

Town following fire plan, amalgamating halls: chief

From page 1.

fire plan of 2003, the staffing study and the vision and working plan, Mr. Powers said.

The plan states fire and emergency services headquarters would move back to Stouffville once the new station is constructed, he said. The Ballantrae station offices will then be turned into sleeping quarters for crews.

The new hall in Stouffville will also house the emergency operations centre. It would be the only building in the town to be fully functional, with back-up power generation, in emergency situations.

The fire plan had called for a fire hall to be built on Hwy. 48 to serve western Stouffville, while retaining the current downtown station, on Main Street east of Park Drive.

But, Mr. Powers concluded it would be more cost-effective to have only one station, more centrally located. Between \$1.5 million and \$1.8 million can be saved annually by not having to operate a second station.

"That is a big factor in terms of long-term operational savings," Mr. Powers said.

The town's new hall will serve 35,000 to 40,000 people by 2021 and will be large enough to accommodate more full-time firefighters.

The new station will be staffed seven days a week around the clock by 2010. Ballantrae will have full-time coverage around 2014.

When it comes to the numbers, the fire hall was estimated to cost around \$2 million in 2003.

Town treasurer Marc J. Pourvahidi said construction costs have risen from \$167 per square foot in 2003 to \$250.

In addition, the 2003 estimates were described by CAO Dave Cash as "very preliminary".

At that time, the proposed station didn't included the headquarters and the emergency operations centre.

"Estimates of requirements were not based on enough research," he said.

The estimate was \$1.96 million in 2004, Mr. Pourvahidi said. Now it is around \$5.9 million.

The figure in 2004 was preliminary, not factoring in engineering and site work, land and design costs, Mr. Cash said.

Because construction costs "have gone through the roof," a development charges report was brought to council in December, with the result being that developers are paying 20 per cent more in fees to fund large projects such as arenas and fire halls.

Now development charges are covering 60 per cent of the fire hall's cost, with taxes paying the rest.

The new fire hall should be in operation in 2009.

Building the fire hall and arena at the same time will save money, Mr. Cash said.

Construction on both buildings will likely begin this summer.

The design of the new fire hall and arena is to be unveiled to the public at a special council meeting March 10. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the fourth floor council chambers, 37 Sandiford Rd. in Stouffville.

Markham building halls

Markham is in the process of adding two new fire stations to bring the municipality's total to nine.

The first one is anticipated to be completed in 2009, similar to the time line for the new Stouffville hall. It will be on Woodbine Avenue near the Cathedral of the Transfiguration in northern Markham.

It will be about 10,000 square feet in size and cost around \$3 million.

It will have a fitness area for fire fighters, a dormitory, kitchen, offices for staff including the fire prevention officer, bays for two fire trucks and miscellaneous areas. About 20 firefighters will be on duty 24/7, Allan Seabrooke, acting commissioner for community and fire services for Markham, said.

The second station will serve the Cornell subdivision in the Hwy. 7 and Ninth Line area, and is expected to open around 2010 or 2011.

Administrative offices, as well as those of the fire chief, deputy chief, public education officers and others, are located in another building that is not part of a fire hall.

Make rinks flexible: Smith

In a meeting with consultants and town staff a week ago, Councillor Clyde Smith advocated making the new arena in Stouffville as flexible as possible, to hold a wide variety of events, and as energy-efficient as possible.

Two ice pads will be built with a new fire hall off Weldon Road, behind Sobeys.

The cost is being covered by development charges. The town is considering adding seats on one pad. Original plans called for about 300 seats per rink.

A meeting with user groups was scheduled for last night. The cost estimate for the arena in 2004 was around \$7.8 million, but grew to about \$17 million in 2008, town treasurer Marc J. Pourvahidi said.

The arena is expected to open in late 2009. Ice time is fully booked at the town's two arenas and registration capped in some age groups of minor hockey.

-Hannelore Volpe

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