

Ballot Issue

Frequently Asked Questions



About the Project

Q: Why does the District need a new fire station?

A: The current station was built over 50 years ago from a converted metal storage building. It was never designed to be a fire station. Today it fails to meet basic building and fire codes, provides inadequate space for 40 volunteers and 13 pieces of apparatus, exposes firefighters to carcinogens from poor ventilation, and cannot be cost-effectively maintained or upgraded.

A third-party engineering assessment ranked it as one of the worst buildings in the city's portfolio. The building immediately below it on that list was demolished. A new facility will address these conditions for the next 50 to 100 years.

Q: What will the new station include?

A: The new facility is designed to meet the functional and safety requirements of a modern fire station — not to be elaborate. It will include vehicle bays engineered for heavy apparatus, a decontamination system required by NFPA standards, isolated bunker gear storage to reduce carcinogen exposure, sleeping quarters for on-call volunteers, a training room, a maintenance workspace, and adequate storage for \$17 million in equipment that is currently at risk in a building that doesn't meet basic codes. Every element addresses a documented operational or safety need.

Q: How long has this been in the works?

A: The need for a replacement facility has been recognized for years. A professional Feasibility and Needs Assessment was completed in June 2025 detailing current facility conditions, future programming requirements, and construction cost estimates. The District has been working to develop a responsible plan that addresses the community's needs without asking for more than is necessary.

Q: Where will the new station be located?

A: The new station will be built on the current site, which the District already owns. The County is also contributing adjacent land. The existing building will be demolished as part of the project.

About the Cost

Q: Why does it cost \$35 million?

A: The \$35 million figure represents the all-in maximum project cost — including design fees, permitting, demolition of the existing structure, contingency reserves, and inflation protection, as well as the construction costs. The construction cost of the building itself is approximately \$26 million. The remaining costs are the standard soft costs associated with any public construction project of this scale. No public dollars will be spent beyond this maximum.

Q: What will this cost me personally?

A: For a home with a market value of \$300,000, the annual increase is approximately \$150, or about \$12.50 per month. For a \$500,000 home, it's approximately \$250 per year, or \$20.83 per month. For a \$750,000 home, approximately \$375 per year, or \$31.25 per month. These figures are calculated from the 8-mill levy increase on the assessed value of your property as determined by the Gunnison County Assessor. If you'd like a precise figure for your property, contact the County Assessor's office or visit the assessor's website and look up your property's assessed value.

Q: What if the project costs more than expected? Will we be on the hook for overruns?

A: No. The project will be delivered under a guaranteed maximum price contract through the design-build process. This means the construction firm is legally responsible for any costs that exceed the contract amount. If it costs more than the contract says, the contractor absorbs the difference — not the District and not taxpayers. This is fundamentally different from traditional government construction projects where overruns can and do happen.

Q: Why can't the cost be lower? Can't you build something simpler?

A: The District has received this feedback and has already modified the design in response to community input — the revised design is more contextually appropriate and less elaborate than the original rendering. However, there is a cost floor determined by what a modern, code-compliant fire station actually requires: engineered floors for 75,000-pound vehicles, NFPA-required ventilation and decontamination systems, training space for 40 volunteers, sleeping quarters for on-call personnel, and storage for 13 pieces of specialized apparatus. These aren't optional features — they are the functional requirements of a fire station that meets current safety standards. Trimming them produces a cheaper building that fails faster and has to be replaced sooner.

Q: Why is it more expensive than the new EMS building?

A: The EMS building houses paramedics and a small fleet of vehicles. A fire station is a fundamentally different facility: it has to accommodate 13 pieces of heavy apparatus, 40 volunteers, hazmat and swift water rescue gear, decontamination systems, training space, and on-site sleeping capability.

Every one of those elements requires engineering and construction that a standard building — including the EMS facility — simply doesn't. See our separate fact sheet, *What a Fire Station Actually Costs — and Why*, for a detailed breakdown.

Q: How long will the mill levy last?

A: The 8-mill increase runs for 20 years, after which 6.5 mills sunset. The remaining 1.5 mills will leave the District at 6 mills total — well below the 12.5 mills during the repayment period. The sunset provision is written into the ballot language and is legally binding.

About Grants and Alternative Funding

Q: Why can't you apply for grants instead of raising our taxes?

A: The District has pursued and will continue to pursue grants aggressively. However, grants available to rural fire districts — primarily FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Grant program and similar federal and state sources — are designed to fund equipment, apparatus, and training, not capital construction of a new facility.

The few grant programs that do cover construction provide only a small fraction of total project cost. A mill levy is necessary because a loan cannot be secured without a committed repayment source, and grants alone cannot provide that commitment.

Q: What about fundraising and private donations, like the hospital did for the EMS building?

A: The hospital's EMS building campaign was a remarkable community effort and a model worth learning from. The District will explore private fundraising and partnership with the Community Foundation and other organizations. However, the EMS campaign succeeded in part because the hospital has an established foundation infrastructure, a large donor base, and the ability to offer naming opportunities tied to a healthcare mission that resonates strongly with wealthy donors. A fire station capital campaign of \$26+ million would be among the largest private fundraising efforts in the valley's history. The District will pursue every available dollar from private sources, but cannot delay the project indefinitely waiting for fundraising to close a gap this large.

Q: What about a lodging tax?

A: A lodging tax sounds appealing because it shifts cost to visitors. In practice, the lodging tax revenue available in Gunnison County does not come close to generating the repayment capacity needed to secure a construction loan of this size. The math simply doesn't work. The District is not opposed to exploring lodging tax contributions as a supplemental source, but they cannot be the primary funding mechanism.

About Our Volunteer Firefighters

Q: Why do volunteers need sleeping quarters?

A: On-site sleeping quarters are the single most effective tool for reducing response time. A volunteer asleep at the station can be on a truck and rolling within two minutes of a call coming in. The same volunteer driving from home — even just five miles away — takes ten minutes or more to reach the station before the truck even leaves.

For residents in the outer district, that difference in initial response time is significant. Sleeping quarters also allow volunteers from outlying satellite stations to come in for training and remain available for calls — expanding the effective coverage of the whole department.

Q: Is the plan to eventually go to a paid fire department?

A: No. The District is committed to the volunteer model. A paid department would cost an estimated \$8 to \$10 million per year — every year, indefinitely. The volunteer department saves district taxpayers that amount annually while providing professional-quality service. The bunking rooms are designed to enhance the volunteer model, not replace it.

Q: How does the new station affect the ISO rating and my homeowner's insurance?

A: ISO — the Insurance Services Office — rates fire departments on a scale that insurance companies use to set homeowner insurance premiums. A better-equipped, better-staffed, faster-responding department can improve the District's ISO rating over time. An improved rating can translate to lower homeowner insurance premiums — potentially offsetting a portion of the tax increase. The District cannot guarantee a specific rating change, but the new facility's capabilities position the department to pursue that improvement.

About the Ballot

Q: Why does the ballot language seem so complicated?

A: Colorado ballot language for tax measures is governed by specific legal requirements that prioritize precision over readability. The District is required to include specific legal language, financial figures, and statutory references. We recognize this is frustrating. If you have a specific question about what any portion of the ballot means, contact the District directly.

Q: The City of Gunnison already passed its measure. Why do district residents need to vote again?

A: The City of Gunnison and the Gunnison County Fire Protection District are separate governing entities with separate electorates and tax bases. The City passed its portion of the measure — a parallel tax increase for City property owners — in November 2025. However, the ballot language for both measures requires both to pass before either takes effect. District voters outside city limits are voting on the District's portion. If the District measure does not pass, neither the City's measure nor the project moves forward.

Q: If this doesn't pass, what happens?

A: The District continues operating out of the current facility, which is already past its useful life and deteriorating.

- Equipment valued at approximately \$17 million remains housed in a building that doesn't meet basic codes.
- Firefighters continue working in conditions that expose them to carcinogens.
- Response times remain unchanged.
- And construction costs continue to rise, meaning the eventual cost of the project — when the building finally cannot be used at all — will be higher than it is today.