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[Letters to Editor](#)  
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[Gorge Weather](#)

March 08, 2006

[HOME](#)

[Local News](#)

[News Headlines](#)  
[Kaleidoscope](#)  
[Features](#)  
[Business](#)  
[Classtime](#)

[Local Sports](#)

[Sports Headlines](#)  
[Sidelines](#)  
[HRV Schedules](#)

[Lifestyle](#)

[Entertainment](#)  
[Opinions](#)  
[Letters to Editor](#)  
[Obituaries](#)

[News Links](#)

[W. Salmon](#)  
[Enterprise](#)  
[The Dalles Chronicle](#)  
[Oregon Live.com](#)  
[Bend Bulletin](#)  
[East Oregonian](#)

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## Sound barrier too much for C. Locks fire budget

By **RAELYNN RICARTE**

News staff writer  
 March 8, 2006

The Cascade Locks Planning Commission wants to protect neighbors from the noise/light of a new fire station — without financially overloading the “bare bones” construction budget.

Last week the appointed body took a second look at its original requirement for a 280-foot concrete masonry wall. The city council had directed in January that the issue be revisited because of the \$37,000-\$50,000 cost for the barrier.

Cascade Locks Fire Chief Jeff Pricher apologized for any hurt feelings caused by his appeal of the Nov. 9 commission decision. At the Feb. 28 remand hearing, he said there had been no choice because the expense of the wall would prevent the building of a new emergency service center.

Although he was not opposed to one day erecting a wall, Pricher said the money simply would not be available until the second phase of construction. He said, after more than a decade of planning, the city finally had the possibility of scoring \$500,000 in federal dollars to help impoverished communities.

And that would make it possible for the fire department to set up larger quarters on public land acquired from the county at the eastern edge of town.

However, Pricher said the city would not qualify for the grant if its construction costs exceeded its available budget. And the application for that money had to be turned in by March 31 — so the issue needed to be resolved before that date.



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[MHCC \(Gresham\)](#)  
[U of O](#)  
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[Gorge Classifieds](#)  
[HR County Library](#)  
[Oregon Blue Book](#)  
[Gorge Commission](#)  
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Cascade Locks Special Projects Coordinator Jay Feldman had whittled away at fire station plans until a model could be built for \$1.2 million. However, to accommodate all expenditures, he had allocated only \$2,438 for screening and landscaping.

"This whole project is budget dependent and this is the first time in 10 years that we have the possibility of getting most of the funding we need," said Pricher. "But we will not be competitive if we have an unbalanced budget. So, we're asking for some leniency on when the wall is to be constructed."

He reminded the commission that the fire department had many other immediate safety needs — including replacement of a brush rig that had exploded into flames with him inside several weeks earlier. Therefore, he said an earlier suggestion that a campaign be initiated to raise money for the wall had caused him more than a little consternation.

"When people are talking about fund-raising for a wall I have to say 'wow,' we have to do some prioritizing," said Pricher. "I beg the commission to take this into consideration when you come to your decision."

Commissioner Joann Wittenberg reminded Pricher that the job of the panel was to look toward the future. And, while there might currently be only one house behind the proposed 7,584 square foot structure, one day there could possibly be multi-family dwellings in that area.

She and the other commissioners felt that the quality of life for neighbors would be lessened by noise and lights from fire station activity.

"This commission is responsible to keep the best interests of the community at heart," said Wittenberg.

However, she and the other four members of the panel concurred that the aging fire station needed to be replaced. The existing building of about 3,584 square feet in the downtown business corridor was constructed in the 1920s of concrete blocks with no rebar. The walls are now held up by steel rods stretched from one side to the other.

Hood River County Building Inspector Dean Nygaard informed the commission that wood, and even dirt, provided a more effective sound barrier than masonry or concrete — and would cost considerably less. However, the commission determined there was not enough room behind the station to accommodate a 6-foot-tall earthen berm. And without that height, the lights from emergency vehicles would sweep over adjacent properties.

Both Pricher and Bob Willoughby, city administrator, believed the funding for a wall could be found within the next few years. They asked that the barrier not be required until the second phase of construction, when the size of the station increased to 13,480 square feet.

Pricher said if the casino were approved by federal officials, the tribes had pledged money to upgrade emergency facilities that could be used for the expansion — and completion of the wall.

The commission also said that, with the county gearing up to build a health services center next to the new fire station, perhaps the building of both walls could be coordinated to lower costs.

“I believe wholeheartedly that we need to let this project go through and put a timeline on completion of the wall,” said Commissioner Kris Miller.

At the end of a 90-minute debate, the commission gave the nod for the station to be built without having the wall erected at the same time. However, they said within two years of occupancy, the undertaking of phase two, or the county initiating its project, the wall needs to go up.

While the commissioners stated a unanimous preference for masonry concrete, they agreed to also consider less expensive options at that time.