

Thinking Locally

Joint Public Safety Facility Reconsiders the Language of Civic Architecture

by Sarah Goldblatt, AIA



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Typically, one doesn't think of farm buildings as design models for public safety facilities and civic architecture. But sometimes, given the context, drawing inspiration from vernacular form is the way to go. Case in point: For the new combined police and fire rescue station for the city of Cherry Hills Village and South Metro Fire Rescue (SMFR), Roth Sheppard Architects did just that. The Denver-based firm has been involved in the planning and design of more than 50 public safety buildings across the country, and generally its designs embody a degree of monumentality that denotes civic stature. However, this recent commission altered the firm's thinking about the expression of civic architecture. Instead of designing an iconic structure that would be an anomaly in this semi-rural residential context, the architects chose to take a local focus that links the community's past to its future.

Like many small municipalities with aging facilities, the city's police and SMFR Station #38 were operating with outdated and inadequate spaces. "The police station had been designed for half its current staff, and the evidence room was completely overflowing," explained Rob Zuccaro, the city's community development director. The original fire station, built in 1979, was designed for a volunteer corps. It now accommodates full-time firefighters and lacks the requisite amenities.

After more than a decade of carefully assessing its space needs and considering ways to organize its 17-acre site into a cohesive municipal complex — one that would optimize open space, maintain neighbors' views and minimize environmental impact — the city issued an RFP for the design of a joint police and fire station to address its most pressing needs.

Cherry Hills Village and South Metro Fire Rescue Joint Public Safety Facility

Architect and Interior Designer: Roth Sheppard Architects, LLP

Principal: Jeff Sheppard, AIA

Project Architect: Kyle Yardley, AIA

Contractor: Adolfson & Peterson Construction
Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing: VH Engineering, LLC/C3S, Inc.

Structural Engineer: Monroe & Newell Engineers, Inc.

Civil Engineer: JVA, Inc.

Landscape Architect: Lime Green Design, Inc.

Lighting Design: Roth Sheppard Architects, LLP/C3S, Inc.

Location: Cherry Hills Village, Colo.

Scope: 21,000 square feet

Purpose: Public safety facility for Cherry Hills Village fire and police departments

Owner: Cherry Hills Village/South Metro Fire Rescue

Completion Date: January 2013



The city selected Roth Sheppard to design the facility, and it was during the community input phase that Jeff Sheppard, AIA, principal and co-founder of the firm, recognized that this project was different from the others they had designed. "This isn't a neighborhood that wants to have a civic edifice as their main entry feature," Sheppard explained. "We viewed this as an almost anti-municipal building."

Roth Sheppard looked to the area's agrarian roots and found a community deeply passionate about preserving its barn heritage and rural charm. To organize the building's programmatic elements, the architects embraced the additive feel of a traditional farmhouse that often started with a barn and a modest main house and expanded over time. They utilized a simplified gabled barn form to help define the major elements, along with contemporary materials, like glass and steel, to connect them. The result is a village of small buildings organized in an "L" shape that wraps around a secure entry court.

The largest barn, proportioned to approximate a riding stable, houses the fire department's apparatus bays. Roth Sheppard tucked mechanical units into the excess roof volume and provided louvers at the gable ends for ventilation. Opposing clerestory windows bring natural light deep into the interior space. The firefighters' living quarters are directly linked to the apparatus bay to optimize response time. The firefighters, along with the police, also have access to fitness equipment and a training room designed for in-service workshops.





A second, smaller barn encloses the training room (which doubles as a community room) and also serves as the gateway to the site. Behind this structure's glass and metal panel façade is a light-filled space with a vaulted ceiling that enhances the room volume. Sheppard said, "This element provides the tie-in to the community, so it's more transparent and has the most public presence on the site."

The police department's holding facility and evidence room occupy a third, more-solid barn form. The central police position within the building — with its offices oriented to the street and toward the public entry — reinforces the new philosophy of "Community-Oriented Policing," which advocates a proactive response to public safety issues. The offices are bookended by a secure auto court that provides quick access to the patrol cars.

Although Roth Sheppard's design clearly delineates the building's public and private zones, it also conveys a sense of openness and belonging to the community. As Jeff Sheppard noted, "We questioned whether every police and fire building has to speak this civic language and concluded that we would rather do something that feels right for the community." ●



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