

Cities explore 'shared' fire station concept

Converse, UC still deciding on a site

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Converse City Council on Jan. 5 received the first of a continuing series of updates on projects funded out of November's successful bond issue.

Voters approved six bonds totaling \$9.9 million for a variety of projects including street repairs, public parks, and construction of a new City Hall, animal care facility and fire station. All are expected to be completed by mid-2017.

City Manager Lanny Lambert told council members plans for the new \$3 million, 20,000-square-foot, four-bay fire station still are evolving, but the current proposals envision Converse sharing the facility — and expense — with nearby Universal City. He said the concept could be the first such municipal partnership.

"We're excited about that prospect because that would cut our costs," he explained.

The location of the joint facility has not been decided, Lambert said. While sites under consideration include city-owned land at Sixth Street and Toepperwein Road, FM 1976 and Patsy Drive, Toepperwein and Bob Grubbs, and Old Cimarron Trail and Scheel Road, the best location, he said, was on the southwest corner of the Northeast Lakeview College, a section of undeveloped property owned by the college at Kitty Hawk Road.

College officials "were very excited about the idea," Lambert told the council, "and said if we would do it, they would give us the land for free." The college, he added, also proposed adding a classroom and turning it into a training facility for a college fire academy. The property is currently tax-exempt, he said, so no property tax revenue would be lost.

Placing the fire station at that location would provide an additional benefit, said Mayor Al Suarez, by allowing VIA Met-

ropolitan Transit to begin service to Northeast Lakeview, creating easier access for potential students. "That would solve a problem they've had since the college opened its doors in 2007," he said. Converse is part of the area bus transit system, but Universal City is not.

The problem, Lambert explained, was that the proposed fire station site is just over Converse's border and actually in Universal City. By law, community bond funding cannot be spent outside the city.

The key would be for Universal City to agree to a municipal boundary adjustment — basically giving Converse the property rights to the proposed station, placing it officially in that city — so that both cities could use the new station. However, Lambert said, "we are not at that point."

Suarez noted that he had been in informal talks on the subject with UC Mayor John Williams, who said "he saw no reason not to do it but, of course, has to go to his council with the proposal."

That proposal, not yet solidified, suggests that, since Universal City hasn't budgeted for a new fire station, that city would pay rent of approximately \$7,000 a month to cover its costs. While the project has not been designed yet, Converse Fire Chief Richard Wendt said he envisions a common area with sleeping quarters for each city's firefighters on opposite sides of the building. "That would give them some privacy and save costs," Wendt told the council.

Another challenge is timing, the city manager added. City staff favors having one company design and build all of the bond-funded municipal construction projects to save money and provide better oversight, he said. That firm would need to be selected within the next few weeks — and the fire station site nailed down — if the proposed timeline for completing those



The city of Converse is reviewing proposals from architects and contractors to build a new City Hall that will replace this building on South Seguin Road.

File Photo

projects is to be met.

"No decision is needed tonight," Lambert told the council, "but eventually we need to have a decision, probably within the next 60 days, on where to locate this station."

Meanwhile, the firm of Windcrest-based Young Professional Resources has been selected to begin \$10.6 million in street repairs and is presently ranking Converse's streets from worst to best and evaluating repair solutions.

The city's public works department is using a special video camera to record the condition of sewer lines under the worst streets to advise which lines might need to be replaced, Lambert said. Street repairs are scheduled to be completed by September.

Proposals from design-build firms are being reviewed to build a 15,000-square-foot, two-story City Hall, the city manager said, adding that the finalist

is expected to be introduced to council members later this month. Proposed designs would be submitted to council by May and construction, to begin in June, should be finished a year later.

Land northwest of Converse's police station at 403 S. Seguin Road is being considered for the new \$2.5 million City Hall, Lambert said. The old municipal complex at 403 and 407 South Seguin Road would be demolished and that land temporarily used for overflow parking.

An \$800,000 expansion of the 4,000-square-foot library will have the same schedule, he told the council, and would double the facility's space.

Converse is talking to the Judson Independent School District about purchasing a 7.5-acre tract at FM 1516 and South Seguin Road for its proposed \$2 million animal care facility and dog park. "It is beautifully wooded acreage,"

Lambert said, "and, if we do it right, it will be a beautiful location." The size of the facility has not been determined.

Finally, the city manager reported, the Converse Economic Development Corp. has hired the architecture department of the University of Texas at San Antonio to prepare a park master plan for the city. With that plan in hand, he explained, the city intends to apply to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for a \$250,000 grant that, when combined with \$1 million in bond funding, would go to purchase playground equipment, build hike and bike trails and athletic fields, and generally develop the area for public use.

Work is expected to begin on this project in the fall, he said, and should be completed by June 2017. Lambert added he intends to provide a regular update on the six bond projects at each council meeting.