

Western Lakes Fire Board
Monthly Board Meeting
May 12, 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, Bill Riemenschneider, and Scott Carter. Excused from the meeting were Dan DeBehnke and Mike Tompkins.

Proof of Notice

- Chief Bowen announced that the notice was posted Friday, May 9, 2025, at 9:16 a.m. in accordance with open meeting laws.

Pledge of Allegiance

- Fire Inspector Steve Boldt led the Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

- George Morris opened the meeting up to public comment.
- Scott Carter shared his recent experience and conversation with members of the Oconomowoc Historical Society regarding a recent interaction and very positive experience with members of WLFD and Station 53.

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 March 24, 2025 regular Fire Board Meeting
 - Payment of bills in the amount of \$1,655,734.62.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Bill Riemenschneider to approve the Consent Agenda items including meeting minutes from March 24, 2025 Fire Board meeting and payment of bills in the amount of \$1,655,734.62. Motion carried unanimously.

Fire Chief's Report

- Chief Bowen provided the board with updates on administrative and operational matters during a busy six weeks marked by the vacancy of the Assistant Chief position. Both operational and administrative tasks are demanding and require effective communication. Commendations were given to the leadership team for facilitating meetings to maintain functionality despite being short-staffed. The recruitment process is ongoing for the Operations and Administrative Assistant Chief positions, which aim to streamline operations by reducing one Chief Officer FTE. Bowen met with various Bureaus about current and future budget priorities, attended the Western Lakes Fire & EMS Association meeting to explore partnership opportunities, and actively participated in discussions on Fire and EMS legislation. Efforts continue on the 2024 Annual Audit, to be presented in June, and the final draft of the Inter-Municipal Agreement has been sent to the five municipalities involved. A meeting with the Chief Elected Officials is planned to ensure alignment with their expectations. WLFD hosted a MABAS exercise on April 2, followed by a debrief on April 8, yielding valuable lessons. Preliminary work on the 2026 operating budget and 5-year capital budget has started. Participation in joint meetings, including the WCTC Fire & EMS Advisory Board and various legislative discussions, has been ongoing. Interviews for the Assistant Chief's position concluded on April 24, and Bowen sought approval from the Fire Commission on May 5. Despite efforts, attendance at all municipal meetings was hindered by other commitments.

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 – Community Risk Reduction Bureau, Deputy Chief Adam May

- DC May provided an overview of the various responsibilities of the Community Risk Reduction Bureau. DC May walked the board and audience through various items, including community outreach and education programs, annual fire inspection, and new construction evaluations/inspections etc. He provided a detailed explanation of their joint efforts working in conjunction with local municipal planners, administrators, and planning commissions to ensure safe and consistent development in the communities. The cost of providing these services was reviewed to show the cost of these services and the fees charged to users. In addition to his presence, Fire Inspector Steve Boldt was in attendance.

Discussion/Action – Strategic Budget Goals

- Chief Bowen presented the Board with budget objectives and initiatives prioritized by District management. These goals are reviewed annually to ensure staff align with the Board's and municipalities' budget priorities. Further discussions will occur as the District navigates its annual and long-term budget processes. Key priorities focus on a Professional Development Program aimed at recruiting, retaining, and developing personnel for effective succession planning. Funding over the past three years has supported adequate staffing levels and diverse development programs, crucial for individual and District success. The plan includes centralizing the WLFD Management Team at a new Administrative Headquarters and Training Facility while reducing management positions. This will enhance operational efficiency and firefighter competency. Currently spread across five stations, management inefficiencies will be addressed through attrition over the next one to five years. The District provides Emergency Management Services to seven municipalities, necessitating a centralized Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to cut costs. Upgrades are needed for Fire Station 51 and the Oconomowoc Police Department, which currently function as EOCs. The new Headquarters will include the centralized EOC with allocated funding for enhancements. To improve emergency response times, all municipalities must enforce visibility standards for property addresses. The District aims to mandate “Fire Numbers” where consistent signage protocols are lacking, focusing on municipalities like Oconomowoc, Dousman, and Ottawa. Those who have not adopted these measures will be encouraged to comply.
- Kent Lorenz shared that he really supports the ongoing professional development priority and desire for succession planning within the District.

Discussion/Action – Executive Coaching Proposal

- Chief Bowen presented the executive coaching proposal to the board. In February 2025, the District launched professional development programs for 34 employees, including the monthly Acting Lieutenant Professional Development Program and a collaboration with Partner2Learn focused on the Clifton Strengths assessment. To address the vacancy in the Assistant Chief position, we propose monthly executive coaching sessions from Partner2Learn for all salaried staff. Each 90-minute session will provide individualized coaching, which is crucial for maintaining team progress, especially given that the absence of the Assistant Chief has increased my workload. The absence of the Assistant Chief has created a leadership gap. Partner2Learn's program will enhance collaboration and optimize performance within the management team. Funding will be come from savings resulting from the vacant Assistant Chief position and a reduction in full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. This demonstrates the District's commitment to investing in leadership development without incurring additional costs. Executive coaching will support the integration of the two new

Assistant Chiefs, help clarify roles, and enhance communication. Investing in leadership development boosts morale and job satisfaction, which aids in employee retention.

- In conclusion, this individualized coaching program addresses immediate operational challenges and supports organizational changes while promoting a culture of continuous improvement. With a total investment of \$33,000 for eleven personnel over six months, this proposal is budget-neutral due to projected savings. Chief Bowen recommends approval.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kent Lorenz to approve the quote from Partner2Learn for individual coaching sessions of the District's management team as presented in the amount of \$33,000.00, with funding for this proposal to be offset through savings in wages and benefits of the vacant Assistant Chief positions. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Impact Fee Study

- Chief Bowen outlined the need for a Public Facilities Needs Assessment and Impact Fee Study due to rapid growth in the Fire District's service area, which has increased demand for fire and EMS services. Funding for this study will assist municipal partners in understanding the impact of new developments on future fire station locations and resources. To fairly distribute the costs of new infrastructure, implementing fire impact fees on new construction is essential. These fees will help alleviate the financial burden on existing taxpayers, ensuring new developments contribute to the necessary facilities. The Fire District has issued an RFP to qualified consulting firms, engaging with three to gather proposals. Although only one proposal was received from McMahon Associates, their expertise justifies moving forward with this study. The estimated cost of \$34,000 to \$40,000 exceeds the \$30,000 budget but will be covered by contingency funds. Not conducting the study now risks placing the financial burden of new fire facilities entirely on current taxpayers. Therefore, it is recommended to approve McMahon Associates' proposal for the Fire Station needs and impact fee study in an amount not to exceed \$40,000. This study is crucial for effective infrastructure planning and cost distribution related to new development.
- Jeff Roemer abstained from discussion and action with this agenda item due to his employment with McMahon Associates.
- A motion was made by Kent Lorenz and seconded by Mike Tompkins to approve proposal from McMahon Associates to complete Public Facilities Needs Assessment and Impact Fee Study as outlined in April 9, 2025 proposal in an amount not to exceed \$35,000.00.

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

- Chief Bowen provided the board with an overview of the draft agreement between the District, the Village of Lac LaBelle, and the Town of Oconomowoc. He presented the proposed modifications requested by Administrator Jeff Herrmann regarding the agreement. Chief Bowen will collaborate with legal counsel to incorporate these changes and will present an updated draft at the next meeting. The District has been delivering services to the Village of Lac LaBelle and the Town of Oconomowoc since 2017. Previously, the City of Oconomowoc Fire Department, along with several other fire departments, was responsible for these services. Since 2020, the District has been providing comprehensive Fire and Emergency Medical Services to both municipalities. The enactment of an Inter-Municipal Agreement on January 2, 2025, resulting in the incorporation of a majority of the Town into the Village, necessitated revisions to the existing agreement between the District and the municipalities. Recently, Chief Bowen and Administrator Herrmann formulated this revised agreement to ensure the continued provision of Fire and Emergency Medical Services by the District. This revision addresses the substantial changes arising from the Town's incorporation into the Village and is deemed mutually advantageous. Both administrators have contributed valuable feedback, and input from their respective governing boards is now being sought. There will be no financial impact on either municipality resulting from these services, as the associated expenses have already been allocated within their existing budgets and have been remitted to the District.

- The board supported the recommended changes as presented. Action will be taken at the next Fire Board meeting.

Discussion/Action – Letter Regarding TCS 10 Impacts on Public Safety Training

- Chief Bowen briefed the board on pertinent issues concerning the admissions procedures at Wisconsin Technical Colleges as they pertain to TCS 10. He has formally requested the board's support in drafting a letter addressed to the Wisconsin Technical College System President, the Board of Directors, as well as to local Technical Colleges and legislators. This correspondence will outline the implications of the current guidance and the challenges encountered in the enrollment of students.
- Kent Lorenz expressed his experiences and engagement during the meeting with Chief Bowen and WTCS President Merrifield. He commended Chief Bowen for his professionalism and foresight in addressing the matter, emphasizing his commitment to achieving a collaborative resolution. Additionally, he referenced his previous involvement with WTCS as a board member. Mr. Lorenz expressed his support for a letter to be drafted and submitted by President Morris.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kent Lorenz for the Chief to draft a letter to WTCS President Merrifield and the WTCS Board if progress is not made. For the letter to be drafted, signed, and shared with the board. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – EMS Week Proclamation

- Chief Bowen presented to the board the upcoming National EMS Week, scheduled from May 18th to May 24th. He provided a proclamation for the board's consideration in recognition of this significant observance. Chief Bowen expressed his sincere gratitude for the EMS professionals within the District, commending their empathy, expertise, skills, and unwavering commitment to serving the District, its municipalities, and, most importantly, those individuals in need of the District's services.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Kent Lorenz to approve the EMS Week Proclamation. Motion carried unanimously.

Future Agenda Items and Meetings

- Spring Joint Owners Meeting – Wednesday, June 11, 2025 beginning at 6:00 pm at City of Oconomowoc Police Department.
- Monthly Fire Board Meeting – Monday, June 23, 2025, at 4:00 pm at Station 1.

Closed Session

1. George Morris Announced that the Fire Board will convene into closed session pursuant to section 19.85(1)(c), 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 pursuant to section 19.85(1)(f), Wisconsin State Statutes, “Considering financial, medical, social or personal histories or disciplinary data of specific persons, preliminary consideration of specific personnel problems or the investigation of charges against specific persons except where par. (b) applies which, if discussed in public, would be likely to have a substantial adverse effect upon the reputation of any person referred to in such histories or data, or involved in such problems or investigations,” for the following purposes: “*Specific compensation, benefits, and performance evaluations related to specific employees.*” The Fire Board will not reconvene into open session at the conclusion of the closed session.
- A motion was made at 6:02 pm to enter into closed session by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Scott Carter. Roll call vote was performed with all in favor.

Adjournment

- At 6:48 p.m. the meeting ended.