealing with a severe lack of space to properly perform their duties," and specifically noted "While the existing site could be redeveloped with a larger building, it still would not solve many of the issues associated with a police function including parking/secure parking, sally port access, etc."

The recommendation by the consultants was clear: "Move the PD to a new site. The police building is far too small for the size of the existing police department (2015)," according to the Blythe Group. "Any growth over the next 10 years will only exacerbate this problem."

Blythe noted that security is difficult to maintain with the existing building and the number of access points. They pointed out the lack of secure parking areas, which is a hazard both for the police staff and the citizens of Durango. The consultants also noted multiple internal security issues such as lack of security for property and evidence, lack of adequate holding facilities, and a lack of secure records area

The bottom line: The current building that houses the Durango Police Department is not a usable space. We have done the best we can by converting the various nooks and crannies as best we can, but there

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*Consultant's recommendation from 2015:*

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are only so many closets that can be converted to a functional work area. There is a finite amount of storage are, and we are stuffed to the brim. Because we do not have secure parking for either the patrol cars or the employees' vehicles, we often have to park blocks away, which takes away residential parking. The department lacks dedicated training or community rooms. This increases training time by 400% as we end up training in a garage or under-sized classroom settings, and citizen meetings are hosted at other facilities. There are no separate bathroom facilities for staff. Our one interview room for suspects is within sight and sound of both our civilian administrative assistants and records technicians. The Department does not have a fitness center nor is the locker room large enough to accommodate the officers or their essential equipment. Staff cannot walk down the hallways unincumbered and are required to step out of the way to allow others to pass. Windows and other public facing areas are not 'hardened' and provide no threat mitigation or protection from those intended on creating harm.

The list is exhaustive, but it only gets longer as we balance the need to secure internal space with publicly accessible space designed to make visitors feel welcome, engaged, and part of the community. Police facilities are not simply a building, they are a tool. Properly located and designed police facilities must have quick and easy access to the community and allow officers to deploy centrally for more immediate response times for those in need. Our officers take great pride in our community. Our facilities should reflect that pride and the work we do to help make Durango such a great place.