



[Home](#) > Building for Search and Rescue moves forward

Building for Search and Rescue moves forward

By Camden Easterling - Enterprise Staff Writer

With funding expected to be in place before long, the Park County Sheriff's Office is moving ahead with plans to construct a new facility for its Search and Rescue operations.

Commissioners and Sheriff's Office officials say they anticipate borrowing the funds from a state loan program. County officials have already secured a \$700,000 loan through the program but recently determined they needed additional money.

Last week, Park County commissioners voted unanimously to award a construction bid to General Contractors Construction Company Inc. of Billings. The company was the low bidder for a construction of a 7,000-square foot facility that would have in one place room to store the pieces of equipment, from boats to snowmobiles, that Search and Rescue now has in various buildings and garages around the county. The new building would be located on county-owned land near the Sheriff's Office's shooting range east of Livingston.

The building also would have space for Search and Rescue to use as a command center when running operations. Plus, the Sheriff's Office, which oversees Search and Rescue, would have room there to conduct training exercises and would allow some public use of the facility.

General Contractors had the low bid, coming in at just more than \$759,000. That price includes all of the options the county had hoped to put into the facility, officials said at a meeting last week.

In late February, Sheriff's Office leaders and the commission reviewed the numerous submitted bids and found them to be higher than cost estimates they had researched before putting the project out to bid. They considered cost-saving measures such as cutting some options like security lighting and fencing, as well as having a county maintenance employee do some of the finish work.

However, they decided SAR workers would be best served by a building that has all the options. And they determined the maintenance worker has enough tasks to juggle without adding finishing a building to his plate.

The county had been approved for a \$700,000 Montana Department of Commerce InterCap loan. After looking at the bid package, county officials determined they needed additional money to cover construction, architecture and engineering fees, plus a 5 to 10 percent contingency, SAR Coordinator Wendy Wood said last week.



County officials talked to InterCap administrators and were told they could ask for additional money, County Finance Director Lani Hartung said last week.

Wood said the county will look at the final numbers but likely will ask InterCap for an extra \$150,000 to \$180,000.

The county plans to pay the loan back by using interest from a \$9 million fund created by a settlement with Burlington Northern Santa Fe. In 1999, BNSF paid Park County to settle a lawsuit over the corporation's responsibilities for cleaning up toxic sludge it dumped at the landfill in the 1970s and 1980s. The fund has accrued around \$115,000 in interest annually in recent years.

The Sheriff's Office expects the construction will be complete by the end of summer 2013.

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