

2-person fire station in South Tahoe may temporarily close

By Kathryn Reed

Fire station No. 2 has been the subject of conversations for years because it's so old (circa 1940s when it was part of the Lake Valley Fire Department) and inadequate.

A proposal being floated is to test closing the station for five days. At any given time only two people staff the building that is located on Highway 50 across from South Tahoe Middle School. An engineer and captain are there.

Under the plan South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Brian Uhler is contemplating the captain would go to Station 3 (by the Y) and the engineer to Station 1 (at Ski Run Boulevard-Pioneer Trail). Stations 1 and 3 have four people now.



South Lake Tahoe fire Station 2 may be closed on a trial basis. Photo/LTN file

By having two captains in one station, one would be in charge of the rig, the other the whole city.

When the three division chief positions were eliminated late last year it created a scenario where the incident commander is also in charge of an engine. This does not create an effective, safe way to handle emergency calls.

Uhler relayed how last week Engine 3 went to a rescue off Highway 89. The crew hiked in about 1.5 miles and lost radio contact. The shift commander was supposed to be in overall command of the city and he was out of reach.

Uhler is in consultations with staff to see if moving out of Station 2 would be worth the experiment. Debriefing afterward would determine if this would be something worth doing on a long-term basis.

“Response time will suffer in the sense of getting an engine on the scene,” Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News* if staffing is eliminated at Station 2.

As it is, one engine with two guys can't do much other than put out a trash can fire, lay lines and wait for others to arrive, so Uhler doesn't see the change hindering the ability to put out a fire. Ambulance service does not change if staffing at Station 2 changes.

In 2009, former Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti talked about getting rid of that station and building a facility at Lake Tahoe Community College. That concept is back on the table as the college looks for ways to expand its programs.

With new leadership at the college, the city and elsewhere, the reality of creating a training facility is more likely.

In 2009, then LTCC President Paul Killpatrick told this reporter he was concerned about having a training facility on campus because it is surrounded by forest.

Having a station at the college off Al Tahoe Boulevard would put firefighters in the same area they are now.

Problems with the current Station 2 include vehicle storage issues, no accessibility for the disabled, a dangerous situation for emergency vehicles to merge into traffic on Highway 50, conditions are lousy and modernization is out of the question.

Uhler expects to decide next week if he is going to do the trial closure at Station 2.