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Fire station cost grows

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Pricetag exceeds Grand Chute electors' spending approval by \$1 million

By Ed Lowe

Post-Crescent staff writer June 15, 2007

GRAND CHUTE — The Town Board is scheduled to take action on a \$4.5 million fire station project plan Tuesday.

That's \$1 million beyond the funding that town electors approved for the project in April.

Town Administrator Mark Rohloff said the proposed construction cost is higher than anticipated due to unrealistic early cost estimates and unanticipated additional costs.

He said the project plan includes more than \$1 million in costs not directly related to construction of the fire station eyed for completion next year. The Town Board has authority to approve funding for those costs independently, Rohloff said.

Rohloff, in a budget summary prepared for review by the Town Board, placed the construction-related costs at \$3.4 million. It adds a total of \$1.1 million for items such as architectural fees, site preparations, furnishings, fixtures and equipment.

The project cost reflects the final recommendation to the board by the town's fire station advisory committee, which revised earlier plans at a meeting this past Tuesday.

The advisory panel voted unanimously in support of the plan going before the Town Board, Fire Chief Tim Bantes said Friday.

However, Supv. Dave Schowalter, a member of the panel who did not attend its most recent meeting due to a scheduling conflict, said he was surprised at the size of the proposed project cost, and does not know if he will support it.

"I had heard it was going to come in high, but I never thought it would be this high," Schowalter said Friday. "We were told (by Town Chairman Mike Marsden) at our first or second firehouse meeting that we were working with a \$3.6 budget and that was the number we wanted to stay with."

Schowalter said members of the advisory panel never discussed a total project cost exceeding \$4 million prior to the final meeting.

Bantes said the funding proposal represents sound planning toward addressing the town's long-term public safety needs

"We decided to go with 5½ (fire apparatus) bays in this plan," Bantes said. "We could get by with 4½ bays with what are needs are right now, but we're planning 20, 30, even 40 years down the road.

"We don't want to build it too small and have to add onto it later at a much greater expense to the taxpayers."

If you go

What: Grand Chute Town Board meeting

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday

Where: Grand Chute Town Hall, 1900 Grand Chute Blvd.

Bantes conceded the early estimates offered by town leaders were unrealistic. "We may have just underestimated how much a building like this would cost," Bantes said.

Rohloff said the Town Board has instructed him to study impact fees as a means to reduce the cost of the structure for current town residents and business operators.

He said he will propose that \$700,000 of the project's cost be funded by fees attached to the cost of building permits for new housing and commercial developments.

The one-time impact fee for a new single-family home would be less than \$200, while fees for new commercial properties might be based on their commercial values, he said.