

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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Why is a New Thomaston Fire-EMS Building Needed?

Town Manager Kara George

In a time of emergency, it may seem like magic when calling 911 for assistance. From the moment you pick up your phone and call dispatch to the feeling of relief when first responders arrive at your doorstep ready to take action, many needs behind the scenes make this "magic" happen.

On Tuesday, August 20th, from 5-8 pm, you are invited to visit our current Fire and EMS Station at 6 Knox Street for a first-hand look at the building and the conditions your first responders work in every day. Preliminary engineering drawings of the proposed new building will be on display, with municipal officials and our first responders in attendance to answer your questions.

During the last Fire and EMS Building Committee meeting, concerns were raised regarding the design and exterior appearance of the proposed building. Thomaston is working with Port City Architecture to provide additional renderings of the exterior, which also will be available for viewing during your visit of the station. It is important to note that Thomaston voters approved design guidelines for the Thomaston Green, and those parameters will be applied during the Planning Board's review of the project.

On June 13, 2023, Thomaston voters overwhelmingly supported reserving a parcel of land at Thomaston Green to build a new Fire and EMS Station. This approval saved taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars by eliminating the need to buy privately-owned land and demonstrated the continued support of our community in providing exceptional emergency services.

Beyond the aged physical appearance and structural conditions of the existing 1956 station, there are crucial needs of the first responders to continue providing the level of emergency care that our community has come to expect and require. Before discussing the dollar signs, it's crucial to discuss the needs and how this proposed project will address them:

Sleeping Quarters The number of ambulance calls has increased to the point that we have four EMS personnel working 24-hour shifts, with the rest of the shifts filled by per diem staff. Currently, cots are set up wherever there is space, or EMS personnel are sleeping in recliner chairs in the break room. This does not meet the code and health standards set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations.

OSHA Standards There are new OSHA proposed Fire and EMS standards under review at the federal level. Because Maine has adopted federal OSHA standards, these changes will apply to all local volunteer and small-community-based Fire and EMS services. These standards will not allow sleeping in the breakroom or on cots on the apparatus floor. Requirements include annual fit-for-duty exams,

health and fitness programs with exercise opportunities during work hours, annual minimum skills assessments, ongoing training equivalent to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) requirements, facilities for decontamination and disinfection, proper storage of personal protective gear, sleeping quarters protected by an automatic sprinkler system, and prevention of exhaust emissions exposure in living areas.

Growing Pains When Thomaston's station opened in 1956, the world depended solely on volunteers, and regulations were not as rigorous as they are today. Thomaston has struggled to retain first responders because the required training is a huge commitment, especially for volunteers with full-time jobs. Fire apparatus have also grown in size over the years, leading to challenges with the current station's limited space. Some may remember when Thomaston purchased the ladder truck over 20 years ago. The Town had to make the bay opening tall enough to accommodate the truck. Today, the Fire and EMS staff can be observed scraping ice off the pavement to ensure there is enough clearance for the trucks to get in and out of the bays. Every centimeter counts! The trucks are not getting any smaller, and there is no room to expand the apron that leads out to Knox Street for trucks to pull out of the station.

Cost Estimates The new Fire and EMS building is projected to cost \$7.9 million. The Town is investigating funding sources through United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development and Congressional Directed Spending (CDS) funds.

Your Support Counts! The proposed project costs are high, but a Fire and EMS Station is a critical need in every community. It is the lifeline, the "magic" that saves lives in desperate times. Many of the issues outlined above would be addressed with the proposed new building project:

1. Improves response time with 24-hour first responder coverage.
2. Provides facility needs required by OSHA.
3. Encourages qualified employee attraction and retention by showcasing our commitment to our first responders, community, and saving lives.
4. Expand exceptional emergency services with added training space, proper sleeping quarters, and larger bays for the apparatus.

For more information about the project, please visit our website at www.thomastonmaine.gov.

Join us on August 20th from 5-8 pm at the Thomaston Fire-EMS Station. Your voice and support count!

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