



AGENDA NO: 9.b

MEETING DATE: June 10, 2025

# Staff Report

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Daniel K. McCrain, Fire Chief  
**SUBJECT:** Bonita Street Fire Station Development

**DATE:** May 28, 2025

## RECOMMENDED ACTION

1. Affirm that it is intent of the City Council to redevelop and staff the Bonita Street Fire Station as City funding and departmental staffing becomes available; and consider three design options;
2. Direct the Fire Chief to complete architectural drawings sufficient to create a “shovel ready” project and appropriate a total of \$93,190 including the \$38,466 of Fire Department Development Impact Fees to fund the remainder needed to complete these documents; and
3. Authorize the Fire Chief to seek funding sources for construction of a new 2-story living quarters (Option B) at the Bonita Street Station (Construction cost estimate \$2,325,682) and
4. Include this project in the City’s Capital Improvement Project list.

## ALTERNATIVES

1. Direct the Fire Chief to seek funding sources for the construction of a new 1-story living quarters (Option C) at the Bonita Street Fire Station. Estimated costs \$1,455,851.
2. Direct the Fire Chief to seek funding sources for the remodel of the existing living quarters (Option A) at the Bonita Street Fire Station. Estimated costs \$788,411 plus engineered retrofits.
3. Provide alternate direction.
4. Take no action.

## FISCAL IMPACT

The cost estimate for the preparation of architectural drawings sufficient for a coastal development permit is \$17,500. There is sufficient available funding in the Fire Department development impact fee fund for this request.

The estimated cost for construction documents is an additional \$75,690 for a total of \$93,190 for both phases of architectural drawings. Currently the Fire Department development impact fee fund has a balance of \$38,466 if we utilize the development impact fee for CDP drawings and construction

Prepared By: DM Dept Review: \_\_\_\_\_  
City Manager Review: YK City Attorney Review: \_\_\_\_\_

documents there would be a shortfall of \$54,724 that would need to be funded from an alternate source the recommendation is the Measure Q&E fund.

The fiscal impact of the complete project is based on estimates of probable costs provided by Jacobus and Yuang, INC. as part of a conceptual design project by Hunter Smith Architecture. The probable costs related to the construction of each proposal include the demolition of the existing living quarters, where required, and construction costs related to each option. These estimates do not include furnishings such as appliances, and furniture.

- Option A- \$788,411 (plus structural retrofit costs TBD)
- Option B- \$2,325,682 (Recommended)
- Option C- \$1,455,851
- Appliances and furniture estimated costs TBD.

## **BACKGROUND**

The City of Morro Bay currently has two fire stations. The primary station known as Station 53 is located at 715 Harbor Street. This station is currently staffed with 4 personnel daily and is the headquarters station housing Fire Department administrative staff. The second station previously identified as Station 54 is located at 460 Bonita Street in North Morro Bay. This station has been unstaffed since the 1970's. Over the years, this station has served as a Fire Chief residence, and as storage for additional Fire Department apparatus and equipment that could be accessed by off duty and Reserve Firefighters for emergency response. The City did own a third property that was designated for a new fire station that was located at Coral and San Jacinto. This property was sold, and a portion of the proceeds were utilized to pay off the remaining loan balance from the construction of the Harbor Street Fire Station.

In October 2001, RRM Design Group conducted a response time analysis evaluating fire department response times from various locations throughout the city in both a 1 and 2 station configuration. At the time of the evaluation the city owned property at San Jacinto and Hwy 1 that was designated for a fire station so that location was evaluated instead of the Bonita Street location. Ideally, a 2-station model with one in North Morro Bay and one in South Morro Bay was found to be the ideal configuration due to a variety of factors. Single station models with a centralized fire station were evaluated and still left portions of town with extended response times and did not address resiliency for flooding and other factors that prevent travel.

In November 2003, the Morro Bay City Council commissioned an ad hoc committee to evaluate emergency services. The recommendations of that committee included moving to a daily staffing of four full time Firefighters with an optimal level of 6 daily as funding allowed. These recommendations were based on industry standards in place at this time. Another recommendation of this working group was to staff a second fire station in North Morro Bay to address a critical need for improved services to the residents in the northern portion of the city. This recommendation was supported by a response time analysis and Standards of Cover survey known as the "Flame Study", a Fire Department community survey, and an ad hoc committee 5-year strategic plan. Some key decisions resulted from the efforts of this ad hoc committee, the first was this information was utilized to assist in the passage of Measure Q. This Measure was a ½ cent sales tax initiative to boost funding for emergency services within the city. Measure Q passed by a vote of the community in 2006. The second was the City Council approved a motion to "inform the Emergency Services Committee and staff that preferences are for two fire stations (north and south) with minimum funding of four full-time personnel on each shift augmented with Reserve Firefighters; and direct staff to bring back

information on implementing a second fire station by July 12, 2004.” This motion carried unanimously with a 5-0 vote. The third point was at the July 26, 2004, City Council meeting, Councilmember Peirce moved that “it is the intent of the City Council to re-open and staff Fire Station 54, and direct staff to seek funding expeditiously.” The motion also carried unanimously (5-0). As a result of this Council action, funding was secured and the apparatus bay at the Bonita Street station was rebuilt. Due to the economic downturn in 2008, financial constraints impacted this goal, construction of the living quarters was unable to proceed, and progress to staff a second fire station was halted. During this time, the Fire Department responded to approximately 1,500 calls for service annually with 34% occurring in North Morro Bay. Department staffing was nine full time Firefighters plus the Fire Chief for a daily staffing of three; the department relied heavily on a pool of up to 20 part-time Reserve Firefighters to augment staffing.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the 20 years since the ad hoc committee report, the Morro Bay Fire Department’s annual call volume has increased to over 2,200 calls for service, a 32% increase. The recommended minimum daily staffing of four full-time Firefighters was finally achieved in 2022. We currently have a total of 13 full-time Firefighters allowing for one shift with a daily staffing of five personnel and two shifts with a daily staffing of four personnel. We augment this staffing in the summer with Seasonal Firefighters to assist with coverage for mutual aid requests and increased local fire activity. Out of our more than 2,200 calls for service, approximately 30-40% occur north of Highway 41. The response time standard of having an engine on scene in under 5 minutes 90% of the time is greatly exceeded in North Morro Bay. The impact of delayed service can be devastating and support the need for rapid response. Emergency services are always fighting the clock. In regard to fires, the ad hoc committee noted that fires double in size every minute and can progress to a situation known as flashover, a condition where everything in a room or structure ignites simultaneously. Survival from a flashover situation is rare even for firefighters with full protective equipment. Flashover can occur in as little as 3-5 minutes from the start of the fire in modern homes. This time has decreased from as much as 17 minutes during the 1970’s due to the transition from natural wood and fiber products to petroleum based, synthetic home furnishings. Smoke, however, is usually much more lethal than the actual heat of fire due to carbon monoxide and other toxic products of combustion that can overcome a person in minutes. In addition to fire, there are many other time sensitive situations that cause great concern. Finally, pain and suffering for even non-life-threatening injuries and illnesses is prolonged without rapid access to emergency medical care.

Some examples highlighting the need for a station in North Morro Bay beyond the routine calls for service include: in 1995, the north and south parts of the city were isolated due to flooding when 12” of rain fell in 24 hours; in 2001, 3,000 people were evacuated from the city due to an anhydrous ammonia leak and again the City was isolated north from south; and, the 2003 San Simeon Earthquake caused damage throughout Morro Bay, including damage to the headquarters fire station. A new North Fire Station would provide an alternate facility for operations. We also experienced emergencies at the power plant located in the heart of the city while it was in operation, including two non-electrical incidents related to the plant.

Most recently, in January of 2023, the City experienced flooding events as a result of an atmospheric river. These flooding events resulted in the isolation of North and South Morro Bay with all routes in and out of the city cut off for an extended period of time. During this storm event we were able to move a crew to the Bonita Street station to cover North Morro Bay. The crew placed cots for sleeping in the apparatus bay and utilized a former employees house in the Cloisters for access to a bathroom and kitchen. This arrangement was substandard in meeting the needs of the response personnel,

but it was a tactical decision made to ensure the ability to continue providing services to half of the city during an evolving emergency. During this event we were unable to rely on mutual aid resources because the entire county was affected by this storm and every route in and out of the city was closed due to flooding.

As presented in Item 9.b of this agenda packet, the City commissioned a Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover report to look at emergency services in Morro Bay. Matrix Consulting Group was the firm selected through an RFP process to complete this study. Matrix Consulting reviewed response data from 2021, 2022, and 2023, as well as organizational documents, policies and procedures, and mutual aid resources. As a result of their review, and interpretation of industry standards, regulations, and best practices, the following are some of the recommendations made to better align the city's emergency response with industry standards.

- Recommend upgrading and staffing the Bonita Street Station to reduce response times to North Morro Bay.
- Increase the minimum staffing on each apparatus from 2 daily to 3 daily to improve firefighter safety and the effective response force. This would increase daily staffing from 4 to 6 personnel.
- Establish a turnout time of 1:30 for all emergency calls 90% of the time.
- Establish a 5-minute travel time benchmark performance objective for 90% of the emergency calls for service.
- Establish a performance objective of an Effective Response Force of 10 personnel and a 12-minute travel time. (long range goal to meet NFPA guidelines)
- Establish a community standard delineating the services provided, response protocols, and benchmark objectives for the city's fire protection system

To address this critically needed piece of infrastructure to support Fire Department Operations, the Fire Department conducted a Request for Proposals (RFP) for architecture services to provide schematic design options with cost estimates for a remodel and/or rebuilding of the Bonita Street Fire Station. The architect provided three schematic design ideas with feasibility analysis and cost estimates.

***Option "A" (not recommended)***

The first proposal Option "A" was to remodel the existing living quarters. Although this design is potentially the least expensive, staff does not recommend this option for many reasons. This option requires multiple retrofits to meet current seismic and energy efficiency standards including repairing cracks and breakage in the existing masonry structure. These retrofits decrease the existing living space down from 1,145 sf because of the need to add 2"x6" wall studs and interior drywall to run new electrical, insulation, and plumbing due to the existing block masonry exterior walls. This footprint reduces an already very limited space for adequate living area for crew members, restroom facilities, office space, and adequate storage for equipment and supplies. This option utilizes the existing footprint of the structure, limiting the design options to provide adequate space or be redesigned to accommodate future needs of the department. Although this option may be the least expensive initially, the result would still be a structure that is a mix of very old existing building and modern retrofits that does not sufficiently address the needs of the organization, potentially leading to future construction needs and costs. As with many renovation projects, unknown elements in the existing structure could be identified during the construction process that could lead to design changes or complications and increased costs. Structural engineering retrofits such as repairing the horizontal

and vertical cracking of the masonry structure, horizontal reinforcement paneling, vertical rebar and grout, as well as wall to ceiling reinforcement were estimated in the cost estimates and will likely incur additional expense once fully engineered. The total of these structural engineering expenses is unknown at this time and will be evaluated further if this option is selected, increasing the actual cost of this option. The architect and cost estimating firm were unable to provide complete cost estimates for the required structural engineering retrofits needed as these would have to be specifically engineered for this project.

### ***Option “B” (Preferred)***

Option “B” is the preferred option for this project. Although this is the most expensive of the three options it provides many benefits over the other two options. The primary benefit of this option is that it provides adequate space for all current and anticipated departmental needs and allows for future departmental growth and changes without incurring significant renovation costs in the future. This option is a 2,322 sf, 2-story structure with personnel bedrooms, bathrooms, and kitchen upstairs with office space and storage downstairs. This option will be designed around the needs of the department and will maximize the space as efficiently as possible. This design also allows for separation between the operational area and the living quarters as is an industry standard to limit exposure to contaminants related to emergency response in the living quarters; this is a design trend in the fire service to potentially reduce occupational cancers. Every aspect of the design has a specific purpose to meet operational needs and to allow for changing requirements as the fire service evolves, technologies are updated, and the needs of the community evolve.

### ***Option “C” (2<sup>nd</sup> Preferred alternative)***

Option “C” would be the second preferred option. This is a new construction 1-story living quarters of approximately 1,410 sf. The benefits of this option over the remodel option “A” are this is a purpose-built structure that will maximize the available buildable area of the property. This option will provide adequate living space for the crew members but not for equipment and supplies, reducing operational efficiency. Benefits of this option over option “A” include sufficient room for three desks within the office space, addition of a dining table for crew meals, each bedroom is large enough for three lockers, and indoor laundry facilities. This option also provides a fully updated facility and removes the possibility of patchwork retrofits and hidden complications possible in option “A”. One drawback of this option over option “B” is this option limits the potential for any future departmental growth or changes to the structure without incurring substantial renovation costs that increase year after year. This option also lacks adequate storage space for the required supplies and equipment for normal operations. Due to the size of the lot and required building setbacks it is not possible to build a single-story structure with all the required features of a modern fire station. This option would meet the goal of establishing a station in North Morro Bay to improve service to that portion of the city but will more than likely require future upgrades to fully support operations.

## **CONCLUSION**

Having a fire station in North Morro Bay has long been identified as a critical need for the city. The Morro Bay Fire Department is in a unique position to accomplish this because the department has sufficient number of fire apparatus to staff this station, and the city already owns property and a second station. The Bonita Street Station can be utilized to meet this need, so we avoid land acquisition expenses. The second station has a fully functional apparatus bay that will not require renovation and is suitable for immediate use. The existing living quarters are uninhabitable due to the age and condition of the building. A thorough evaluation of the existing living quarters has highlighted many structural and safety deficiencies, as well as the need for substantial renovation to meet the department’s needs. Although the initial cost estimates indicate that remodeling the existing

building is the least expensive option, the cost for required structural engineering retrofits has not been fully incorporated into the overall cost of this option. This option also results in a station that would not fully meet the operational needs of the department and would require future expensive renovation as operational needs evolve. We have determined that removing the existing living quarters and building a new structure will ultimately better serve the department.

Once a vision is agreed upon, the next step in this process is the development of architectural drawings sufficient for a coastal development permit. This would create a “shovel ready project”. By having a “Shovel-ready” project we can be eligible to apply for grants, State and Federal budget appropriations and other funding opportunities. Therefore, staff is seeking approval for funding in the amount of \$93,190 to complete the architectural drawings. This amount includes the use of \$38,466 of development impact fee funding available to the Fire Department.

Subsequent steps would include applying for a development permit, presenting this project to the planning commission and finally creating construction documents.

The new 2-story option is the preferred design choice as this project would meet all of the department’s current and anticipated operational needs. Having adequate space for personnel, equipment, supplies and operational areas is essential. The 2-story option provides adequate storage space separation between operational areas and living areas that are not possible in the 1-story option due to the limited footprint available within the property boundaries. By building a second story we can maximize available space on a small parcel. By anticipating future departmental needs and planning ahead, we can prevent future costly renovations and unplanned additional capital expenses ultimately saving the city money. The 2-story option is similar in size and appearance with other properties on Bonita Street and will not dramatically alter the appearance of the neighborhood.

The cost of construction continues to increase annually, the construction costs for other local fire departments have ranged between \$1,100 per square foot and \$1,500 per square foot depending on the project and in many instances the addition of land acquisition expenses. These costs are higher than constructing a private residence due to the requirement to utilize prevailing wage contractors that a private citizen is not required to do. The estimates of probable costs for option B equate to a unit cost of \$908.68 per square foot, and \$874.37 for option C. These estimates allow for a 7.5% annual escalation in construction costs with construction to begin in August 2025 for estimating purposes.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Schematic Plans
2. Schematic Design and Feasibility Analysis
3. Staff Presentation