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**Sussex Prepares to Fix Crumbling Parking Garage:
\$434,000 Slated for Judicial Complex Structure**

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It will cost Sussex County about \$434,000 to repair the county judicial complex's disintegrating parking garage in Newton, even though the \$2.5 million structure is only about 7 years old, officials said yesterday.

The county set aside the funds over the past two years, anticipating the work, and is gearing up to spend the money, Sussex County Administrator Carmine Marchionda said. It did not take long for problems to emerge at the parking structure off High Street.

In 1995, less than three years after the three-tier structure received a certificate of occupancy, chunks of concrete - including a 25-pound slab - began falling from failing support columns.

Some of the concrete on the structure is deteriorated from the effects of calcium chloride, applied to melt ice, that seeped into poorly designed joints, Sussex County Director of Facilities Management Joseph Biuso said.

He said there are places where you can scoop up portions of the disintegrated concrete with bare hands. Wondering about the extent of the structure's obvious problems, the county freeholders last year hired Cowley Engineering, a structural and forensic engineering company from Bedford, N.Y., to conduct an inspection.

"They went in, did a very nice job and quantified all the problems in the facility, the design defects, construction defects, deficiencies by poor maintenance, actions required, costs for repair and long-term maintenance recommendations and costs, Biuso said.

Repairs were made to the garage over the years, and Biuso said it is not about to collapse. However, he said fixing the structure will be a major undertaking that will create "a big disruption" since sections will be closed during the work.

Neither Marchionda nor Biuso knew when the work will begin. - Marchionda said Sussex County Counsel Dennis McConnell is studying the case to see whether the county should take legal action against Prismatic Development Corp., the Fairfield contractor for the judicial complex and garage, or any other company involved in the construction.

A man who answered the phone late yesterday at Prismatic, but declined to give his name, said nobody was available to discuss the situation. However, he said the

garage was built by a subcontractor from Virginia whose work was approved by the county.

Repairing the structure is only the beginning, according to the Cowley report. The document warns the county that it must treat the garage with care.

"During snow removal, care should be taken not to damage the decks and sealer with snowplows or other equipment," the report said. "Also, axle weights for snow removal equipment should not exceed 4,000 pounds. A snowplow blade must not be allowed to touch the concrete deck surface, sealants, toppings or joints."

The report notes a "heavy rubber blade edge" can be mounted to the snowplow blade, but even that should be kept about a half-inch off the surface during snow removal.