

## **Questions and Answers from Selkirk Fire Department Public Meetings**

**Q: What will happen to Station 3?**

A: Station 3 (in South Bethlehem) will remain open and will continue to house one firetruck for events on that side of town. With the larger bays at the new HQ building, only one truck will be housed at Station 3, providing the volunteers more room to safely operate there. Renovations at Station 3 will be focused on installing new exhaust containment equipment. As a truck returns from a scene to Station 3, it will go to the HQ building for decontamination and washing before it returns to South Bethlehem. In this way, we are able to protect the firefighters and provide a cost-efficient solution.

**Q: What will happen to response times when the Maple Avenue station (currently station #1) closes and moves to the new HQ building?**

A: Based on 2017 call data, 80% of the calls would have seen improved response times if volunteers had responded from the new HQ site. In total, 92% of 2017 calls would have seen improved call times or be no worse than two minutes slower. Additionally, SFD analyzed how the new building would affect response times for volunteers from their homes to the fire station (the first component of response) and found that 70.9% of current volunteers would be able to respond to the new building faster. This means that, even for residents in the Maple Avenue area of town, response times will not be significantly negatively impacted and may, actually, improve.

**Q: How were District boundaries drawn?**

A: The Town's fire district boundaries were drawn nearly a century ago, likely based around farm properties, etc. at the time.

**Q: How does the bond work?**

A: This is a 25-year, \$17.5 million bond that will pay for the total cost of this project. The rate of interest on the bond is 4.25%. Repayment of the bond each year will be done through four key components:

1. The increased tax payments that come with authorization of this bond which will be less than an additional \$100 per year for the average homeowner.
2. The District already sets aside money into a designated building fund from its regular budget to help cover the costs of this project. Those reserves and new monies that will go into that fund will be utilized for bond payments.
3. Additional revenue which will be generated through selling or leasing the unused portions of the property on Rt. 9W. For example, SFD is looking to lease some of the property to use as a solar farm and other parcels can be developed for commercial enterprises.
4. The sale of the property on Maple Avenue where Station 1 is currently (including the parking lot across the street) once the new HQ building is complete.

The bond payments are fixed but, if the revenues streams exceed the conservative estimates made in the proposal, the amounts needed from the additional taxes could be decreased.

**Q: Have there been any injury claims to date?**

A: SFD has been very lucky that there have been no significant injuries resulting from the unsafe conditions in the three firehouses. There have been some close calls but, so far, they have not resulted in anything significant. This does not mean, though, that having volunteers in cramped quarters, washing trucks in the streets or getting in trucks in the outdoor elements is safe. In fact, these procedures violate almost every safe operations protocol for firefighters. Additionally, due to the cramped conditions, the current stations do not allow us to provide essential protection to the volunteers from exposure to carcinogenic diesel fumes, and combustion byproducts from fires that return to the station in the form of soot on the apparatus nor is there adequate space to properly decontaminate their personal protective clothing and equipment.

**Q: What is the project timeframe?**

A: After the voters approve the bond, it will take approximately five to six months to break ground on the project. We anticipate that the new HQ building construction will take about 14 months, being ready for occupation in the summer of 2020. Reconstruction of Station 2 will start in the late spring of 2020 and continue through the first quarter of 2021.

**Q: What will coverage look like during the construction period?**

A: The more formal plan will be developed after the voters approve the bond vote but SFD has already begun to explore temporary truck storage and solutions for coverage-during the reconstruction of Station #2 (There will be no disruption during the HQ building construction).

**Q: Will the Fireman's Fair continue at Station #2?**

A: It is anticipated and expected that the Fair will remain at Station 2. The Commissioners have been working with the Station #2 membership to determine needs for the Fair moving forward.

**Q: What happens if the costs increase? Have cost escalations been built into this proposal?**

A: SFD's architect, Mitchell Associates, only develops firehouses. They have a very strong track record of delivering projects on-time and within budget. They have already anticipated cost increases (due to the increasing prices of materials) and have also included budgeted contingency amounts. Ultimately, if the price of the project significantly exceeds the budget, the Board of Fire Commissioners will have to make some decisions about budgets moving forward. It is not anticipated that this will be necessary.

**Q: Will the large trucks be able to use the proposed roundabout near Station #2?**

A: NYSDOT has already approached SFD for discussions regarding the design of the roundabout. We are confident that the design will not hinder our ability to respond to emergencies in the District. We will work to phase construction with NYSDOT so that neither project interferes with the other.

**Q: How did the parcel of land on Rt. 9W get purchased by SFD? What was its appraised value?**

A: Through a connection with the owner of the parcel on Rt. 9W, SFD was offered a limited-time opportunity to purchase the property before it came onto the market. The property was sold to SFD for \$550,000. Though there was no time to conduct a full appraisal, SFD did look at comparable costs for similar properties (though, it should be noted, that there are very few remaining property parcels of this size in the town of Bethlehem) and found that the proposed price was a significant bargain. SFD had the money to purchase the property in its building reserve fund and was able to buy it for cash after issuing a notice of permissive referendum (which appeared in both the Spotlight and the News Herald). Even if SFD ultimately decides not to build on this property the District would likely recoup its investment with a significant profit. There were no restrictions on how SFD can use the property in the purchase agreement.

**Q: Why does the new HQ building have bunk rooms?**

A: At times -- such as in the event of natural disasters, etc. -- volunteer firefighters will stay overnight in fire station so they know that they can get to a scene without any problems. It is no longer appropriate to ask these volunteers to sleep on floors or cots, so modern facilities provide for a limited and sparse area for them to rest. Additionally, modern firehouses are designed to provide as much flexibility to the firefighters as possible. So, if SFD were to look to, for example, develop a duty crew program (often done in conjunction with other departments), the new fire station will be able to handle it.

**Q: Why does the new HQ building have a community space?**

A: Headquarters will have a meeting/training room that will be available to the community for public and private events. The meeting/training room is sized to allow the Department to hold joint trainings with its mutual aid, and regional response partners, as well as public trainings such as CPR classes. Town officials have expressed appreciation that a modern, ADA compliant meeting room will be available in this part of Town, and the RCS School District has expressed gratitude that a space will be available within walking distance of the Becker School in the event that the school needs to be evacuated to a safe and secure facility.

**Q: Why does the new HQ building have a separate trailer building?**

A: There will be a separate trailer barn behind the new HQ building because that allows the new building to be slightly smaller and cost efficient as the trailer building won't be as expensive to build and maintain as the new fire HQ building. The trailer barn will house hazmat trailers, other trailers and the rescue boat.

**Q: What will happen to the Maple Avenue station (Station #1)?**

A: It is anticipated that after the new HQ building is built and the equipment and memorabilia are moved from Station 1 to its new home in the building on Rt. 9W, the property will be sold.

**Q: What is the issue with mechanics working on equipment at station #1? Why can't a mechanic just take the trucks to their garage?**

A: Modern firetrucks are too big to be worked on inside the bays at Station 1 (the cabs aren't even able to be opened inside). Actually, none of the stations have large enough bays to work on the equipment inside. This forces the mechanics to do routine maintenance outside in the elements. At Station 1, those working on the trucks or washing them must stand in the roadway, in dangerous proximity to the cars and trucks traveling on Maple Avenue. Beyond being unsafe, these conditions are detrimental to the equipment and can cause more problems. Some mechanical work is done at other garages in the area but, as far away as Balston Spa. To be cost effective, and to not have the truck away from the District when an alarm sounds, a fire district should try to keep its equipment in the district in case it is needed.

**Q: Why does this feel rushed? Why wasn't the public more involved?**

A: The Board of Fire Commissioners of the Selkirk Fire District has been working on this project for nearly four years and the District has been studying its needs, the changing needs of the District and the Town and the studies related to firefighter safety for more than 12 years. As a part of this process, SFD members and others have been engaged in an ongoing discussion about internal needs. Additionally, the Commissioners have been in ongoing discussions with the town of Bethlehem about this project. In the last 18 months, there have been two mailings to all District residents about the project, a series of open houses and the SFD has had a presence at several community events to provide opportunities for interested residents to stop and discuss the project. Additionally, all of the information about this project has been (and remains on) the SFD website ([www.selkirkfd.org](http://www.selkirkfd.org)). The public was certainly informed throughout the project as SFD worked to develop the most effective and cost-efficient proposal possible.

After the Building Committee, working with the architect and financial advisor, made a final decision on the project to bring to the voters, there was a delay before it could move forward as some regulatory and administrative details were worked out with the Town of Bethlehem. Once those were cleared up, the date for the bond vote was selected and the

public meetings were scheduled. We felt that it would be wrong to postpone the vote until the middle of winter and, believe that having the bond vote on the same night as SFD's regular commissioner elections would encourage more participation.

**Q: What happens if the project isn't approved by the voters on December 11?**

A: The Board of Fire Commissioners is confident that this plan is the most efficient and cost effective proposal which accomplishes the necessary goals of protecting our volunteer firefighters and allowing them to preserve the lives and property of those living in the Selkirk Fire District. There is no other plan which makes as much sense.

If the voters turn this down, the Board of Fire Commissioners will work harder to communicate the importance and benefits of this proposal and bring it back to the voters in the near future.

