

Cross Mills Volunteer Fire Department  
and the  
Cross Mills Fire Station

The Cross Mills Volunteer Fire Department was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1938 to protect the homes and businesses in the Cross Mills area of Charlestown. With the help of an active Ladies Auxiliary, members raised funds to purchase a fire truck and build a station in 1939.

As the community grew the need for fire protection grew. Fund raising activities (bingo, community breakfasts, raffles, etc.) were used to purchase additional fire trucks, fire fighting equipment, additions to the building, truck repair/maintenance, and for volunteer training.

Several additions extended the original station to accommodate expanded services including the Charlestown Ambulance Corps for a time. Newer, larger fire trucks required an extension of the truck bay portion of the building in the 1970s.

Volunteer members of the Cross Mills Fire Dept. were called upon to fill rolls as firefighters, fundraisers, truck mechanics, and building maintenance. As our community changed, fewer members worked in the Charlestown area and their time became more and more precious. It became increasingly difficult to find volunteers who could contribute the amount of time needed to fill all of these rolls.

In 1979 the Charlestown Fire District was formed. The Fire District began collecting a tax from property owners in Charlestown. The Fire District took over the responsibility for purchasing fire trucks, fire-fighting equipment, and for providing fire fighting training. The Cross Mills Volunteer Fire Dept. maintained ownership of the Cross Mills Fire Station and received rent from the Charlestown Fire District for housing the now district owned fire trucks. A similar arrangement was made with the Charlestown/Richmond Volunteer Fire Dept. and their station, which was located in the village of Shannock. This arrangement worked well for a time, but the burden on maintaining the fire stations took its toll on the volunteers.

In 2004 the Charlestown Fire District built a station at the corner of Rt. 2 and Rt. 112. The trucks and equipment were moved from the Charlestown/Richmond station. The Charlestown/Richmond Volunteer Fire Dept. still exists and its volunteer members staff the station. The Fire District through the fire tax supports the expenses of the station and its trucks and equipment. Standard models of modern fire trucks are larger and the new station was designed to accommodate them.

The Cross Mills Fire Station is not large enough to house new trucks. The existing fire engines housed at Cross Mills that are used in structure fires are 20 and 26 years old. While they still have useful life and will be refurbished, they will need to be replaced in the coming years. In 2006 the Charlestown Fire District hired a consultant to determine the

most economical course of action: renovate the existing building, demolish and build a new station on the existing site, or purchase property nearby and build a new station on the new site. The consultant's report was clear that the most economical solution was to build on a new site.

This past year the Fire District purchased two lots down the street from the existing Cross Mill station and formed a building committee to plan for the construction of a new station. When completed the trucks and equipment will be moved from the existing station into the new and the Cross Mills Volunteer Fire Dept. members will staff the new station.

Our community certainly has changed since 1938. It is much more difficult to find and keep volunteers who are willing to commit the many hours that it takes to train and respond to emergencies. State and federal rules require constant training. Emergency calls come at all hours of the day and night. With fewer volunteers working in Charlestown a large burden falls on those who are around during the day.

The building committee began its work with the architect by looking carefully at the present Cross Mills station. What functions/activities took place? How much space is needed for the trucks and other equipment? What might be needed in the future? What areas in the old station were not needed in the new?

From this assessment we came up with a list of requirements for the architect to use in designing the building. It should include:

- A garage area for 4 fire trucks and an open bay for trailers and repairs
- A mechanical work area
- Space for firefighter gear storage
- A wash area for contaminated gear
- An office for the chief to complete reports and store records
- A meeting training room
- A physical fitness room
- Men's and women's bathrooms
- A sitting room for volunteers

Meeting this list of needs resulted in the building that you see represented in the plans.