

WHITFIELD COUNTY BREAKS GROUND ON COHUTTA FIRE STATION 11

SPLOST funds being used to pay for \$1.5 million facility, which is expected to lower insurance premiums drastically for homeowners in the town

By **MITCH TALLEY**

Whitfield County Director of Communications



Whitfield County Fire Station 11 should be up and running in Cohutta by mid-2018, according to Fire Chief Ed O'Brien.

A group of Whitfield County and Town of Cohutta leaders gathered Monday afternoon for a groundbreaking ceremony for the new station, which is being constructed at 5268 Cohutta/Varnell Road with Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds.

"We are so excited about this fire station," Commission Chairman Lynn Laughter told the large group that gathered for the ceremony, "and I appreciate Chief O'Brien and his staff that had so much input into it. Thank you to the citizens for voting in the SPLOST because that's how we were able to afford to do this."

The 7,800-square-foot facility, budgeted at about \$1.5 million, will feature three bays for trucks, along with living quarters for up to six firefighters, bathrooms, offices, and a room for turnout gear. Once in operation, the station, like the other 10 in the county, will have two firefighters on duty 24 hours a day. Cohutta's volunteer fire department will also continue to help answer calls.

Cohutta Mayor Ron Shinnick expressed his appreciation to the county for its help in making the fire station a reality.



“To get these kinds of things done in small municipalities, it really takes a partnership and understanding each other’s needs and how we can work together to make things like this happen,” Shinnick said, “because the bottom line for me is that we want to help our citizens and provide the best service possible to them. This is really answering the need for all our citizens in this end of the county.

“I think this is remarkable,” the mayor continued, “that with this project at about \$1½ million and the sewer project which is just up the road and is going to be coming right in front of the new fire station, we’re looking at a total of about a \$2.1 or \$2.2 million investment in the infrastructure of the Town of Cohutta.”

That investment is expected to pay off nicely for local property owners. Currently, Cohutta has an ISO fire rating of 9 or 10 for property owners, but O’Brien says that rating should plummet to a 3 next year, resulting in much lower homeowner’s insurance premiums for Cohutta.

“We’re glad the Board of Commissioners gave us the opportunity to do the SPLOST,” O’Brien said. “That’s where this money is coming from – not our individual property taxpayers, it’s from anyone who comes into Whitfield County and spends money at our local businesses. That gives us the tax revenue to build this station. It’s actually a win-win for the community.”

The chief expressed thanks to Cohutta for donating the 2-acre site for the station, helping to lower the cost of construction.

Also on hand for the ceremony were commissioners Harold Brooker, Roger Crossen, Greg Jones, and Barry Robbins, Cohutta council members Sandy Claybourne, Greg Fowler, and Shelia Rose, and Dalton-based architect Ken Harless and contractor Allan Felker.

“This is great – we get a chance to design a station in our own hometown,” Harless said. “We’ve designed a lot of fire stations, and no two of them are alike. We’ve worked with Chief O’Brien and his staff, and I’ll tell you that every time we sat down, it was budget, budget, budget and low-maintenance, low-maintenance, low-maintenance. So we took what I think is a great, great design working with these guys. It’s going to be extremely functional, going to look real nice. It’s not a Taj Mahal – the money’s gone into function.”