



RM of Edenwold Fire Hall - Open House Summary

Overview

On August 6th, 2020, the RM of Edenwold hosted a Fire Hall Open House to present the floor plan and layout of the proposed fire hall. Approximately 37 members of the public attended the open house, including volunteer firefighters from around the community, the mayor of Pilot Butte, and the fire chiefs of Balgonie, White City and Pilot Butte. There was also a significant RM presence, including four members of staff, the RM's communications consultant, the architect who is working on the project, the Reeve, and four Councillors.

Some frequent topics that arose during conversation included how the fire hall would promote regional cooperation, how the fire hall would support RM plans for growth and development, and how the fire hall would be financially managed to provide beneficial fire services in a timely and efficient manner. Overall, debate and discussion were informative and helpful, RM representatives outlining the benefits and strengths of the proposed fire hall.

Questions Posed by Attendees

1. Why does the RM feel that a new fire hall is needed?

The RM has been working towards this project for over ten years and believes now is the right time to move forward for a number of reasons. Chief among these is that Council believes it is their responsibility to ensure efficient and adequate fire protection services for all citizens now and into the future. This project is a commitment to residents and businesses alike to ensure that excellent fire protection services will be available to them at all times and that these services will be provided to them in a cost-effective manner.

Other reasons include:

- The Town has reported that there is a need to expand the hall in White City. The RM feels current and future Emerald Park residents, as well as surrounding commercial and agricultural lands, would be better served by a second, more proximal location, rather than the expansion of an existing location. The White City hall is well-located to service east White City and surrounding areas, but the proposed RM fire hall location is far better to service Emerald Park, the Great Plains Industrial Park and surrounding areas.
- The project enables the RM to become an active participant in fire protection services within the region. Today, the RM out-sources all fire protection services, leaving the municipality with little control and decision-making power regarding how the services are provided and budgeting.
- By becoming a fire protection service provider, the RM improves the security of emergency response services for the Emerald Park area. When emergency service provision relies on complex negotiations to establish inter-municipal contracts, it creates the risk for residents and businesses to be left without services entirely while negotiations proceed. In fact, Emerald Park was without a contract for several months during past negotiations with White City; while not ideal, this situation could feasibly happen again in the future. Further, the Town has indicated through their annexation documentation that they intend to end fire services to the RM if the annexation is successful. The RM's proposed fire hall project creates certainty for RM citizens and businesses that they will not be left without emergency services in their time of need.
- In the RM's view, the municipality has been overpaying for the fire protection services provided by White City. The RM pays almost double for White City's services in comparison with those provided by Balgonie and Pilot Butte. This proposal will see long-term cost savings for tax payers.

2. Is this proposed fire hall intended to replace White City's fire department?

The proposed RM of Edenwold fire hall is intended to add a complementary facility to improve service-delivery to the region. When looking at larger centres, as development progresses, new public services facilities are added locally to meet the increased demand. The RM is following this typical pattern. Even if the relationship with the Town of White City were better, this would still be the right time and the right location for the RM's fire hall project. There continues to be growth in the region and all service-providers are better positioned to efficiently address emergencies by having more services available in closer proximity to residents and businesses.

The RM would like to continue working together with White City to provide services to the areas east of the Town, if the Town is willing to work together with the RM and to provide these services in a cost-effective manner.

To be clear, the RM is not dissatisfied with the services being provided by the White City fire department, the fire chief or the volunteer firefighters. The RM is dissatisfied with the costs and terms of the contract with the Town.

3. Can a firefighter volunteer with more than one department?

This particular question was asked by many of the region's volunteer firefighters. As the president of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Fire Fighters Association was in attendance at the Open House, this question was answered by him. His response was: "Yes! A firefighter in the community can volunteer for more than one department." The creation of a new fire department will thus not restrict or remove volunteer firefighters from other departments but instead has the potential to improve fire services across the area.

4. Will the construction of an RM fire hall take away vehicles from the other regional departments?

The RM owns two fire trucks including one currently housed in Balgonie and one in Pilot Butte. The proposal is for the two vehicles owned by the RM to be relocated to the proposed Emerald Park fire hall, where they will be stored and maintained. As a regional partner, these units will still be available for any fire event in the RM or neighbouring community as needed. The relocation of these units also opens space within the Pilot Butte and Balgonie halls, which, the RM understands would be welcome, as the Towns would have more room for equipment, gear and there could be potential improvements to internal circulation, health and safety.

5. What changes does the RM see for neighbouring departments?

With the exception of White City, which is expected to see a considerable decrease in the coverage area of the RM, there is little change expected for neighbouring jurisdictions. The RM anticipates that each department will continue to hold primary responsibility for fire service response for a defined area of the RM.

In the RM's business case report, the municipality has proposed reduced contract fees for the neighbouring departments once the RM's new department becomes operational. This includes a considerable reduction for White City and lesser reductions for the other partners taking the RM's overall fire services contract budget from \$250,000 to \$100,000 per year. The reduction is reasonable because the RM will be able to support the efforts of the neighbouring departments by providing complementary and secondary services both within the RM and within the neighbouring jurisdictions. The RM's fire department will attend to local events anywhere in



the region, as needed. As such, there will be an added service benefit to the creation of the RM's department for the neighbours.

The future contract fees have not yet been negotiated with the neighbouring departments, but the RM expects to meet with each neighbour this fall to initiate contract negotiations for the future. The contract price estimate included in the business case report could change based on the negotiations. The RM is open to hearing any suggestions or concerns from the neighbouring Councils.

6. What were the results of the consultation process with local fire fighters?

The RM engaged with local fire fighters from the five departments in the region that provide fire protection services to the RM of Edenwold in order to obtain feedback regarding the project and input about the site and building design plans. Based on the feedback obtained, both the site layout and internal building layout changed dramatically from the first designs to the final version that was presented to the public at the open house.

For the site plan, the changes focused on access and visibility for the fire hall to/from Hutchence Road. The building is now proposed to be parallel to Hutchence and close to the roadway in order to ensure clear sight lines to the roadway, which make it easy for the trucks to depart the station efficiently when attending to an event. Circulation patterns on the full site have also been considered and modified and parking for fire fighters is now located immediately adjacent to the door that provides direct access to the change room, where the fire fighters get on their gear when responding to an event.

The internal building layout is vastly different from early iterations based on the expert fire fighter feedback. Many of the comments regarding the internal building design pertained to health and safety. Studies have shown that there are carcinogens found on gear and equipment after events that affect fire fighter health, so it is critical to design a facility to limit the possibility of having any of the contaminated gear or equipment pass into "clean", uncontaminated spaces. The internal building design has been altered with this in mind. There are now pathways and circulation patterns drawn into the facility to allow for proper cleaning and drying of contaminated items before they are brought into the clean spaces. Ventilation also factors into this issue.

Other issues that were raised are related to functionality of the spaces. When emergencies occur, the team is required to move efficiently through the hall to get out the door as quickly as possible. Any bottlenecks or tight quarters in the building reduce efficiency. In particular, the change room is incredibly important to enable all members to dress and prepare themselves efficiently and stay organized. The revised plans include a very large change room space to address this need for members. The change room also provides direct access to the apparatus room, so that members can quickly reach the fire-fighting units when they are ready.

It was noted by fire fighters that cleaning and drying equipment is an issue in almost all the stations in the province. So, it is important to have adequate space and equipment for cleaning and drying. The proposed facility includes a drying room with proper ventilation to ensure that equipment is clean, dry and ready to go for the next event.

Finally, all fire fighters noted that the biggest issue in most halls is that there is simply not enough space for trucks, people and all the necessary equipment. The lack of space leads to disorganization and potential health and safety concerns. The apparatus area needs to be measured carefully to allow for proper spacing between trucks to ensure that doors on adjacent vehicles can be opened at the same time without conflict, but also that no space is wasted to ensure efficiency. Any extra space should be dedicated to storage of equipment such as training equipment. The revised design takes this into consideration, adding space to the apparatus room as was recommended, but reducing space and eliminating unnecessary rooms, such as the control room and extra bathrooms.



The feedback received from fire fighters on the revised site and building layouts has been overwhelmingly positive.

7. Will the new fire hall lead to an increase in noise?

Though the firefighters use their sirens during all calls, no matter the time, regional fire chiefs have stated they have never received any complaints due to fire truck sirens. The sirens are used for the protection of the firefighters and other motorists, and ensure the firefighters can safely and efficiently respond to all calls, no matter the hour.

8. Why not wait until a decision is issued on the White City annexation plan?

White City announced its intention to annex almost 4,000 acres from the RM back in May of 2018. It is now well over 2 years later and it is not yet clear if the Saskatchewan Municipal Board has even accepted the Town's application as complete.

While the RM has been forced to operate under a cloud for these last couple of years as a result of the Town of White City's annexation plan, the RM has not, at any time, stopped working for the betterment of the local community or delayed decision-making on important matters. The RM Council takes their job seriously and has ensured that business in the RM continues to proceed as it should, despite the difficult political climate. The municipality continues to pride itself on the excellent services we provide and fire protection services are among our municipal responsibilities.

The proposed location of the fire hall is on land owned by the RM. This would still be the case in the unlikely event of a jurisdictional change, just as an acreage in the RM of Sherwood would not become owned by the City of Regina if it were to be annexed into city limits.

9. What are the next steps in the RM's fire hall project?

The next step in the project is to complete the construction package with the architect and engineering team and go to tender to obtain construction pricing bids. After having received bids for construction, the RM Council will be able to balance both the benefits and negatives of construction using firm numbers. Ultimately, these factors, along with comments received from the public, local firefighters and neighbouring councils, will be considered by Council to decide if the RM of Edenwold will move forward with the construction of a fire hall this year. The municipality will continue to provide updates as the project progresses.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to attend the Open House and provide feedback! Continue the conversation by contacting municipal staff or Council with any questions or comments you may have.

