

Litchfield Park, Avondale delay opening fire station to save money

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Budgetary breathing room is what Litchfield Park gained when it agreed with [Avondale](#) to delay the operation of a fire station the two cities will share.

"It absolutely makes our task easier than what it would have been had we continued on the path we were originally on," said Litchfield Park Mayor Thomas Schoaf. "It's one of the pieces for Litchfield Park in resolving the issue of making sure our budget stays in balance."

The move will save about \$1.1 million for Avondale and \$650,000 in operating costs for Litchfield Park if the fire station opening is postponed for one year.

The delay comes as cities across the Valley cut costs to balance budgets during the worst economic downturn in years.

This week, Avondale laid off 20 people while eliminating 47 jobs.

"Our city staff has again been tasked to reduce expenditures in each of their areas, and we are looking at a number of different measures to reduce Litchfield Park's expenditures in the short term to make sure that we sustain a balanced situation," Schoaf said. "I don't foresee layoffs in the present time, but I think there will be some decrease in services that we're able to offer. We're waiting to get specific recommendations from our staff for how they are going to meet these new goals. That's something we're going to be working on over the next four weeks."

Earlier this year, city departments made cuts to deal with the worsening economy, which Schoaf says has not hit bottom yet, so the city must continue to adjust to falling revenues.

As for the fire station, Avondale, Litchfield Park and Estrella Mountain Community College partnered on the \$6 million, 18,200-square-foot public safety building project located on the Avondale campus.

The project, currently in design phase and scheduled to be completed in early 2010, will house a fire station, an Avondale police substation and classrooms for EMCC's new Emergency Medical Technician program.

Avondale [City Manager](#) Charlie McClendon said police will use the substation once the facility is built and the college will use the classrooms. Only the fire station will be delayed.

Schoaf said the two cities are taking advantage of the down economy and going ahead with building the facility because of lower costs.

The agreement between the two cities specifies the station will be operated by Avondale Fire/Rescue, which will provide fire coverage and emergency medical services for Avondale's northwest quadrant and for Litchfield Park.

Although construction will be completed early next year, the cities plan to begin operating the new fire station in early 2011.

Under the agreement, Litchfield Park and Avondale will split evenly \$4 million of construction costs.

Litchfield Park is currently served by for-profit Rural/Metro Fire Department. The city sought the partnership with Avondale to become part of the Valley's automatic aid system, which means that if a house is on fire, dispatchers send the closest firetruck to respond, regardless of municipal boundaries.

"We have worked on a variety of contingency planning to make sure that our residents will be covered," Schoaf said. "The simplest of those plans was with Rural/Metro, and Rural/Metro has agreed to stay, so there is not a problem in terms of us being able to maintain excellent fire emergency services for our residents."