

Work starts in July on Augusta's Hartford Fire Station

The expansion will more than double the size of the station, which sits prominently on a hill looking down on the city's downtown.

BY **KEITH EDWARDS** KENNEBEC JOURNAL



Share     



An addition to the Hartford Fire Station in Augusta would help modernize the station in the city's downtown. *Rendering courtesy of Mitchell Associates Architects*

AUGUSTA — The \$6 million expansion and renovation of Hartford Fire Station is meant to preserve the look of the fire department's existing, nearly 100-year-old headquarters building while adding a large new section big enough to accommodate today's larger, heavier fire trucks.

But while the new addition will have a brick facade like the original older structure, and will also have the same basic purpose and be attached to the old building, it will technically be a separate building.

That's because if the existing building, which will be renovated as part of the project, were to be considered part of the same building as the planned new



An Augusta firefighter backs a truck into the Hartford Fire Station in this file photo. *Staff file photo by Andy Molloy*

addition, and hold front-line fire trucks, it withstand natural disasters, did not exist when the original Hartford Station was built in 1920.

Matt Nazar, city development director, told the Planning Board last week while the original Hartford was built prior to those building codes being in place, it has demonstrated its ability to withstand natural disasters in part by simply remaining standing for nearly 100 years.

“It has certainly withstood some significant natural events and stayed standing,” Nazar said, noting a 1938 hurricane was one of the biggest New England has ever seen, which Hartford withstood, and also citing major winter snowstorms. “Renovating to the Category 4 standards would be very expensive and, at this point, unnecessary, in the opinion of the emergency services folks and management of the city. From a construction perspective it’s technically going to be a separate building. Even though it will look like one building, they’ll be built to two different standards. One built to modern building codes and one built to its existing standards which, we do feel, is a very safe building.”

City officials said bringing the older building up to those standards would add substantial cost to the project, more than \$100,000. So, instead, even though the buildings will be attached, share the same basic function and appear to anyone passing by to be a single building, the addition

Fire Chief Roger Audette said the existing, four-garage-bay part of the station will not hold any front-line fire trucks or ambulances, instead only holding second-line trucks, equipment, and rescue vehicles and supplies not usually used on most emergency calls. That will allow the building to remain in use without being upgraded to meet the higher standards.

Audette said the fire department worked with the city's code office and reviewed state and federal fire codes and determined it was not required that the older section of Hartford, if it doesn't hold front-line fire or rescue apparatus, meet the modern standards for natural disasters.

The Planning Board approved the project last week and work is expected to start on it in about four weeks, according to Audette. Once work starts, it is expected to be complete in about 500 days.

The expansion will more than double the size of the station, which sits prominently on a hill looking down on the city's downtown.

Planning Board members approved the project unanimously, with some praising it for preserving the older section of the building while providing the new addition to house fire trucks, including the city's [new ladder truck](#), that are too big and heavy to fit into the original structure.

“Always, from the time I first moved to Augusta, will maintain the dignity, the aesthetic appearance, of the building.”

Residents [approved bonding up to \\$6 million for the project last year.](#)

The addition to the station will be put on what is now a parking lot and part of Gage Street, which was discontinued as a street by a 2008 City Council vote, though it has continued to be used as a through street, from Memorial Drive to Water Street.

That public vehicular access is about to end, as that part of the former Gage Street will, as part of the project, only be allowed to be accessed by public safety vehicles. A public sidewalk there will remain open to the public.

The addition will feature two large drive-thru bays, as well as additional, rear-facing bays for ambulances and other vehicles and equipment.

Audette said most of the time, rescue vehicles

will leave out the front of the site onto Water Street. But he said there will be provisions made to allow fire or rescue vehicles, when needed, to leave the station and go directly, out the back of the site, onto Memorial Drive. The city is working with the state Department of Transportation but Nazar and Audette said they anticipate there will be some form of a warning light to stop traffic on Memorial Drive so fire and rescue vehicles can enter that often-busy street without having to wait for a break in traffic.

Audette said most of the time rescue workers and vehicles will leave the site on Water Street, and will only use the Memorial Drive way when there is an incident, requiring a rapid response, in that immediate area, such as an accident on Memorial Bridge.

The construction project is expected to address [structural issues with the old section of the building](#), and provide much more space for training and modern sleeping quarters for firefighter-paramedics, who work around the clock.

The city also recently [built and opened a new fire station in North Augusta](#), to respond to fires, accidents and other emergency calls in that growing part of the city.

Keith Edwards—621-5647

Twitter: @kedwardskj

kedwards@centralmaine.com

COMMENT

Share     

Send questions/comments to the editors.

FILED UNDER:
AUGUSTA MAINE