

Memo



To: Honorable Mayor Justin Nickels
Members of the Finance & Personnel Committee

From: Todd Blaser, Chief Fire Rescue

Date: September 7, 2023

Re: Fire Department Reorganization Plan

I respectfully request your support during this upcoming budget year as I propose an organizational change, which I believe will provide a more effective and efficient delivery of emergency services in and around our community, as well as resourcefully addressing the demands for services.

Manitowoc Fire Rescue is a career department made up of 51 full-time represented line personnel. The full-time staffing is made up of three shifts of 17, working 24-hour shifts, 56-hours per week. The non-represented Chief and Assistant Chief work a traditional 40-hour work week.

The current organizational model utilizes a Company Officer supervising staff at their specific assigned station. The Company Officer position is filled by employees holding the ranks of Lieutenant and Captain¹ as assigned by the Chief. At Station #1 the assigned company officer is the Officer in Charge and responsible for coordinating emergency and non-emergency activities of the day.

Besides my position, the Assistant Chief is the only other leadership position that is not part of the Firefighter Labor Union. Over the years, the fire department administration has gradually moved away from the daily operations of the organization, leaving the supervision responsibilities and critical decision-making during emergency situations to the Company Officers (Captain and Lieutenants). During this time, the Company Officers lacked clear direction, expectations, training, accountability and career development. The demands for our service from the community are constantly changing, and the organization's ability to meet the demands of the community has been significantly hindered due to the leadership inconsistencies.

Also, due to the lack of clear hierarchy, there were times when company officers were inconsistent in enforcing policies. This was compounded by the fact that the employees and supervisors are members of the same labor union.

I have worked diligently to make improvements in these areas and to change the culture by providing clear operating policies and procedures, direction, officer expectations, and training. However, because the fire rescue service is a 24-hour operation, there are gaps that are unable to be filled by the two non-union supervisors.

The current practice is for the Chief and Assistant Chief to share "On Call" time. When "On Call" we are in constant communication and remain in the community with a response vehicle and are prepared to respond at a moment's notice. The primary objective of the "On Call" time is to provide critical decision-making during

¹ Note that the current and expected continued organizational model has moved toward the elimination of the Captain position through attrition.

emergency operations and provide support to the Company Officers. The secondary objective is to provide supervision of Company Officers and staff by enforcing policies and response guidelines.

To address the supervisory gaps, I am proposing the establishment of a city-wide shift supervisor within our current staffing model. We currently have seventeen members assigned to each of the three shifts, with each shift having company officers. Moving forward, I propose each shift have four Lieutenants as Company Officers and a Battalion Chief to supervise these Officers, as well as coordinating staffing and emergency responses into and out of the city. The Battalion Chief position would be a non-represented position and reporting directly to the Chief/ Assistant Chief.

The addition of the Battalion Chief position will offer the organization the ability to recruit leaders from within the organization. This arrival of new ideas and concepts would only strengthen the department. This position would provide critical decision-making during emergency responses and provide critical supervision of the staff.

If this proposal is approved, it will reduce fire union membership by three employees, bringing the total number of fire union members to 48. This may not be ideal from a coverage standpoint, but at this time, my recommendation is to address the more pressing need of consistent leadership within the organization. The hope is that replacing the three union positions would be considered again in future budget discussion.

I understand the financial impact of this request and have worked diligently to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and prudence during my tenure. The implementation of the Battalion Chief positions would complete the management structure of the organization. This proposal has been vetted and supported by Mayor Nickels and Human Resource Director Jessie Lillibridge. These improvements will meet the changing and growing demands of the citizens and the community we serve, allowing us to meet our department mission.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.