

**Western Lakes Fire Board**  
**Monthly Board Meeting**  
**August 25, 2025**

**Call to Order**

- George Morris called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Board members present were George Morris, Jeff Roemer, Kent Lorenz, Mike Tompkins, and Kevin Laabs. Excused was Dan DeBehnke and Scott Carter.

**Proof of Notice**

- Chief Bowen announced that the notice was posted Wednesday, August 20, 2025, at 12:07 p.m. in accordance with open meeting laws.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

- Matt Fennig, Fire Chief for Lake Country Fire & Rescue, led the Pledge of Allegiance

**Public Comment**

- George Morris opened the meeting up to public comment.
- Matt Fennig, Fire Chief of Lake Country Fire & Rescue, introduced himself to the Fire Board. He expressed his personal support, as well as that of his team at LCFR, in exploring opportunities for collaboration between LCFR and WLFD. He looks forward to discussions regarding collaboration and integrating the two departments into a single unit.
- Jeff Herrmann, Administrator for the Village of Lac La Belle and Town of Oconomowoc, requested the Fire Board to consider the partnership between WLFD and the two communities he represents during the discussion on the agenda item regarding future municipal partners. He shared the current and past contributions by both municipalities in the annual operating and capital budgets as part of the contract agreement. In 2020 as part of the expanded WLFD contract to cover the municipalities fully the Town of Oconomowoc make significant investments into the Okauchee Fire Station to allow for living quarters, and also paid for temporary living quarters during the length of the project. Additionally, they fully paid for a new dive squad and equipment including cardiac monitor, SCBA, and extrication equipment. During the COVID pandemic they also supported the District with a contribution of ARPA funds to assist in the response and equipment needs of the District. He requests the Fire Board to consider these contributions in their discussion regarding new municipal partners and consider these as credits towards the fund balance contribution.

**Consent Agenda**

- Items listed under the Consent Agenda are considered in one motion unless a Fire Board Member requests that an item be removed from the Consent Agenda
  - Minutes of July 28, 2025 regular Fire Board Meeting
  - Payment of bills in the amount of \$1,318,208.97.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kent Lorenz to approve the Consent Agenda items including meeting minutes from July 28, 2025 Fire Board meeting and payment of bills in the amount of \$1,318,208.97. Motion carried unanimously.

**Fire Chief's Report**

- Chief Bowen provided updates for the fire board's monthly report on District and Administrative Operations. Chief began by welcoming Assistant Chief Hoffman to the WLFD and congratulating Assistant Chief Meyer on his promotion. The chief noted that both new appointments have been a positive and needed addition, improving the department's ability to be responsive and delegate duties more efficiently. They will continue to work together to align duties with the WLFD's mission, vision, and values.

- Chief Bowen shared an update on the Facilities Needs Assessment and Impact Fee Study. McMahon Associates is progressing with the project and has requested data on the square footage and service area of each station to complete their analysis. The study is expected to be finished by the end of August and presented in September. 2026 Budget: The Fire Board adopted the 2026 Operating Budget and 5-Year Capital Improvement Budgets as presented at the August 13 budget workshop. The chief noted that a lot of work has gone into balancing these budgets to meet the community's needs, with a goal of presenting reasonable, incremental increases in the future. Current Budget Trends: The 2025 fiscal year budget is trending favorably, with expenditures running 2% below projections. This is partially due to vacancies and lower insurance costs from improved workers' compensation factors. While highway revenue is slightly below projections, this has been offset by increases in other revenue sources like miscellaneous income and the Wisconsin EMS Funding Assistance Program.
- An overview of the department's emergency response activities following the rain events of August 9, 2025. WLFD crews were heavily involved in mitigation efforts and damage assessments. Over a 48-hour period, WLFD responded to 65 calls for service, including providing mutual aid to a neighboring department for a lightning strike. At 11:15 pm Saturday evening the storms intensified and began causing calls for service across the District and Waukesha County. At 12:22 am, Waukesha County activated the Fire/EMS High Call Volume Protocol due to the number of calls for service coming in. Overall, our area was spared and did fairly well. The District was able to allocate resources to the calls as they came in. We had command staff respond to support the high call volume protocol and local operations of dispatching and emergency management operations. A limited number of off-duty personnel responded in to assist with the surge in calls and higher acuity responses. The eastern half of Waukesha County was truly a disaster, along with Milwaukee County, both of which have requested mutual aid from surrounding areas to assist with their calls. In addition, as a result of the storms and impacts they had on the City of Milwaukee, Waukesha County was requested to respond with a strike team to assist with calls for service in Milwaukee. The District provided an aerial ladder as part of this MABAS request.
  - Scott Carter asked how we get this kind of information out to the citizens, as this is heroic action. He shared how impressive this is and wishes more people would realize what the District does. Chief Bowen shared this was recently in the newspaper and on social media to bring awareness.
- The chief also noted that the district is in ongoing discussions with the City of Delafield and Lake Country Fire & Rescue about the request for proposal for fire and EMS services by the City of Delafield and alternatives of working together with LCFR. Chief Bowen shared that leadership from both WLFD and LCFR will be getting together to discuss these options and a joint vision, and that he and Chief Fennig have had preliminary conversations.
- Other projects and initiatives that are being worked on include: Hiring and Retention: The chief highlighted a new focus on evaluating current hiring processes for both full-time and part-time staff to ensure the department's needs are met while also providing a positive experience for new hires. Additionally, a review of retention methods is underway, with the goal of exploring advanced strategies to retain staff. The chief noted that turnover costs far exceed retention efforts. Employee Wellness: WLFD is collaborating with its PEER Support Team and Safety Committee to offer a comprehensive array of physical and mental wellness resources to all members. Policy Implementation: The department is working with assistant chiefs and committees on a phased implementation of Lexipol Policies and Procedures, with a goal for full adoption by April 2026.
- Mutual Aid Discussion: The chief also provided an update on a recent instance of providing mutual aid to a neighboring fire department that was short-staffed. WLFD is now meeting with that department's chief to discuss a long-term service contract.

### **Chief Officer Reports**

- George Morris asked if any of the Chief's had anything to add to their reports, and if the board had any questions.

- Members of the board engaged in discussion regarding the difference between mutual aid given, automatic aid, and mutual aid received. They would like a deeper dive into the mutual aid being given by the District to determine the balance between the District and its partners. Specifically, when departments are calling for mutual aid due to station brown-outs in their own communities. When these departments do not have primary coverage and staffing how this impacts the District and municipalities the District serves. Assistant Chiefs Hoffman and Meyer and Chief Bowen shared the same concerns with brown-out stations and will present at a future meeting a deeper analysis of this and methods to ensure balance and still support our neighbors.

### **Presentation – Training Bureau, Deputy Chief Alex Konen**

- Deputy Chief Alex Konen provided the Fire Board with a detailed overview of the responsibilities and activities of the Training Bureau. His presentation concentrated on several key areas: Deputy Chief Konen elaborated on the annual training plan for Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS), which includes specialized training for the District's special teams, such as Dive, Drone, and Rescue Task Force. He outlined both the full-time and part-time academy schedules, emphasizing the development process for new recruits. Furthermore, he examined the daily training schedule, illustrating how training is strategically balanced to ensure operational staffing and readiness throughout the District at all times. The Deputy Chief presented specific metrics to evaluate employee compliance and proficiency. The discussion also addressed the alignment of the District's training requirements and measures with various industry standards, including: Insurance Services Office (ISO), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (WI SPS), Wisconsin Department of Health Services (WI DHS)
- This presentation effectively informed the board of the rigor and scope of the District's training program, underscoring its dedication to professional development, operational readiness, and adherence to all pertinent state and national standards.
- Jeff Roemer expressed his satisfaction with the efforts of the District. He, unfortunately, has seen through his profession many departments that do not strive to ensure training standards.
- Scott Carter asked if at times individuals do not meet these standards and what the results are. DC Konen expressed that we strive to coach people up, but if they are not able to meet the standards for their positions, they are not authorized to work in those capacities until they are satisfactorily completed. Failure to meet the standards of the District can also lead to a non-disciplinary separation.

### **Discussion – Formulation of Guideline for New Partner Municipalities Joining WLFD at the Direction of the Municipalities Parties of the WLFD Intermunicipal Agreement**

- Chief Bowen presented a draft guideline regarding the process for new municipalities seeking to join the Western Lakes Fire District. This guideline was developed at the request of the owner municipalities and is distinct from the Intermunicipal Agreement itself. The initial framework was created by a workgroup composed of representatives from the City of Oconomowoc, Village of Summit, Village of Dousman, Village of Lac La Belle, Town of Ottawa, Town of Merton, and Town of Oconomowoc.
- The draft delineates the prerequisites for prospective partners to ensure operational, philosophical, financial, and logistical coherence with the District. Key stipulations for new members include the following: prospective municipalities must consent to the terms of the existing Intermunicipal Agreement with minimal amendments; new members are mandated to make a one-time contribution to the District's fund balance, calculated by multiplying their percentage of the operating budget by the current fund balance. This payment may be rendered as a lump sum or distributed over a three-year period.
- Joining municipalities are required to transfer ownership of their fire station(s) and property to the District. Any station must conform to the District's standards for 24/7 staffing, incurred at the new municipality's expense prior to joining. Furthermore, all apparatus must undergo inspection by the District's Fleet Bureau. New partners will enter into an initial three-year contract.

- The draft also addresses the composition of the Fire Board and Fire Commission as the number of member municipalities expands: for up to nine members, each municipality will be allocated one board or commission member. Should the number of municipalities be even, the largest financial contributor will receive two members. For more than nine members, to maintain a nine-person body, members will be elected "at large" by the elected officials of all municipalities, ensuring the selection of the most qualified candidates to represent the entirety of the District. Chief Bowen solicited feedback from the board concerning the draft, with the objective of finalizing the document for discussion at the Joint Owners Meeting scheduled for September 10, 2025.

#### **Discussion/Action – 2026 Health Insurance Plan and Contribution Rates**

- Chief Bowen and the Human Resources Department presented a review of the District's health insurance options for 2026, emphasizing the goal of maintaining effective staffing with a competitive benefits package. The District currently offers the PO4 health plan through the Wisconsin Employee Trust Fund (ETF), which replaced a no-deductible option in 2018. The deductible reimbursement was eliminated in 2023, coinciding with wage adjustments to help employees adapt. For 2025, the District maintained an 87% contribution rate for the lowest-cost plan despite a 9.9% premium increase.
- A thorough analysis suggested that while moving away from ETF might offer short-term savings, it could lead to higher long-term premiums and fewer plan options, impacting recruitment and retention. Recently, Network Health became accepted by ProHealth Care, which may reduce the overall premium increase to 2.5% for 2026 if employees switch providers. This gives employees broader options while supporting recruitment and retention.
- Management recommends continuing with the Wisconsin ETF PO4 plan and covering 87% of the lowest-cost provider's premium to ensure a competitive and sustainable health insurance benefit for employees.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kevin Laabs to approve health insurance as presented for 2026, with the District covering 87% of the lowest cost provider for eligible full-time employees, and 50% or 25% for eligible part-time employees, according to policy, contingent on final budget approval by municipalities. Motion carried unanimously.

#### **Discussion/Action – 2026 Wage Adjustment and Compensation Plan**

- Chief Bowen presented the annual District compensation plan, aimed at attracting and retaining qualified employees. Approved in 2022, the plan seeks to keep wages at the 60<sup>th</sup> to 70<sup>th</sup> percentile of comparable agencies. It includes a step-based structure for full-time employees and set rates for part-time, paid-on-call, and apprentice personnel. A review by the Chief and the Human Resources Manager considers internal factors, such as local law enforcement wages and wage compression within the Western Lakes Fire District (WLFD), while also analyzing market wages from comparable Wisconsin fire departments. The 2026 projected wage adjustments are expected to range from 2.0% to 5.0%, with local law enforcement seeing increases of 3.75% to 5.0%. The proposed 2026 budget includes a 4.0% increase for full-time, apprentice, and part-time positions, with a 3.0% base adjustment and an additional 1% incentive for completing the annual physical function test, emphasizing employee health and safety.
- Currently, the District is consulting with legal counsel and the Health and Safety Committee about this policy. Chief Bowen recommends approving the proposed wages and annual physical function test pending final budget approval and legal review.
- Jeff Roemer asked about funding for the testing equipment and validation process. Chief Bowen shared the total cost is being put together and will be presented later this year after a final cost is determined and potential partner agencies are identified for cost sharing. At this time, the excess funds from health insurance and risk reductions would assist in covering this expense.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Mike Tompkins to approve the wage adjustments as presented, contingent on final 2026 budget approval by the municipalities. The wages presented reflect a 4% increase in wages for the District's full-time, apprentice, and part-

time employees. Of the increase, 3% is the base adjustment, and 1% is an incentive add-on for employees who successfully pass the annual job performance physical function test. The 2026 wages will become effective January 4, 2026 and will include the 1% compensation for the job performance function test initially, with employees completing the test in September/October at which point the compensation could be adjusted based on results of the test. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Future Agenda Items and Meetings**

- Joint Owners Annual Budget Meeting – Wednesday, September 11, 2025 beginning at 6:00 pm at City of Oconomowoc Police Department.
- Monthly Fire Board Meeting – Monday, September 22, 2025, at 4:00 pm at Station #1.

### **Closed Session**

- George Morris announced the Fire Board will convene into closed session pursuant to section 19.85(1)(e), Wisconsin State Statutes, “Deliberating or negotiating the purchase of public property, the investing of public funds, or conducting other specified public business, whenever competitive or bargaining reasons require a closed session” for the following purposes:  
*“Discuss request for proposal from City of Delafield for fire and emergency medical services revision to service contracts with Town of Ashippun and Town of Concord and possible District action on same.”* The Fire Board will not reconvene into open session at the conclusion of the closed session and, if appropriate, the Board may act upon matters discussed in closed session.
- A motion was made at 5:33 pm to enter into closed session by Kent Lorenz and seconded by Kevin Laabs. Roll call vote was performed with all in favor.
- A motion was made at 6:47 pm to end closed session by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kent Lorenz. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Adjournment**

- At 6:47 p.m. the meeting was adjourned upon the conclusion of the closed session.