



GALLATIN COUNTY

MEMO

To: Amsterdam/Churchill Residents
From: Warren Vaughan, Planning Department 
Date: September 4, 2007
Re: Community Meeting Regarding Fire and Emergency Services Issues

Attached are the meeting notes from the August 30 Churchill/Amsterdam Neighborhood Planning meeting regarding *fire and emergency services* issues. The first attachment to this memo is the "Fire Department Overview" handed out by Dave Hoekema. My notes, from both Jim Cashell and Dave Hoekema, follow.

As stated at previous meetings, this is the second of four educational meeting as we prepare to start the formal planning process. We will have two more meetings over the next two months, all from 7:30 – 9:00 pm on the last Thursday of the month at the Amsterdam Rural Fire Department. The broad public involvement period will not begin until late fall, when many of the large landowners are available.

Thanks to everyone who came to the meeting, and thanks to the Fire Department for agreeing to be our hosts. Again, we've got the third of our four educational meetings on Thursday, September 27th at 7:30 PM at the Amsterdam Rural Fire Department. The topic will be *school issues*. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 582-3130 or email at Warren.Vaughan@gallatin.mt.gov.

**Notes from the August 30th Amsterdam/Churchill Neighborhood Planning Meeting
re: Fire/Emergency Service Issues**

Jim Cashell of the County Sheriff's Department

- Growth has already overwhelmed their department;
- They have gone from 15-20 events in a 24-hour period (when Sheriff Cashell first started) to 120-140 events in a 24-hour period;
- Staffing is their big issue;
- There is no formal impact fee adopted by the County to require new development to pay for impact to the Sheriff's Department. Currently, when a development is proposed, the Sheriff's office runs a formula and comes up with a per-lot fee they ask the developer to voluntarily give. A major issue with having a Sheriff's impact fee is that the legislature mandates it can only be used for capital items (such as offices and cars), rather than staffing, and staffing is their big issue.
 - While money for capital items is helpful, if they have no staff to man those items it does them no good.
- Currently have 5 deputies in Big Sky and two deputies in West Yellowstone;
- 7 people are sworn in for investigations;
- 28-32 officers patrol the Gallatin Valley.
- Realistically, the Sheriff's Office has no patrol presence in the daytime in the valley because they have so many other things to do. For example, much of their time is spent transporting inmates to other counties because our jail is not big enough.
 - Last year, Gallatin County paid \$312,000 to Broadwater County to house inmates. This is only the fee paid to Broadwater County for rent of the space; this does not include transportation fees or the salaries of officers transporting those prisoners. This year, Gallatin County will begin transporting prisoners to Choteau County as well.
- The bond for the new jail, another serious issue, will be on the ballot after the first of the year;
- Growth is causing serious infrastructure issues with the County: the Chamber of Commerce has put together numbers on what all the infrastructure upgrades in the County would cost. The total is over \$300 million.
- Another issue is that the State Judicial Committee says that Gallatin County needs a fourth judge; this will cause problems with housing the new judge. The County already has problems with the Law and Justice system. The building is old and there is no space.
- Churchill is a relatively quiet area. There are not that many people, and there are no bars or places that sell alcohol.
- When evaluating an area, you can't just look at the numbers of calls. You also have to look at the types of calls.
- Over time, and as the County has grown, the expectations of people have also increased. Many new residents expect a level of service that is above and beyond what emergency service providers have historically provided.

- The average response time is approximately 15 minutes, though Class I calls are answered in 5-7 minutes. Non-emergency calls can take much longer.
- Churchill is not patrolled during the day because of staffing issues.
- The Sheriff's Office has just recently been granted another deputy which allows them to form "work groups". This will allow a specific work group to focus on many of the administrative tasks that often make it impossible to patrol the area.
- At night, up to 7 deputies may be on duty and most are able to patrol.
- Housing is also an issue for young deputies who can't afford to own homes in the area.

Dave Hoekema of the Amsterdam Rural Fire Department

- The Fire Dept has been reviewing subdivisions over the past several years and is seeing a growing need for planning in the area;
- The Dept has been able to equip the station relatively well in the last few years;
 - All equipment is currently on a 20-year replacement cycle;
 - Several people put in 100-300 volunteer hours a year;
 - The Dept will need to get a new building in the next 10 years or so;
- With the current station and equipment, the Department's effective response area is within 5 miles of the station.
- The Department, and emergency services for the community, would benefit from a planning area that would focus growth into the core of Amsterdam and Churchill.
- Development along Norris Road has begun to cause concern because it is stretching the department thin; if more development occurs in this area, the Dept will need a new station in that area. This means they will also need equipment and volunteers to man the station.
- If Churchill is to become a town, one of the Dept's needs is for water systems to connect and coordinate. Existing and new infrastructure, such as water systems, hydrants, tanks, and fill site, need to work together;
- There is currently no plan for fire protection for community and commercial buildings (such as the school, church, and retirement center);
- Currently the Dept operates as a "defensive" department, meaning they focus on keeping fires contained in the building; they are beginning to train as an "offensive" department, meaning they could enter buildings for rescue.
- The area has not grown that much, and so there hasn't been a significant impact to date on the number of calls they're getting. Looking at other parts of the valley, however, shows them that this will change as Amsterdam Village and Churchill Northeast begin construction.
- As the Dept looks ahead, it wants to know how big it will need to be. Current call loads are manageable, but as soon as a dept gets to the 200-300 calls/day range, there will need to be changes with staffing (which takes money and people);
- Amsterdam Village will provide both impact fees and a pressurized water system with hydrants.

Following are questions the planning process needs to examine regarding fire and emergency services:

- Are there key road connections or improvements that could be made that would benefit provision of fire and emergency services?
- Should the plan policies focus growth within the core of Amsterdam/Churchill in order to maximize the efficiency of the existing fire department services, or should the plan focus on ways to provide service to new development along the Norris Road corridor? How much development is possible in the Norris Road vicinity given existing parcels?
- What needs to be done to begin coordinating water supply systems in the area?
- What should be done to remedy potential issues with new and existing public and community buildings? What provisions (such as state building codes) are already in place that would affect new structures?

Participants

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