

FORT MCKAY FIRE HALL

by LAURA NEWTON



The community of Fort McKay is set to become home to a new fire hall, one that has not only been developed for the community, but by the community as well. “There are many past and present members of the Fort McKay community who have played a critical role in the conceptual discussions,” says regional fire chief Jody Butz. “We want the community to feel safe and secure in seeing the building and knowing that they were instrumental in its design.”

As functional and purposeful as the fire hall building may be to local safety, symbolically, the building also serves another important purpose. “As part of the Truth and Reconciliation journey, and reflecting on the path that lead us to this point, we see this fire hall as an important step in that journey, and its construction and completion will allow us all to raise the flag of our nations together,” explains Butz.

Grace O’Brien, of S2 Architecture expands on this: “The design philosophy of the Fort McKay Fire Hall is founded on the functional requirements of a fire station and rooted in the design imagery of the local Métis and First Nations communities of Fort McKay.” Therefore, the design and materials used speak to both the history of fire stations and of the local surrounding landscapes.

The spaces of the building are fairly straightforward for the functionality of a fire hall. The one-storey fire hall consists of four non-drive-through

apparatus bays, an office space with indoor training area and other support facilities, site parking, and an exterior training area. However, a glazed tipi feature that abuts the southeast corner of the building, gives the building a unique expression of the community that it serves.

Formed with structural steel and metal decking, the building utilizes a combination of phenolic panels and brick cladding, explains Scott Douglas of Clark Builders. Specifically, the fire hall apparatus bay portion of the building is primarily clad with an orange-copper brick as a contemporary nod to the classic red brick of fire stations, while the administrative portion of the building features a wood veneer phenolic panel intended to ground the building among the densely treed backdrop and provide a warmth to the building’s esthetic.

Upon approach to the Fort McKay Fire Hall, you notice its many distinct parts. “The lower portion of the building, including the rounded corner is the administrative and staff area, the taller brick mass with the large overhead doors houses the response vehicles, and the tallest portion of the building is the hose drying tower whose functional program is unique to fire stations,” explains O’Brien.

Inside, the office welcomes building users up a ramp into the main training area and an open kitchen and lounge area. “The visitor will note a touch of whimsy, as the surrounding

walls of the kitchen are modelled after the end of a fire apparatus including gold and yellow striping below the ‘Fire Rescue EMS’ lettering, signal lights, a rear bumper that acts as a counter and vents, and reflectors on the lower checker plate panel,” describes O’Brien.

Continuing into the building, a training area with desks is open to the main lounge area and a more intimate seating area in the rounded corner that forms the tipi. “Historically, tipis provide shelter and warmth. In the Fort McKay Fire Hall, this area of the building performs the same function as it houses the large gathering and training space,” explains O’Brien, noting that the firefighters will use this space for formal training and as a cool down space after returning to the fire hall after a stressful call. “The warmth of the room is accentuated by the wood beams that adorn the ceiling and is reflected back in the wood esthetic of the flooring.”

The flooring within the tipi portion of the training room has, centred at the heart of the tipi, the Fort McKay Fire Department logo. Meanwhile, remaining interior flooring throughout consists of luxury vinyl tile and porcelain tile, as well as epoxy flooring and concrete floor in the apparatus bays.

The apparatus bays and adjacent support spaces are intended for storage and maintenance of response vehicle, duty gear, and other safety equipment. Room finishes, proportions, and heights of these spaces are designed

specifically with their functional requirements in mind.

The North wall of the apparatus bays feature brick corbelling. “The corbelling adds a texture to the building that is not only visually interesting but is also specifically designed to echo the geometric patterns of the beaded artwork that both the local indigenous communities practice,” says O’Brien.

“The Fort McKay Fire Hall symbolizes strength and security. With this new hall, its design and construction, and even the location, we know that this will be a community landmark for years to come,” concludes Butz. **A**

LOCATION

76 Fort McKay Road, Fort McKay, Alberta

OWNER/DEVELOPER

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

ARCHITECT

S2 Architecture

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Clark Builders

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

RJC Engineers

MECHANICAL CONSULTANT

MCW Consultants

ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

SMP Engineering

CIVIL CONSULTANT

Arrow Engineering Inc.

TOTAL SIZE

12,594 Square Feet

TOTAL COST

Undisclosed