

Fire Rescue Task Force

April 10, 2014

6:00 p.m.

City Manager Conference Room
City of Whitewater Municipal Building
312 W Whitewater Street, Whitewater, Wisconsin

MINUTES

1. **Call to order and roll call.** The meeting was called to order by Chairman Ken Kidd at 6:03 p.m. Present: Don Gregoire (Fire Chief), Todd Lindert (Rescue), Jan Bilgen (Police Commission), Ken Kidd (Council), Phil Frawley (Council), Cameron Clapper (City Manager). Absent: None.
2. **Approve minutes for the March 13 meeting.** It was moved by Lindert, seconded by Bilgen to table minutes for the March meeting until the next meeting of the Task Force. Ayes: Kidd, Gregoire, Lindert, Bilgen, Clapper, Frawley. Noes: None.
3. **Follow-up on any changes to previously discussed items.** Lindert indicated that Option B was preferred by EMS members in their meeting on April 9. This option, from Lindert's presentation on February 13, included a Board of Directors with a fire chief and an EMS chief reporting to the board and members of both the fire department and EMS having equal rights in the organization. This organization would be separate from the City of Whitewater.
4. **Conference call with the Fire Department attorney regarding the organizational structure of the Whitewater Fire Department including composition of the governing body/board, duties and responsibilities of the governing body/board, duties and responsibilities of the fire chief, duties and responsibilities of Fire Department officers (including EMS) and duties and responsibilities of the city toward the proposed newly organized department.**

A conference call was held with attorney Phil Stittleburg, attorney for the Whitewater Volunteer Fire Department. The following bullet points highlight some of the information shared by the attorney.

General Statements

- The current structure of the fire department is not acceptable. This is due mainly to the cumbersome bylaws which are different between divisions within the department, and the point of separation between the city and the fire department is unclear.
- Nationwide, fire based EMS services are more efficient.
- To keep the organizational structure clean, Stittleburg recommended sticking with one of two options, either a fully independent department or a municipal department. Stittleburg did state that the city and department could go with a "hybrid" department if desired. This would allow the fire department to consider expanding the membership of the board to include other community members and/or officials as well as allow current supportive operations performed by the city to continue to be

provided. Any services to be performed by the city, however, would need to be clearly outlined by contract.

- In either option the LOSA program (or similar) would continue.
- When asked what organizational structure was the best long-term solution, (PHILS LAST NAME) stated that the trend among agencies nationwide was to become municipal departments so that the volunteers could focus responding to emergencies and municipal resources could take care of the non-emergency administrative duties.

Option 1 – Fully Independent Department

- A board of directors would serve as the governing body for the organization.
- Membership would elect board members.
- All board members would come from within the organization. The board members, once elected would appoint board officers from among the board membership. The board together with membership would appoint department officers. The board would be elected by the membership. All tasks currently performed by the city on behalf of the fire department (such as loss control/insurance, worker compensation, payroll and payroll taxes, etc.) would become the responsibility of the fire department. The timeline to establish the new organization could easily be a year or more.

Option 2 – Municipal Department

- The department would be subject to the Police and Fire Commission (PFC) and ultimately, to the Common Council. Note that accountability to the PFC for the fire department would be similar to the police department.
- If a municipal department was the favored option, the transition would begin immediately upon adoption by the Common Council.

At the conclusion of the phone call, Ken Kidd asked those in attendance to share comments. Attendees expressed a desire to do whatever was best for the community and that decision makers needed to make sure they considered the interests of those volunteering their time to serve as firefighters and EMTs when making a final decision.

Some in attendance expressed a desire to move forward with a “hybrid” structure that included a board of directors consisting of members from inside and outside the department and negotiated contracts with the city and the towns/townships.

Jan Bilgen voiced the need to consider all the support provided to the department by the city when making a decision, to be completely separate would be a huge undertaking.

5. **Propose future meeting dates.** The next meeting of the Task Force will be April 17 at 7:00 p.m. in the City Manager Conference Room at the Municipal Building.
6. **Adjourn.** It was moved by Bilgen, seconded by Lindert to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous approval at 8:30 p.m.