

*Commissioners, rural fire  
board say they are  
contributing already*

**By Jan Schultz  
The Imperial Republican**

One thing was learned by city officials at a joint meeting of the Imperial council, Chase County commissioners and rural fire board Monday night.

And that's the probability that funding from the county or rural fire district won't be available to construct a building for emergency services.

About 30 people from those governmental entities, including fire department and EMS members, gathered Monday to discuss financing the proposed new building between 7th and 8th on Broadway.

"We want to hear your views on combining on this project," said Imperial Mayor Annie Longan as the meeting opened.

Longan noted that space is getting tight in the current fire hall, which houses the fire trucks and Imperial EMS ambulances. Growing space limitations are why the IVFD started looking into a new building.

The city's new pumper, which arrived a couple of years ago, and a new rural pumper/tanker that came earlier this month are longer and wider.

Additionally, another rural truck of similar size will be arriving this October, which will make space even tighter, according to the IVFD officers.

The two new trucks already here have forced the relocation of the IVFD's dive team trailer and the county's decontamination unit to storage units at the airport.

When the second rural truck arrives this fall, one of the fire trucks will have to be moved out, according to the firemen.

Current building plans drawn up by a committee of IVFD and EMS members, and County Emergency Manager Paul Kunnemann, show bays for the fire trucks and ambulances, as well as offices for the IVFD, EMS and Kunnemann, as well as IVFD and EMS meeting rooms/training areas.

Cost for the new structure has been estimated between \$1.2 million and \$1.5 million.

Mayor Longan said it's a possibility if there is no financial help from the county, that the county-sponsored entities (EMS and Kunnemann) may not be included in the new building. The EMS could continue to be housed in the current fire hall, she said.

"I don't believe the city can do this big of a project on its own. It's possible we could leave the EMS where it's at," she said.

"The firemen want to include everyone, but the city can't build it on its own," she said.

By eliminating the two ambulance bays, the combination meeting/training room for the EMS and the EMS president's office, and possibly the emergency manager's office, it would save about \$500,000, according to IVFD estimates.

That would leave a fire hall for all of the city and rural trucks, as well as the combination meeting/training area and an exercise room for IVFD, a kitchen and storage area.

According to an interlocal agreement between the city and rural fire district, the city is to house the three rural trucks, its quick attack unit, along with the jointly-owned command vehicle and jaws unit.

Rural fire board member Steve Wallin noted they have spent over \$600,000 on purchase of

the two new trucks.

There is no formal agreement with the county, according to City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland. There is a 1981 letter signed by former Imperial Mayor O.L. Swanson that states, in part, "It is our understanding that we will no longer be required to furnish manpower and that our primary responsibility will be to house the ambulance unit or units."

If the project proceeds, previous discussions indicate the city would likely bond for some of the building cost. A bonding agent was present at Monday's meeting.

J.D. Reeder, a former IVFD member, is also researching federal grant funds that he said come from a different program than the stimulus package.

Council member Doug Gaswick at a previous meeting also asked the IVFD to consider using some of its Helen Fanning estate funds bequeathed to them several years ago.

Mayor Longan also suggested they might consider an additional half cent sales tax proposal to city voters for construction of the fire hall.

There had been discussion of forming an inter-local agency between the city and county, similar to the one formed between the city and school to build the pool complex.

However, Commissioner Jodi Thompson said, considering the economy, she is not in favor of the county bonding for the structure.

She said if the city acquires some grant funding, she would be interested in looking at the project again.

Currently, the city provides housing for all of the fire trucks (rural and city) and ambulances.

The rural fire board allows the use of its trucks and equipment, if needed, at fires within the city limits. Only taxpayers in the rural fire district pay for the rural trucks/equipment, while city taxpayers pay for the city pumper. Both fire districts share costs of the command car and jaws unit.

The county budget coordinates purchase of the ambulances. The county also provides the 24-hour-per-day dispatchers, who work with all emergency services.

The city will be giving the current plans to its engineer, Miller & Associates, who will review them for structural engineering, and so they would comply with federal grant regulations, should a grant application materialize.