

Western Lakes Fire Board
Monthly Board Meeting
July 28, 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, Dan DeBehnke, and Scott Carter. Excused was Kevin Laabs.

Proof of Notice

- Chief Bowen announced that the notice was posted Friday, July 25, 2025, at 3:47 p.m. in accordance with open meeting laws.

Pledge of Allegiance

- Pat Cornett, Finance Manager for the District, led the Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

- George Morris opened the meeting up to public comment.
- Mark Frye, Administrator for the City of Oconomowoc thanked the Fire Board and District staff for doing a good job.

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 June 23, 2025 regular Fire Board Meeting
 - Payment of bills in the amount of \$1,040,951.48.
- A question regarding \$1,006.68 for Batteries for Engine 51 was asked. This provided an understanding on the number of batteries on an Engine and cost of these batteries. The purchase was part of the regular replacement program, just seemed like a high number for batteries.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to approve the Consent Agenda items including meeting minutes from June 23, 2025 Fire Board meeting and payment of bills in the amount of \$1,040,951.48. Motion carried unanimously.

Fire Chief's Report

- Chief Bowen provided updates for the fire board's monthly report on District and Administrative Operations. Starting August 4, Assistant Chief Joe Hoffman will take on the role of Assistant Chief of Operations, overseeing Battalion Chiefs, the Training Chief, and daily operations. Deputy Chief Tim Meyer is promoted to Assistant Chief of Administration, leading the Emergency Medical Services, Community Risk Reduction, Personnel, and Fleet/Facilities Bureaus. This organizational restructuring, a result of strategic planning, aims to reduce the number of Chief Officers while enhancing operational efficiency and improving the span of control, allowing for a smooth transition into their expanded roles.
- An update on the Facility Needs Assessment and Impact Fee Study indicates that McMahon Associates is conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the District's facilities to identify deficiencies and assess space for future growth. The study aims to analyze the impact of new development on the need for additional facilities, with costs covered by impact fees from new growth rather than current taxpayers. The study is set to be completed by the end of August and presented to the board and municipalities in September.
- Chief Bowen provided a financial update regarding the 2026 operating and five-year capital budgets. A preliminary draft budget will be presented at the July Fire Board meeting. Over the past

three years, the District has significantly invested in daily staffing, improving deployment and response times. With the successful implementation of the three-year plan, the focus will shift to maintaining and enhancing operations. The goal is to develop future budgets that meet the evolving needs of the community while ensuring reasonable, incremental budget increases. Currently, the 2025 budget shows favorable trends, with revenue collections closely aligning with projections despite some fluctuations. A shortfall in highway revenue is offset by increases in other sources, including EMS funding assistance. Expenditures are trending 2% below projections, partly due to vacancies in key positions and reduced insurance costs.

- Chief discussed the strategic discussions held over the past month with the District's leadership, focused on improving operations, employee satisfaction, and community service. Recruitment Program: A review of hiring processes for full-time sworn and non-sworn personnel is underway, covering orientation and academy components. We aim to enhance the new hire experience and ensure understanding of District operations. Retention Efforts: A thorough analysis of employee retention methods is essential. Evaluating existing retention programs and exploring new strategies is vital, as the financial impact of turnover significantly outweighs retention costs. Employee Wellness Programs: We're partnering with the PEER Support Team and Safety Committee to provide mental and physical wellness resources, enhancing overall team well-being. Community Outreach: Efforts to improve engagement and education in the community are ongoing, including website updates for better information accessibility to support recruitment and customer service. Capital Improvement Projects: We continuously assess long-term capital needs and the service life of facilities and equipment, looking for cost-reduction strategies. Summer poses unique challenges with extreme heat, increased vacation time, and heightened call volume due to community events. Despite these demands, I am proud of the WLF D members for their dedication to maintaining staffing levels and meeting community needs during this busy season.

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.

Presentation – Operations Bureau, Deputy Chief Tim Meyer

- Deputy Chief Tim Meyer gave a presentation on the Operations Bureau and how it plays a critical role in supporting the Western Lakes Fire District's mission through technology, equipment, training, and community engagement. The Bureau manages over 150 technology assets, including desktops, mobile data computers, tablets, and EMS monitors, ensuring seamless operations across all stations. Key platforms such as EPR Fireworks, Vector Solutions, and Aladtec provide integrated records management, compliance with NFIRS and NERIS, training and certification tracking, scheduling, and personnel management.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) remains a significant investment, with full turnout gear exceeding \$5,000 per set. The Bureau also oversees SCBA care and repair, gear extractors, and SCBA fill stations at multiple firehouses. Fire and communication equipment further support operational readiness and safety.
- Community engagement is a cornerstone of the Bureau's activities, with participation in parades, holiday celebrations, National Night Out, and school events. Station open houses and employee recognition programs strengthen public trust and morale, while uniform oversight ensures professionalism and adaptability.

Discussion/Action – Driver Operator Pumper and/or Aerial Compensation Policy

- Chief Bowen presented an overview of the proposed Driver Operator Pumper and/or Aerial Compensation Policy and Implementation Plan. In 2023, the District introduced a wage adjustment for full-time driver operators of pumpers and aerial apparatus as part of its staffing and compensation strategy. A formal policy document has been created to enhance clarity and consistency.

- The key change is the requirement for employees to demonstrate competency in operating all apparatus in their classification before receiving compensation. This approach ensures that driver operator positions are consistently filled and equips operators to handle all relevant apparatus.
- The documents have undergone internal review and have been submitted for legal examination to ensure compliance with labor laws. The initiative is budget-neutral, as the compensation has already been included in the 2025 budget. Management recommends approval of the policy and implementation plan, giving employees time to achieve compliance.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to approve the Driver Operator Pumper and Aerial Certification and Compensation Policy and proposed implementation plan.
- Scott Carter likes the policy and supports it with a friendly amendment to the section which reads both aerals, he feels should simply read “all aerals” in the event that in the future there are ever more than two the policy is still effective.
- Jeff Roemer amended his motion which was seconded by Dan DeBehnke to approve the Driver Operator Pumper and Aerial Certification and Compensation Policy and proposed implementation plan with a change from both aerals to all aerals. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Fire and EMS Protection Agreement between WLFD, Village of Lac La Belle, and Town of Oconomowoc

- Chief Bowen provided background on the Fire & EMS Protection Agreement with the Village of Lac La Belle and Town of Oconomowoc. Since 2017, services have been provided by the District, which took over from several local fire departments. In January 2025, an Inter-Municipal Agreement incorporated most of the Town into the Village, necessitating a revised partnership agreement.
- Recently, Chief Bowen and Administrator Herrmann drafted this revised agreement to ensure continued Fire and Emergency Medical Services from the Western Lakes Fire District. Both administrators have offered constructive feedback and are now seeking input from their governing boards.
- There is no financial impact on either municipality as the District continues to provide services within the existing budget. The revised agreement has been approved by both boards, and Chief Bowen recommends its approval.
- A motion was made by Dan DeBehnke and seconded by Kent Lorenz to approve the agreement between the Village of Lac LaBelle, Town of Oconomowoc, and Western Lakes Fire District. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion – 2026 Operating Budget and 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan

- Chief Bowen distributed the draft of the preliminary 2026 operating budget and the five-year capital improvement plan. The current draft is unbalanced and indicates an approximate \$50,000 shortfall in operational funds. The proposed budget includes a suggested 4.5% levy increase for the municipalities that receive fire and emergency medical services from the District. Further assessments are underway concerning revenue projections, with a particular and detailed examination of the emergency medical services revenues, which represent the second most significant revenue source for the District. The team is also in the process of refining the projections for each area of expenditure. The overarching objective is to present a fiscally responsible and conservative budget that addresses the growing demands of the communities served by the District, taking into account increasing call volumes, population growth, ongoing development, and an aging demographic. The strategic goals of the District for 2026 encompass the enhancement of staff training to provide additional opportunities that promote the retention of current employees, recruitment, and succession planning. There is an emphasis on investing in the existing team to facilitate leadership development, tactical training, skill enhancement, and overall professional advancement. Additionally, the maintenance of competitive wages and benefits for all positions within the District remains a strategic priority during the budget process. Initial health

insurance premium rates have been released, necessitating further analysis. Currently, 90% of the District's employees enrolled in health insurance are covered by Dean Health. The proposed increase for 2026 is projected to result in an out-of-pocket expense increase for employees ranging from \$5,000 to \$7,500. This situation is concerning, as it poses a significant financial impact on employees and may complicate the process of locating and securing healthcare providers for themselves and their families. Notably, Network Health announced today that it will be accepted by ProHealth Care, presenting a potential solution and a positive change. We are closely evaluating the health insurance costs and their implications, which are subject to real-time changes. The current budget includes a proposed 4.5% wage increase for employees to help mitigate the effects of rising health insurance costs. We are concluding a wage assessment based on both internal and external comparable data, in addition to reviewing the overall benefits package provided by the District to inform the 2026 budget. In the forthcoming two weeks, staff will be finalizing the details and supporting documentation pertinent to the budget.

- The five-year capital budget is currently undergoing a comprehensive analysis to assess any necessary modifications to the approved allocations. This evaluation will focus on the condition and utilization of facilities, equipment, and apparatus to identify potential opportunities for delayed or alternative replacements. Additionally, it will consider whether any urgent matters should be prioritized and incorporated into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
- Mike Tompkins asked about the development of the budget and how projections are calculated, as looking at the 6-month actuals and simply doubling them doesn't add up. Chief Bowen and Finance Manager Cornett explained this as a thorough and detailed process evaluating each line item of the budget to determine what has been expended or is going to be expended. There are several sections of the budget that are not expended equally throughout the year. There are also strategic purchasing decisions made to purchase in bulk when possible to get the best pricing. Over the coming weeks, a deeper and final analysis of the current 2025 and proposed 2026 budgets will be completed to formulate the final draft budget. Tompkins appreciated the explanation.
- The board appreciates the high-level review of the draft budget and work that has gone into development by committees of staff, bureau chiefs, finance, and the chief. Overall, they support the incorporation of the budget initiatives and priorities that have been laid out and discussed since April of this year to put together next year's budget. They look forward to the upcoming budget workshop and reviewing the budget presented by staff.

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

- Chief Bowen distributed the draft guideline which was originally part of the most recent revision of the Intermunicipal Agreement but was removed at the direction of Legal. The guideline for new partners should be separate from the "Agreement between Municipalities". As a result the Owner Municipalities requested the Fire Board develop a guideline for new partner municipalities. The items outlined in this draft were discussed and developed initially from the Intermunicipal Agreement Revision Workgroup which was represented by 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. Chief Bowen requests the board review this draft and bring their thoughts and amendments to the next meeting. The goal is to provide a draft for discussion at the September 10, 2025 Joint Owners Meeting.

Future Agenda Items and Meetings

- Special Budget Workshop – Wednesday, August 13, 2025 beginning at 4:00 pm at Station #1.
- Monthly Fire Board Meeting – Monday, August 25, 2025, at 4:00 pm at Station #1.

Closed Session

- George Morris announce the Fire Board will convene into closed session pursuant to section 19.85(1)(c)(e), Wisconsin State Statutes, "To consider employment, promotion, compensation, or

performance evaluation of the District's part-time and full-time employees, over which the Fire Board exercises responsibility;" and "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 and possible District action on same; discussion of specific, District personnel matters." The Fire Board will 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 5:19 pm to enter into closed session and also invite Mayor Magnus, President Riley, President Queen, Chairman Rupp, Chairman Klink, and Administrator Frye to join the Fire Board in closed session by Mike Tompkins and seconded by Scott Carter. Roll call vote was performed with all in favor.
- A motion was made at 6:59 pm to exit closed session and return to open session by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kent Lorenz. Motion carried unanimously.

Act Upon Matters Discussed in Closed Session

- Following the closed session discussion regarding the request for proposal from the City of Delafield for fire and emergency medical services from the District.
- A motion was made by Dan DeBehnke and seconded by Jeff Roemer that the Fire Chief of the Western Lakes Fire District (WLFD) be formally directed to gather and present comprehensive information regarding provision of services to the City of Delafield. A written report and formal presentation shall be provided to the Joint Owners Board for discussion and further direction at a future scheduled meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Full-time Firefighter/Paramedic Positions

- Based on the current year-to-date budget and budget projections, coupled with current staffing and pool of eligible candidates for full-time, Chief Bowen requested the ability to hire one additional full-time position if a candidate exists. The next academy is scheduled for September, which would allow depth of staff to account for injuries, FMLA, and staffing needs of the District.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Mike Tompkins to authorize Chief Bowen to hire an additional full-time firefighter/paramedic. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

- At 7:04 p.m. a motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.