

Council, rural fire board, commissioners to meet with committee April 27

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Progress on a new building that could house the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department (IVFD), Imperial EMS and the county emergency manager has been waiting on possible USDA funding.

However, after a recent city council meeting, those USDA funds may not be pursued due to the myriad of requirements that would come with them.

Groups involved with the potential building will be meeting again this Monday, April 27. City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland said the council has a regular meeting at 6:30 p.m., and the meeting on the building plans will follow at about 7 p.m.

Taking part in this Monday's meeting with the building committee will be the city council, the county commissioners and members of the rural fire district board.

Options for financing and the possibility of forming an interlocal agency between the governmental entities will be discussed.

USDA funds to help?

The building committee and city officials met with a USDA official here on April 10, and, afterwards, some came away thinking those government funds may not be worth the effort of applying.

City Economic Development Director Leslie Carlholm said they were initially led to believe the federal stimulus money available for such projects was going to be combined with other USDA funds for these types of building projects.

However, it now appears those funds will be commingled, and if the USDA grant/loan is received, communities may not know up-front what the "strings" are. If a grant is given, the balance of the building cost must also be borrowed from the USDA at market-interest rates.

The city would have to show that it had been turned down for the loan funds from another source, to be eligible for the USDA loan.

Use of potential federal stimulus funds also requires added paperwork, and may also mandate that Davis/Bacon Act wage and benefit requirements be followed.

Committee members did learn the maximum grant that could be received here was 15 percent, but it could also be less, according to city officials.

Requirements also indicate they'd have to use all of the accompanying USDA loan money first before any of the grant funds were used. If the loan covers the entire cost, then the grant funds would have to be returned.

After the issues were discussed at the April 13 council meeting, Council President Doug Gaswick said, "We might as well not waste our time with the USDA" funding.

IVFD member Nick Schultz, a building committee member, said some of the USDA requirements would add to the cost of the building.

That same scenario apparently holds true for accessing some of the FEMA money. The building committee will not be adding a tornado shelter in the structure, after all, but still has plans at this time for housing County Emergency Manager Paul Kunnemann's office.

The tornado shelter had been a consideration earlier in the planning, and might have helped in receiving a FEMA grant. However, costs associated with adding the shelter were estimated to be more than the grant funds they might have gained.