

Board of Fire Commissioners

Fire District No.1, Township of Riverside
P.O. Box 458 - Riverside, NJ 08075

Proposed Riverside Fire Station Replacement Project Referendum

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the difference between the Riverside Fire District No. 1 and the Riverside Fire Company No. 1?

This is an area of confusion for many township residents, and one that gets erroneously explained by residents on a daily basis.

Fire departments in New Jersey are either a municipal fire department or a fire district. A **municipal fire department** is under the governance of and funded by the local municipal government. This is the same way a police department, public works department, and recreation department are funded by the local purpose tax in your annual property tax bill. A **fire district** is a political subdivision that is formed through the adoption of a township ordinance. The **fire district** is created as a taxing authority (similar to the local school district) and is overseen by a board of five publicly elected officials titled **Fire Commissioners**. A **Board of Fire Commissioners** is governed by N.J.S.A.40A: 14-70 et al. and is charged with the responsibility of providing the resources necessary to provide firefighting services to the residents within its territorial location, in this case the Township of Riverside. Therefore, the **Riverside Fire District No 1** is overseen by the publicly elected **Board of Fire Commissioners** who are charged with providing the necessary resources for firefighting, including a fire station that serves the needs of the firefighting personnel and the community.

When looking at the break down of your property tax bill, the Fire District Tax is the lowest portion or percentage of your annual property tax bill. Property taxes collected for the school district, local municipality, and county government are each separately more than the Fire District Tax.

The **Riverside Fire Company No. 1** is a private entity contracted by the **Board of Fire Commissioners** to provide firefighting services to the Township of Riverside and mutual aid responses to its neighboring municipalities. The **Riverside Fire Company No. 1**, which was organized in 1892, is staffed 100% by volunteers and is led by a volunteer Fire Chief. The members of the **Riverside Fire Company No. 1** give freely of their time to respond to emergencies, of all types, 24/7 and 365 days a year, and attend hours and hours of training annually. They are your friends and neighbors, and also taxpayers - just like you. The **Board of Fire Commissioners** employs a full-time Clerk/Administrator to oversee the daily operations and financial expenditures of the fire district. This person is NOT a career fire chief and is NOT responsible to respond to firefighting emergencies as part of their daily job duties with the fire district. The **Riverside Fire District No. 1** and the **Riverside Fire Company No.1** are **two completely different entities** and NOT one in the same. The bond referendum for the new fire station is the sole responsibility of the **Board of Fire Commissioners of Riverside Fire District #1**.

Why does the fire station not meet today's fire service needs?

The current fire station is occupied by both the Board of Fire Commissioners of the Fire District and the Riverside Fire Company, which are two separate entities. The building lacks the office space to conduct administrative business or to house the records and office equipment of both entities. The current fire station also lacks storage space for firefighting tools, bunker gear, fire hose, Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (S.C.B.A. – a.k.a. air packs) and spare air cylinders. The fire station also lacks enough space for other

Board of Fire Commissioners

Fire District No.1, Township of Riverside

P.O. Box 458 - Riverside, NJ 08075

firefighting and maintenance equipment, as well as training simulators/props.

Cancer in the fire service is emerging as a serious concern in national studies, as firefighters are shown to be more likely than the general public to be diagnosed with cancer. This is the topic of most concern in the fire service nationally today. The modern fire environment is much different than that of years past, because of the petroleum-based plastics and synthetics in the furnishings and materials in today's homes. The advent of energy efficient new homes and renovation of older homes to conserve energy creates a sealed environment in which fires produce higher heat release rates before the arrival of the fire department. Additionally, our firefighters participate in more live fire training sessions each year at the county fire academy burn buildings than we did 15 years ago. This further exposes our members to soot and carcinogens generated during the live fire training. Our volunteer firefighters in Riverside have begun taking measures toward cancer reduction by completing fireground cancer awareness training at the station, which has resulted in new policies and equipment requiring our firefighters to perform gross decontamination with soap and water of their protective gear at the fire scene. This step alone is not enough and must be done in conjunction with environmental controls inside the fire station. The current building does not have the necessary cancer reduction controls to reduce the danger to our personnel, which are discussed below.

The current fire station lacks decontamination showers for the members to use after an incident, so that they do not transfer the cancer-causing by-products of fires into their personal vehicles and take into their homes. This contamination not only endangers the health of our members, but also puts their families at risk of exposure. The current fire station is also lacking a gear extractor/washer room for cleaning of firefighter protective clothing, which would also require upgrades to existing plumbing drains and electrical wiring to even install a bunker gear washer/extractor machine. In the current fire station, the members' firefighting gear is stored in the fire truck garage area, so each time the fire trucks start-up they exhaust cancer-causing by-products of the diesel exhaust that contaminates the gear putting members at a greater risk of cancer.

Why don't we refurbish the existing fire station instead of building a new one?

The current fire station was built in 1926. Refurbishing the current fire station has been considered by the Board of Fire Commissioners and the fire district's architect, but it was determined that refurbishment of a nearly 100 year-old commercial building would also be a costly option and not in the best interest of the taxpayers long-term. Some of these considerations include:

- ✓ The need for a new roof to stop continuous and on-going water leaks;
- ✓ The five large air conditioner units on the roof are over 30 years old and need to be replaced;
- ✓ Windows and walls collect water during heavy rain storms and snow fall, even after weatherproofing steps were done;
- ✓ Significant electrical and plumbing upgrades are needed;
- ✓ The current station needs an addition of a men's room on the second floor and a women's room on the first floor;
- ✓ The current fire station has no space or equipment that can be utilized as an Emergency Operations Center (EOC). An EOC is needed under the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to coordinate the efforts of township first responders including the fire department, police department, emergency medical services, public works, township government officials and emergency management personnel during the time of a local disaster or serious weather event.
- ✓ An elevator would need to be installed, along with other building upgrades relating to the Americans with Disabilities Act to achieve compliance;
- ✓ Building upgrades would be required to meet the current N.J. Uniform Fire Code;

Board of Fire Commissioners

Fire District No.1, Township of Riverside

P.O. Box 458 - Riverside, NJ 08075

- ✓ The fire station and its utility systems are not energy efficient, which has resulted in increased utility bills;
- ✓ There is a drop in the floor of the garage area and there is a structural deficiency in a load bearing wall and floor supporting a fire truck caused by ground settlement.
- ✓ There are visible structural cracks in exterior walls of the fire station, on both the upper and lower sections of the building. These structural cracks are in need of on-going sealing and repair to slow down further deterioration of the building.
- ✓ As part of a building renovation project, another fire engine garage bay would need to be constructed so that the two pumper trucks are not parked in-line behind one another, but instead each would be in their own garage bay to increase operational efficiency.

After taking all of the above into consideration, and the need to have a fire station that meets the demands of the modern-day fire service, the Board of Fire Commissioners believes that the construction of a new fire station is the best option and in the best interest of the taxpayers long-term.

Why haven't I heard about this project before now?

The Board of Fire Commissioners felt that bringing attention to the project closer to the bond referendum would ensure that the project would be front and center in the minds of the residents, increasing voter turnout for the referendum. The Board also felt that by offering multiple community information sessions at the fire station the week before the bond vote, it would also ensure that the information needed about the project would remain fresh in the mind of the voters, instead of being forgotten about if the project had been advertised and discussed 4-6 months ago. In hindsight, this may be an area that Board of Fire Commissioners could have improved upon by providing a project overview sooner in 2018 to explain the many reasons this project is needed, to ensure that our fire department evolves with the changing needs of the modern-day fire service. This area for improvement, however, does not change the fact that the fire station is in need of replacement for the many reasons listed above.

When and where are the upcoming community information sessions about the bond referendum?

There are several community information sessions scheduled on the upcoming bond referendum, dates and times below. They will be held at the current fire station located at 4 West Scott Street. Officials including a member of the Board of Fire Commissioners, the Clerk/Administrator of the Board, and one Riverside Fire Company Official will be on hand to provide station tours, display architectural drawings of the project and answer questions. Light refreshments will be available at each session.

Wednesday, October 17, 8 am - 10 am and 7 pm - 9 pm

Thursday, October 18, 8 am - 10 am and 6 pm - 8 pm

Friday, October 19 12:00 - 1:00 pm

The Fire Prevention Open House was rescheduled from this past Thursday due to concerns about rain storms that would have reduced the public turnout for the event, in addition we anticipated our members would be out responding to emergency calls for service. The rescheduled Fire Prevention Open House will be held

Board of Fire Commissioners

Fire District No.1, Township of Riverside
P.O. Box 458 - Riverside, NJ 08075

this Thursday, October 18, from 6:00 - 8:00 pm at the fire station at 4 W. Scott Street. Information about the fire station bond referendum will be available at this event.

Will the new fire station have a bar or liquor license?

While the current firehouse does have a small bar in the member's lounge, as many older firehouses built in the early to mid-1900s do, it is operated under a club license, issued by the N.J. Alcohol Beverage Commission, and has its own account separate from and not funded by the fire company treasury account. The bar area is open on a limited basis and is not utilized on a daily basis. The new proposed firehouse will not have a bar.

What is different about this referendum from the one in 2016?

The bond referendum for a new fire station in 2016 was for the construction of a two-story building that was designed to be used as the firehouse, with both Fire Company and Fire District offices on the second floor, as well as the Riverside Township Administrative offices on the first floor. The building would have been 20,930 square feet, and it would have cost \$5.6 million and been financed over a 20-year period at 3.65% interest with the average per residence annual impact of about \$136 a year, or \$11.33 per month.

The 2018 fire station referendum is for the construction of a one-story firehouse with both Fire Company and Fire District offices. The fire station would be approximately 13,500 square feet costing \$4.5 million and it would be financed over a 25-year period at 4% interest, with the average per residence annual impact of \$95.29 a year or \$7.94 per month. This building, as with the one proposed in 2016, would have a meeting room available to be scheduled for use by other community organizations.

When is the public vote of the bond referendum for the new fire station?

The special public vote for the fire station bond referendum has been publicly advertised as required by state law and has been approved to occur on **Saturday, October 20, 2018 from 2:00 - 9:00 pm at the fire station located at 4. W. Scott Street in Riverside.** All registered voters of Riverside Township are permitted to vote on the bond referendum.

Who can I contact if I have further concerns or need additional information about the fire station referendum?

For further information on the fire station replacement project, please contact either:

Richard G. Horton, Riverside Fire District No 1, Board of Fire Commissioners, Chairperson

Phone: 856-461-6251

Email: rhorton@riversidefire.org

Donald E. Nesbitt, Clerk/Administrator of the Board

Phone: 856-461-6251

Email: dnesbitt@riversidefire.org