



South Hadley leaders from the town and school administration, all school principals, police, both fire districts, and emergency management held an inaugural meeting in April 2023 at Town Hall to enhance municipal prevention and emergency response protocols. The robust partnerships between town departments and agencies ensures that all residents of South Hadley, including students in our schools and anyone visiting town hall and other town facilities, can have confidence in the safety of their public facilities.

“We want all residents, employees and visitors to be as safe and secure as possible as they engage in the business of their daily lives,” said School Superintendent Mark McLaughlin and Town Administrator Lisa Wong.

South Hadley Chief of Police Jennifer Gundersen commented that “the safety of all members of the South Hadley community is best achieved through effective communication and strong partnerships. As we enhance our safety protocols, these tenets will guide our efforts towards success.”

The meetings produced the following initial agreements:

- To seek a town wide security evaluation of all facilities, conducted by building security specialists.
- To engage in additional town and department wide training in coordinated emergency response.
- To develop and implement coordinated communication systems across all departments of the town, seeking improvements in information sharing and coordinated responses to potential emergency events.
- To meet monthly to address security related matters and implement improvements as necessary.

Officials discussed short term improvements to facility safety and security that can be implemented, such as the numbering of windows and doors in school buildings to facilitate identification of areas of concern in the event of an emergency.

The meeting reinforced the many best practices and partnerships that already exist in South Hadley supporting resident safety, including:

- Robust partnerships with police including the service of a School Resource Officer whose daily presence in our schools provides both security and training to staff and students.
- Frequent oversight of town facilities by both fire departments to ensure compliance with industry standard best practices, current laws and all local and state regulations.
- Proactive planning, information sharing and provision of services by Emergency Management and Health Services.
- Emergency response protocols and drills performed regularly in all schools throughout the district to ensure that staff and students are well prepared to take whatever action may be necessary in the event of an emergency event of any kind.

Events like this safety meeting, the first of its kind in many years, will only amplify the efficacy of each department and make each stronger as a result of its partnership and coordination with the other. We look forward to additional benefits to our town resulting from these strong and growing partnerships.