

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Medina City Council  
**FROM:** Scott Johnson, City Administrator  
**DATE OF MEETING:** April 16, 2019  
**SUBJECT:** April 16, 2019 Work Session – 6:00 PM

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### Fire Services Strategic Planning Discussion

#### Background

Mayor Kathy Martin, Council Member Jeff Pederson (2018 meetings), Council Member Dino DesLauriers (2019 meetings), Chief Ed Belland and I have been meeting with the chiefs of the four fire departments that service Medina to address current issues facing the departments and to strategically plan for future emergency response services for our citizens and businesses. We have learned much from our meetings, as summarized below.

#### Quality of Service/Standards

The group determined that each of the four departments generally provided quality service with roughly similar response times and that the “standard” for what the City sought was in fact the level of service now provided. All four departments respond to most of the fire calls in less than 10 minutes, and while there are many factors that affect response times (traffic, distance to the scene, weather conditions and the like), a fair measure to compare the response times of the four departments was how long it takes each department to roll a firetruck from its station, and based on the data furnished by the departments, it appears that each department, on average, was rolling a truck within five minutes of receiving a call. The group concluded that, if a department fell below that five-minute standard, we would need to make changes to the response procedures to continue to meet that standard.

#### Personnel Recruiting Issues

Recruitment and retention of volunteer fire fighters appears to be a common issue and the most critical issue for all the departments (and is an issue national in scope). The discussion of this issue included the following observations and suggestions:

1. Coverage during typical daytime business hours is difficult and the number of persons physically in or near Medina and willing to serve during these hours has shrunk; many of those that do cover daytime hours are retiring.
2. “Job-sharing” with other City departments (e.g., training police or public works personnel to perform certain tasks like running hoses, doing accountability checks or other services not required to be performed by licensed fire fighters) is a possible interim solution to the daytime issue. It was noted, however, that adding fire service duties to other city departments may increase the need for City personnel in those departments (Lino Lakes trains its police force as fire fighters, but the size of the police department has increased

dramatically) and the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA) also impacts City personnel costs. An employee who holds two jobs for the same government employer must aggregate his/her total hours worked for FLSA pay purposes. This requirement has major impacts on overtime costs for local governments with employees who also serve as firefighters (please reference the information memo from the League of Minnesota Cities – Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA): Police and Fire Employees).

3. Using Duty Officers has also been implemented by some fire departments. Duty Officers typically drive “command vehicle” trucks, permitting them to move directly from wherever they may be at the time for a call to the scene, without first stopping at the fire station to step into turnout gear or staff a fire truck; thus, the duty officer arrives on scene first, assesses the situation and advises the department as to staffing and vehicle requirements for a particular call. While the use of Duty Officers enhances a department’s efficiency, the Duty Officers themselves often are over-taxed with a disproportionate number of calls. Another possible means to address the issue of day-time coverage is to share Duty Officers among the departments or to cross-train another City employee to handle Duty Officer calls during day-time hours.
4. Hiring duty crews during daytime hours is an interim solution, but has significant budget implications since the duty crews would be paid for all hours “on call” rather than on a per call basis. While the need to respond to daytime calls is critical, the volume of calls may not at this time justify employment of full-time personnel. The group discussed possibly “sharing” of duty crews, but the geographical distances between the departments and the geographic breadth of the City renders personnel sharing difficult. Nonetheless, the chiefs noted that hiring part-time personnel was also difficult and they generally believed that full-time paid firefighters would be needed in five to ten years.
5. The group concluded that, if a department fell below that five-minute standard, we would need to make changes to the response procedures to continue to meet that standard. The administrative burden on the chiefs is increasing; it was predicted that those departments that do not have paid or full-time chiefs will need paid, full-time chiefs within the next five years. It was noted, however, that cities served by the departments may resist such employment due to budget implications.
6. The cancer risks of firefighting seriously impact recruitment and retention of firefighters, and that the older firehouses needed to be retrofitted and equipped to minimize cancer risks. This, too, has future budget implications.

### **Fire Station and other Capital Improvement Needs**

The Loretto and Maple Plain departments had issued capital improvements needs assessments for their fire stations, and it was noted that the Hamel Fire Department also anticipated that its fire station will require significant improvements in the next few years. Council Member DesLauriers and Chief Belland are working with Hamel to better assess options to improve their fire station.

Funding of capital improvements costs (both facilities and equipment) was acknowledged to be a critical issue facing the departments and affecting the delivery of fire and emergency services. The funding matter is compounded by a number of factors, including the following: (A) other

than the Hamel Fire Department, each department is dependent on funding from multiple sources: if one source refuses to bear a reasonable proportion of capital expenditures, the ability to make the capital expenditure is greatly at risk; (B) cities may be disinterested in funding capital expenditures if they do not own (or partially own) the assets to be acquired; (C) if one department purchases a major piece of equipment (e.g., a ladder truck), will it be willing to make that equipment available to other departments if the cities serviced by those other departments have not paid a proportionate share of the capital acquisition costs; and (D) even the cities served by a department purchasing a major asset may be unwilling to share in those costs.

Possible regional cooperation among the cities served by the four departments serving Medina was acknowledged, but the Chiefs expressed concern whether the cities they serve will collaboratively work together to address capital improvement costs—different city councils at different times have varying views on budgeting and planning for capital improvements.

### **The Rising Cost of Emergency Response Services**

Finance Director Erin Barnhart has worked diligently with the Fire Chiefs to pull together a summary of the rising personnel and capital costs as discussed earlier in this report. The cost compilation was vetted with all the Fire Chiefs to ensure we have approximated anticipated costs as best as we can.

The 10-year projected fire capital spreadsheet was the outcome of the work of Finance Director Barnhart and the four Fire Chiefs. The Loretto, Maple Plain, and Hamel Fire Departments discussed during our meetings the need for new or updated facilities for their departments. Facility costs could add approximately \$280,000 per year to Medina's fire budget. All the fire departments also discussed the need for possible future personnel. The personnel costs could add approximately \$516,000 by 2030 to Medina's fire budget.

### **Thank you to our four Fire Chiefs!**

The meetings have resulted in a renewed spirit of Cooperation of the fire departments that we want to encourage to maintain.

Thank you to our four Fire Chiefs for their time and leadership on this topic, specifically:

1. The Chiefs have openly shared their views of the future
2. Chiefs are meeting separately to create an action plan to meet the future emergency response needs of the City
3. Maple Plain and Loretto Departments have collaborated on training
4. Hamel and Long Lake likewise are exploring ways to share resources
5. Loretto has added Hamel to its call alarms

### **Discuss Next Steps for the City of Medina**

City representatives advised that they previously had been informed that the City would not need its own fire department until Medina's population rose to 10,000 persons based on a discussion with the Maple Grove Fire Chief in 2013 (the current projection is that the City will have 8900 residents in 2040). The Chiefs suggested that the assumption was not correct; in the general

view of the Chiefs, the City would need its own fire department when the departments with which it contracts cannot or do not provide the service the City requires. Thus, anticipated residential and business growth is not necessarily the most critical factor in determining the need for a City fire department.

The chiefs noted that the fire district borders are well planned geographically to minimize response times within each district. It was noted that because the Loretto and Maple Plain Fire Departments are approximately 3.5 miles apart, they essentially operate as a two-station department.

City representative asked if the fire chiefs could talk about different operational plans that would address the current staffing issues. Several ideas were suggested to look at as shared duty crews, Part-time CSOs, utilizing a Public Works Employee trained to drive an extra pumper truck to a fire, or more auto starts for multiple departments.

All four of our fire departments continue to do a good job of recruiting firefighters in a difficult employment market. Staff was recently notified by the Hamel Fire Department that they hired three new firefighters for their department.

Staff has put together a “Heat Map” for the City of Medina. The map shows the areas where the fire departments receive the greatest amount of calls in Medina.

The major challenges facing Medina fire departments today are facilities improvements, staffing issues, and administration of the departments (i.e., Full-time Chiefs). Each department could identify and prioritize their items, giving the City the most critical issues that need to be addressed first.

Staff is requesting City Council review of the information and discussion regarding fire services in Medina.