

Lodi Area Fire Department Site Selection Committee Report

May 12, 2021

Bobby Annen – Fire Department
James Brooks – Town of Lodi
Matt Davies – Fire Commission
Kevin Kessler – Town of West Point
Nick Strasser – City of Lodi

1. Committee Scope, Composition & Charge

The Lodi Area Fire Department (LAFD) Site Selection Committee (the Committee) is an ad hoc committee assembled by the City of Lodi, the Town of Lodi, and the Town of West Point. The Committee consists of five individuals; one representative from each of the three municipalities, one member from the Fire Commission, and one member from the Fire Department. The sole charge of the Committee is to make recommendations on the best location for a potential new fire station.

Accordingly, this report provides recommendations for a primary station site in Appendix A, recommendations for a potential satellite station in Appendix B, and closes with some thoughts on how the municipalities might proceed.

The leaders of the three municipalities provided the Committee the following guidance:

1. The site must be a minimum of 2 acres
2. The site must be outside a 25-year flood event
3. The site must be within current ISO guidelines for response times to schools

The leadership additionally noted that large lots could be considered if they could be subdivided, that the use of eminent domain would not be supported by any municipality, and asked the committee not to speak with land owners about land costs or the purpose of inquiry.

2. 2019 Lodi Area Fire and EMS Station Study

In 2019 the three municipalities commissioned a study (Station Study) of the Lodi Area Fire Department and the Lodi Area EMS. The results of this study were presented to the public, with a request for comment, on August 29 of 2019. The study contains a rigorous analysis of the condition of the LAFD facilities, the needs of the district, and makes forward looking projections and recommendations. As an understanding of these conditions and needs are vital to understanding why a new station is needed and where it might be sited, the Committee considers the Station Study to be not just recommended, but indeed essential background for anyone reading this report.

3. Two Acre Lot Size and Implied Requirements

In addition to the requirement for a two-acre minimum lot, there are some practical considerations that significantly factor in to the Committee's recommendation. First, for insurance, code, and financial reasons, a fire station should be connected to a municipal water supply when possible. This means that the station should be in, or near the City proper, and reasonably close to existing water infrastructure. Other infrastructure such as roads, bridges and rail are also important considerations. Narrow bridges may present dangerous crossings and are potentially subject to closing for periodic maintenance or replacement. Rail crossings can be blocked by regular rail traffic or accidents. The station should be located so as to have easy access to major roadways with the minimum possible obstructions. Finally, because the City of Lodi is located in the southeastern corner of the fire district and due to the location of the major roadways, a site on the northern edge of the city would best serve the district as a whole.



Figure 1: LAFD District Map

4. 25-year Flood Event

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides flood maps based on 1% (100-year) and 0.2% (500-year) annual chance flood hazard. The figure below shows the FEMA map for the City of Lodi and the immediately adjacent town lands. The particular areas of interest with respect to this report are those on the northern edge of the city on Highway J both to the east and west of Highway 113, and that of the current fire station. The locations recommended by this committee in Appendix A and Appendix B lay outside the 500-year flood hazard zones.

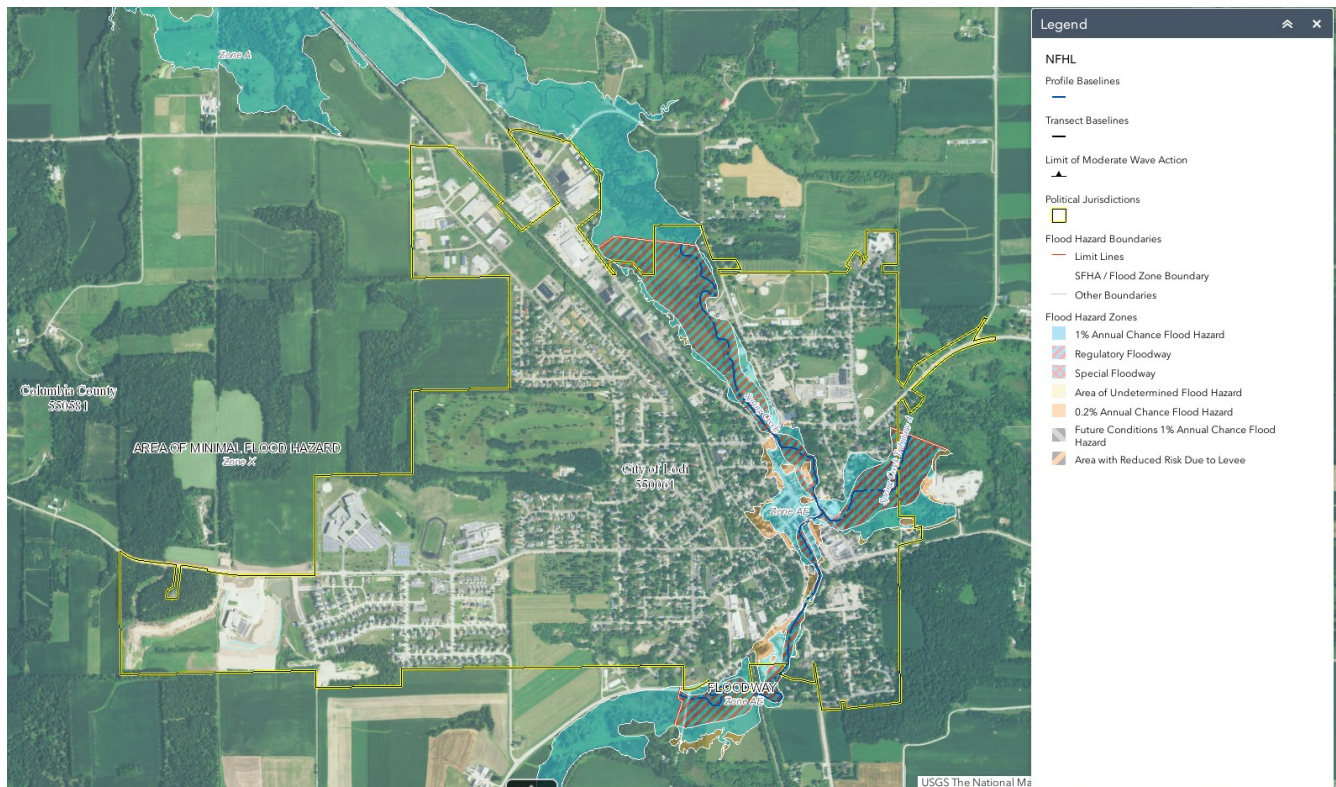


Figure 2: City of Lodi Flood Zones

5. The Insurance Services Office

The Insurance Services Office (ISO), a subsidiary of Verisk Analytics, is an organization that, among other things, creates ratings for fire departments and districts. ISO ratings are based on a multitude of parameters and are considered the standard measure of fire department capability and performance. ISO ratings are also used by some insurers to determine homeowners insurance rates, however many insurers use their own proprietary formulas to calculate rates.

ISO does not provide specific guidance on fire station distance or response time to schools, nor could the Committee find any standard measure from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) or similar. ISO does, however, use a 1.5-mile optimal response distance, and a 5-mile minimal credit distance in their calculations. While the Site Study did not specifically address the schools, it did address the potential impact that moving the station to

the vicinity of State Highway 113 and County Highway J would have on the western portion of the City of Lodi where the schools are located. Below is an excerpt from the study discussing that option.

“This distribution of resources section of the ISO score has a maximum value of ten points and under the current location it is scored at 7.01 points. An overall score of 60 to 69 points receives a four rating, Lodi Area Fire district overall score is 65.05. It is highly unlikely that this configuration would affect the distribution section by more than 50%. More likely about 25%, or a reduction of total score of 1.9 to 3.75 points could be expected. This would still leave a score of 63.15 to 61.3, which would still be an ISO rating of 4. We believe this loss of points in this area could be made in other areas to offset some of the point loss and ensure no loss in rating.”

As noted in the Site Study, the current station location provides 1.5-mile coverage for most of the City of Lodi, but fails to provide even 5-mile coverage for some portions of the district. The above example was included to illustrate that a station move which puts some areas of the City of Lodi slightly outside the 1.5-mile response distance, would not necessarily have a meaningful impact on ISO ratings. Nonetheless, the Committee has considered changes to the 1.5- and 5-mile response distances in our recommendations in Appendix A.

6. Harmony Grove Satellite Location

An excerpt from the Station Study is included below as it articulates the merits of building a satellite station in Harmony Grove. While there is need for the satellite station even now, as the population of the fire district grows, that need will likely become more acute. The Committee wishes to acknowledge this, and is making location recommendations for that station in Appendix B.

“An additional fire station should be constructed in the Harmony Grove area. This would not only put this area within the maximum five mile range but provide 1.5 mile coverage for the area served by the municipal water system. This would provide fire protection recognition and credit for the properties in this area as well as improve initial response times. This would only need to be a small station as discussed previously in the report and could be minimally equipped with a mid- sized engine that meets minimum ISO requirements. We also recommend that members of the fire department that live in the Harmony Grove area be cross trained as Emergency Medical Responders (EMR’s) to improve initial response times for life threatening emergencies in this area.”

7. Current Location

There are few things that evoke emotions of joy, pride, and comfort the way a beautiful brick firehouse, sitting on the main street of a small town does; doors open, sunlight glinting from polished chrome and shiny red body panels, perhaps a child in a red plastic fire hat, laughing and excited to be on, and touching a real fire truck! Adults walk by, waving at the firefighters diligently tending their equipment, hoping to never need the service, but relieved to see it nearby. All those sitting on this committee badly want such a vision realized for our community. Indeed, with regard to these considerations, there is likely no better location for the LAFD than where it currently sits.

While the current location is near perfect from the above perspective, it is not without some shortcomings that deserve discussion and consideration. The most obvious issue is one of space. As discussed previously, the Committee has been charged with finding a lot a minimum of two acres in size. Figure 3 shows an area of approximately two acres at the current site. While that size requirement is likely somewhat flexible, it would be almost impossible to form a site larger than about half of what's desired at the current location.

Figure 4 show a conceptual 18,000 sq.ft. building footprint, about the recommended size for Fire and EMS. At two stories such a footprint may be large enough to hold police as well. Outside the building footprint there needs to be space for parking and room to safely maneuver trucks onto the roadway, roll up hoses, and perform similar activities. While it would be possible to build an adequately sized and positioned building, doing so would require purchasing one or more of the adjacent properties and razing all the existing buildings. The land purchases, demolition, and likely need to build multiple stories would make this the most expensive option for the fire district. Rebuilding at the current location is also complicated by the need for the LAFD to temporarily relocate for the time between when the current facility is demolished and the new one put into service.

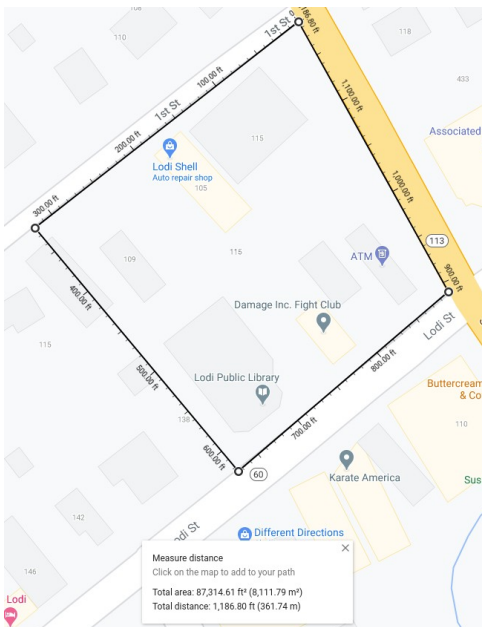


Figure 3: 2 Acre Polygon

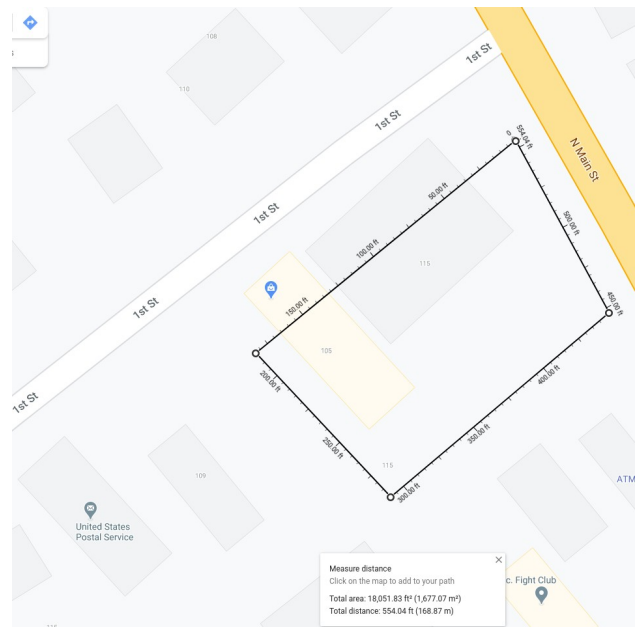


Figure 4: 18,000sqft Conceptual Building

More worrying than space considerations is that the entirety of the current location and adjacent areas lay in a flood hazard zone. A 1% annual chance flood hazard means that placing the station in this location will likely see it flooded either within our lifetime, or that of our children, whom the new station will still likely be serving. This becomes an even more troubling scenario should a public safety building be built in this spot. Fire, EMS and police could all be under water in a major time of need.

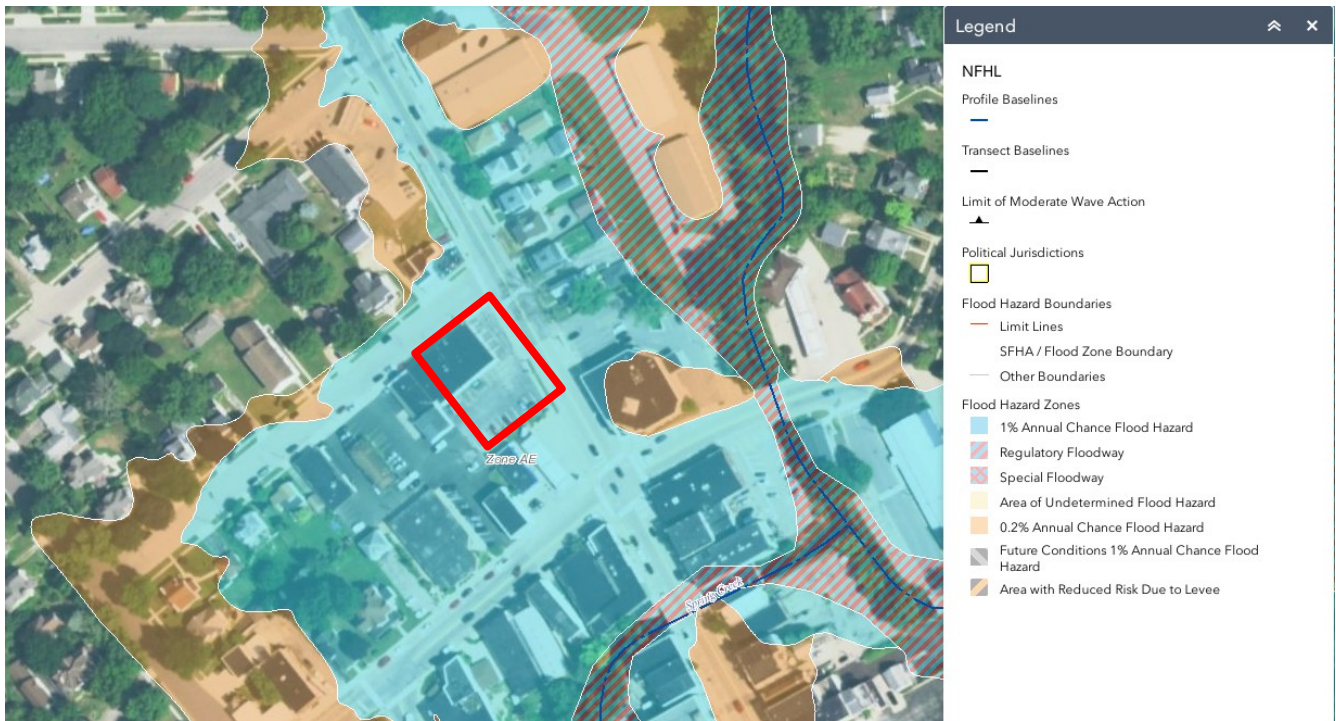


Figure 5: FEMA Flood Hazard Map - LAFD Current Location

While the committee greatly desires the LAFD to remain in its current location, because of the space, flooding and cost issues in doing so, with great reluctance, this committee does not recommend keeping the fire station in its present location.

8. Suggestions and Observations

While the Committee has made recommendations in this report as to the best possible location for a new fire station, there remains a great deal of work to get from that recommendation to the new fire station the district needs. During the course of discussion on the site, the Committee also had a few observations and recommendations we hope will be helpful as the project progresses.

- *Be prepared to move if federal infrastructure dollars become available.* There is currently much discussion at the federal level concerning infrastructure spending. The municipalities would be well advised to monitor the situation and ensure they are poised to move forward if federal dollars become available.
- *Consider hiring a grant writer.* Along with the special federal dollars above, there may be more regular grants to help lighten the financial impact of this project. A knowledgeable, experienced grant writer may provide a substantial return on investment for the community.
- *The Committee recommends land purchase negotiations begin as soon as possible.* Negotiations principally lead by the City of Lodi for the main station, and by the Town of Lodi for a satellite if constructed, would likely make the most efficient negotiating structure.
- *Get the word out.* Effectively communicating the current state of the department will be essential in getting the community involvement needed to keep moving forward. Whether it is the Station Study, this report, station tours, or shouting from the roof tops, there is a clear need for more communication to the community on this issue.
- *The Committee requests a joint session of the municipalities to present this report and its findings.* Communication is key not only to the community, but also between the municipalities. Robert's Rules of Order exist exactly to enable useful discussion in a large group of passionate representatives. This committee believe municipalities would heed the rules and have a productive meeting, accomplishing things that might be impossible through email and multiple isolated meetings.

Acknowledgments and Thanks

The Committee would like to thank the leadership of the City of Lodi, the Town of Lodi, and the Town of West Point for recognizing the needs of the Fire District and their willingness to explore the problem and pursue a solution that will maintain and improve the fire protection provided all the people of the fire district.

The Committee would also like to extend thanks to those members of the LAFD that not only sat through our long meetings, but provided a wealth of technical information and advice to aid the deliberations of the Committee.