

# Architecture students will design fire stations

## Work is part of University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program

By **Nicole Ginley-Hidinger**  
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The dining room area in Medford's Fire Station 2 acts as a workspace, a meeting space and occasionally an exercise room. It fits about two people comfortably, which causes problems during the 8 a.m. shift change when there are about six people working.

The fire station on West Eighth Street was built in 1951, when fire trucks were still Ford Centrals with rounded headlights and the hoses were placed on top. The station hasn't changed much since those days, except for a garage that houses a bigger fire truck. The current firefighters agree that it's time for a new building.

Medford Fire-Rescue has an \$11.4 million budget to rebuild fire stations 2 and 3, another station in need of renovations on Siskiyou and Highland, next to Bear Creek Park. In addition, there are major renovations planned for Station 4 and minor remodels of Station 6. In the next couple of years, they also hope to do a major remodel of Station 5. In short, all of Medford's fire stations are slated for either renovation or remodeling.

"We've been waiting for these fire stations a lot longer than (I've worked here)," says Justin Bates, the deputy chief of operations and a 16-year veteran of Medford Fire-Rescue. "All of us who work here are super-excited to see these fire stations get built."

That's where professors Virginia Cartwright's and Jim Givens' Architectural Design studio at the University of Oregon comes in. In just a few months, the dozens of students in the Architectural Design studio will have come up with several potential fire station designs for Medford to choose from.

The project is part of the Sustainable City Year Program, which links the students of the University of Oregon with an Oregon city, county, special district or partnership of governments for an entire academic year. This year, Medford will receive assistance with its sustainability goals through the work of student classes across UO.

This year, more than 400 students will work on 15 to 20 projects, devoting an estimated 40,000-plus hours of work to helping a Medford transition to a more sustainable future.

Each student in the Architectural Design class is working to create a plan for one of the firehouses, which means that there will be about six to eight ideas for each station. Throughout the process, students will visit and discuss the projects with Medford Fire-Rescue and Medford city staff.

"I feel the students are pretty open-minded," says Gordon Sletmoe, deputy fire chief. "I like the idea that we're getting multiple potential designs. I like the variety."

On Jan. 10, the architecture students traveled to Medford to look at the current fire stations and their development sites, and to talk with the firefighters about aspects they find important in the design of a new station.

"Fire stations in the past have been built without much thought for the firefighters that have to work in them," says Bates. "For example, response time is a big deal for us. It's really important that we are able to get the firemen on the fire engine and out the door as quickly as we can. So, I'm excited to see these fire stations get built with that in mind."

David Jones, a student in Cartwright's class, signed up for the course to get the opportunity to work on a project in his home neighborhood, about a mile from the house he grew up in.

"I thought it would be great to do this project because I'm from here," Jones says. "I'm giving back to the community that has already given so much to me."

He knew about the project from the attention it had gotten in the community. He was also familiar with the new site for Station 2, which is near the intersection of Stewart Avenue and South Columbus Avenue in a largely residential neighborhood. However, the visit still changed some of his predetermined ideas about which way to take his design.

"There's a lot more to take into account for designing a fire station than I had originally anticipated," he says. "My initial thought was to have the lockers in the garage so that it's easy access to throw on your suit, jump on the truck and go. But you learn that the diesel fumes really hurt and damage the equipment. There's stuff like that that I didn't know about."

The new firehouses will be designed to be silver LEED certified so the buildings will be sustainable and energy-efficient.

"In this case they're really preaching sustainability aspects, which is great," Jones says. "That is one thing that the Department of Architecture is really known for, their sustainability."

At the end of the term, students will present their plans to members of Medford Fire-Rescue and the community.

"We're going to sit down with (an architecture firm) and say, here's all these designs we got, here's the ones we really like, here's some components of the other ones we like, and here's some other ones that as good as they are, they're not really what we need right now," says Sletmoe. "Then we're going to find out how we can incorporate them into an architectural engineering plan."

Medford Fire-Rescue anticipates hiring an architect within the next 60 days and beginning design work. Construction will begin sometime later this year.

Since the fire stations are all expanding to 10,000 square feet or more, the plans will include space for a large dining/kitchen area that can comfortably fit everyone at shift change.

"We have been discussing the need for replacement fire stations for years," says Sletmoe. "The need is greater now than it has ever been in the past. We are excited that this project is moving forward and happy the University of Oregon is partnering with us on it."

Nicole Ginley-Hidinger is a senior at the University of Oregon, majoring in journalism. She plans to graduate in the spring and hopes to pursue a career in sports journalism.