

Western Lakes Fire Board

Joint Owners Meeting

June 11, 2025

Call to Order

- George Morris called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. Board members present were George Morris, Jeff Roemer, Kent Lorenz, Mike Tompkins, Bill Riemenschneider, Dan DeBehnke, and Scott Carter.
- Each of the municipalities called their meetings to order.
- Also present was the City of Oconomowoc Common Council, Village of Summit Board, Village of Dousman Board, Town of Ottawa Board, Town of Merton Board, and Village of Lac LaBelle Board.

Proof of Notice

- Chief Bowen announced that the district notice was posted at 7:12 a.m. on June 7, 2025.

Pledge of Allegiance

- The Chief Elected Officials from the Municipalities led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Introductions

- Representatives from the Fire Board, Municipalities, and Fire District introduced themselves to the group.

Public Comment

- George Morris opened the meeting to comments from the public, of which there were none.

Consent Agenda

- A motion was made by the Village of Summit, seconded by the Village of Dousman to approve the September 11, 2024 Joint Owners Meeting Minutes. Motion Carried.

Presentation – 2024 Annual Financial Audit

- Chief Bowen introduced Shannon Small from Clifton Larsen Allen, the third-party vendor that completed the audit of the 2024 financials of the District. The financial audit process began at the beginning of the year by CLA, and included several records requests, site visits, and reports to be completed. Shannon reviewed with the municipalities the draft audit materials, which will be acted upon at the next Fire Board meeting. Each municipality received a printed and electronic version of the District 2024 financial audit. Of note, the allowance for uncollectable accounts for ambulance receivables has increased. This is due to the time it takes for the District to receive payment for services. Currently, the District's fund balance remains below the recommended 18%, but is steadily increasing. The cause of the reduced fund balance is two-fold: the first being the increased budget in 2023 and 2024 as a result of the staffing/funding plan, and in 2022, the fund balance was used for internship wages and compliance with DOL rules. Staff continues to balance revenues and expenses and is working to build up the fund balance for cash flow purposes. Due to the timing of apparatus ordering there is a carryover of 2024 capital funds into 2025 that will be utilized. The overall audit is reported as a clean audit with no significant findings.

Presentation – Partner2Learn regarding Clifton Strengths, Professional Development, Succession Planning Program

- Chief Bowen introduced Tiffany Weigand from Partner2Learn to provide an update on services they have provided to the District as they relate to professional development of the District staff including Clifton Strengths, team building, and working as a functional team. This training and

program assist with individual and organizational professional development and succession planning for the District. Partner2Learn has collaborated with several other Fire Departments and Municipalities on similar programs, which are individually tailored to meet the specific needs of each client. The overall emphasis is on professional development, which leads to retention of current employees and the avoidance of the costly loss of institutional knowledge and the costs associated with rehiring and retraining new staff.

Presentation – District Updates (2024 Year in Review, 2025 Projects, 2026 Budget Goals)

- Chief Bowen provided an update of the District's starting with 2024 as a year in review. Last year was a significant year of hiring with the second phase of the staffing plan. This included the District's first Finance Manager, Pat Cornett being hired, and the addition of three new Lieutenants, and three new Firefighter/Paramedics. In 2024, the District saw a shift and a balancing of the employee loss to employee gain ratio for the second year in a row. This shows stabilization of the recruitment and retention of the District. Other significant accomplishments included the first Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover for the District being completed. These documents will be used to make data-driven decisions moving forward. A Standard Operating Guideline Manual was also created for operational guidelines of the District, to support the current Policy manual of the District. Staff completed an Aerial Ladder Truck assessment, which was presented to the municipalities with unanimous support. The District began the implementation process for a Peer Support Team and an MABAS change of quarters resource work station. At the end of the year, the District converted the accounting and payroll software to Civic Systems as well. In 2024, the District participated in over 180 community events, providing community education, outreach, and community relations, including open houses at several of its fire stations. As part of a quality improvement goal of the District it implemented a guideline regarding "After Action Reviews" of significant incidents with goals of improving procedures, skills, tactics, operations, and administration. These reviews lead to training materials and overall growth and development of the team. Response times for the first arriving unit were reduced by another 8.3% resulting in the first arriving unit arriving in 9 minutes and 8 seconds for the 90th percentile alarm time to the first arriving unit. In 2022 this was 10 minutes and 21 seconds. The 90th percentile deployment or out-the-door times of staffed fire apparatus also improved for the second year in a row to 4 minutes and 10 seconds which is a significant improvement from 2022 prior to the staffing plan when it was 10 minutes and 18 seconds. This number has already been reduced in 2025, with the final phase of the staffing plan bringing it down to 2 minutes and 56 seconds. The 90th percentile of the first unit arrival in 2025 has dropped to 8 minutes and 18 seconds which is another 9/2% improvement.
- Chief Bowen reviewed the current projects underway for 2025, including an Acting Officer Professional Development Program, which will lead to promotional consideration for the final three Lieutenants. EMS, Finance, and Human Resources are actively working on the Wisconsin GEMT submissions for supplemental revenue for Medicaid ambulance transports. A consultant has been hired to complete the District and Municipality Facility Needs Assessment and Impact Fee Study, and staff are working with them for completion in September. Due to the retirement of Assistant Chief Schuetz, management is working on a management organizational restructuring, which will reduce the number of Chief Officers by one position. Ongoing work on succession planning at all levels of the District is underway, along with hiring processes and training academies scheduled for the remainder of the year. Other significant projects include the installation of the In-Station Alerting System, the refurbishment of Water Tender 56, and the refurbishment of Engine 53.
- Chief Bowen presented the current Strategic Budget Goals that are being discussed with the Fire Board as part of the 2026 Operating Budget, Capital Improvement Plan, and future strategic plans of the District. An emphasis on 2026 is on training programs of current staff to provide additional opportunities at various levels of the District. Centralizing the administrative and management staff in one location to bring efficiency to the team and further reduction of a Chief Officer position in the future. And continued efforts to maintain effective staffing levels, including competitive wages and benefits to ensure recruitment and retention of quality employees at the District.

Discussion/Action – Revised and Restated WLFD Intermunicipal Agreement

- Chief Bowen reviewed with the municipalities the draft revised and restated Western Lakes Intermunicipal Agreement. This revision started in 2023 with the Chief working with representatives from each of the municipalities and the fire board on recommended changes to the IMA. The recommendations were presented in the fall of 2024 to the municipalities, where direction was given to incorporate the Town of Merton as a party to the IMA. In the fall of 2024 and the past five months, Chief Bowen worked with Attorney Allen D. Reuter of Reuter, Whitish, & Evans, based in Madison, Wisconsin, on the revised and restated IMA. Chief Bowen reviewed the changes to the IMA with the municipalities, as outlined in the 2017 agreement. Additionally, he reviewed the legal changes and their justification with the municipalities. Key areas that have been amended include the incorporation of the Town of Merton into the agreement as a partner to of the agreement, updates to the District boundaries, Fire Board composition, Fire Commission composition, Fire Board duties, Budget Process and Municipal Approval, Levy Limit Exception Resolution, Financing Formula Recalculation, Excess/Surplus Funds, Payment of Budgeted Expenses, Fire Stations, Amendment regarding the Town of Merton contributing \$30,000.00 to the District's fund balance, Termination/Withdrawal, Signatures, and an Article regarding Additional Owners.
- Matt Rosek, City of Oconomowoc Alderman, asked if the 4.5% budget increase was adequate and if the municipalities were comfortable with this being the maximum threshold, as anything greater would require unanimous budget approval. Currently, the other municipalities feel this is an appropriate threshold.
- Donna Hann, Town of Merton Clerk, explained the changes reflected in the agreement by the Town's legal counsel, which are shown as "redline" changes in the agreement. Chief Bowen indicated the District legal has also reviewed these changes and recommends they be approved.
- Debbie Michael, Village of Summit Administrator, requested the typo of two "the" on page 15 of the agreement.
- The municipalities took a few minutes to discuss the revised and restated agreement at their tables and individually act on the proposed agreement.
- A motion was made by the City of Oconomowoc and seconded by the Village of Dousman to approve the Revised and Restated Western Lakes Fire District Intermunicipal Agreement with changes on page 15 of duplicate "the" and changing Village of Merton to Town of Merton, and acceptance of final legal changes as presented. In addition, for the Chief and Fire Board to work on a guideline for new future municipal partners joining the District and present at the fall meeting. Lastly, welcome to the Town of Merton. Motion carried unanimously.
- George Morris, Fire Board President, thanked the municipalities, work group, and Chief Bowen for all the time and energy that went into revising the agreement as it was no small feat. He looks forward to this next chapter of the District.
- Chief Bowen congratulated Bill Riemenschneider, Fire Board representative from the Town of Ottawa on his 38 years of service on the Fire Board and a happy retirement with the approval of the agreement. Mr. Riemenschneider received a standing ovation from the room.

Future Meetings

- Fall Joint Budget Meeting – Wednesday, September 10, 2025 at 6pm at the City of Oconomowoc Police Department.

Adjournment

- At 8:54 p.m., a motion was made by Village of Dousman and seconded by City of Oconomowoc to adjourn the Joint Owners Meeting. Motion Carried.
- At 8:55 p.m., a motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kent Lorenz to adjourn the Meeting. Motion carried unanimously.