

Western Lakes Fire Board
Monthly Board Meeting
January 26, 2026

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, Dan DeBehnke, and Scott Carter. Excused was Kevin Laabs.

Proof of Notice

- Chief Bowen announced that the notice was posted Friday, January 23, 2026, at 3:46 p.m., in accordance with open meeting laws.

Pledge of Allegiance

- Deputy Chief Brad Ingersoll, led the Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

- George Morris opened the meeting up to public comment, of which there was none.

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 December 17, 2025 regular Fire Board Meeting
 - Payment of bills in the amount of \$3,151,219.21.
- Jeff Roemer raised questions regarding the check register. He acknowledges that, due to the timing of the December meeting, the check register reflects an increased amount this month, effectively encompassing two months' worth of invoices. Kent Lorenz, the treasurer, further clarified to the board that these invoices pertain to the period from mid-November to mid-January. Mr. Roemer inquired about the cost of the water softener for Station 55, as it appeared to be considerably high for such an item. Chief Bowen clarified that the expenditure exceeds that of a standard water softener; it includes a complete iron filter system, recommended as an alternative to a total well replacement following multiple inspections and analyses conducted by vendors. Dan DeBehnke noted that, considering it is an iron filter system, the cost seems justified.
- Furthermore, Jeff Roemer questioned the Stryker purchases for stair chairs and LUCAS devices, totaling \$328,522.92, as this amount appeared excessive for the approved acquisitions. Chief Bowen and Deputy Chief Warren retrieved the approved invoices, which amounted to \$164,261.46, essentially half of the sum reflected in the check register. It appears the values for the Stryker items are double the actual invoice. Chief Bowen will further investigate this matter in collaboration with Finance Manager Cornett, focusing on the check register details and the rationale behind the duplicate invoice for Stryker, and will subsequently report the findings to the board.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to approve the Consent Agenda items, including meeting minutes from December 17, 2025, and payment of bills in the amount of \$3,151,219.21, and have the Chief report back to the board the findings and analysis with supporting detail from Finance Manager Cornett. Motion carried unanimously.

Fire Chief's Report

- Chief Bowen provided the Fire Board with updates and a review of numerous projects, programs, and initiatives that are currently in progress. He began with an overview of discussions among the WLFD and LCFR command staff and management teams regarding potential collaboration and consolidation opportunities. Additionally, he provided an update on the joint hiring process underway between the two agencies. Chief Bowen also informed the board about initiatives of the

Waukesha County Chief's Association, as well as pertinent Fire Protocols and Dispatch matters regarding the CAD-to-CAD interface, closest unit dispatching strategies, mutual aid received and provided, upcoming modifications to unit response and deployment plans, and changes to the 2026 MABAS card. Furthermore, Chief Bowen shared with the board proposed legislation pertinent to EMS billing, insurance payment regulations, and the No Surprises Act.

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.

Discussion/Action – 2026 Fire Board Meeting Calendar

- Chief Bowen presented the board with a proposed draft of the 2026 meeting calendar, which is based on the effectiveness of the system implemented in the previous year. The Fire Board convenes monthly on the fourth Monday at 4:00 PM. Due to holidays such as Memorial Day and Christmas, the meetings scheduled for May and December are adjusted to avoid conflicts. In addition to the regular monthly meetings, the Fire Board convenes bi-monthly with the Municipal Boards during the months of June and September. Furthermore, a special budget workshop meeting is scheduled in August as part of the budget process. The proposed schedule includes the merging of the April and May meetings to accommodate the Memorial Day holiday. Additionally, the draft provides the board with the option to combine the November and December meetings in consideration of the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kent Lorenz to approve the 2026 Fire Board Meeting Calendar as presented and evaluate the November/December meeting later in the year. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Full-time Residency Requirement

- Chief Bowen presented a memorandum requesting expansion of the residency radius for hourly sworn full-time employees, not for salaried sworn staff. His proposal focused on expanding the existing 35-mile requirement to either 45 or 50 miles, rather than eliminating residency altogether, and he expressed concern about fully removing residency requirements. Expanding residency limitation is supported by the District's management team and workforce as a whole as a method of attracting exceptional candidates across southeastern Wisconsin, the Madison Metro area, and areas of Fond du Lac.
- Board members noted that times have changed, staffing levels have improved, and off-duty response needs are not as critical as in the past. They observed that many employers are loosening or removing residency requirements and questioned whether eliminating residency entirely would better position the District to hire the best candidates. Dan DeBehnke's review indicated minimal additional applicant benefit outside the Chief's proposed radius because major state population centers already fall within that area. Jeff Roemer supported eliminating residency entirely to maximize flexibility in hiring and to remove one constraint from the selection process. Board discussion included the view that if a candidate is the best fit, their choice to commute long distances should not be a barrier. Kent Lorenz questioned whether employees would really commute more than 2 hours for work. Jeff Roemer and Chief Bowen confirmed that there are Departments that have employees traveling greater distances to work due to the 48/96 or even 24/48 shift schedules. The Board and administration discussed the various positives and negatives of requiring or eliminating residency completely as part of the discussion. Deputy Chief Ingersoll shared that when he attends recruitment fairs, he receives feedback from candidates about residency. Chief Bowen highlights that more departments are expanding or removing residency, but it is still mixed, with several still maintaining strict residency requirements.
- A motion was made by Dan DeBehnke and seconded by Jeff Roemer to remove the residency requirements for the District's full-time employees.

- During the discussion, Chief Bowen sought clarification on whether the Board’s intent was to remove residency for Chief Officers as well. Roemer confirmed that the motion was to remove residency requirements generally and that residency expectations for Chief Officers with assigned vehicles would instead be governed under the District’s vehicle regulations.
- The motion carried with six votes in favor and one against, with Mike Tompkins voting no.

Discussion/Action – Full-time Firefighter/Paramedic Certification Requirement

- Chief Bowen reviewed with the Fire Board a proposal to approve a change to the full-time firefighter/paramedic job description so that new hires have 12 months, instead of 6, from date of hire to obtain paramedic licensure. He explains that the 6-month window, adopted in 2022 to improve recruitment during a severe Fire/EMS hiring shortage, has proven too short once new hires account for the new-hire academy, field capstone clinicals, and heavy coursework alongside full-time shift work. As a result, the District risks losing otherwise high-caliber employees for scheduling reasons rather than lack of ability. The memorandum highlights that extending the licensure deadline to one year will protect the District’s significant investment in hiring and training, improve the likelihood that employees successfully complete their paramedic requirements, and support long-term retention without lowering clinical standards or removing the paramedic requirement.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Mike Tompkins to approve the recommended change to the full-time firefighter/paramedic job description to change the requirement for paramedic licensure from 6 months to 12 months. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Drone Replacement (2026) CIP

- Deputy Chief Ingersoll presented to the Fire Board regarding the purchase of replacement unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS) for the 2026 capital project. The current drone, purchased in early 2021, is nearing obsolescence, with battery costs rising significantly from around \$700 to over \$990 each. Replacing five sets of batteries would cost nearly \$10,000. The committee concluded that purchasing new drones is more cost-effective than keeping the aging unit. The Aviation Team, the District's most utilized special operations team, regularly assists with various tasks. A committee was formed to evaluate aircraft options, focusing on federal regulations regarding foreign-made drones. However, two domestic aircraft evaluated fell short in price and capability compared to the DJI Matrice 4TD.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to approve Order EST402698496 from Drone Nerds in the amount of \$23,580.00 for the acquisition of two DJI Matrice 4TD aircraft (with DJI RC Plus 2 Enterprise controllers), batteries, and AL1 spotlights; and to approve the purchase of associated peripheral equipment as listed (or equivalent) not to exceed an additional \$11,420.00 for a total project cost not to exceed \$35,000.00. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Station Security Cameras & Station Alerting (2025 & 2026 CIP)

- Chief Bowen presented the 2026 capital project for security cameras, highlighting its alignment with the District’s goal of protecting staff, visitors, and assets while minimizing liability. The project aims to enhance safety and health through improved physical security, deterring fraudulent claims, and enabling quick incident responses. Key drivers for the initiative include recent attempts to breach station facilities, property damage from drunk driving, and narcotics chain-of-custody requirements. The District-wide camera deployment is recognized as a best practice and a vital investigative tool for law enforcement. This camera project is bundled with the In-Station Alerting project to reduce costs. The Board previously approved funding, allocating \$10,000 for camera pre-wiring and a \$45,000 (10%) equipment contingency, with \$37,000 already spent on joint equipment purchases. Axis security cameras were chosen for their reliability and high-resolution capabilities. With a total allocation of \$55,000 (alerting/pre-wire) and an actual cost of

\$47,000, the 2025 portion is \$8,000 under budget. For 2026, \$60,000 is allocated for camera completion, with a projected cost of \$50,986, leaving that portion \$9,014 under budget. The 2026 allocation includes \$46,386 for the final phase and a 10% contingency of \$4,600. Overall, the two-year project is trending under budget, demonstrating an efficient rollout.

- A motion was made by Dan DeBehnke and seconded by Jeff Roemer to approve the final phase of the District-wide security camera project as quoted in the amount of \$46,386 with a 10% contingency of \$4,600 for a total cost of \$50,986.00 as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Future Agenda Items and Meetings

- Monthly Fire Board Meeting – Monday, February 23, 2026, at 4:00 pm at Station #1.

Adjournment

- At 5:12 p.m., a motion was made to adjourn by Dan DeBehnke and seconded by Jeff Roemer. Motion carried unanimously.