

NANAIMO FIRE STATION #1

by NATALIE BRUCKNER



Pedestrians walking past Nanaimo's busiest fire station will notice a dramatic difference these days. Gone is the aging 1966 building and in its place stands a contemporary three-storey civic building and flagship fire station that is home to Fire Rescue Operations, Emergency Operations Centre, and Fire Rescue Command/Business Centre.

From the outset it was decided that rather than be an imitation of historic typologies or dated icons of firefighter stations, the building should instead convey a sense of departure from the previous fire station.

"The old building reflected the architectural style and community's aspirations at that time, but it was nearing the end of its functional life when the City began planning to build a new Fire Station #1," explains fire chief Tim Doyle. "We needed a structure that would survive a seismic event and serve the community when we are most needed."

Using this as a springboard, S2 Architecture set about to design a building that would not only be state-of-the-art, be built to post-disaster standards, and engage with its surroundings and community, but would also contain a subtle playful element.

RENDERINGS COURTESY S2 ARCHITECTURE

"We highlighted this station as an obvious 'beacon' to help people understand where the station was and to use it as an orienting element in the city," explains Linus Murphy, architect at S2 Architecture.

Every little detail on this building has been carefully considered; from the asymmetric panels on the walls that emulate waves flowing from the shore and the yellow band that floats around between the main and second floor that resembles the shoreline, to the dark base and windows along the base and the gold eyebrow that wraps around part of the building, both of which are a nod to the area's coal mining history.

Also, to take advantage of the beautiful view, S2 designed the larger more expansive windows to look out to the harbour. "This means that when walking or driving up the street from the harbour, the building rises above the adjacent structures to be seen as a destination," says Murphy.

As a mark of respect to the Snuneymuxw First Nation on whose unceded territory Nanaimo lies – and recognition of the ongoing work toward reconciliation – the City contracted Noel Brown to design and carve a Welcome Pole to be located in the southwest corner of the site.

Thought was also given to the pedestrian experience, which Murphy explains is reminiscent of walking along the historic streets in Nanaimo. "We maintained a decidedly modern aesthetic in contrast to the retail buildings along the walk from the harbour," Murphy adds.

Achieving all this, and more, on what was a very tight site, was quite incredible. Perhaps, just as incredible

was the fact that "demolition activity for the build was phased so that Nanaimo Fire Rescue could continue to operate out of the existing facilities while the new building was constructed," explains Mark Bullen, partner at Capex Project Advisory.

This insightful strategy helped mitigate a lot of the disruption that Nanaimo Fire Rescue was facing with the development of the project in terms of having to move out to a temporary swing space. "It also provided the opportunity to construct a large concrete apron in front of the new facility that allows the fire trucks to turn around on the property rather than in the road, which is safer and more convenient," adds Bullen.

On entering the building there is a natural flow for reduced turnout

time [the time it takes from first hearing an alarm to the time a vehicle has left the building].

Doyle explains that inside, the building basically has two functional zones: the apparatus bays, where the fire trucks are stored and maintained; and the adjacent accommodation block, with the crew living quarters and office accommodation including the City's new Emergency Operations Centre.

The floor plan had to take into consideration the height of the apparatus bays, which are dictated by the number and size of the fire trucks. As a result, the apparatus bay is approximately two-storeys high and takes up much of the ground floor on the site.

The accommodation block in contrast has a lot more flexibility, as Doyle





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explains: “After a few design iterations we were able to fit the accommodation block in beside the apparatus bays in a narrow three-storey format, without needing to add a whole floor of accommodation over the top of the apparatus bays. This saved the project a great deal of money, not least in structural costs.”

No stone, as it were, was left unturned when it came to efficiency of design – from the materials and systems, right down to the size of the building. The team even took into consideration elements such as call volume. “This results in a great deal of importance put on the efficiency of the building’s design, the robustness of its materials, the importance of flexible technology, and the training opportunities of the staff. All this needed to be achieved while providing the quiet and learning spaces needed by firefighters to recharge after any particularly difficult call-out. In a small volume of space, this was a very delicate balance of active/passive, public/secure, and response/recharge areas – this was achieved through a great deal of input from the firefighters,” says Murphy.

In addition to this, Murphy explains that the internal planning for fire response was designed around firefighters gaining access to the front

of each vehicle in the apparatus bays, so that turnout time is minimum.

“S2 had a very talented team that came up with some really playful and eye-catching features, such as an all-red locker room and the black, white, red, and gold façade which was chosen as a nod to the history of Black Diamond Engine Company – the precursor to today’s Nanaimo Fire Rescue,” says Bullen.

Bullen also credits the success of the build to Nanaimo Fire Rescue, as well as to the professional consultants

that were engaged to design, cost, and manage the project, and the construction contractor, Kinetic Construction, who brought the design to life.

In conclusion, Doyle says: “As a key resource for middle and northern Vancouver Island, Nanaimo is evolving to reflect the vitality and diversity of the community that lives here, and those who are attracted to it. The new Fire Station #1 is a bold, confident statement that Nanaimo is on the rise and ready to meet the future from a position of strength.” **A**



LOCATION

666 Fitzwilliam Street, Nanaimo, B.C.

OWNER/DEVELOPER

City of Nanaimo

PROJECT MANAGER

Capex Project Advisory

ARCHITECT

S2 Architecture

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Kinetic Construction

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

RJC Engineers

MECHANICAL CONSULTANT

Rocky Point Engineering

ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

AES Engineering

CIVIL CONSULTANT

Aplin Martin

COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT

Pomax Consulting Inc

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Murdoch de Greeff Inc.

TOTAL SIZE

22,604 square feet

TOTAL COST

\$20 million

RENDERING COURTESY S2 ARCHITECTURE



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