
MEMORANDUM



TO: Mayor Walker and Councilors
FROM: M McPherson, City Administrator
SUBJECT: **Fire Department Transition**
DATE: January 31, 2024

Background:

Mayor Walker and I met with Assistant Fire Chief Vaccari and Firefighter Jamin Wood on January 28 (Sunday) to discuss how the City and the Princeton Fire and Rescue Department (PFRD) can move forward. The discussion was open, cordial, and productive. Topics ranged from the workplace assessment to replacement of personal protective equipment. Both sides agreed that communication and working together will be key for moving forward.

PFRD Requests

Vaccari and Wood brought to the table the attached series of requests. They were discussed on Sunday and then further discussed internally with staff on Monday. The following is our response and recommendation for the Council to consider:

1. Pause the workplace assessment for 120 days; this allows the City to begin the hiring process for a new chief.

Response: Staff recommends that the Council agree to this request. Flaherty and Hood will be asked to set aside the work, all collected information will remain with them until requested by the City. The City reserves the right to restart the process.

2. Invite administration (Administrator/Mayor/Councilor) to participate in the monthly Fire Executive Board meetings.

Response: The City Administrator will attend and will assist with the development of the monthly meeting agenda. The Mayor intends to attend as well, and if he is unavailable, a Councilor's attendance would be recommended.

3. Align Chief Lawrence's retirement date with February 8, 2024. Swear Assistant Chief Vaccari in as Temporary Chief.

Response: The City's Personnel Manual requires a 30-day notice, hence the last day of Chief Lawrence's employment as Fire Chief being March 1. This time is needed to allow for the transition of duties, passwords, vendor information, and general transfer of information to the Assistant Chief, the Assistant City Administrators that will be helping with budget and other financial duties, and the Fire Executive Board members. Staff would offer this as a compromise: effective February 8, Chief Lawrence would return the command vehicle, all methods to access the Fire Department, would not respond to any calls, and would relocate to City Hall to continue the transition work.

Per Provision H of the PFRD Organizational Handbook, the Assistant Chief shall assume the duties of the Chief in their absence. Effective February 8, the Chief's position will become vacant and Assistant Chief Vaccari will assume the duties of the Chief without the need to be sworn in. The City will proceed with its normal hiring process for a department head, and will invite applications from all qualified applicants (both internal and external). It is the in-

tent that the best qualified candidate for Fire Chief be hired and appointing a Temporary Chief (when such an appointment is not needed) interferes with that process.

A process for hiring a new Chief has not been identified at this time, but creation of a hiring committee broader than the Ad Hoc Committee is envisioned. Staff recommends working with the PFRD to identify a variety of persons, both internal and external, to serve on a hiring committee whose sole purpose would be to review applications, identify interviewees and recommend a candidate to the City Council.

4. Equipment purchased via the Relocation program to remain in the Fire Department.

Response: The equipment will remain in the Fire Department.

5. Written confirmation that Ron Lawrence will have no direction over the Fire Department in any way.

Response: The minutes of the January 25, 2024 council meeting will specifically reflect the Mayor's comments and confirmation of this. The Fire Chief's job description notes that the position reports to the City Administrator.

6. Engine 5 check engine light is on.

Response: An in-house diagnostic tool was connected to Engine 5's engine. The engine is too old for the in-house diagnostic tool to collect information. Public Works Director Gerold indicated that a specialist in Detroit engines from the City would be contacted as well as reaching out to Rugged repair in Milaca.

7. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) repair and replacement.

Response: PFRD leadership will prepare an inventory of equipment that is in need of repair or missing; replace what can be from in-house stock as applicable, and then provide the Administrator with the list and arrange for repairs. A standard operating guideline related to PPE will also be developed.

8. Limit/threshold for items that can be ordered without Council approval.

Response: There is no official threshold, it is more of a balancing act within each line-item amount in the approved budget. Budget administrators need to be aware of the approved budget amount and be able to forecast and prioritize expenditures.

Attached are the DRAFT job descriptions for the Part-time Fire Chief and the Part-time Emergency Manager.

Request

Staff requests that the City Council find consensus on the above items. Staff also recommends that the City Council review the attached job descriptions and provide input as needed. The job descriptions will be placed on the February 8 Council agenda for approval and to authorize the posting and hiring.