

Sharing Your New Station May Save You Money



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By Ken Newell

While the overall economy has experienced a lack-luster performance since the Great Recession of 2008-2011, the construction industry is booming. If you are in construction, the benefits of the increased activity are bountiful. If you are planning to build...not so much. Many Departments are finding that the projected construction costs for their building projects are more than their budgets can tolerate. So many are seeking additional sources to supplement their insufficient capital funds. Let's consider how the option of multiple facility users may be the key to making your construction plans a reality.

No matter which public safety division your Department represents, 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, Public Works Departments, and even public library branches.

Even when multiple users are housed under one roof, it is often possible to have separate driveways and parking spaces, separate entrances, and even separate heating and air conditioning systems.

In many joint-use facilities, there is 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 in construction costs. But zero shared space is a possibility. So how does bringing another end user under the same roof save your Department money?



The Conway Public Safety Facility is a Design-Build project example of how two Departments can share the same building and save money.

The new two story structure houses the Fire Department Headquarters on the first floor, and the Police Department Headquarters on the second floor.

By combining the two departments into a single Public Safety Facility, allows for a joint use of common areas such as training rooms, conference rooms, day room, physical fitness area, and communications.

Additionally, the shared facility utilizes a joint public entrance and lobby. The design helped the City to save a considerable amount of money and space over having two separate facilities.

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

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

Fourth, 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 \$250 per sf. The unit cost of 15,000 square feet may be \$225 per sf. In this example, you have automatically saved \$250,000 on your 10,000 square feet just because the building project has grown, and not to mention the other saving potentials outlined above.

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 recently completed projects reflects a joint venture that seems to be a perfect fit for two different Departments. 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 recognized 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 bunk rooms. 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.

So how can two or more Departments peacefully coexist under one roof? There are many solutions, but let's discuss a couple of the more prominent ways this has been accomplished.

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If the second occupant needs relatively minimum space, yet with a clear, separate entry, then the building layout and exterior appearance can reflect both occupants and entry points. The decision can be made whether there will be any interior occupant circulation between the two areas or not.

If the available site is limited, and if both building occupants have significant space needs, a multi-story facility may be considered, which allows the separation of floors to serve as the natural separation between the different occupants.

If the available site allows for a single story facility, the occupant separation can be accomplished horizontally.

This option can more easily accommodate access to shared spaces between the occupants, while providing security with controlled access to limited portions of the facility.

If housing multiple occupants in the same building has very little security concerns, then the facility layout may not need to take controlled access into consideration. While duplication of some spaces may be desired for the separate occupants, access to those separate spaces may be unlimited.

You may decide that sharing facilities is not something that you can live with. But recognizing the opportunities will only widen your project options, and potentially provide the capital funds you need.



The project began with the demolition of an old hospital on the site. Great care was taken to preserve the heavily wooded lot of old-growth Live Oak trees. The new Public Safety facility closely mirrors the L-shape layout of the old hospital, to preserve its natural beauty.