



2 new fire stations waiting on design and site

By **PHIL ATTINGER**

STAFF WRITER

Highlands County plans to have two new fire stations in the next two years.

They've been in the works for a few years already: A brand new station beside Spring Lake Improvement District and a replacement station for Lake Placid Station 36.

Spring Lake

The Spring Lake station, to be called Station 20, will go in along Haywood Taylor Boulevard just west of Spring Lake and southwest of Sebring

International Raceway.

It will have ready access to the Raceway, Sebring Regional Airport, Spring Lake and Lorida on U.S. 98.

What it doesn't have yet, according to Highlands County Public Information Officer Karen Clogston, is a standard design for the station. That will take another couple of months, she said.

Right now, the Lunz Group in Lakeland is working on a prototype design, Clogston said. When finished, she said, the standard design can be customized to add on living quarters and vehicle bays, depending on each

location's needs.

It's needed, Clogston said, because as the county continues to grow, fire stations will need to add on to meet the needs.

A former chief of Highlands County Fire Rescue, Marc Bashoor, talked about having such a template, but Clogston said he didn't have one drawn up yet when he retired.

The county went through another administration under Laney Stearns before the current one, and a couple of project managers have rotated through staff, as well.

Clogston said one of the county's engineers now has this as a prime task, leaving County Engineer J.D. Langford to focus on roads and former county engineer, now Director of Critical Infrastructure Clinton Howerton Jr. to focus on drainage and design of a new landfill cell.

The county has \$3 million in grant funding for the Spring Lake station from the Florida Bureau of Fire, Arson and Explosives Investigations — formerly referred to as the State Fire Marshal.

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After getting a prototype, the county will then need to create a master plan, Clogston said, to customize the building to the site. That, plus getting all the necessary permits will add on another six months, at least, Clogston said.

Lake Placid

As for Lake Placid Station 36, both the county and Town of

Lake Placid have begun looking for a new site, as reported in the Highlands News-Sun on Nov. 26.

County officials said Wednesday what Town Councilman Ray Royce reported to the Town Council this month: That a proposed site on Hillcrest Avenue, town-donated land between Karlson Law Group and Highlands Cove Apartments, does not have enough room to accommodate the fire station they need.

As it is, the site can't accommodate Ladder 36, Clogston said, which already has difficulty navigating around the current site off Interlake Boulevard. Not having that truck on site would affect the Insurance Services Office (ISO) Fire Score for the town and surrounding area, raising insurance rates.

"We will start a tentative timeline once we have a definitive site," Clogston said.

As of Thursday, they hadn't found a site.