

*“Who is the Visitor in Your Station?”
“And How Are They Saving You Money?”*

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Are the projected construction costs for your building project more than your Department’s budget can afford? A lot of questions, but in this day of escalating construction costs the answers to these questions become even more important. Let’s consider how the option of multiple facility users may be the key to making your construction plans a reality.

Whether you represent Fire, Rescue, EMS or all of the above, no one is overly enthusiastic about having another Department as a “room-mate”. However, many Departments have found that by soliciting and enlisting other facility users to join them in their project they are able to reduce their capital expenditures. The joint-use of a facility can be designed so that it is not as unappealing as it may sound.

There are many examples of how this concept has been successfully implemented. Fire Departments have provided additional facilities for EMS Departments, and vice-versa. Fire/Rescue Departments have provided additional facilities for Police, Parks & Recreation, and even Public Works Departments.

Just because multiple users are housed under one roof does not mean that they cannot have separate driveways/parking, separate entrances, and even separate heating and air conditioning systems. Often there are no interior means of access from one department to the other. However, the more circulation and support areas that can be shared the more you are likely to save costs. But zero shared space is a possibility.

So how does bringing another end user under the same roof save your Department money? First, since most Departments have separate capital improvement budgets, combining funds from two budgets will obviously allow more “construction” than two totally separate projects.

Second, if the additional end user adds substantial space to the facility an economy of scale applies. The more space you build, the less you will pay per square foot. For example, your Department needs to build 10,000 square feet. You enlist the Police Department who needs 5,000 square feet of substation at this location. The unit cost of 10,000 square feet may be \$150/sf. The unit cost of 15,000 square feet may be \$140/sf. In this example, you have automatically saved \$100,000 on your 10,000 square feet just because the building project has grown.

Third, your agreement with the partner Department may include a prorated share of utility and maintenance costs.

Fourth, you possibly can save money on programmed spaces and technologies by not duplicating these. Parking spaces, public toilets, training rooms, corridors, janitor closets and kitchens are all examples of spaces that can be jointly used with the right Department. Phone systems, computer network servers, copiers, printers, etc, are potential shared technologies.

Fifth, providing facilities for another Department with a time limit may provide you with growth space you will need in the future, at today's prices. For example, if Public Works needs space to park vehicles until they build their new facility in five years it may work great with your plans to accommodate their equipment in an additional bay that you could grow into within five years.

One of our projects currently under construction reflects a joint venture that seems to be a perfect fit for both parties. A Volunteer Fire/Rescue Department was in desperate need of new facilities. The rapidly growing city that their response area overlaps and supports needed another substation in approximately the same area. Everyone recognizes that the City will likely annex the Volunteer territory over the next twenty to thirty years. The result was that the Volunteer Department agreed to build enough extra apparatus bays for a City engine company, along with an additional sleep room. The City agreed to pay one-half of the mortgage payment over the next thirty years. At such a time as the City annexes the area the station will become their property and they will pay the full mortgage.

You may decide that sharing facilities is not something that you can live with. But recognizing the opportunities will only widen your project options.