

**City of Whitewater
Fire/EMS Task Force Meeting
Whitewater Municipal Building 2nd Floor
City Manager Meeting Room
October 22, 2015**

MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

- Motion to hold meeting with less than 72 hours notice by Lindert. Second by Bilgen. Motion passed, All-0 at 7:10 pm.

2. Present: Cameron Clapper, Ken Kidd, Don Gregoire, Jan Bilgen, Patrick Wellnitz, Bob Gabbey, Mike Higgens, Doug Saubert, and John Pecha.

3. Status update of by-law changes

Gregoire advised the by-laws are still in the process of being rewritten. Over the last few weeks time has been spent on the department budget and township agreements. The task force would like to see a skeleton of the bylaws at the next meeting. Gregoire stated the department had a goal to have bylaws near completion within the next month.

4. Discuss fire department budget, staffing needs and township agreements and related matters.

A. Township Agreements

- Gregoire advised the township agreements have gone out for signature. Two township agreements have been returned signed. A total of six contracts were sent out.
- Whitewater Township was notified their costs went up 15% for this agreement and will continue to go up in the future. The cost of fire service is currently at about Price is approximately ½ of the expected future cost for the service. Even with the increase, the service cost will still be lower than that of other area departments with less favorable ISO fire protection ratings.
- Clapper wants to review copies of the electronic fire agreements and will check with Michele Smith, City Clerk to obtain.

B. Staffing Needs

- Total calls for EMS in 2015 is currently around 1,100 calls. The year-end total is expected to reach or exceed 1,500.
- Total calls for fire service in 2015 is currently around 286 calls. This total is up from last year's total of 246 calls at year-end. Total fire service calls is expected to reach or exceed 300 for the year. The fire department currently responds to 2-3 calls per day on average.
- Some calls for service are the result of faulty alarms. Staff is currently drafting a faulty alarm ordinance which will require property owners with faulty alarms to

pay a fee when the faulty alarm results in repeated fire department responses charging fees for these alarms will result in some revenues for the department which should help to compensate for some of the added fire service costs. The ordinance will be completed and approved by the Common Council by January 1, 2016. The department receives a high percentage of faulty alarms every year. This ordinance will force owners to fix their systems or pay the fine.

- MABAS is also being used more frequently. The fire department is often called upon by other departments in the area due to superior equipment and service response.
- In short, the Department is experiencing 2-5 year trend in increased calls with a decreased number of volunteers in the department that are able and willing to respond to them. With the decrease in personnel comes also a decrease in people available to recruit new volunteers. While the response to calls remains consistent for fire calls, there are fewer firefighters on the trucks when responding.
- To clarify the staffing need and the existing funding shortfall for 2016, Clapper gave an overview of the proposed 2016 budget with Gregoire providing additional details. Noted staff requests for the department were as follows:
 - i. Four paid-on-premise (POP) responders to provide needed EMS Coverage at \$7.50 per hour (65,000 approximately per year)
 - ii. One part-time administrative assistant for data entry
 - iii. One part-time EMT Director (30 hours/week)

C. Budget

- Clapper reviewed changes to the fire department budget for 2016. Bilgen pointed out, that in order to accommodate funding for staffing needs in the fire department; every municipal department would need to take a 2-4% cut across the board.
- It was suggested the fire department bring on two POP responders in 2016 and two more in 2017.
- Fire department is behind on completing bylaws, officer qualifications and about 9 other duties due to the fact they are drowning in administrative work.
- Clapper asked Chief Gregoire if the fire department would be willing to use existing reserves to pay for needed staffing over the next one-two years until the city can set aside revenue to cover the additional staffing needs with the understanding that in the future, the city would repay the money either through an additional contribution toward a replacement vehicle, a facility expansion, or another capital project. The repayment would be considered an additional contribution above and beyond the city share for the improvement.
- Task Force members agreed that Whitewater residents have been receiving a very good deal in terms of cost for fire and EMS services for many years. Clapper further stated that he would be willing to promote a referendum to increase tax funding and take the idea to the common council for their consideration. Task force members determined that a referendum would be more effective in 2017 because it would give city staff, task force members, and fire department members time to complete the department reorganization and to educate the

community on the need for the tax increase. The task force debated whether to allocate administrative responsibilities for the fire department to existing city personnel or to hire an administrative assistant to help with the need to process paperwork for the fire department.

- Gregoire and Assist Chief Bob Gabbey clarified that there was a need to answer phone calls, follow up on invoices and bills, etc. in the fire department offices. Clapper stated that there may be options within current staff to address fire department needs by reprioritizing projects. Neighborhood Services could assist in fire inspection calls. City staff could also assist with the recruitment of an intern from the University that could then be utilized by the department. Gregoire and other officers in attendance felt that the proposed pop positions would work at a rate of \$7.50 per hour. However, the department would first need adequate sleeping quarters in the municipal building. Clapper advised that the sleeping quarter project was already underway with city staff awaiting a quote from an architect. The goal for completion would be 1/1/2016.
- Task force member Kidd reminded everyone about AB350, pending legislation which would bring in extra revenue which could total \$90,000 in the first year. Clapper will attend fire department business meeting on Nov 12 at 7:00 pm to present the funding idea to the fire department membership.
- Next meeting of the Fire/Ems Task Force will be Nov 18, 2015 at 7:00pm

5. Adjournment

Motion by Lindert to adjourn. Second by Bilgen. Motion, All-0 at 9:36 pm.