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New Fire Station on the Drawing Board

By Cathy Tyson



ConFire Deputy Fire Chief Lewis Broschard and Fire Chief Jeff Carman showed attendees at the neighborhood feedback meeting the preferred station plans. Photo Cathy Tyson

a functional local station is very good news, and it can't come soon enough. However, the entire construction process is slated to take 24 months in order to finalize architectural plans, get city building permits, environmental reviews and complete construction.

"I consider getting this station an emergency," said concerned neighbor Susan McEntee. "It needed to be done yesterday."

The new station will be about 60 percent smaller than a standard fire station, and will be approximately 3,800 square feet, said Carl Campos, CEO of LCA Architects, due to the constricted lot in Happy Valley. Once complete, the rectangular station, a bit longer than what is now there, will house three personnel: a captain, an engineer and a firefighter. One of the three will also be trained as a paramedic. It will also house a large fire truck and a substantial amount of equipment.

There are stringent requirements for this type of structure, Campos explained: it must be ADA accessible throughout, per county regulations it must be environmentally efficient and LEED certified, and it must be built to withstand major seismic events. It must also have separate dorm accommodations for female employees, as well as a very large driveway so the rig can back in. It must also have a decontamination area and laundry room.

City Manager Steven Falk said at the meeting that it was up to the neighborhood to choose the style, and the way to speed up the process is if the neighbors can come to an agreement about the style of the exterior of the building quickly versus drawing out the city approval process with disagreement and infighting.

"This is up to you, have at it" he said. At that point attendees were given stickers to place near their preferred design style.

Lafayette residents will get their new fire station, but it will be up to them to determine how long it will take to build.

After engineers recently evaluated the uninhabitable Station 16 on Los Arabis Drive that has been vacant since 2012, Contra Costa Fire Protection District staff and architects crunched the numbers; it made more financial sense, said Fire Chief Jeff Carman, to demolish the existing structure and start fresh with a new functional modern fire station that will serve the community for decades to come.

This move comes after lengthy negotiations on a joint station with the Moraga-Orinda Fire Department fell through.

Carman was clear: "Our number-one priority on the Capital Improvement Plan is to build this station."

For Lafayette residents living in the neighborhood, a functional local station is very good news, and it can't come soon enough. However, the entire construction process is slated to take 24 months in order to finalize architectural plans, get city building permits, environmental reviews and complete construction.

Large poster boards mounted on the wall had over a dozen examples of various fire station building styles, from sleek and modern to Mediterranean to craftsman-esque. By far, the image that garnered the most stickers looked vaguely like a residential version of the Veterans Hall, with stone elements, a metal roof and lots of windows.

"We want to be good neighbors," said Deputy Fire Chief Lewis Broschard thanking residents for the feedback, but he cautioned that ConFire will have to balance suggestions with their budget and the primary need to house a substantial amount of equipment and apparatus on a constrained site.

According to Broschard, the original Station 16 was constructed in the 1950s, way before Lafayette was even incorporated, and was originally designed for only two people. That station eventually was rolled into ConFire in the late 1960s and was in use until the Loma Prieta earthquake. At that point, there was so much damage, a double-wide mobile home to accommodate three people was installed at the site, although the original garage remained. As that mobile unit was nearing the end of its useful life in 2011, capital reserves were set aside and architectural plans were made to replace it. Less than a year later, in 2012, came the rodent infestation and mold; however plans were already in the works to replace the station. Then the really bad news came, as voters rejected Measure Q that would have helped fund the station rebuild. Firefighters from Station 16 have been working from Station 15 on Mt. Diablo Boulevard ever since. It looks like they will be there for another couple of years, until at least 2018.

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