



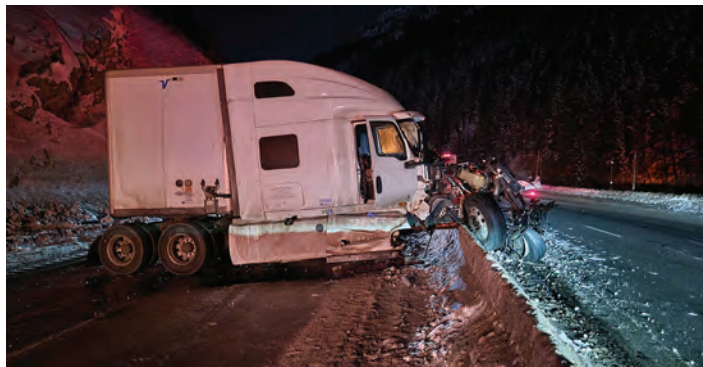
Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue Newsletter

www.fortellisfire.org

Summer 2023

Chief's Corner

It's been a very exciting year for Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue! We broke ground on our new station last October and construction began very shortly after and has continued throughout the winter. Our general contractor is projecting that the project should be completed by mid-September. The new address is 3041 Bozeman Trail Road, just about ¾ of a mile west of our current station. We are starting to prepare plans for the move which should begin around September 15th. The new station will have modern amenities, five long bays to house all our equipment plus offer some room for expansion as our service area and needs grow. We will also have a state-of-the-art training room which will also act as a meeting space for use by our residents as needed. We are extremely excited to move into this new station and sure that all of you will be proud of the new home for Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue.



Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue volunteers protect the dangerous Bozeman Pass section of I-90 responding to many crashes like this one in January, 2023.

As our department grows so does our call volume. This past year your fire department logged 302 calls with motor vehicle crashes and medical calls leading our overall incident volume. Our portion of Interstate 90, which spans from approximately the East Main Street exit to the top of the Bozeman Hill, is arguably one of the most crash-prone sections of the Montana Interstate system. Fort Ellis prides itself on our ability to respond and safely handle these incidents efficiently. Secondly, the majority of our firefighters are medically-trained to handle all emergency medical calls within our service area.

Finally, it's time for me to say so long to you as Chief. After 13 years leading this amazing department, it's time for me to retire. My wife, Meg, and I hope to really enjoy our retirement



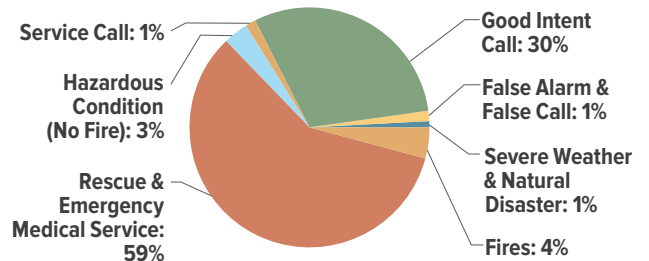
Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue Chief Mike Cech

by traveling more and spending time in Arizona in the winter. I'm fortunate to turn over the reins to Frank Boynton, my current Assistant Chief of Operations. Frank has been with the department since 2016 and an assistant chief for the past several years. I'm very proud of what we've been able to accomplish as a department during my tenure as Chief and have all confidence in Frank to continue that tradition. I'm not leaving the department and will continue to provide guidance to new leadership along the way.

Please remember that your firefighters are volunteers and all have a passion to do the best they possibly can to make our service area safe and to respond as needed to any emergency. Please tell them "Thank you" whenever you get a chance.

Mike Cech, Fort Ellis Fire Chief

2022 Incident Type Breakdown



Total number of incidents in 2022 302
Total hours of Personnel Training in 2022 3,212

Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue New Station Update

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our new station fundraising campaign! Thanks to the generosity of many Fort Ellis residents, local businesses and area grantors, we have raised \$985,000 for the new station. Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue protects 59 square miles, 3400+ residents, many local businesses, four schools, and \$1+ billion in property values - not to mention all of your irreplaceable pictures and personal mementos. This project was critical as our current station is structurally unsound, built on a flood plain and the lease expires in 2024. We are in the final stages of the campaign and plan to wrap up our efforts once we hit the \$1M mark.

Some of the numerous key benefits of the new station include:

- Right-sizing the station to store Fort Ellis vehicles, increasing vehicle lifespan, and reducing maintenance costs.
- Improving the health/safety of our volunteer firefighters thanks



to a dedicated turnout/gear room, decontamination station and a ventilation system to remove exhaust and toxins.

- Securing continued fire and EMS services to YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, the I-90 corridor, and the thousands of acres of recreation that border the area we serve.
- The new community/training room will serve as a neighborhood gathering location for HOA meetings, etc.

We thank you for your support of this project and hope you will consider purchasing a personalized, engraved brick for the community area near the flagpole fronting the new station. These bricks will be a testament to the strength of our community coming together to build Fort Ellis' new station and honor our volunteer firefighters who give their time, talents, and resources to serve our neighbors and keep them safe.

FEFR Says Goodbye While Also Saying Hello

Volunteer-staffed organizations have regular turnover both welcoming new members while also saying goodbyes. This past year has been no different, though we saw the retirement of three longstanding leaders, which was more than usual. The department also added two great new volunteers as well.

Three command staff members, Steve Buckner, Justin Schnelbach and Laine McNeil, all retired from service definitely leaving a hole after serving for 18, 15 and 13 years respectively. Steve also served as an assistant chief of operations in addition to training officer during his tenure. Each received a letter of commendation from Chief Mike Cech coupled with well-wishing from all department members.

“We have some big shoes to fill with these guys stepping away,” said Buck Taylor, assistant chief for personnel. “I had the pleasure of serving with each of these fine gentlemen on many incidents over the years and both our residents and volunteers have been lucky to benefit from their leadership, acumen and care for 36 years of combined service.”

Two other department members, Tim Pilewski and Ben Refling, also stepped down after moving away from the area.

And while goodbyes always are hard, welcoming two new members helps to fill that void with new energy and enthusiasm.



Kevin Lessard has been an excellent addition as he comes with firefighting experience from two volunteer departments in his native Vermont. Kevin manages Triple Tree Ranch when he is not running calls with us.



Charles “Carlos” Beasley rounds out the recruit class and is excited to learn everything he can. Carlos is a PhD student in chemistry at MSU and lives just up the street on Canyon View Road.

Please help us welcome them to the department!

Are you interested in learning more about volunteering? Visit us at www.fortellisfire.org or contact Assistant Chief Buck Taylor at btaylor@fortellisfire.org.

FEFR Board of Trustees to Ask County Commission for Fee Increase

Thanks to the generosity of many of our service area residents, our new fire station at 3041 Bozeman Trail Road is fully-funded and expected to be complete in early September. Your volunteer firefighters will occupy the building in mid-September to begin answering 911 calls.

The Fort Ellis Fire Service Area Board of Trustees now is turning its attention to funding the replacement of our aging fleet of firefighting apparatus. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is the governing body for firefighting and recommends retiring firefighting apparatus at 15 years of age. In our fiscally-constrained environment, we are attempting to replace our apparatus when they approach 20 years but, in some cases, closer to 25-years-old. In accordance with our apparatus acquisition strategy, we recently purchased two new trucks. The first, a new command truck, is a GMC 4WD pickup and replaces our 2004 Suburban which has been moved into reserve status. The second is a new wildland engine replacing a 2001 truck. Fort Ellis used a DNRC partnership where a local fire department purchases the cab and chassis and the DNRC installs the firefighting pump, tank and plumbing. This DNRC program allowed Fort Ellis access to a more reliable truck for about \$30,000 including the sale of the older truck.

In order to fund future purchases of fire/rescue apparatus, the board recently presented a resolution to the Gallatin County Commission requesting a fee increase of \$250 per year, from \$400 to \$650. The County Commission denied our request, stating that they wanted us to demonstrate more widespread public noticing as well as a desire to investigate the process of converting to a fire service district from our current fire service area model as they see the district as a more equitable funding mechanism for the future.

A fire district is funded by a tax mill rate levy on the value of property compared to the current flat rate fee. This allows for a progressive fee model meaning the higher the property value, the higher the fire service fee. It shows the potential to provide the necessary funds to support and sustain our fire department. The challenge with our current flat rate funding model is the

need to fund the department puts a larger burden on our residents with more modest resources. This was a key concern for the County Commissioners. In addition, as a district, there would be fees collected on vacant land parcels, which is not the case currently as a service area.

With that said, there is still a current need for additional funding to continue to provide the excellent service everyone in the Fire Service Area expects and deserves. A fee increase is required to fund our vehicle and equipment acquisition accounts to meet the required replacement timetable for all apparatus. We continue to try and be creative in how we receive enough funding for this apparatus by selling aging trucks, writing grants, and securing lower cost trucks through partnerships with the DNRC. Unfortunately, federal grants are highly competitive and rarely funded at the level needed. Our current, and only, structure fire engine is a 2004 model soon to reach 20-years-old. It must be replaced before it reaches its mandatory retirement age of 25 years. With the ever-increasing cost of new apparatus, a new structure engine costs at least \$750,000, so it is imperative that we can fully fund our vehicle replacement reserve accounts. Without a structure fire engine we would not be able to respond to any structure fire calls in our district.

The Board of Trustees and department leadership will be returning to the County Commission on August 22, 2023, to respond to their initial feedback and again request a fee increase of \$250. The meeting will occur on Tuesday, August 22, 2023, at 9:00 am in the Gallatin County Commission room on the third floor of the County Courthouse, 311 W. Main Street. We ask that residents support this important increase by writing letters to the County Commission and/or appearing during the meeting and making public comment.

Everyone at Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue thanks our customers – all of you – for your continued support of your local, volunteer fire department. We stand ready to continue serving you with excellent emergency services into the future.



A Fort Ellis firefighter assists extinguishing a structure fire providing mutual aid to Hyalite Fire Department.

Visit us at www.fortellisfire.org for:

- **Burn permit information**
- **Volunteer opportunities**
- **Emergency preparedness**
- **Blue reflective address signs**

Or scan the code at right using your smartphone!





Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue

Newsletter

Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue
3041 Bozeman Trail Rd.
Bozeman, MT 59715

CHECK OUT OUR NEWLY DESIGNED WEBSITE:

www.fortellisfire.org

[f/fortellisfire](https://www.facebook.com/fortellisfire) [ig/fortellisfire](https://www.instagram.com/fortellisfire)

EMERGENCIES

- DIAL 911
- TEXT 911 is available in Gallatin County. We urge the community to always call 911 when possible, but to use this service when that is not feasible.

For non-emergencies:

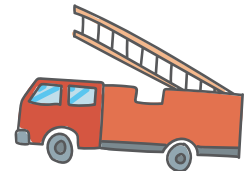
- Call 406-587-0236
- Email info@fortellisfire.org

Are you interested in learning more about volunteering or other ways you can help Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue? Visit us at www.fortellisfire.org or contact Assistant Chief Buck Taylor at btaylor@fortellisfire.org.

SAVE THE DATE!



Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue Annual Picnic Sept. 28!



Thursday, Sept. 28
5:00-8:00 pm
(Rain or Shine)

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Fort Ellis Fire Station
3041 Bozeman Trail Road

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**Come and tour
the new fire station!**

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Donations of \$5/person help to defray costs are appreciated.

Join Fort Ellis Fire/Rescue
for our annual picnic!

- BBQ | Burgers | Hot dogs
Veggie burgers | Drinks
- Please bring a side
or dessert to share!