

Proposal to Site a Fire Station at Hidden Lake

Summary:

The Moreno Valley Fire Department is working on siting a fire station in the southern Moreno Valley. With quick action and a positive working relationship, Hidden Lake and the Moreno Valley FD could have a station serving B38, Elk Ridge, and Hidden Lake within 5 years. Without strong action, we should expect any fire station to take years to establish.

Opportunity:

The single most important action that Hidden Lake can take for fire protection besides the current FireWise program is to get a fire station sited at Hidden Lake. Besides the significant reduction of response time, HL would then have equipment stationed on location to fight both brush and house fires. There is a likelihood that EMS equipment could also be at hand.

Response time is cut in two ways – first, the MVFD would not have to transport equipment to the location, but rather would only have to come by personal (faster) transport to the fire station. There are 4 members of the fire department at Hidden Lake, 2 at Elk Ridge, and another two within 5 minutes travel. ¹

Additionally, rates for homeowner insurance at Hidden Lake would drop, due to proximity to a fire station.

Costs:

Land for a fire station normally has to be owned by the County, or be on a 99 year lease. A fire station itself can range in price from \$80,000 to \$160,000 when provided by a bonded licensed contractor. However, if the community were to construct the substation, costs would likely be in the range of \$30,000 to \$40,000. It is safe to assume that this fire station would not be as large as Taos Pines' station, so a cost less than \$40,000 is to be expected. Water tanks, an option but a highly valuable one, can cost approximately \$10,000 to \$20,000. Perhaps \$55,000 would be a workable number with which to begin.

To place Wildfire equipment in the station would be up to the Moreno Valley Fire Department. The equipment that could be kept at a substation would be wildland apparatus (e.g., type 6 engines and ATVs). Wildland apparatus can be highly effectively used to fight structural fires. Also, Moreno Valley FD possibly could station a type 4 engine at the substation – this vehicle is entirely suited to structural fires. ²

Operating costs are not considered here.

¹ Of course, Kris Perreault is a fireman and county employee. Assuming that Kris would be first to spot a fire, with one additional fire fighter he can begin fighting fire immediately after calling in the fire. In addition, Emily Perreault is a trained EMS person, cutting response time for medical emergencies.

² A type 4 engine is a fairly large compressed foam pump engine, costing approximately \$150,000.

MVFD Needs and Contributions:

MVFD is most successful at raising money for equipment, both through the New Mexico Fire Protection Funds for our district, and through grants and donations. Public donations are often directed to operating costs and wildland protection, while Fire Excise taxes are often focused purchases like water tanks. Funding for land and buildings (long term capital) come from the New Mexico Finance Authority, and can be difficult to set aside for new facilities.

MVFD, however, is very well placed to provide equipment, volunteer labor, expertise at materials contracting and building facilities, and, potentially, onsite manpower for running the substation.

Hidden Lake Needs and Contributions:

Hidden Lake POA needs, as perhaps its third priority, a significant upgrade in fire protection.³ This protection, the ability to fight fire, would partner with fire prevention – our FireWise Program. The fire substation brings professionalism, and quick response, to our front gate. Hidden Lake POA also needs limited fiscal liability over the next few years.

Hidden Lake, however, is well placed to contribute land. Additionally we have volunteers for fund raising. We can tap our own community (both full-time and part-time owners) and surrounding communities for donations, and we can design fund raising exercises to contribute to the fire station. HL also is suited to provide volunteer labor for construction.

Other Communities:

Other communities can provide donations, volunteer labor, and perhaps leadership. The procurement of a substation should be considered a *Community effort*, not a *Hidden Lake effort*.

Whether the station would be sited at B38 (for instance) or Hidden Lake, it would be a major step forward for the Valley and benefit all local communities. We should therefore be quite supportive if another location is chosen. However, while Hidden Lake would never have automatic claim to the station's location, we can offer an immediate enabler to get the project started, and Hidden Lake can provide quick response for the fire station's call-outs.

Concrete Proposal:

The essence of the proposal is that MVFD would supply the equipment, including water tanks, and volunteer labor. Hidden Lake would provide land. The communities would provide \$35,000 in donations and contributions.

³ The first two Hidden Lake priorities are perhaps snow removal and road maintenance.

1. Hidden Lake should, after reaching agreement with Chief Bob Coss, prepare to deed 1/4 – 1/2 acre to the County for the explicit, stated purpose of a fire station. ⁴ Timing for the sign-over would be after construction of the station. ⁵
2. Hidden Lake and other communities should prepare a one to two year plan to procure materials and permits, and construct the building. MVFD can facilitate forming a community organization to raise funds and build the substation – HL would clearly play a key role here and could provide leadership if required.
3. MVFD would then start actions to procure its own equipment funding.
4. The Community Organization would commit to two major activities – fund raising and construction. Locally, HLPOA would commit, first, to help staff the committee for aggressive fund raising. I would suggest that this happen at the Annual meeting. MVFD and the Community Organization should move into a one year fund raising program.
5. If after the end of 1 year or after the raising of \$20,000, the Community should proceed with construction of the substation.

As an end-in-mind, we should expect a working fire substation at the gate of Hidden Lake ⁶ under MVFD direction at the end of 2 years, or less. It would be a simple metal building with equipment capable of major first response in a wildland or structural fire, or in a medical emergency. It would be very simple in order to reduce any permitting and licensing – for instance, it would not have water or septic for the firefighters. HLPOA would bear no operational responsibility for the substation, though the community could provide volunteer firemen, and Colfax County would bear all future administrative and financial responsibility.

Timing:

In this case, speed is valuable.

1. The MVFD website implies that site selection talks are already ongoing, but not finalized.
2. To deliver a major development like a fire station will probably take one to two years – so a delay of a year is a significant extension of time until we are better covered for fire protection.

⁴ Property would revert back to Hidden Lake if the station is not on site within 10 years, but the property would be 'outside' of HLPOA's domain for governance and dues after the station is turned over to the County.

⁵ Timing is based upon building the station with volunteer labor, rather than using full County procurement procedures.

⁶ If Hidden Lake is chosen as the site.