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Wednesday, March 12, 2008

News

New fire station, community hall planned in Gates

Area's growing fire district is raising construction fund

BY DANIELLE PETERSON

The Stayton Mail

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Plans are under way to build a new fire hall-community center in Gates, and it will be the largest development the city has seen in recent years.

The fire district has outgrown its current facility, and there is no room for expansion, Fire Chief Gary Swanson said.

"The bottom-line reality is that we've outgrown the facility," Swanson said. "The building cannot be remodeled or expanded because of site restrictions. We've done a couple of remodels over the years, and we have nowhere to go now. We're trying to be proactive right now and provide a facility that will allow for future growth."

In 2006, the fire district formed a seven-member nonprofit board, the Gates Fire District Emergency Services Support, to raise money and oversee the project.

Chairwoman Nicole Miller said the estimated \$2.7 million project will include a 7,400-square-foot building with four large apparatus bays, a spacious training-meeting room, administrative offices, full-scale kitchen and showers.

"It's (the project) been in the background for a couple of years, but now we're ready to move forward," Miller said.

She said the current facility, which is owned by the city, doesn't have enough room for paperwork, let alone future growth.

"Many of the administrative documents are stored at people's personal residences," Miller said. "There just isn't enough space."

The current facility, built around 1950, is about 3,334 square feet and includes four small apparatus bays. It does not have wheelchair access to the second floor.

"It was built well for the time, but times have changed," said Dave White, volunteer firefighter and board member. "We've looked at every possible scenario for expansion, and none of them work."

In September, the district purchased a 1.79-acre site on E. Sorbin Street, at the northwest end of the Gates Bridge.

Nine sites were considered for the project, eight in Marion County and one in Linn County. After evaluating property costs, sizes and locations, organizers decided on the Sorbin Street property.

Swanson said the district chose a capital fundraising campaign because the community wouldn't be able to support a bond measure.

"There is a very limited economic base within the fire district," he said.

"These people don't have the resources to go out and pay the extra taxes that it would take for a bond measure. So what we're asking our taxpayers to

do is to give a one-time donation.”

About \$150,000 has been raised, most of which was collected through grants and the project’s kick-off dinner and auction. Swanson said the board has organized a list of 44 foundations to contact for support.

He said they also are looking for in-kind donations to help offset the total cost.

“We’ve already lined up people who are willing to provide some substantial services,” Swanson said. “Our goal is to begin construction about 14 months from now, but we either get the money and build it or we don’t,”

If funding is secured, the new facility could be built by January 2010, but Swanson estimated that the board would need about \$1.5 million to start construction.

Surround Architecture Inc. of Portland has created a schematic of the proposed center.

“We want the building to be designed like it belongs here,” Miller said. “If you look at it (the rendering) from a certain perspective, it almost looks like a large barn or lodge.”

Organizers are particularly excited about having a large space for meetings and community events, something the city never has had before.

“We’re trying to create something that will lend some vitality to this community” Swanson said. “This will provide an adequate place for meetings and events, reunions, whatever is needed.”

More importantly, the facility will be equipped with a generator and the resources needed in the event of a disaster.

“We want to be self-sufficient,” White said. “Our thought is, if we have bad weather or a power outage and there are people who are unable to stay in their home, we’ll have a facility for them.”

Swanson said power losses are common to the area.

“During a three-day power outage last year we had some residents that didn’t have any heat.”

The Gates Rural Fire Protection District serves about 1,000 people within its boundaries. In addition, it serves the travelers of Highway 22 and the visitors of the neighboring recreation areas.

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