

Western Lakes Fire Board
Monthly Board Meeting
November 24, 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, November 21, 2025, at 11:09 p.m. and reposted on Friday, November 21, 2025, at 3:57 p.m. with the addition of discussion/action regarding the three-year audit firm proposal, in accordance with open meeting laws.

Pledge of Allegiance

- Ed Henschel, Village of Merton Administrator, led the Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

- George Morris opened the meeting up to public comment.
- Tim Wiedenbauer, asked about the Fire Truck in the parking lot off Hwy 67 following the structure fire in September. He asked if this is going somewhere for repairs and out of the elements.
 - Assistant Chief Meyer explained that this is not a functioning Fire Truck, and is owned by the property owner where the fire occurred.
- Ed Henschel, Village of Merton Administrator, addressed the board about the partnership between the Village of Merton and Western Lakes Fire District to jointly provide services to the Town of Merton. He expressed the joint desire to continue providing services to the Town of Merton and to work on making the budget process smoother next year, with final budget numbers provided to the District following the District's timeline. This timeline is much earlier than their budget process, and they look forward to working together in the future.

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 October 27, 2025 regular Fire Board Meeting
 - Payment of bills in the amount of \$1,758,260.40.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to approve the Consent Agenda items, including meeting minutes from October 27, 2025, and payment of bills in the amount of \$1,758,260.40. Motion carried unanimously.

Fire Chief's Report

- Chief Bowen updated the Board on several projects slated for completion by year's end. Key initiatives include drafting municipal ordinances for a Lift Assist Ordinance and Impact Fees, based on the recent Facilities Needs Assessment. Efforts are ongoing for the Fireground Physical Agility Assessment, with expected action needed at the December meeting to finalize the 2026 compensation and fee schedule. The District is currently balancing the 2025 budget and collaborating with various bureaus on year-end projects. The Finance Department will also submit the 2026 budget for GFOA recognition.

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 – Village of Merton FD Operating & Capital Budget Contributions

- Chief Bowen advised the board that discussions regarding the Village of Merton Fire Department have been ongoing in the past three Fire Board meetings. Given that the budget request exceeded the contracted amount by 4.0%, the Fire Board has requested Chief Paral to provide additional information regarding the budget request and the staffing requirements of the District. An initial increase of 11.91% was requested in September; however, due to adjustments related to EMS revenue increases, the revised request is now 8.30%. During the October Fire Board meeting, Chief Paral faced questions regarding the budget that he was unable to satisfactorily address during the meeting. Consequently, the Fire Board postponed any decisions on the Merton Fire Budget until the following questions were resolved: What date does the year-to-date revenue and expense information reflect for 2025? For Fire Inspection Services, what was the invoiced amount in 2024, and was the final amount collected? What were the invoiced and collected amounts in 2025? When the Village receives grant funding for Fire/EMS, how is that revenue and the associated expenses recorded? For EMS revenues, will there be credits allocated to the Town of Merton/Western Lakes Fire District for excess revenues? Since the October meeting, Chief Paral has collaborated with the Village of Merton Administrator to provide responses and supporting documentation to these inquiries. These materials have been disseminated to both the District and the Town of Merton, and summarized in the materials for this month's meeting. At this time, the recommendation is to approve the revised 2026 Village of Merton Fire and EMS Budget, contingent upon the following modifications to the contract between the Village of Merton and the Western Lakes Fire District. The payment schedule for WLFD is as follows: 70% of the amount is due on January 21 annually, while the remaining 30% is due on June 30 annually. Furthermore, an annual audit of EMS revenues, along with the crediting of excess revenues to the Western Lakes Fire District (on behalf of the Town of Merton) and the Village of Merton, is to be established. In instances where EMS revenues exceed the budgeted amount, the excess revenues will be credited to WLFD, the Town of Merton, and the Village of Merton to be applied towards capital project expenses in the subsequent year. The distribution of this credit will be determined based on that year's budget contribution percentage. For example, if WLFD contributed 58% to the budget, it would receive 58% of the excess EMS revenues. Additionally, there will be an update to the Merton Fire Department organizational chart to include a reporting line from the Fire Chief to the Village of Merton Board, representing the oversight by the Western Lakes Fire District and the Town of Merton.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Scott Carter to approve the proposed Village of Merton Fire Department budget for 2026 as proposed on November 21, 2025 with WLFD contribution of \$476,500.00 towards operating budget and \$39,050.00 towards capital expenses for a total of \$515,550.00, contingent upon the following amendments to the contract between the Village of Merton and Western Lakes Fire District.
 1. WLFD Payment is due under the following schedule
 - a. 70% of the amount is due on January 21st annually
 - b. 30% of the amount is due on June 30th annually
 2. Annual audit of EMS revenues and credit of excess revenues towards capital contribution the next year.
 - c. If the EMS revenues exceed the budgeted amount the excess revenues will be credited to WLFD/Town of Merton and the Village of Merton to be used to offset capital project costs the next year. The distribution of the credit will be based on that years budget contribution percentage.
 - i. For example if WLFD contributed 58% towards the budget, we would receive 58% of the excess EMS revenues.
 3. Update of the Merton Fire Department organizational chart to include between the Fire Chief and Village of Merton Board a box representing the reporting to the Western Lakes Fire District and Town of Merton.
- Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Village of Hartland FD 2026 Budget Contribution

- Chief Bowen presented to the board a summary of the 2026 District budget, which includes the contract with the Village of Hartland for contracted services pertaining to the southern portion of the Town of Merton. The District has allocated \$860,472 in the 2026 budget for contracted services with both the Village of Merton and the Village of Hartland. The Village of Hartland Fire Department has formally requested a budget increase of 3.0%. This request is consistent with the stipulations outlined in the agreement between the District and the Village of Hartland regarding such services. The budget request has been submitted and remains unchanged since its initial presentation in August of this year. The proposed budget ensures the maintenance of current staffing levels and operational capacity for the Hartland Fire Department. It includes the allocation of funds amounting to \$309,000.00 to the Village of Hartland for Fire/EMS services in the southern sections of the Town of Merton, in accordance with the agreement established between the WLFD and the Village of Hartland.
- A motion was made by Mike Tompkins and seconded by Scott Carter to approve the 3.0% increase to the Village of Hartland Fire Department budget for 2026 in accordance with the contract between Village of Hartland and the Western Lakes Fire District. This would result in a WLFD contribution of \$309,000.00. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Three Year Audit Firm Proposal

- Chief Bowen reported that the District received two proposals from reputable audit firms for the annual financial audit, evaluated by Finance Manager Cornett, Treasurer Lorenz, and Chief Bowen. Both firms received identical scores. One firm, the incumbent, has provided continuity in the audit process, while the other offers a fresh perspective and potential cost savings. No recommendation has been made yet to allow for further discussion among board members. The audit is a critical aspect of effective governance and financial management, representing an investment in regulatory compliance, asset protection, and stakeholder trust. We believe the audit's strategic benefits will offer long-term value. In September, requests were sent to four auditors: Clifton Larson Allen (the incumbent), Reilly Penner & Benton, Baker Tilly, and Wifli. Only Clifton Larson Allen and Reilly Penner & Benton submitted proposals, while Baker Tilly declined and Wifli did not respond. Clifton Larson Allen has served as the District's auditor for the past six years, gaining a strong understanding of the budgetary changes and complexities due to staffing enhancements. A financial statement audit provides an independent assessment of the District's financial standing, ensuring funds are accurately recorded, financial statements are precise, and internal controls are effective to prevent fraud or mismanagement. This audit is essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring taxpayer dollars are used appropriately.
- Kent Lorenz shared that he was impressed with both firms proposals, and that we would be well served by either. He feels that it is healthy to change auditing firms periodically to ensure a fresh perspective and review.
- Dan DeBehnke expressed that his experience has also been to change auditors periodically, though this has become challenging in recent years as the number of firms has decreased and many do not have the workload to take on new clients.
- A motion was made by Dan DeBehnke and seconded by Kent Lorenz to approve proposal from Reilly Penner & Benton to complete the District audit for 2025, 2026, and 2027 with optional extension to be determined at a future meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Lexipol Policies and Procedures Manual (update, Review, Approval, and Implementation Process)

- Chief Bowen explained that policy manuals are essential for consistency, legal protection, and accountability in fire service agencies. The Western Lakes Fire District's current manual will be

reviewed and modernized with Lexipol, a leader in state-specific public safety policies since 2003, serving over 8,100 agencies nationwide. The new manual will incorporate Wisconsin-specific content, ensuring our policies meet local regulatory and operational needs. The Lexipol Policy Manual offers several benefits, including comprehensive content of Policies tailored to Wisconsin statutes and standards. Ongoing revisions to keep policies current without heavy internal staff involvement. Legal Defensibility, as policies are developed by experts, enhances protection in legal contexts. Daily Training Bulletins keep personnel familiar with policies. The rollout plan includes updating key sections of the manual, such as the Mission Statement and job descriptions, in phases until mid-2026, ensuring a smooth transition while maintaining operations. This modernization reflects Western Lakes Fire District's core values of professionalism, integrity, loyalty, and leadership. The Lexipol contract, already budgeted, will not require additional funding beyond the existing amount, and we will receive \$2,500 from the District's insurance provider to support implementation. It is recommended that the Western Lakes Fire District Board approve this implementation plan.

- Chief Bowen shared that historically, policies would go to the Fire Board for approval prior to being enacted and requested the Board's direction on this practice moving forward. With the integration of Lexipol, does the board wish to approve each policy as done historically, or would they like to approve management to implement the program and provide these policies to the board.
- Jeff Roemer indicated that, at this point in the District, Lexipol has been selected as the vendor for the District's policies and procedures. It is now the responsibility of the Chief and the management team to implement these policies in accordance with Lexipol's recommended processes. As these policies and procedures are executed, they should be presented to the Board; however, prior approval from the Board is not required. The Board's endorsement of Lexipol for the District's policies and procedures encapsulated the approval process within the context of the program's execution. Dan DeBehnke further supports the notion that management should implement these policies following the established guidelines provided by Lexipol, emphasizing that Board approval is not necessary for each individual policy moving forward.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to authorize the Fire Chief to implement the Lexipol Policy Manual system for Western Lakes Fire District, to include the complete rollout of the manual, with the understanding that additional sections will be released on a scheduled basis as outlined by staff. Final policy approval is contingent upon review and approval by the District's legal counsel, where appropriate at the discretion of the Fire Chief. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) Training Grounds Agreement

- Chief Bowen noted that the Western Lakes Fire District has been training at Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) for two years as part of its new hire academy. A recent cost analysis revealed that WCTC was not covering the expenses of disposable materials used in training. Advanced notice of changes for 2026 has been provided to help the District adjust its budget, which now includes these costs. For the new hire academies with Lake Country Fire & Rescue and Hartland Fire Department, each department will fund one of the three live fire burn days. If the District schedules additional burn days, it will bear the full cost. Approval of the 2025 WCTC Facilities Use Agreement is recommended.
- A motion was made by Dan DeBehnke and seconded by Jeff Roemer to approve the Waukesha County Technical College Facilities Use Agreement as proposed and authorize the Fire Chief to sign the agreement. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion/Action – Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) Agreement for Urban Search and Rescue Emergency Response Services (WI-Task Force One)

- Chief Bowen and Assistant Chief Hoffman explained that the Western Lakes Fire District respectfully requests that the Fire Board review and consider participating in the State of Wisconsin’s Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Emergency Response Services Agreement. This agreement strengthens the District’s ability to respond to large-scale emergencies and disasters. The Wisconsin USAR team, established under Statute 323.721 and managed by the Division of Emergency Management (WEM), provides specialized search, rescue, and recovery services. By committing personnel to this team, the District ensures support during significant emergencies when local resources are inadequate. Participation in the USAR agreement offers advanced training, specialized equipment, and coordinated response protocols, ensuring District personnel are prepared for complex incidents while meeting national standards. The agreement also includes reimbursement for training and deployment expenses, easing the District's financial burden. The Fire Board’s approval is crucial for aligning this commitment with the District’s objectives and safeguarding its resources and personnel. Overall, joining the State of Wisconsin USAR agreement enhances the District’s emergency response capabilities while fostering regional cooperation. It is recommended that the Fire Board authorize this participation to improve readiness and limit financial risk by securing reimbursement for most related expenses.
- Jeff Roemer shared that this is a great opportunity for the District to be part of this team and supports the District participating in WI Task Force One.
- A motion was made by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke to authorize the Fire Chief to execute the State of Wisconsin Urban Search and Rescue Emergency Response Services Agreement, contingent upon review and approval by the District’s legal counsel, and to sign all necessary documents to formalize the District’s participation. Motion carried unanimously.

Future Agenda Items and Meetings

- Monthly Fire Board Meeting – Wednesday, December 17, 2025, at 4:00 pm at Station #1.

Closed Session

- George Morris announced 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: “*Contract Service Agreements with Municipalities; 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 5:06 pm to enter into closed session by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Mike Tompkins. Roll call vote was performed with all in favor.
- A motion was made at 5:54 pm to end the closed session by Jeff Roemer and seconded by Dan DeBehnke. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

- At 5:54 p.m. the meeting was adjourned upon the conclusion of the closed session.