

MISSOULA FIRE DEPARTMENT

‘A BIG HELP FOR OUR CALL VOLUME’



SHANNA MADISON, MISSOULIAN

Jacob Glauser suits up for a call at Missoula Fire Department Station 4 on Feb. 17.

Amid expansion, one station crowded training new recruits

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Missoula Fire Department Station 4 near Reserve Street has long been the city's busiest location because of its proximity to main corridors, but also because it houses the department's training center and mechanic space.

For the last few months, the station has been even busier than usual, bringing in and training a new unit of firefighters hired by the city to help staff a soon-to-be-built sixth fire station.

While plans for the station are still in the works, Station 4 now boasts double the number of firefighters, requiring extra temporary sleeping quarters. For the time being, the firefighters on site told the Missoulian they do not mind the extra company.

"It is a bigger family to be around," newly hired firefighter Logan Zieschang, 21, said in a recent interview. "This north side of town in Missoula is really busy, so having

that second engine company has been a big help for our call volume, especially when things blow up and we get a structure fire."

In May 2024, Missoula voters approved a \$7 million fire levy to allow the city to hire more firefighters and build a sixth station. Prior to that, the department had not grown since 2008. In calling for the levy, former fire chief Gordy Hughes said the department's response times had slowed as more residents moved to the Garden City.

Missoula City Council approved a design contract for the new station earlier in February, but the department still needs to purchase the land it's eyeing on Third Street and finalize construction plans.

Fire Chief Lonnie Rash previously told council they could break ground on the new station within the next year.

In the meantime, the department has hired 26 new city firefighters who are now regularly on duty across all city stations, including at Station 4.

The Missoulian joined Station 4 for a brief ride-along last week to discuss the department's expansion.

New members ready to help

Dave Farmer, a long-time firefighter based at Station 4, said the building has been crawling with people over the last several months, and they've had to make adjustments to accommodate the new recruits.

"It has definitely been tough at times, we have had to move a bunch of our training — we've been using the (Missoula County) Elections Office," Farmer said, noting that Station 4's training room previously accommodated 60 people.

But Farmer said the new firefighters are welcome, as a new generation is getting experience while adding some competition for veteran members of the department.

"It's always a race to see who can get to

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Montana's 0% sales tax may be attracting big data centers

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Montana's lack of a statewide sales tax could definitely be a factor in why there's interest from big data center companies looking to build facilities and buy power here.

The CEO of NorthWestern Energy, Brian Bird, recently gave an update to investors in which he revealed there are 11 unnamed data center companies in NorthWestern's queue to get approved to buy power and set up in Montana or South Dakota. But Bird mentioned that many of those companies are waiting to see if South Dakota's Legislature will change its statewide sales tax

rate of 4.2% before they invest.

"We're waiting on sales tax reform in (South Dakota)," he said. "Which is something that is very very important to data centers before they move forward in South Dakota. If we do see some sales tax movement in South Dakota I do expect to see that queue count to go up in 2026."

Montana's statewide sales tax is at 0%, although some tourism-dependent communities have a local-option sales tax.

Besides the aforementioned 11, three other data center companies are in more advanced stages of discussions with

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COURTESY OF SABEY DATA CENTERS

The Sabey Data Center in East Wenatchee, Washington. Montana's lack of a statewide sales tax could definitely be a factor in why there's interest from big data center companies looking to build facilities and buy power here.