

# Veterans hall completion in Catch-22

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ Feb. 14, 2014

The Jenny Lind Veterans Memorial District community hall could be completed by the end of this year, but a Calaveras County building regulation is posing an expensive, if not impossible condition to meet.

The memorial district is in the final stages of obtaining a construction loan to complete the interior portion of the building. However, a major stumbling block in the process has been whether the county will allow the substitution of a dry (chemical) fire suppression system.

The switch to a dry system could save as much as \$45,000 in construction costs, but more important, according to memorial district officials, the water flow into the building is insufficient for a wet system.

“We’re in a Catch-22 situation,” said memorial district Trustee Lou Domondon. “It doesn’t make sense and we have to get it resolved.”

If the building department insists on the wet system, the memorial district might take the matter to the county Board of Supervisors for consideration.

Calaveras County’s regulation even conflicts with State Fire Marshall provisions allowing for a dry system, Domondon said.

The memorial district has obtained a verbal commitment from the Bank of Rio Vista for a construction loan to complete the new hall. As proposed last year, the loan has a limit of \$450,000 with the district paying interest on only the portion it uses for construction. When construction is completed, it converts to a permanent loan. The initial interest rate is 4.5 percent, with the loan being re-priced after five years and an interest cap at 7.5 percent.

If the district were to use the entire amount, the monthly payment would be \$3,059.

The new building, sitting behind the existing 50-year-old hall at Daphne and Pine streets, is more than three times as large as the old hall. The new hall will have a commercial kitchen, multiple meeting rooms, larger stage area for theatrical events and a better design, larger capacity for community and private events.

In addition, the modern building will solve handicap-access, heating and air-conditioning issues associated with the old hall.

A groundbreaking ceremony took place four years ago. The memorial district had enough money to complete the building's exterior shell and volunteer labor has been used to erect framing and a stage on the inside. In the meantime, the building has set idle as the district pursued ways to finance the completion of construction.

"We're starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel," said district Trustee Gail Belmont, "it hasn't been us stopping completion of that building, but all the procedures we've had to go through."

If the district can get over the fire suppression hurdle, the project can go out to bid and hopefully be completed by the end of the year, she said.

The loan is expected to be finalized after the construction costs are determined and an appraisal and title search have been completed.