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Goodwins Mills FD receives federal grant

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City Editor

LYMAN — The Goodwins Mills Fire Department got word Wednesday that they have received a major construction grant for improvements and expansion of the fire station.

The Department of Homeland Security has awarded \$879,753 to the department, under the Fire Station Construction Grant program. The funding is being distributed through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

"We've been waiting for it for a long time," said GMFD Chief Rodney Carpenter, who was glad to hear the news.

The department, which serves Lyman and Dayton, applied for the grant in June 2009, with the help of Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission.

In November, Carpenter said

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he was asked for direct deposit information for the funds. That request was promising, but when he didn't hear back within a few weeks, he began to doubt that the department had won the grant.

"Now here it is in February and it's like, 'What? Really?'" he said.

The grant will be used to construct an addition to the fire station on Goodwins Mills Road in Lyman that will provide sleeping quarters, an exercise room and a full kitchen. The station will also see several improvements to bring it up to the National Fire Protection Association code, he said.

"It's a tough economy and we're trying to keep the tax burden down, but on the same token, we can't go backwards," said Carpenter. "This three quarters of a million will help."

A new heating and ventilation system, vehicle exhaust extrication system and a sprinkler system will all be installed with the funds. The sprinkler system will be the most involved, since the town does not have public water, said Carpenter. The department will have to drill a separate well and install a pump and tank for the

system — but the investment will serve as an example.

"It's hard to make somebody else do that when we're not doing it ourselves," he said of the sprinklers.

The grant will also be used to install a fueling station, gender-specific bathrooms that will replace the single toilet now available, and make the building handicapped accessible.

The department has contributed \$100,000 as the local share of the grant, said Carpenter, partly through investment of funds from the Oscar Rundgren estate — a former assistant chief.

Carpenter said he expects that the project will be well covered by the grant and may even come in below previous estimates, due to the poor economy. Any funds not used in the construction project will be returned to the federal government, he said.

He hopes to go out to bid soon and break ground on the project this spring.

"This grant funding will allow the Goodwins Mills Fire Department to make necessary improvements to its facilities, and to strengthen preparedness and response capabilities," said U.S. Sens. Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, in a statement. "It is important to ensure that

our first responders have the resources they need to better serve their communities."

Goodwins Mills Fire Department is currently a non-profit corporation and has two full-time firefighters and about 45 volunteer firefighters. The department serves about 5,600 residents of Lyman and Dayton.

Recently, a committee made up of citizens of both towns has been working on plans to change GMFD into a municipal department or a fire district, which would allow wider access to grants and give voters more control on how money is spent at the department.

As currently proposed, said Carpenter, the change would include a request for a full-time fire chief starting in September and an additional full-time firefighter to begin in January 2011. He said the department has applied for a grant to help the towns transition into funding these positions.

Public hearings are expected to begin soon on the committee's proposal to change GMFD into a municipal department, said Carpenter, with a view toward a public vote in June.

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