



Virtual Meeting  
Mequon, WI 53092  
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[www.ci.mequon.wi.us](http://www.ci.mequon.wi.us)

Fire Department

## **FUTURE OF OUR FIRE DEPARTMENT COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, July 21, 2020**

**6:00 PM**

**Virtual Meeting**

### **Agenda**

**ELECTRONIC MEETING NOTICE:** Pursuant to the current recommendation of the CDC limiting the size of public gatherings and the various federal and state orders implementing that recommendation, and to help protect our community from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, this meeting will be held virtually through the GoToMeeting platform with each member accessing the meeting remotely. Citizens may join the meeting online or by phone. Please go to <https://www.gotomeet.me/Mequon/future-fire-dept-c> to join the meeting online or call into the meeting by dialing 1-866-899-4679 and enter access code 700-427-901.

**WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS** may be made in writing in advance of the meeting. Written comments should be directed to the Fire Department at least 2 hours prior to the meeting by email at [dbialk@ci.mequon.wi.us](mailto:dbialk@ci.mequon.wi.us) addressed to the intended committee. Written public comment may also be deposited in the drop box at City Hall on 11333 N. Cedarburg Road, Mequon at least 2 hours prior to the meeting. Comments received timely will be forwarded to all members of the body for their consideration.

**VERBAL PUBLIC COMMENTS** will be accepted only from members of the public who register in advance. Registration shall be made by sending an email to David Bialk, Fire Chief at [dbialk@ci.mequon.wi.us](mailto:dbialk@ci.mequon.wi.us) or by leaving a message at 262-242-8789 no later than 2 hours prior to the meeting.

- 1) Call to Order, Roll Call
- 2) Approve Meeting Minutes
  - a. June 16, 2020 Minutes
- 3) Open Discussion
  - a. Finalization of Preliminary Report for Common Council
- 4) Future Meeting Date
  - a. August 18, 2020
- 5) Adjourn

August 18, 2020 Dated: July 21, 2020

/s/ Dale Mayr, Chair

Notice is hereby given that a quorum of other governmental bodies may be present at this meeting to present, discuss and/or gather information about a subject over which they have decision-making responsibility, although they will not take formal action thereto at this meeting. Any questions regarding this agenda may be directed to the Public Safety Office at 262-242-3500, Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM



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Fire Department

**FUTURE OF OUR FIRE DEPARTMENT COMMITTEE**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**Tuesday, June 16, 2020**  
**6:00 PM**  
**Virtual Meeting**

**Minutes**

**1) Call to Order, Roll Call**

Alderman Mayr called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

**Present:**

Melissa Bleidorn  
 Kirsten Hildebrand  
 Rick Lemke  
 Alderman Dale Mayr  
 Alderman Kathleen Schneider  
 Deputy Chief Kurt Zellmann

**Absent:**

Lynn Streeter

Also Present: Fire Chief Bialk, Administrative Assistant Wellman

**2) Approve Meeting Minutes**

a. Motion to approve the June 2, 2020 minutes.

**RESULT: Approved by Voice Acclamation [Unanimous]**

**MOVED BY: Ald. Schneider**

**SECONDED BY: Melissa Bleidorn**

**3) Open Discussion**

Chairman Mayr opened the meeting by discussing the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the department. Chief Bialk did address that transports from senior living facilities have slowed but did not have the data from the facilities as to why that was.

Chairman Mayr brought up the option of combining area departments. Chief Bialk mentioned that approximately six months ago area municipal leaders discussed that option and decided a public policy study would be the appropriate route to determine the possibility. Chief Bialk noted that it would be a long-term study and results may not be available for some time and if the

Attachment: 6-16-20 Minutes (5312 : June 16, 2020 Meeting Minutes)

result is to combine, integration will take years to complete (as it did for the North Shore Fire Department-7 years). Deputy Chief Zellmann added Mequon can be a leader in such discussions and modeling if combining departments is the future by acting to add additional full-time command staff now. Chief Bialk shared with the committee the make-up of Ozaukee County fire departments, noting that Grafton currently has more full-time employees than all other departments.

The remainder of the meeting committee members discussed wording, formatting and additional edits to the report as well as the need to include the numerous documents/studies that were utilized throughout the process of creating the recommendations. Clarification on the cost of the proposed recommendations were discussed as well. Additionally, the committee spoke of the subsequent proposal surrounding facilities and incentives that will help with recruitment and retention of members.

Ms. Bleidorn volunteered to complete the edits that were discussed for the document. Chairman Mayr asked that the additional documents needed to complete the report to be provided by fire department staff, as well as recommendations and revisions to the document, are to be forwarded to Ms. Wellman and to be distributed by her to the whole committee. Distribution of any material will not be discussed with other committee members until the next scheduled committee meeting to follow open meeting laws.

**4) Future Meeting**

The next meeting will be held virtually on July 21, 2020 at 6:00 PM.

**5) Adjourn**

Motion by Alderman Schneider to adjourn at 7:48 PM, seconded by member Rick Lemke. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,  
*Jill Wellman*

# FUTURE OF THE FIRE DEPARTMENT INITIAL COMMITTEE REPORT [STAFFING]

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## **OBJECTIVE:**

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The Future of the Fire Department Committee (the "Committee") was assigned the task of evaluating the Mequon Fire Department/EMS and giving recommendations to the Common Council regarding of current and future needs. Evaluation was to include staffing, buildings and equipment.

Staffing presents the most urgent issues and is the focus of this first report. Recently the Fire Department has experienced gaps in EMS coverage which, if unaddressed, may lead to a decline in quality of service. This report examines the current model and recommends changes to stabilize staffing and continue to improve quality of care.

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## **BACKGROUND:**

Prior to preparing this report, the Committee reviewed and discussed the following information:

- Fire Department Staffing Study dated October 2, 2017 by Matrix Consulting group;
- Executive Summary of Employee Engagement Survey dated January 2016;
- Mequon Fire Department 2018 Annual Report;
- SWOT Analysis of the Mequon Fire Department by Rick Lemke, Committee Member and Volunteer Fire Department Member;
- City of Mequon Fire Department Recruitment Report dated December 17, 2019;
- Various additional data, reference materials and other documentation compiled by Command Staff to assist the Committee in understanding the current Fire Department structure and operations, along with associated costs, demographic challenges, etc; and

, during the last few months, information gathered during tours of the Buntrock Ave Safety Building and the East Side Fire Stations. During these tours and subsequent meetings, the C. During each of the subsequent meetings the committee had an opportunity to meet with the Command Staff, and Paid-on-Call and Part-Time Department Members.

Attachment: FOFD Committee Report MJB Edits (5334 : Report)

- These meetings were designed to have open question and answer sessions to better understand the issues facing the Department, along with and drill that down to Members' individual concerns.

First and foremost, the Committee commends the Command Staff and Department's rank and file for attending every meeting and giving us their comments and recommendations. Their input has been critical in our committee work.

We found that the FIRE/EMS Members are very positive about many aspects of the Department. However, they but also have many concerns of about both its the current and future stability of the department.

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Mequon has been well-served for decades by a volunteer paid-on-call department with only minimal full-time staffing. Currently, we have the Fire Chief and Assistant Chief as our only full-time staff. However, due to changing demographics and other societal trends over time, our Fire Department, like many other volunteer departments nationwide, is struggling to fully staff all EMS calls. The number of EMS calls in Mequon has increased 10% in two years and 76% over the past ten years. To further complicate this situation, during the last two years there has been a 20% reduction in the number of volunteer firefighters and EMTs available to deal with these increasing demands.

We believe the changing demographics of our community is a significant factor causing the challenges faced by the Department in its current structure, namely an increase in EMS calls with a concurrent decrease in number of volunteer firefighter/EMTs. The median age of the population in Mequon increased from 45.8 years in 2010 to 48.3 years in 2019, and additional senior and assisted living housing has been added to the housing stock of late. A Mequon is an aging community and as Mequon the community ages, the trends suggest the community it will require more frequent EMS service, this demographic group will continue to increase and call volumes will continue to increase.

Meanwhile, the aging of our community also results in a decreased pool of potential Fire/EMS volunteers, who tend to skew toward a younger demographic. To complicate this, during the last two years there has been a 20% reduction in the number of volunteer firefighters and EMTs with increasing demands.

This will directly affect the quality of care given to our residents if no corrective action is taken.

In addition to the decreased pool of potential community volunteers due to Mequon's aging demographic, our investigations suggest that many additional factors are causing the further reduction in volunteer-paid-on-call members, such as:

- Increasing time commitments for work and family that decreases time for volunteering-
- Reduction in risk tolerance for younger generations
- Changing nature of calls, currently 78% EMS and 22% FFire (We understand that potential volunteers are often more interested in firefighting opportunities rather than responding to EMS calls)related,
- Increase in late-night call volume causing fatigue during volunteers' other full-time jobs
- Increased time commitment and costs for certification and training-
- Young members cannot afford nearby housing in our community, which tends to be more expensive than neighboring communities and with less rental units available, so they must stay at the Fire Station. The Fire Station housing is in need of immediate upgrades and is not an attractive option for potential volunteers.
- (Housing in station needs immediate upgrades)
- Competition for EMS staff from nearby departments

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The Department has increased its recruiting efforts in order to find additional volunteers (enhanced use of social media, distribution of print brochures, etc.) but to-date these efforts have not resulted in significant increased volunteers.

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Currently there are approximately over 50 Paid-on-Call and Part-Time Mmembers on the roster to fill on-call shifts and times. No on-call shifts are assigned. Mand members sign up for the shifts and times that they are available. Because of work and family commitments, a number of the Mmembers can only commit to a small number of shifts, leaving a core group of 12 Mmembers to cover 80% of on-call hours.

As a result, critical time slots are not have trouble being filled. This was highlighted last summer, when scheduled service times were not staffed/filled and as a temporary solution the Common Council had to approve extra compensation to ensure adequate service for the city was achieved. We believe that tThe dual challenges of increasing calls and decreasing volunteers currently faced by Department is will directly affect the quality of care given to our residents if no corrective action is taken.

**OPTIONS:**

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We believe there are There are 4 basic options that can be considered for the Mequon Fire Department/EMS moving forward:

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- Maintain the Status Quo
- Combine Mequon with other Neighboring existing FFire Departments

Attachment: FOFD Committee Report MJB Edits (5334 : Report)

- ~~4.2. Keep structure and recruiting efforts the same~~
- ~~3. Convert Department to Full-time-Full-time Paid Staffing Structure Fire and EMS staffing~~
- ~~2. Combine Mequon with other existing Fire departments~~
- ~~3.~~
- ~~4. Retain Hybrid to include Current Structure With Additional -and adding a minimum number of Full-time Staffing and Pay Increases for Paid-on-Call and Part-Time Members~~
- ~~5. Combine Mequon with other existing Fire departments~~

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**Maintain the Status Quo Keeping the same:**

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~~For the reasons described above, we do not believe this is an acceptable option. This is really not an option as we discovered during our interviews and interactions with Command staff and rank and file members. Current Members are covering allotted shifts times as best as possible, but there will, at some it is likely that at some point time there will be a critical mass where critical times that are will be open and not adequately staffed.~~

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~~Furthermore, in our interviews, Command Staff as well as and rank and file have~~

~~repeatedly mentioned overwork and burnout as having the potential to cause the loss of losing even more volunteers, as well as -increasing potential for plus increasing the possibility of error due to fatigue. The Committee has been very impressed with the hard work, dedication, and high level of service provided by the Mequon Fire Department even under these difficult current circumstances. We feel that it is not a reasonable expectation for them to continue to operate under the status quo in light of the increasing challenges described in this report, which at some point will negatively affect the quality of care given to our residents if no corrective action is taken.~~

**Combination of Mequon with Other on Neighboring other Fire Departments?**

~~The Committee is aware that the City is in the beginning stages of talks with various neighboring communities regarding the combination of Mequon with other neighboring Fire Departments. We support that effort, and in particular the investigation as to whether the combination of Thiensville and Mequon would result in cost savings, efficiencies, synergies, etc. However, since these discussions are only in very~~

Attachment: FOFD Committee Report MJB Edits (5334 : Report)

preliminary stages, and we believe that any changes resulting from these discussions would be many years in the future, we do not recommend waiting for this option to come to fruition before our recommended changes discussed below are made.

The committee has not discussed the various savings and synergies that a combination of two or more Fire/EMS departments would generate for the Mequon Department and the other communities. The Committee realizes that the city is in the beginning stages of talks with various communities and support that effort.

Specifically, the combination of Thiensville and Mequon would have obvious returns for both communities and the committee would support any study or negotiations to move in that direction.

**Convert Department to Full-time Paid Staffing Structure Fire and EMS staffing:**

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Converting the Department to full-time, paid Fire and EMS staffing would solve the problem of open shifts, and potential critical shortages facing the Mequon Fire Department. However, this would also increase the costs associated with the full-time department significantly, and the loss of our current volunteer staffing. Current estimates of the cost of a full-time department for the City of Mequon would be approximately \$4,000,000 per year. The chart below shows some examples of costs associated with full-time fire departments for communities of comparable size and call volume to Mequon, along with a comparison to the cost of Mequon's current structure, which is significantly lower and which the Committee feels provides considerable value to the City taxpayers.

**Comparisons of Community Size, Area, Cost and Service Levels**

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	Population	Area	Budget	Call Volume
<b>Mequon</b>	<b>24,385</b>	<b>49 Sq. Mi.</b>	<b>\$1,588,029</b>	<b>2,414</b>
Pleasant Prairie	21,166	33 Sq. Mi.	\$4,122,899	2,653
DePere	24,699	22 Sq. Mi.	\$4,120,948	2,660
Fitchburg (No EMS)	28,316	35.6 Sq. Mi.	\$3,521,130	2,103

Need to add our average age demographics here!!! Furthermore, in addition to significantly increased costs, conversion of the Department to a full-time staffing structure would by definition result in the elimination, or at least significant reduction, of the role for volunteer members, many of whom would ideally like to continue to serve the Department, provided some of the current challenges are addressed. For these

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reasons, we do not recommend conversion to a full-time paid staffing structure at this time.

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Combination of Mequon on other departments?

~~The committee has not discussed the various savings and synergies that a combination of two or more Fire/EMS departments would generate for the Mequon Department and the other communities. The Committee realizes that the city is in the beginning stages of talks with various communities and support that effort.~~

~~Specifically, the combination of Thiensville and Mequon would have obvious returns for both communities and the committee would support any study or negotiations to move in that direction.~~

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Retain Current Structure with Additional Full-time Staff and Pay Increases for Paid-on-Call and Part-time Members~~Hybrid Options?~~

The last option, and the option recommended by this Committee, Hybrid Option would be to retain the current structure (a hybrid of full-time paid staff members, along with part-time and volunteer members), but add a minimum number of additional full-time staff members and institute pay increases for members. We believe these changes (the specifics of which are discussed in the section below entitled "Committee Recommendation") will serve to stabilize the Department in its current structure, address the immediate need to insure there are no "holes" in the schedule to maintain current quality of service, provide support for current members so they are incentivized to remain part of the Department, and assist in recruitment of potential future volunteers. Although there will be some increased cost with these staff additions and pay increases, these changes will allow the City to maintain the basics of the full-time/volunteer hybrid structure, which will continue to result in significant cost-savings in relation to conversion to a full-time department and significant value to taxpayers.

The specifics of our recommendation will be discussed below, but the following is a brief summary of the Department's current staffing and pay structure, an understanding of which will assist in our explanation of our specific recommendations for staff-adds and pay increases.

The Mequon Fire Department has three groups of members: full-time, part-time, and paid-on-call. The Chief and the Deputy Chief are currently the only full-time staff members. There are approximately 50 paid-on-call members and out of the 50 paid-on-

call members, 10 are eligible for part-time hours (as the paid-on-premises paramedic, as described below.)

The paid-on-call ("POC") and paid-on-premises ("POP") staff members of the Department generally fit into three categories:

1. Community members who have other full-time jobs but enjoy serving the community and helping people;
2. People who have other full-time employment and are looking to supplement their income while at the same time helping people; and
3. Young people who want a full-time fire/EMS job who are working for Mequon to gain experience.

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The pay structure for paid-on-call and part-time members falls into four categories:

- **Standby Pay**—pay for POC members who are on the schedule to respond to EMS calls. Five members are on call every day 24 hours, 365 days a year. Members sign up using an online program. Standby pay is currently \$3 per hour, provided that pursuant to a temporary MOU (expires at the end of 2020) standby pay was raised to \$7 per hour for weekend hours to incentivize sign-up for these hours.
- **Call Pay**—pay for POC members for responding to an emergency call or training. Call pay is based on a member's rank, certifications and length of service, between \$16.50 per hour and \$26.50 per hour. (Also, at the start of the COVID 19 crisis, the City added a \$10 per hour hazard pay increase to the base call pay for members which will end when the City determines the crisis is over.)

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- **Station Work Pay**—pay POC members make for anything other than standby or emergency calls, such as fire inspections, public education, and standby for special events. Station work pay is \$16.50 per hour.

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- **Paid-on-Premises Pay**—pay for the one part-time, paid-on-premises paramedic, staffed 24 hours per day/ 365 days a year. 10 POC members are eligible based on certifications to serve as the paid-on-premises paramedic. In the temporary MOU (expires at the end of 2020), the City earmarked money to incentivize the POP paramedic and pay was increased from \$18.32/hour to \$23.32/hour. (Also, at the start of COVID 19 crisis the city added a \$10 per hour hazard pay increase to this base pay which will end when the City determines the crisis is over.)

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Based on this hybrid staffing model consisting of only two full-time staff plus POC and POP volunteers, and with the trending decrease in the number of volunteers and increasing EMS calls, the Department currently runs in a manner one might describe as "excessively lean" with very little margin for error. An additional concern voiced by the rank-and-file POC/POP members based on this excessively lean staffing structure is that it doesn't allow for 24-hour/7 day per week supervision by Command Staff at the station. (Or, alternatively, requires Command Staff to put in excessive hours providing such supervision at Mequon's current, minimal full-time staffing levels.)

[END MJB Edits]

**COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: a combination of Paid on call and full-time staffing.**

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We looked a number of approaches to hiring full time, but it was obvious that Mequon again would be in competition with other departments for non-command full time staffing. This is called a bottom up approach and would not address the need for:

- 1. Full time training officer
- 2. Addition Fire Inspection
- 3. Command staff for all shifts

The Matrix Staffing Study recommended the hiring 3 Deputy Chiefs working 24-hour shifts and each with a functional area of responsibility within the department. This study can be used as an example for a Hybrid department.

The study also recommended the hiring of a part time fire inspector, but we believe that if the department would hire additional deputy Chiefs, one of the duties would be to support the current fire inspection process.

The committee also discussed at the January 2020 meeting

- 1. Paid on Call pay increase of \$10.00 per hour
- 2. Paid on premises position at station 1

Cost associated with Hybrid option.

Addition of three deputy Chiefs \$120,000 (3)  
Paid on Call pay increase \$150,000  
Paid on Premises position (Station 1) \$208,000

Total? Question: Three chiefs were listed as 120K each but listed costs as 240K??

I think total should be \$718k not the \$598 listed