

Is it time for a 2nd fire station?

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Wednesday, 11 September 2013 20:38

Fire chief says yes, telling commission that department has outgrown current facility

It's time the City of Port Washington considers building a second fire station on its west or south sides, where the community is experiencing the most growth, Fire Chief Mark Mitchell told the Police and Fire Commission Monday.

"We've really outgrown our current station," he said. "I think the time has come where we need to seriously think about it."

He suggested the city explore the former highways LL and 33 ramp land east of Eernisse Funeral Home on the city's west side as a potential site for a new fire station.

It would provide easy access to highways, he said, and many department members live on that side of the community.



"The potential is there," Mitchell said. "We need to look at this now while the land is still available."

He considered locations in the former VK Homes property on the city's southeast side, Mitchell said, but decided against recommending them.

"It's too remote," he said.

Space is at a premium in the fire station, Mitchell said. Since the current fire station at 104 W. Washington St. was built in 1968, he said, fire trucks have grown wider and longer.

Despite an addition built in 1995, he said, "The trucks are packed in there. You can't open the door of one without hitting the side of the other."

The training room is undersized for the current department, Mitchell said, and there aren't designated restrooms for women.

"This was built back in the time when there weren't female firefighters," he said, noting the department has 20 to 25 women on its roster today.

In the future, the department is likely to need some sort of living space, particularly for paramedics, he said.

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That space would also be needed when the city hires some full-time firefighters, Mitchell said.

“We’re heading in that direction,” he said, adding the department currently has about 70 staff members, including firefighters, EMTs, paramedics and divers.

The current fire station also lacks storage space and is not energy efficient, Mitchell said.

“There’s a lot a modern facility would do to make things more efficient,” he said.

Building a new station on the outskirts of the city would also trim the department’s response time, Mitchell said, noting firefighters would not have to fight traffic getting to the station and leaving in fire trucks. They would also be closer to some of the more remote portions of the department’s coverage area, he said.

“As the city grows, our response times are getting longer,” he said.

Mitchell said he envisions a new facility becoming the headquarters for the department, with administrative, training and storage facilities as well as operational space.

A larger training room could also be used as a community room for the city, he added.

The current station could then be used as a satellite station, Mitchell said, especially if the city made an investment in the building to increase energy efficiency.

The department has enough trucks to equip both facilities, he said.

Mitchell said he’s discussed the need for a new station with the city’s finance committee at budget time in recent years, but it’s time to make a concerted effort to jump-start talks.

Mitchell said he does not know how much land would be needed for a new station, nor does he have a cost estimate. Commission members suggested the city should consider a joint facility, noting the county Emergency Management Department is also in need of additional space.

“We’re all about trying to share things and cut costs,” Mitchell said. “I think there’s a lot of potential for shared services. It just depends on what everyone wants to put into it, or if there’s any interest at all.”

He told the commission that Cedarburg has the newest fire station in the county, and Saukville’s firehouse is among the best in the area.

Commission members agreed that it’s time to consider Mitchell’s proposal, but said more research is needed to make a case to the Common Council.

“I think you should pursue it,” Commission Chairman Rick Nelson told Mitchell.

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Commission member Mike Mueller said Mitchell needs to compile statistics on what comparable departments have in terms of facilities and equipment.

“You have a case for it,” he said. “The need appears to be there. Now, you have to create a business case for it.”

Image Information: PORT WASHINGTON’S fire station is cramped and inefficient, Fire Chief Mark Mitchell said as he told the Police and Fire Commission it’s time to look for a location for a second firehouse. The current firehouse at 104 W. Washington St. was built in 1968, with an addition built in 1995. Photo by Bill Schanen IV