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Firefighters put out spending proposal

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FORKS TWP. -- Firefighters are having trouble finding buildings to light on fire -- for training purposes.

That's why the fire department's five-year plan includes erecting a four-story training tower for fire drills.

"Firefighters need to train in facilities you can routinely burn in and take a beating and will still be standing the next day," said Deputy Fire Chief Bryan Weis.

Without the facility, the department must find empty buildings to torch. Sometimes a developer who purchases a new property might dispose of an old house on the tract and allow firefighters to conduct drills there, said Fire Chief Tim Weis.

Years ago, the department built a one-story concrete building for drills. But it's now unsafe to use for training because firefighters set it on fire so many times, the roof is unstable and the structure is crumbling, officials said.

Their only other option is basically a tree house where firefighters light barrels on fire and simulate combating a second-story fire.

A training tower is in Washington Township, but fire officials said it would be unsafe to take fire equipment so far away from Forks Township.

In 2008, the department wants to erect a \$350,000 training tower with special concrete walls that can withstand multiple burnings.

The Community Fire Company has committed \$175,000 to the project, the township plans to pitch in \$75,000 in 2008 and about \$100,000 could come from a variety of sources in the future, such as impact fees or loans, said supervisor David Hoff.

The volunteer fire department's plan for 2006-2010 focuses on training. Officials say training becomes more pressing each year as the population grows and call volume increases.

The township's population has jumped 36 percent in the past four years, from 8,419 people in 2000 to about 11,500 in 2004, according to the plan. The number of housing units jumped 42 percent in that period, from 3,159 to 4,401.

Training hours have increased from 1,738 hours in 2000 to 4,011 in 2004 and are expected to climb to 7,251 in 2005.

The five-year plan calls for spending \$290,000 for equipment. The plan calls for allocating \$145,000 in emergency services taxes toward the expenses each year. The emergency services tax has generated about \$300,000 this year.

Replacing two circa-1980s pumper trucks at a combined cost of \$825,000 is also part of an ongoing apparatus replacement plan. Funds come from the emergency services tax and partly from loans, which the

township pay from its general fund, Hoff said.

Supervisors plan to decide on the plan during their November 3 meeting. The fire department consists of 60 volunteer firefighters. Fire officials said the plan will have no impact on the township's general fund.

"I think the proposal is aggressive, do-able and will provide township residents with the best coverage they can get from a volunteer fire department," said supervisor David Hoff.

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