

NEW FIRE STATION INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

October 2022



Since 2017, the Eagle Point Town Board has been considering fire department and town shop space needs. Through this process, a number of options have been discussed including a remodeling of and addition to the existing fire station, a remodeling of the existing station with a free-standing heated storage building, and a new fire station with the existing station being converted to shop space. Following much review and discussion, at the Spring 2020 Election, a non-binding referendum question to fund a new fire station building was voted on by residents with the result in favor of moving forward. Because of the Covid-19 issues beginning in early 2020 and the risks with large group gatherings, the Town Board elected to postpone a Special Electors Meeting at that time. In early 2022, the town Board resumed the process of confirming the decision to pursue a new fire station and convert the existing fire station to town shop space. Having finalized the space needs and costs, the Town Board is now ready to proceed to the next step – seeking approval of the taxpayers to fund and construct the fire station via a Special Electors Meeting to be held October 24, 6:00 p.m. at the Eagle Point Town Hall.

What is the makeup of the fire department regarding facilities, equipment, and personnel?

The Eagle Point Volunteer Fire Department was formed in 1977 and operates out of a single station in Eagleton. The department presently maintains a fire main engine, two tenders, a rescue truck, John Deere Gator and trailer, a water rescue boat and trailer, portable pumper, and other firefighting equipment. The department includes 22 volunteer firefighters and emergency medical responders.

How did the Town Board determine the needs for a fire station project?

In 2016, the Planning Commission completed an update of the town's 2008 Comprehensive Plan. One of the findings resulting from the plan update was the identification of space needs at the fire station, which was constructed in 1978. In addition to needing more space for equipment, the current fire station lacks shower rooms for personnel returning from fire and EMS calls, a meeting/training room, and any room for future growth. In January of 2017, the Town Board hired CBS Squared, a Chippewa Falls based architectural and engineering firm experienced in fire station design, to complete a space needs study. This task studied various options for meeting the fire station and town shop space needs.

A new station was voted down in 2017. Why is it being voted on again?

Following the 2017 Special Elector's Meeting, the Town Board heard from a large number of residents who were not able to vote due to their inability to park or otherwise get to the meeting to vote. The result of the vote was 137 against and 116 in favor. The Town Board also reviewed the feedback from residents and revisited the space needs. A more thorough analysis of the options and a better organized Special Elector's Meeting were key suggestions. Over the past five years, the Town Board has spent many hours discussing and debating the options and came to the conclusion that a new station and conversion of the existing fire station to shop space was the best long-term solution for the town.

Do the number of runs the department makes each year justify a new station?

In 2021, the fire department made 47 fire runs and 110 EMS calls. Although this statistic is important, the need for fire department equipment and space cannot be based on the number of calls made each year. In addition to providing adequate space for equipment needed, a fire station is also utilized for meetings, training, record-keeping, maintenance, repairs, public education, recruitment events, and several other fire department purposes. The fewer the calls made, the better. However, the department must be prepared with proper equipment and training to serve town residents 24/7.

Why did the town board choose the new fire station option?

Based on discussions at town board and fire department meetings and information provided by CBS Squared, the Town Board reached a consensus that the new station offered the best opportunity for the town to meet long-range space needs for the fire department and town shop. In addition to meeting space needs for both departments, it avoids costly remodeling of the existing fire station to bring it up to current building code, centralizes the fire department in a single facility and offers the best solution for future expansion, if needed.

How will the existing fire station be utilized for shop space?

The current town shop is used for both equipment storage and maintenance. In the winter months, the town road crew stores as much of the snow removal equipment in the heated shop for readiness before a snowstorm and for de-icing after a storm. This equipment includes three snowplow trucks, a front-end loader with a plow, and a road grader, all of which may be needed to maintain approximately 96 miles of town road. Incidentally, Eagle Point has the largest number of roads miles of the 23 towns in Chippewa County. The current shop will not accommodate all this equipment at once and no floor space is left for equipment maintenance. With this additional space, all the town shop needs can be met.

What is the scope of the project and where will it be?

The attached sheet shows the proposed new fire station floor plan and site plan that includes a new driveway to Highway 124. The new station will include approximately 6,000 square feet and would be constructed on land northwest of the existing town shop/fire station that was recently purchased from the Decker family. The building will be a basic pre-cast energy-efficient building that is easily expandable in the future, if necessary. The new driveway will serve the new fire station and town shop and will eliminate the problem with travel by town shop equipment through the town hall parking lot during large events.

Why does the fire station need a separate meeting room? Can't the fire department use the town hall?

The common practice is to have a meeting room within the fire station to accommodate all members. In fact, most, if not all, area fire stations have meeting/training rooms. The meeting room should have its own heating and ventilating system, proper lighting, audio visual equipment and seating at tables. Most importantly, the meeting room should be close to department apparatus for quick response, training and easy access to equipment and supplies. Using the town hall for training also requires transporting materials and equipment to another site.

What are the proposed costs of the new station?

When a new fire station was proposed in 2017, the estimated cost of the building and land was \$915,788. COVID impacts and inflation have increased the project costs over the past five years. Although costs are expected to stabilize in the near future, a reduction in building costs will be minimal if any. CBS Squared, which is currently involved with similar projects, have provided an updated estimated station cost of \$1,172,670. The Town Board has set the maximum cost at \$1,200,000.

I live on the south end of the town. Can I be served by the Chippewa Falls Fire Department?

For the record, the Eagle Point Volunteer Fire Department has served town residents well for the last 45 years. In 2019, the town board approached the City of Chippewa Falls regarding the possibility of providing Automatic Aid (responding the same time as Eagle Point) to residents south of 105th Avenue. The City was unable to provide automatic response to Eagle Point due to the strain on personnel and equipment needed to serve their own emergency service needs. Eagle Point does have Mutual Aid agreements with the City of Chippewa Falls and surrounding fire departments.

Did the town explore locating the new station closer to the south end of the town where the population is higher?

The town considered the possibility of locating the new station farther south. Consulting with the fire department members, the consensus was that a site in Eagleton provides the best response time for fire fighters, many of whom live in the Eagleton area. EMTs generally respond from their homes and are located throughout the town. The current station's proximity to the center of the town allows equal access to the far northern and southern areas. Also, keeping the fire station near the town shop better enables the town's road crew to remove snow during the winter season.

Will the electors have the option of voting on a new fire station project?

Yes. Electors will be asked to vote yes or no on granting the Town Board the authority to borrow funds for a new fire station at the Special Electors Meeting.

If the referendum in April 2019 passed, why do we need a Special Electors Meeting?

As noted previously, the referendum was non-binding, meaning it was advisory only. Wisconsin Statutes require that Wisconsin towns must hold a Special Electors Meeting to vote on the construction of any buildings and the borrowing of funds for that purpose. The Town Board is fully aware that many town residents would like to vote on the project by secret ballot at a regular election (like the recent primary election). However, a Special Electors Meeting with voters present in the town hall must be held. The Town Board is currently working on a plan for organized parking for both disabled and able-bodied residents, efficient voter registration, as much seating as possible, and a brief but informative meeting.

Does the fire department contribute to equipment needs/special projects in support of fire department costs.

Yes. The fire department volunteers have raised and invested over \$200,000 on their own through their annual fundraiser, donations, and grant writing. In fact, the department applied for and has received grants and donations for a rescue trailer, grain-bin rescue equipment, firefighting gear for all members, self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), water/ice rescue equipment, defibrillators, firefighter facepiece fit tester, handheld firefighting tools, and other equipment. They have also used their fundraising monies to remodel the station bathroom. In addition, in September of this year, the department received a state grant in the amount of \$154,000 for emergency medical supplies to advance the skills they can use in the field such as advanced airways and automatic compression apparatus for CPR. They also have written a DNR grant for radios and pagers. The annual fundraiser has been completed and the approximately \$12,000 was raised that will be put into additional equipment for improved firefighting response. In 2015, the department received a \$100,000 donation from the Shirley Dallmann Estate, which will be applied to the cost of the new fire station.

Does the town currently have other indebtedness?

As elected officials, it is the Town Board's responsibility is to address critical needs in the town. In the last several years, road improvements and fire station and shop space needs have been priorities. In 2021, the Town Board secured a \$1,650,000 loan from Bremer bank with a 10-year repayment term and fixed rate of 1.92 percent with the intention of using these funds to complete road projects, several of which were "catch-up projects". With almost 100 miles of roads to maintain, Eagle Point, like many other towns in Wisconsin, needs funding beyond the normal tax levy to keep from falling further behind with road repaving and maintenance. Due to road project changes and other factors, a portion of these funds have not been spent. The Board may elect to use these funds for the fire station and, as needed, for road projects. The Bremer loan has an annual payment of \$200,804.61 and will be paid in full in March 2031.

What will the new Fire Station cost me as a taxpayer if the project is approved?

The project cost would come from the \$100,000 Dallmann Estate donation and borrowed funds resulting in a taxpayer levy. The Board will evaluate options to use existing funds, unused funds borrowed from Bremer Bank or other loan options, to minimize the tax impact for our residents. The following chart describes the estimated tax impact based on \$100,000 home and a \$200,000 home. The terms of the loan are based on a State Trust Fund loan, which appears to be the best rates at this time. Incidentally, due to the level of the average household income, the town does not qualify for Community Block Grants and other grant programs that fund building projects.

Approximate* Annual Tax Cost to Eagle Point Property Owners – approximately a 0.50% increase in property tax:

Assessed Value - \$100,000	Annual Tax Increase = \$68.92
Assessed Value - \$200,000	Annual Tax Increase = \$137.84

**Estimates assume using funds from Bremer and borrowing \$500,000 at 4.5% for 10 years*

How will the upcoming re-assessment of my property impact my property taxes?

Re-assessments are necessary periodically to ensure the property value used for tax assessments is accurate and equitable. A re-assessment **does not generate more tax revenue** for the Town of Eagle Point, Chippewa County, or the school districts. The amount of tax we can collect each year is restricted by State Statutes. The re-assessment may result in a higher or lower value for your property, and as a result could impact the amount of tax you pay. In a perfect world, if all property values increased by the same percentage, no one would experience a change in their property tax. Property values that incur a higher-than-average percentage of property value increase will experience an increase in taxes, and those with a less than average increase (or a decrease) will experience a reduction in their property taxes. Re-assessments are completed to ensure all property owners are assessed their fair share of the annual tax, based on an accurate valuation of their property.

Conclusion

The Town Board recognizes the impact town projects have on personal budgets. However, providing adequate facilities for public safety and road maintenance must be a priority in Eagle Point and every town, village, and city. We encourage all town residents to take time to consider the fire department and town shop space needs, visit these facilities during Open Houses, and contact Town Board members or view information on the town's website at

<http://www.townofeaglepointchippewa.com>.

Please plan to attend fire station and town shop Open Houses on October 22 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM