

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

A new building that will house the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department, Imperial EMS and the county's emergency management director may be built the way the city and school cooperated on the new pool complex.

That means possible formation of an inter-local agency, which will be the subject of an upcoming meeting.

About 20 individuals representing the interested parties met Monday night with the Imperial mayor and council to discuss the project, and how it will be financed.

Potential cost of the building, as discussed at the meeting, is \$1.5 million. While estimates are still not complete, some on the building committee indicated the price could be closer to \$1.2 million.

Plans are to locate the new structure between 7th and 8th Sts., on Broadway in the now-empty lot where the old grade school stood.

A building committee involving the IVFD, EMS and County Emergency Manager Paul Kunnemann has been working on building plans for several months.

The financing end of it has been somewhat in limbo, though, according to Fire Chief Bryan Dannatt and EMS President Deb Hayes, as the committee waits on possible USDA grant/loan funding.

Leslie Carlholm, the city's economic development director, has been working closely with the committee on the building progress.

She believes the "best case scenario" for USDA funding will be a 15% grant.

Federal stimulus money is also coming to the state, and will be funneled through the USDA, as well, for fire/emergency services building projects such as this.

However, Carlholm didn't expect any more than a 15% USDA grant, if that, and then the project may also be required to borrow the rest of its needed funds from USDA.

There were still a lot of questions on the USDA funding, according to the discussion Monday, and what strings will come with it.

The group hoped some of those would be answered at a meeting here this Friday with the USDA representative from North Platte.

Whatever comes from the outside sources, it appeared from Monday's discussion that city officials prefer starting the process for purchasing bonds for the construction costs.

Those other funds, if received, would offset the bond requirements.

By forming an inter-local agency involving the city, county and possibly the rural fire district, the percentage of financing from each entity could then be worked out.

City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland said that system worked well between the city and school, as each entity split up payment for the pool complex.

A four-person agency board meets periodically to pay bills relating to the pool complex, and to discuss other matters, she said.

She felt a similar inter-local agency for this building project could be formed within 60 days.

All of the details on who pays for what have to be worked out before the agency is formed, Leyland noted.

"We want to see this project move ahead," said Imperial Mayor Annie Longan.

"Once we determine how the pie will be split to pay for it, we can publicize the combined effort," more fully, she added

She noted Imperial and the area are known for working together, "and people will see that."

Council member Dustin Weiss also suggested starting a fund drive right away for donations to the project, publicizing it with a sign on the prospective building's lot and establishing a bank account for donations.

Council member Doug Gaswick said financing the entire building cost would be "a tough sell right now," also noting the city bonded for a new fire truck recently.

He suggested one way to make it work was use of the Helen Fanning funds, which were donated to the IVFD about five years ago.

The Imperial EMS also received Helen Fanning funds.

"I think she would be proud to support this building," Gaswick said.

He added, "You know the city will take care of you, and why not use some of the Helen Fanning money, if not all of it to make this happen?"

Several IVFD members said they are using interest from that fund, and have spent close to \$80,000 for buying equipment outside of city budget dollars.

Fire Chief Dannatt said they've also used Fanning money to "do some things we weren't able to before," in the areas of safety and liability, such as regular testing of their air packs.

Most who spoke didn't support depleting the Fanning funds entirely, but IVFD member Brian Carman said he believed they'd consider using some of it.

Police department won't
be housed in new building

The possibility of including the Imperial police department in the new building was discussed, as well, Monday night.

Mayor Longan said the suggestion came up at the council's retreat.

"We'd like to get your thoughts on it," Longan told the group.

Fire Chief Dannatt said it had been his understanding that the police preferred to stay where they are, in offices next to the current fire hall at 7th and Broadway Sts.

Fire Chief Larry Browning said that was his preference.

He said his department doesn't interact that often with the IVFD and EMS on a day-to-day basis and didn't see a need to be in the same building.

And, there are times when police situations warrant privacy and security of evidence, he noted, which a separate building would provide.

Browning said they are cramped in their offices now, and need more space for files and refrigeration. If the new building becomes a reality, there would be room for the police department to expand into some of the areas now used by EMS, if the council chooses to take that direction.

Other members of the building committee also expressed concern, noting the current building plans would have to be changed. Inclusion of the police department would extend the building a lot further west, taking up additional parking, as well.