



## Fifth fire station may open, city looks at funds

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Clovis Fire Department Chief Mark Aston unveiled a plan April 19 to build and staff a needed fifth fire station in Clovis by 2007.

The plan is part of an update to the 1988 Fire Department Master Plan, a guide to the department's policies, procedures, performance goals and future.

Top among the goals is building a fifth and sixth fire station and increasing the amount of fire personnel per capita, or per 1,000 people. Currently, the department has 0.73 firefighters per capita. The desired number is 0.80.

Voter-approved Measure A funds that helped build the department's new fire headquarters on Fifth Street will also pay for a fifth fire station in the city's northeast area. The new fire station has not been built yet because money to hire new fire personnel is scarce.

Fees from a newly formed Community Facilities District will provide money for future police and fire facilities.

But, the task of finding money to hire new firefighters has left city leaders perplexed.

Aston told the City Council April 19 that a revised plan may help get the city's fifth fire station on line for less money.

**Using a sophisticated new piece of software called Fireview, department personnel mapped out service areas and future patterns of city growth to determine the best possible location for new fire stations.**

Under the current plan, the city would need to hire 12 firefighters to staff future Fire Station 35 through 2010 at a cost of \$10 million. Under the proposed plan, the city would only need to hire three new firefighters to open that station with an estimated cost of \$5 million. The difference is the result of reshuffling fire departments and personnel.

"It's a reduction of \$5 million to accomplish the same level of service," Aston said.

**The Fireview program allowed fire department planners to see the best locations for stations in the city.**

A better location for Fire Station 31, currently at 650 Fowler Ave., is the site of the department's old headquarters at 633 Pollasky Ave. Moving Station 31 to that site will reduce overlap between Station 31 and Station 34's service areas.

Fire Station 34 is located at 2427 Armstrong Ave. That relocation allows the transfer of six firefighters from Station 32, at 2300 Minnewawa Ave., to the city's future fifth fire station, Station 35, which is proposed to serve the city's northeast area from Temperance and Alluvial avenues.

With the transfer of those six firefighters, the city will only be required to hire three new firefighters to fully staff Station 35.

The city was previously planning to locate the fifth fire station at Nees and Burl avenues. However, Aston said that locating it at Temperance and Alluvial avenues will take advantage of the proximity to Freeway 168 and other major traffic corridors, improving the station's five-minute response area.

According to guidelines established by the department, a fire station's service area should not normally exceed 4.5 square miles and the emergency response time should be no more than five minutes for the first engine company at the scene of an emergency. Second and third engine companies should arrive within eight minutes.

Aston said the proposed plan would take effect within the 2005-06 fiscal year. However, he said much of that depends on what city funds are available in the future.

"Right now the tentative plan -- and that's if the state doesn't rob any more money -- we're shooting to open Station 35 in late summer or early fall 2006," Aston said.

Council members are due to adopt a 2004-05 city budget in June. According to the plan, the design phase of the new fire station will be a part of that budget. The construction of Fire Station 35 will come out of the 2005-06 budget. Staffing will come out of the 2006-07 budget.

But whether there will be enough money to begin the process remains to be seen.

"We recognize that funding makes that happen," Aston said.

Council members adopted the plan and updated standards unanimously. They said they liked the plan, but want to proceed with caution.

"I think the most important thing is that we crawl before we walk," said Council Member Harry Armstrong. "If we move cautiously, I can see where we can do it. We're not going to make a promise that we can't keep."

Mayor Lynne Ashbeck said she wants the city to continue to make police and fire services a priority, even if that means having to forego other city services in the future.

"In some ways, as a city, we have to be prepared to say, 'This is what matters,' " said Ashbeck. "If it comes down to this or something else, it has to be this."



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