



Hot Spots

Newsletter of the Friends of Creston Fire

Learn more about your fire department and the efforts of its dedicated, hardworking volunteers.

Chief's Corner: Building a Need



Preliminary drawing for Creston Fire Department's planned Station 251 on Hwy 35.

By Gary Mahugh

I am often asked, "Are you building a new fire station?" Then I might get, "where?" and occasionally, "why?" The first question's answer is complex; the other questions are easier to answer.

I will start with the "are you building" question. We are in the planning and fund-raising stages of a new fire station. This project was identified long ago as a need for our fire district. Because we are self-described as being conservative and we have a reputation of being good stewards of our (your) dollars, the progression of such an undertaking is not on a fast track. We have a preliminary design that includes space for apparatus, offices, a training/community room, a kitchen, and future staff quarters. The design calls for a "not fancy but functional" building that will be low maintenance and here for years. It is a public building, so we must meet certain design and legal criteria. Things are moving methodically; we hope to soon be starting the process of having official engineered plans.

The question of where this station will be built has a more definitive answer. The station will be constructed on land just west of Creston School, on a 7-acre parcel purchased several years ago by the Creston Fire Fighter's Association through fund-raising efforts. This field is

now used for Creston Auction parking. An approximate 1-acre lot will be designated for the new station along Hwy 35.

The "why" question is fairly easy to answer. The existing Creston station was built in the early 1960s, with the later addition of a meeting room. The truck bays were built for much smaller trucks than we now have. With two apparatus in the bays, we can barely move around them; it is tight just to open doors, and we have no room for future temporary or permanent apparatus housing. The current building is not designed for expansion or to meet health and fire fighter safety criteria needed for today's fire service. After more than 50 years, it is time.

And now for the one question I don't get asked much but that we feel is important: "How will you pay for it?" This is multifaceted, but I, as fire chief, and our trustees are striving to fund the construction through a few avenues. One is fund-raising. This is a grassroots effort to find financial support in the community. The Station 251 Building Fund has been established and is growing with donations from community members and the fund-raising efforts of the Creston Fire Fighter's Association and Friends of Creston Fire, such as the annual Creston Auction and Soup for Supper events. I encourage you to

consider donating to this cause. The Creston Fire Fighter's Association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, so all donations are tax deductible.

Another funding source will be our fire district budget. We have deferred some purchases, and a capital improvement fund is in place. We will eventually sell the current station and property to help pay for the new station.

Finally, we are looking for alternate funding—grants, low-interest programs, etc. Ultimately, we intend to complete this project without adding to your taxes or asking for your vote on a special bond. Those might be easier solutions, but our history is not one of going the easy route.

To help with the financial picture of the new station, many local businesses are offering donated or discounted services. All will be recognized as the project is built. Services being offered include dirt work, fire suppression, plumbing, and wiring. This makes this new station a true community project, one that the entire east Flathead Valley can be proud of.

Meanwhile, our normal fire and emergency medical services continue. We were called for assistance 300 times in 2019. That number will not go down; rather, we expect continual increases into the future, making an improved primary station a real need.

You can be a big part of this project through your support. All donations are appreciated, as is your help at the Creston Auction and other Creston Fire events. There are also opportunities for estate planning and benevolent gifting—these are ways to be part of your Creston Fire Department, because such gifts have long-lasting, positive impact. One thing stands clear: YOUR fire department is community based, and there are many ways for you to be part of this winning team. Whether your role is as an active responding member, as a participant in the Friends of Creston Fire, as a donor, or all three—there is a place for you!