

Western Lakes Fire Board
Monthly Board Meeting
February 23, 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, Dan DeBehnke, Mike Tompkins, and Scott Carter. Excused was Kevin Laabs.

Proof of Notice

- Chief Bowen announced that the notice was posted Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 2:48 p.m., in accordance with open meeting laws.

Pledge of Allegiance

- Lieutenant Switalski, led the Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

- George Morris opened the meeting up to public comment. There were no public comments presented at this time.

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 February 23, 2026 regular Fire Board Meeting
 - Payment of bills in the amount of \$1,222,585.49.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to approve the Consent Agenda items, including meeting minutes from February 23, 2026, with amendments as discussed, and payment of bills in the amount of \$1,222,585.49. Motion carried unanimously.

Fire Chief's Report

- Chief Bowen opened his report by highlighting the extreme weather shifts crews recently navigated while responding to high-stakes incidents. He then held a moment of reflection in honor of District Chaplain Ralph Modjeska, who recently passed away. Chief Bowen shared Chaplain Modjeska's profound impact on the department and acknowledged the Honor Guard for providing full honors at his funeral on March 13.
- Highlighting recent departmental milestones, Chief Bowen reported on the success of the 2025 Western Lakes Public Safety Awards Ceremony held on March 10, a joint event with the Oconomowoc and Summit Police Departments. Following this, a formal Swearing-In Ceremony took place on March 20 to welcome new officers who have completed the District's inaugural professional development program.
- A major highlight for the District was the successful completion of the Wisconsin DSPS 2% Dues Audit, securing nearly \$500,000 in funding assistance. The audit thoroughly reviewed commercial fire inspections, reinspections, and community risk reduction and education efforts. It also evaluated the ongoing training of firefighters, driver operators, and officers, along with equipment maintenance and retirement expenditure compliance. Furthermore, the Western Lakes Fire District was proudly awarded the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for its 2026 Budget Materials.
- Chief Bowen provided an update on the full-time and apprentice hiring process, praising the team's hard work over the past several months. Out of 54 initial applicants, 32 were invited to the assessment center, and 16 advanced to the final Chief's interviews. Candidates have now been identified for background investigations and will proceed to the next steps with the Fire

Commission. In related personnel readiness news, the District's new Fireground Physical Ability Test (FPAT) equipment has officially arrived.

- On the operational front, upcoming MABAS and CAD response plan configurations are scheduled to launch in April. The EMS Bureau and its committees are actively implementing DEA changes regarding controlled substances to ensure strict compliance. Progress also continues on the new Blood Program, with program materials to be reviewed at the next board meeting.
- Addressing recent statewide cyber-attacks targeting municipal and public safety agencies, Chief Bowen commended the District's IT staff for keeping systems both operational and secure. He stressed that these threats are significant and reminded all personnel to remain highly vigilant. Additionally, he recapped a recent Vistage training attended by several WLFD management team members, which focused on best practices and the appropriate use of AI in business and government operations.
- Looking ahead, Chief Bowen expressed pride in the upcoming Station 56 Open House in Stone Bank, which will be a great community event featuring an Easter Egg Hunt and an appearance by the Easter Bunny.

Chief Officer Reports

- George Morris asked if any of the Chiefs had additions to their reports, and if the board had any questions. The board reviewed the written reports covering the following areas:
 - Operations: Assistant Chief Hoffman highlighted the ongoing Lexipol policy manual implementation, the successful DSPS 2% dues audit, and recent ISO training aimed at maintaining the District's Class 2 rating.
 - Administration: Assistant Chief Meyer discussed the updated dispatch response plans, which incorporate 5-person crew assumptions, and the development of new monthly performance metrics for the Board.
 - EMS: Deputy Chief Warren noted a focus on clinical documentation training to support billing necessity and reported that equipment for the new pre-hospital Blood Program has arrived.
 - Community Risk Reduction & Fire Prevention: Deputy Chief May reported on the fire investigation team's invitation to the newly formed Milwaukee Area Fire Investigator Group. He also noted that 601 fire inspections have been completed so far this year (with a focus on April liquor licenses) and commended the Honor Guard's service at Chaplain Modjeska's funeral.
 - Personnel: Deputy Chief Ingersoll reported the joint full-time hiring process with LCFR has concluded, with the academy starting June 1. He also highlighted the new drone program's immediate success in locating patients during two recent search and rescue operations.
 - Training: Deputy Chief Konen outlined the transition to spring training, highlighting upcoming Dive Operations training in April and a Dive Rescue International certification course in May. He also noted the successful progression of five employees through the newly extended 3-week Fire Academy.
 - Fleet & Facilities: Deputy Chief Igl provided updates on MDC hardware field trials, proactive third-party oil sampling for heavy apparatus, and various station maintenance repairs.

Discussion – Update on Facility Needs Assessment and Impact Fee Study

- Chief Bowen provided an update on the status of the Facilities Needs Assessment and Impact Fee Study conducted by McMahon Associates. The final draft of the study is expected any day now and will be used to work with legal counsel on finalizing the draft Impact Fee Ordinance for the Municipalities. Chief Bowen has also drafted a memorandum of understanding between the municipalities and District which will be reviewed by legal. Once all materials are finalized, they will be distributed to the Board and Municipalities for review and will then be made available for review at each of the municipalities. Each municipality will hold a public hearing regarding the proposed ordinance before discussing the potential adoption of impact fees.

- Scott Carter asked what happens if we don't construct a new fire station with the funds collected. It was explained that by implementing the recommendations of the study, adopting the ordinances, and collecting impact fees we are pretty much committing to the construction of a future fire station based on the service level need. However, if we do not expend the funds in accordance with law they must be returned to the individual that paid the fees originally with associated interest earned. This is tracked information by both the Municipality that collected the fees and the District which receives the fees from the municipalities.

Discussion/Action –EMS Fee Schedule Adjustments

- Chief Bowen, Deputy Chief Warren, and Billing Specialist Matzelle reviewed with the board materials following up on discussions from the previous month. Chief Bowen presented a detailed memorandum regarding the District's EMS billing and fee structure. He reiterated the industry's shift to a "cost of readiness" model, noting that the District's actual cost to provide service is \$2,500.00 per incident. This cost is consistently not covered by the fixed rates of government programs, which now make up 76% of the District's payer mix (68% Medicare, 8% Medicaid). Chief Bowen explained that legislation like the No Surprises Act has allowed insurance companies to increasingly treat the District as "out-of-network," placing the burden of balanced billing on the patients. To combat these underpayments and maintain fiscal stability, he recommended adopting defensible fee schedules based on a cost-of-service analysis and maximizing participation in GEMT programs. He then presented the proposed fee schedule which follows the 350% of the medicare rate that has been proposed in WI and adopted in 22 other States. DC Warren and Billing Specialist Matzelle recommend the adoption of the revised fee schedule and billing practices following the comprehensive assessment and research completed and support from the third part billing vendor EMSMC which the District contracts with for services.
- A motion was made by Kent Lorenz and seconded by Jeff Roemer to approve the updated 2026 EMS Fee Schedule and bundled billing charges as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – 2025 Budget Amendments

- Chief Bowen reviewed with the Board a memorandum drafted by Finance Manager Cornett regarding budget amendments from 2025 to 2026. Annually management and the board review the prior year budget to identify items that were not expended due to timing of the purchases. If the budget reflects expenditures that were not expended, and the total budget is under the projected expenses against positive revenues the items identified may be carried over through a budget amendment. The 2025 budget amendments are required to align final revenues and expenditures prior to closing out the fiscal year, specifically accounting for unspent capital funds transitioning to the new year.
- A motion was made by Dan DeBehnke and seconded by Jeff Roemer to approve the 2025 Budget Amendments as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – 2025 Carryover Resolution

- Chief Bowen on behalf of Finance Manager Pat Cornett, via memorandum, presented the 2025 Fund Balance Carry Over Resolution (Resolution No. 26-001). The resolution authorizes the transfer of \$1,136,910.09 in unspent 2025 budgeted funds into the 2026 budget. It was explained that these funds are tied to projects delayed by supply chain issues and extended production lead times. The carryover ensures the completion of critical purchases, including a new SCBA fill station (\$50,000), dive equipment (\$42,891.15), a water tender (\$250,000), an ambulance (\$374,865), a reserve engine refurbishment (\$46,821.26), and various operational capital equipment upgrades.
- A motion was made by Kent Lorenz and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to approve Resolution No. 26-001 for the commitment of fund balances in the amount of \$1,136,910.09. Motion carried unanimously.

Future Agenda Items and Meetings

- Next Monthly Fire Board Meeting – Monday, May 11, 2026, at 4:00 pm at Station #1. This is a combined meeting of April and May due to Memorial Day.

Adjournment

- At 4:36 p.m., a motion was made to adjourn by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke. Motion carried unanimously.