As Allan Hancock College moves forward with capital construction fueled by funding from Measure I, here is an update on one of our largest and most ambitious projects — the Public Safety Training Complex at the Lompoc Valley Center.

Once finished, this state-of-the-art facility will be a premier destination for police, fire and emergency medical services training and certification needs.

The $462.2 million, 51,197-square-foot facility has been meticulously designed for every training need. Some of the major features of the complex include an emergency vehicle operations course, a six-story fire training tower, a scenario village, shooting range, fitness track, obstacle course and more.

In addition, there will be more classrooms, locker facilities and conference spaces. In total, the project spans 80 acres.

Bid opening is expected in May, with construction to begin in July. Completion is expected in 2013.

This is the first in a series of reports delving into features of the complex and the advantages it will provide to public safety students, current professionals and the public. Today, I want to focus on plans for police training facilities.

In some cases, the little things make a big difference, such as on-site locker rooms. In others, it’s the state-of-the-art equipment and resources that will be available.

For example, in the current Santa Maria public safety training facility, all physical training exercises have to be held at the end of the day, because there are no showers for cadets, nor are there separate locker rooms for female cadets and staff.

Therefore, the academies are currently leasing modular locker rooms. With the college’s commitment to increasing the number of women who succeed in our academies, separate locker rooms are an important addition to the new complex.

The new emergency vehicle operations course (EVOC) is also vital. The state is changing the training requirements for EVOC certification, and the college’s current driving track does not meet those new requirements.

With a speed limit of 45 mph, the current track falls short of the state’s new requirement that drivers reach speeds of 100 mph to receive certification. The ability to certify our students in EVOC driving and to offer this service to local and regional police departments is crucial to the continued success of our program. The new track allows us to meet those standards.

The shooting range is another important addition. Now, the closest range is in San Luis Obispo, and its distance is not conducive to ongoing training. In addition, there is no rifle range near the college, a deficiency that needs to be corrected, now that police departments require officers to be trained in the use of a rifle.

The new shooting range will include a 100-yard rifle range that is fully outfitted for safety and noise reduction. The range is an outdoor facility surrounded by a solid concrete block wall, with additional interior and overhead ballistic and acoustic protection.

To address air quality, the range is outfitted with two separate filtering systems, one to extract lead particle dust, and another to produce a constant flow of air from behind the shooter and toward the target area. The target systems at the range will be fully automated, allowing the instructor to manipulate targets individually or in unison via a wireless control pad.

Both the fire and police academies plan to take advantage of the scenario village, a real-world environment of buildings, streets and structures depicting a typical community. This setup will allow our law enforcement classes to practice responding to anything from hostage situations to shootouts.

Much like the scenario village’s multi-use function, the police, fire academy and emergency medical service program will all have access to additional features, including an obstacle course, fitness track and weight room.

We are confident that when the Public Safety Training Complex opens, we will attract new students from all over the state to attend our academies and be recertified at our facilities. This is good news for the community.

As the complex becomes a destination training center, bed taxes and other revenues will increase, giving a boost to the local economy.

We look forward to breaking ground on the Public Safety Training Complex, and plan to offer our students, who already have the best instructors available, one of the best facilities in the state.

José M. Ortiz is superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College.