



FAIRFAX TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE September 4, 2024
PREPARED FOR Mayor and Town Council
PREPARED BY Heather Abrams, Town Manager and Dan Mahoney, RVFD Chief
SUBJECT Review and Discuss Fire Station 21 Construction Upgrades

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Town Council review and discuss the construction upgrades for Fire Station 21 and provide direction on the preferred option for moving forward.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report discusses various options for upgrading Fire Station 21 to accommodate additional staffing needs, particularly in light of upcoming changes related to the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD) [Joint Powers Agreement](#) (JPA). Three main options are considered, each varying in scope, cost, and long-term viability. The Town Council's guidance is needed to select the most appropriate path forward.

BACKGROUND

Fire Station 21, located at 10 Park Road in Fairfax, is owned by the Town of Fairfax and sits within a cluster of the Town-owned properties that include Bolinas Park, the Pavilion, Town Hall, Fairfax Police Station, to the Community Center, Peri Park, and the Women's Club. The two-story station was built in 1974. Its facilities have not seen significant upgrades since then. The second story consists of a kitchen, bathroom, dayroom, single sleeping quarters and a large unoccupied room intended as an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), all of which have had no updates since 1974. The first floor consists of an engine room, shop, makeshift exercise room in the engine room, two bathrooms, single sleeping quarters and offices that have had minor repairs (replaced sheetrock, update bathrooms to meet code, replace damaged flooring) due to flood damage. The building is also prone to flooding as evidenced by a marker near the equipment bay doors which shows the water level during the flood of 2005. Approximately, \$337,000 and over 6 months was spent in 2005-2006 on flood recovery for the Fairfax Fire Station.

The structure has not been updated to meet modern standards for seismic safety, accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or fire suppression. Station 21 is a key facility in the community's emergency response network, and its aging infrastructure is a concern, given the essential services it provides. Under the RVFD JPA, which includes the Towns of Fairfax, San Anselmo, Ross, and the Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District, the fire department operations are jointly funded and governed. The JPA Board consists of two members from each member agency's governing body, and it operates on a consensus-driven model that requires unanimous approval for significant decisions. Fairfax's JPA contribution for RVFD operations for Fiscal Year (FY) 24-25 is budgeted for \$3,307,376 (\$2,954,275 in FY 23-24), making it the Town's second-largest expense after police services. RVFD operating costs are expected to increase over the coming years, as described in the [RVFD budget projections](#). Under the JPA, ownership, maintenance, and upgrades to the fire station buildings are the responsibility of the Towns. Fairfax has typically paid approximately \$15,000 annually for minor maintenance tasks.

The Third JPA Amendment became effective January 1, 2022, which requires Fairfax and San Anselmo to upgrade their respective fire stations to accommodate a third fire fighter. This amendment was driven by the scheduled closure of the Town of Ross Fire Station 18 on July 1, 2025, which would necessitate

the reassignment of firefighters. The amendment specifically mandates that Fairfax contribute up to \$210,000 toward the interior remodel of Station 21 to meet the needs of the additional staffing. Two out of the three fire stations would receive a third fire fighter when the fire station in Ross closes. Since the adoption of the Third Amendment, there have been several key transitions within the JPA. These transitions, combined with budget adjustments and the evolving needs of the fire department, have complicated the implementation of the planned upgrades, necessitating a review of the project scope and timeline.

We believe the intent of the JPA Third Amendment language was to divide the current upstairs dorm space into 2 separate dorms (estimated construction cost to put up one wall) and remodel the bathroom (estimated cost based on bathroom square footage), and through the negotiation process, it was agreed that Fairfax would separately fund a kitchen remodel. It is not clear whether the intent was to simply provide the \$210,000 to RVFD and the RVFD staff would manage the planning and construction; however, staff agrees that Fairfax's Public Works and Town Manager staff should manage/oversee the project.

At this time, we recognize that it would be very difficult to meet the language requirements (intent of scope of work) based on the timeline of Station 18 closing in less than 11 months. Due to increases in the RVFD operating budget, the construction budget for Station 21 was reduced in Fairfax's [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 24-25](#) to \$150,000, with possibly more available during mid-year budget discussions. The [FY 23-24 budget](#) projected a project total of \$325,000 for Station 21, with \$60,000 which was intended and spent in FY 23-24, for a remaining anticipated total budget to be \$265,000. After the budget was adopted, the Fairfax and RVFD staff worked with the Station 21 designer to determine several options for the remodel project.

On December 6, 2023, staff discussed options for Station 21, and the Council approved an agreement with the architect to move the project from conceptual design to bid ready drawings. The estimated construction cost of that design was [\\$650,000](#). It included a more wholistic upgrade to the second floor of Station 21 by rearranging the floor plan, rebuilding the kitchen in a different location, and providing private sleeping quarters and a private bathroom with shower to all three firefighters to be on-duty. The designer and architect selected routinely work with RVFD and other Fire agencies and have familiarity with similar projects. Drawings are nearly complete and have been submitted to Fairfax's plan check contractor, Coastland, for review. Coastland's review was to ensure the drawings meet code requirements, so that when they are bid, there are no surprise requirements that necessitate costly change orders.

Coastland identified several deficiencies in the 1970s era fire station that are likely to necessitate additional design work and double the cost of construction. For example, the current un-upgraded building only meets seismic, flood protection, and fire suppression requirements of the time of its construction, and major upgrade construction tends to trigger current requirements. The scope of work drives the cost; however, the scope also drives additional requirements such as ADA, firewalls, seismic retrofitting, etc. The more work that is done, the more requirements will be triggered. The cost of a temporary separate dorm to house firefighters onsite during the construction, which may be needed within the next 11 months, was also not included in the \$650,000 construction estimate.

DISCUSSION

Staff would like the Council's input on whether it would be better to construct a lower cost temporary separate dorm as envisioned in the JPA Third Amendment, and have further discussions on the scope of work, or proceed with the current design. A temporary dorm could lead to a more beneficial discussion

of long-term vision for Station 21 in Fairfax. There may be an opportunity for a loan through Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District or County of Marin that could cover the costs of the current design and be paid over approximately five years.

Given these developments, staff recommend that the Council discuss options and provide direction on which approach the Council prefers. When considering the options below for scope of work, Council may consider a short-term or long-term approach. During the meeting, the Fire Chief and Town Manager will discuss the vision behind each of the following options.

The following options are presented for the Council's consideration:

1. **Option 1** – Comprehensive Remodel:

- **Scope:** Remodel the upstairs to include an additional dorm room and bathroom and upgrade the kitchen. The downstairs may also require upgrades to meet code requirements.

Additional Requirements - An outside plan check review was completed and additional requirements such as a 1-hour fire wall separation, seismic retrofitting and ADA accessibility may also be required.

- **Cost Estimate:** Approximately \$1.5 million, including design, construction, and temporary housing for firefighters.
 - Upstairs - \$640,783 (May 2023) 5% cost escalator equals \$672,822
 - Downstairs - \$82,000 (May 2023) 5% cost escalator equals \$86,100
 - Additional Requirements - Unknown costs (Coastland)
- **Pros:** Provides a long-term solution, modernizes the facility.
- **Cons:** High cost, may delay any future relocation of the station out of the floodplain.

2. **Option 2** – Value Engineered Remodel

- **Scope:** Build a separate dorm area in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) room, with bathroom and kitchen upgrades.
- **Cost Estimate:** Requires additional value engineering to determine final costs; expected to be lower than Option 1.
- **Pros:** Moderate cost, extends the service life of Station 21.
- **Cons:** Does not address all building deficiencies or flood risk.

3. **Option 3** – Minimal Remodel:

- **Scope:** Divide the current dorm space into 2 separate dorms, remodel the bathroom and kitchen as budget allows.
- **Cost:** Likely to fit within the original budget allocation of \$210,000 and was what was discussed in the JPA Third Amendment language.
- **Pros:** Quickest and least expensive option, meets the immediate need.
- **Cons:** Short-term solution that may not satisfy firefighters' needs or expectations and does not resolve long-term building concerns.

FISCAL IMPACT

Option 1: Requires a loan, potentially from the Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District or from Marin County, to cover some or all of the \$1.5 million expense. Staff will provide a financing plan if this option is chosen.

If the Town selects Option 1, a loan from Marin County or from the Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District will be needed for some or all of the approximately \$1.5 million expense (including all design, construction, and temporary housing still needed to complete the project). Sleepy Hollow has expressed a willingness to consider providing such a loan, subject to terms and conditions customary in loans of the size and type requested (including standard representations, warranties, and covenants, rights in collateral, etc.), or which Sleepy Hollow deems reasonably necessary. Staff have met informally with Sleep Hollow representatives about this option, and it does seem viable. The interest rate for a five-year loan of approximately \$1 million would likely be set at just above what Sleepy Hollow earns by depositing its undesignated reserve with Marin County. If Fairfax were to take the same loan from the County of Marin, it would likely be at a rate just above the then current LAIF interest rate, and the County has provided these types of loans previously. Staff have not considered using possible bond funds for the fire station as this is not the intent of the bond measure on the November Ballot. Selecting Option 1 would forestall consideration of relocating Fire Station 21 out of the flood plain in the foreseeable future. If Option 1 is selected, staff will bring Council a financing plan and construction implementation plan and timeline.

Option 2: Additional soft costs will be incurred to value engineer the project. Staff will return with revised cost estimates and a project timeline.

If the Town selects Option 2, some additional soft costs will be incurred to value engineer the previous design and have the new design plan-checked. Staff would bring the new cost estimate back to Council for approval. Staff would also provide a timeline and implementation plan for this value engineered option; this would likely include temporary onsite housing for fire fighters during construction.

Option 3: Fits within the original \$210,000 budget but may result in firefighter dissatisfaction and does not fully address the building's issues.

This option provides the quickest and least expensive path to sleeping quarters for the third fire fighter, who is scheduled to arrive on July 1, 2025. Staff anticipates that Option 3 would fit into the original budget; however, Option 3 may be dissatisfying to fire fighters who have been living with sharing older bathrooms and a dilapidated kitchen for many years. A separate project to reface the kitchen counters and cabinets could be accomplished relatively quickly but will not address the unusual second story floor plan of Station 21. Depending on the limits of the construction, it is possible that temporary housing for fire fighters would not be needed for Option 3.