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Getting Started – Fire Station Design Planning 101

So you are ready to build a new fire station. Possibly the community growth indicates that it would be prudent to take planning steps now. Here are a few key items to use to get you started on the right path.

1. **Financing.** Before your do anything else, take stock of your sources for funding such as tax base, bonds, grants, building fund, etc. There can be costs for obtaining the funding such as processing fees. Also note the time lines associated with obtaining each of your sources as this will often have a similar impact on your project as the money itself.

2. **Architect.** Get the architect involved at the earliest stages. Find one that has a portfolio of successful projects and happy clients. Having about 10 stations at a minimum will go a long way to assuring you of getting an architect that understands fire stations and their owners. The owner's team, while including the fire chief, can also include the finance manager who is often a township trustee. Initial meetings with an architect are usually available for a minimal or possibly no fee. Your architect is your GPS to get you to your destination of a successful project.

3. **Current Operations.** List everything about how your building operates and how the people work with the facility. Ask your crews to drop off their lists to your desk. Your architect can provide you with a checklist to get you started if you'd like a guide. This is not the Wish List, just about what you do currently.

4. **Current Needs.** Again, start with your crew's lists. This is the Wish List. Remember to temper this as the funding and budget may have an impact. Put a priority to these items. Little things we can take for granted such as the light switch location can be important. We understand; your station is not just an office, you LIVE there!

5. **Future.** What is the projected growth for your community and your fire department? Is there additional land available near the site for future expansion? It usually costs less to build extra now instead of later.

6. **Property.** Based on community needs, what is the best proposed location? Is the available property of sufficient size? Is there workable access for personnel, equipment and ramp space? What utilities are available? What is the location's proximity to adjacent fire services either from your department or those with a mutual aid agreement? What would be the response time to the most remote location in your fire service area?

7. **Property Next Door.** Mark Twain said "Buy land, they're not making any more of it." Would it make sense to buy the adjacent property to the proposed site? If it is not needed now for building, consider making it a park or other easily converted use until the time comes to expand.

8. **Survey.** Surveys are inexpensive compared to the assurance you will get from them. They are required for you to know what part of the property is buildable, where utility service is located, etc.

9. **Geotechnical / Environmental.** Will the soil hold up the building, is there a high water table or is there rock that will require difficult excavation? Environmental reports will discover if there are detrimental conditions below the surface. Some lenders and municipalities require this report before allowing permits, processing financing or just purchasing the land. These reports will also help you control your site development costs.

10. **Attitude.** Maybe this should have been first on the list. Understand that success is attainable because others have done it. Your architect will help you manage pro-actively. Keep focused and be of good humor!

ABOUT: Sebree Architects, Inc. since 1973 has 39 fire stations completed for both professional and volunteer departments.