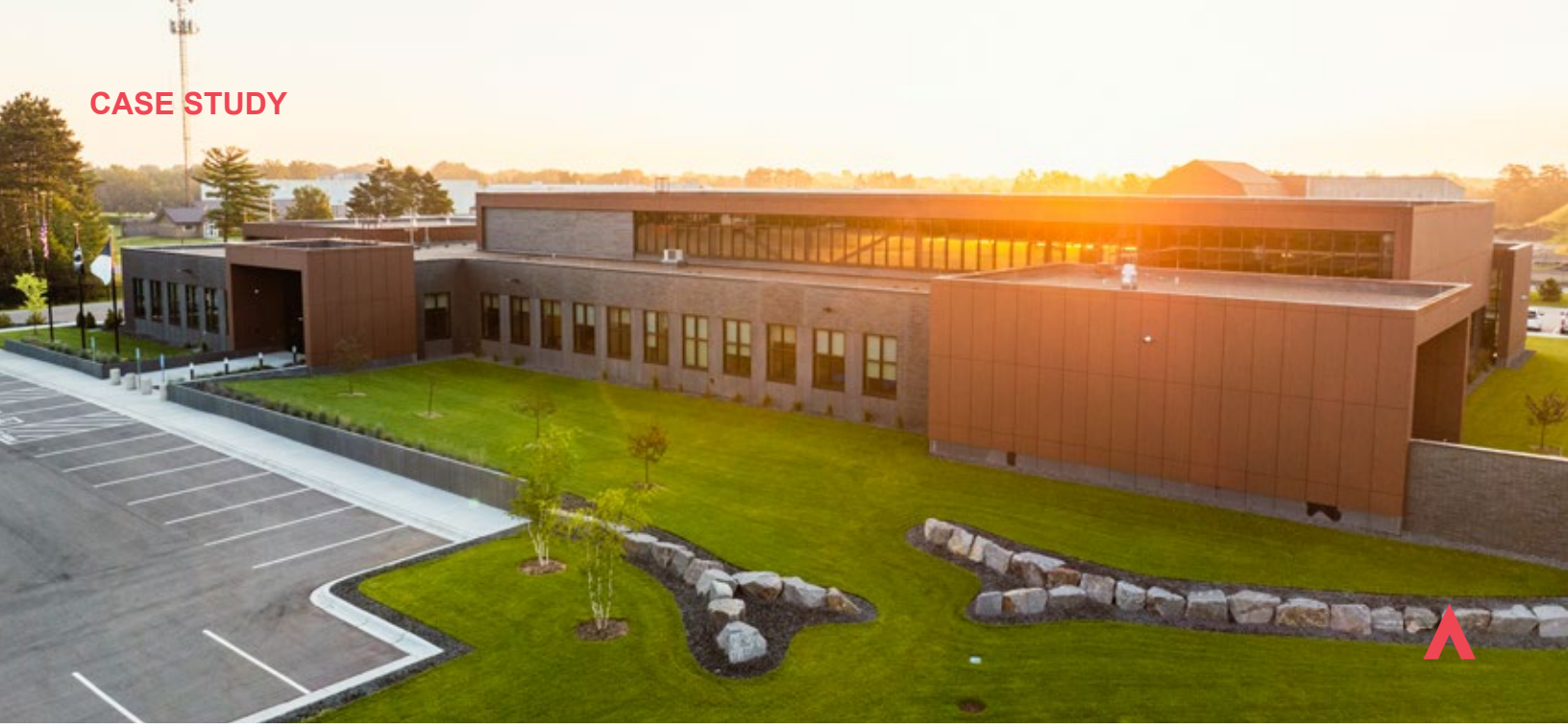
CASE STUDY



Anoka County Emergency Communications Center

Supporting First Responders with Comfort, Reliability, and Long-Term Efficiency

1
WELL SYSTEM

464
MBH HEATING DEMAND

135
TONS COOLING DEMAND

BUILDING HISTORY & USE

For years, Anoka County's 911 call center operated out of the basement of the Government Center. As call volumes increased and staffing needs grew, the space became increasingly constrained. Operators worked without access to daylight, in tight quarters that limited flexibility and made long-term growth difficult.

Those challenges came into sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic. County leadership recognized that the people answering emergency calls perform some of the most critical and high-stress work in public service. Improving their environment wasn't just about square footage — it was about supporting employee well-being, retention, and performance while planning responsibly for the future.

Rather than retrofit the existing basement space, the County chose to invest in a new, purpose-built facility on county-owned land near other public safety operations. The building opened in April 2025 and now houses both the 911 call center and the radio shop, supporting 25–30 employees with room to expand as needs evolve.

WHY SUSTAINABILITY? WHY GEOTHERMAL?

From the outset, Anoka County approached the project with a practical, cost-conscious mindset. Working with Wold Architects and Engineers, the County evaluated multiple HVAC options — including a conventional system and geothermal — using a 10-year lifecycle cost analysis.

The results showed that a geothermal system would pay for itself in approximately eight years through reduced energy and operating costs. Just as important, it aligned with the County's long-term goals for efficiency, resilience, and responsible investment in public infrastructure.

Because the facility is mission-critical, reliability was non-negotiable. The final design paired geothermal heating and cooling with a traditional boiler backup, ensuring uninterrupted operation under all conditions.

Darcy Solutions was selected for its compact geothermal approach, which minimized site disruption while delivering the performance required for a high-demand, 24/7 operation.

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

Design was approved in 2021, construction was bid in 2022, and the facility opened in 2025 following pandemic-era supply chain delays. Throughout the process, the design team prioritized usability, security, and continuity of service, with sustainability integrated as a practical value-add rather than a standalone goal.

Geothermal construction proceeded smoothly, though additional coordination was required during permitting as regulators worked through classifications for newer system types. Clear communication between the County, design team, and contractors helped keep the project on track.

Since occupancy, the system has performed as designed — operating quietly, efficiently, and reliably in support of round-the-clock emergency response.

"We're conservative by nature and we look closely at the numbers. When the lifecycle analysis showed geothermal would pay for itself in about eight years, it became a practical decision — not a risky one."
— Jerry Covel, Construction Manager, Anoka County

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Educate early.** Hybrid systems benefit from upfront training for operators and maintenance staff.
- **Plan ahead for drilling.** Increasing geothermal demand can affect schedules if not anticipated early.
- **Expect permitting learning curves.** Emerging technologies may require additional coordination with regulators.
- **Evaluate lifecycle value.** Geothermal is most effective when long-term cost and operational benefits are part of the decision-making process.

A FACILITY BUILT FOR THE FUTURE

The Anoka County 911 Emergency Communications Center represents a long-term investment in people, resilience, and public safety infrastructure. While geothermal isn't the right solution for every project, this facility demonstrates how it can deliver measurable value when site conditions, financial goals, and operational needs align.

For Anoka County, the result is a modern, efficient workplace designed to support those who answer the call — every hour of every day.

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