

Legislative Statement 9/20/2016

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Grand Chute Fire Department

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit this statement to the Legislative Council Study Committee as an advocate for the safety of the citizens and visitors of our State, as well as my fellow emergency response personnel. I am thankful to have the opportunity to speak here today on their behalf, and share my thoughts on the issues facing our EMS and fire service agencies in the State of Wisconsin. It is the honor and privilege to represent these men and women that drives me to pursue the vision of making our emergency service organizations the safest and finest in the country.

My diverse background in emergency service delivery spans over thirty years, starting out like many others in our state serving as an EMT on a volunteer rescue squad in Northeast Wisconsin. Having found my passion, I enrolled at Fox Valley Technical College and graduated with an Associate's degree in Fire Science. Throughout my career I progressed through the ranks as a Firefighter/ Paramedic, Company Officer, and Training Division Chief. As my fire service career developed, I simultaneously served as a Paramedic Manager of a hospital-based advanced life support ambulance service in Marinette for more than two decades. In addition to those responsibilities, I acted as the Medical Control Liaison for the surrounding volunteer-based first responder and basic life support ambulance agencies that served Northeast Wisconsin via the Bay Area Medical Center. Most recently, I have had the pleasure of serving as the Fire Chief for the Town of Grand Chute in Outagamie County, a position that I have proudly held for the past nine years.

I am the current President of the Outagamie County Fire Chiefs Association and was elected to the four year Trustee Position on the Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association Executive Board in 2015. As a staunch supporter of education for our emergency services personnel, I actively serve on the Fox Valley Technical College Emergency Medical Services and Fire Protection Curriculum Advisory Committees, and was honored as the Outstanding Advisory Committee Member of 2015 by FVTC.

Know Your Roots

The first official meeting for the Township of Grand Chute was held in Appleton on April 3rd, 1849, in the home of W.S. Warner. The first order of business was the election of town officers. Henry L. Blood was chosen as town chairman and assessor, Ezra L. Thurber as town clerk, John Stevens as inspector of schools, and Hiram Polly as treasurer and tax collector. In addition, two supervisors were selected, along with three constables, and four justices of the peace. After the election of officers, a budget of \$200 was adopted. To raise the money for the budget, a tax of \$2.50 was imposed on each quarter section of deeded land. Any landowner unable or unwilling to pay the tax had the option of giving the township two days' work instead.



The Grand Chute Town Board authorized the formation of a volunteer fire department at their annual town meeting on April 6, 1937. In July, 1937, the Town of Grand Chute approved the purchase of one fire truck, which was procured for \$3,500 from the Rural Fire Apparatus Company, Inc., Hortonville. This 1937 Ford Pumper was delivered in October, 1937 and was kept at the Van Dyke Coal Company. It was at this time, the Town Chairman, Emmett O'Connor revealed that a volunteer department would be organized to staff the truck.

Today

Grand Chute is the largest urban town in the State Wisconsin boasting a population of over 22,000 residents. Our community is recognized as the commercial and retail hub for the Fox Cities, a metropolitan region that is home to over 370,000 people. The 1.2 million square foot Fox River Mall in Grand Chute is the second largest indoor mall in the state, anchoring a regional shopping, hospitality, and entertainment district in its surrounding area.

A diverse blend of business and industry comprises the largest employers in Grand Chute including Pierce Manufacturing, Presto Products, Pacon Corporation, McCain Foods, and Navitus Health Solutions. Additionally, we are home to the main campus of Fox Valley Technical College, as well as the Fox Cities Stadium who hosts the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, a Class A minor league affiliate of the Milwaukee Brewers.

The Grand Chute Fire Department provides all-hazard emergency response and risk reduction services to an estimated daytime population of 70,000 residents, shoppers, students, and visitors occupying the twenty-three square-mile area encompassing our thriving community. This robust response area is served by two stations staffed 24 hours a day by a total combination of 21 career, 5 part-time, and 34 paid-on premise fire personnel who answered more than 2,100 emergency calls for service in 2015.

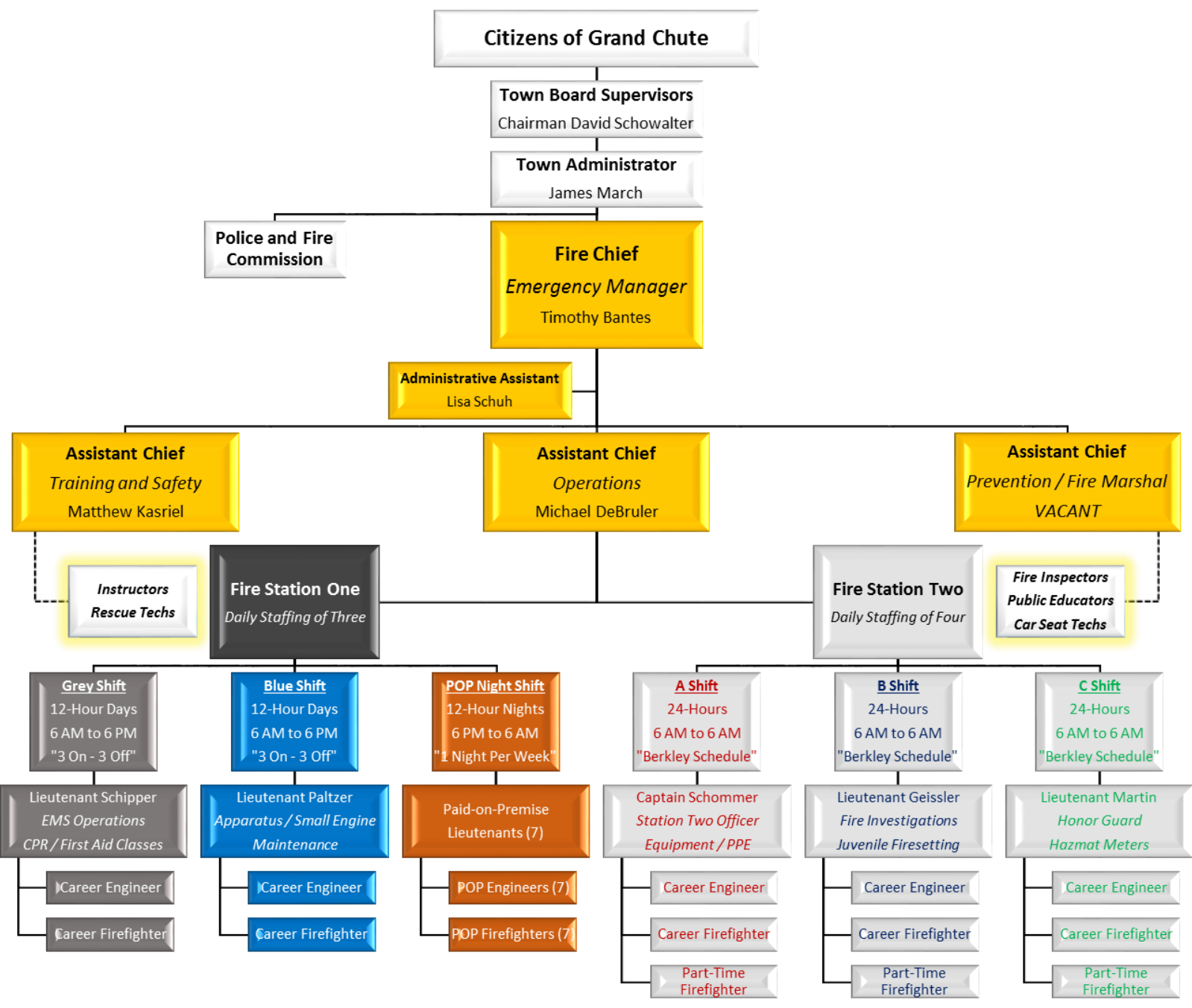
Combination Fire Departments and Data Driven Staffing

In an ongoing effort to provide the highest caliber of service to our community while maintaining fiscal responsibility to our tax payers, we utilize a combination of full-time (career), part-time and paid-on-premise personnel to deliver fire and emergency services. This complex yet efficient staffing and deployment model is supported through our use of a web-based emergency services management system which facilitates the coordination and scheduling of personnel while also providing real-time text message / email link that allows us to rapidly notify personnel via the previously mentioned communications mediums when additional staffing is needed.

Our daytime staffing model for our headquarters fire station is arranged as follows: A crew of three career personnel consisting of a Company Officer, Engineer (Driver), and Firefighter work a 12-hour “day shift” from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. There are two of these “day shifts” (designated as blue and grey shift) that work a three-day on, three-day off rotation. As an example: blue shift would work from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday (a total of 36 hours), and would then be off on Thursday, Friday and Saturday while grey shift was on duty for the same time period during those days. Blue shift would then return to duty on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. The cycle continues in the three-on, three-off pattern.

The nighttime staffing model for our headquarters station is made up of paid-on-premise personnel consisting of a Company Officer, Engineer, and Firefighter who provide shift coverage from 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM. These individuals work a 12-hour shift and are assigned a “day of the week”, requiring us to maintain a roster of seven paid-on-premise Lieutenants, Engineers, and Firefighters to maintain coverage.

The staffing model for our fire station two consists of three shifts of career personnel comprised of a Company Officer, Engineer, and Firefighter who work a 24-hour shift schedule commonly known as the “California” or “Berkeley” plan, A fourth Firefighter position is also assigned to this station in a part-time classification during 6:00 AM to 6:00PM, with a paid-on-premise Firefighter relieving the part-time staff member for the 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM shift.



The Evolution of the Grand Chute Fire Department

The combination model organization is arguably one of the most efficient ways to provide high quality emergency services to a community, however it is also one of the most challenging to manage. The delicate intricacies associated with the increased number of personnel and their unique needs requires an attentive leadership team who are willing to invest the time and energy to establish strong relationships with their personnel. Additionally, the leadership team must maintain an inherently flexible and balanced perspective to ensure the needs and expectations of the community are met while also remaining mindful of the aforementioned needs of personnel.

With these ideologies as a foundation, the Grand Chute Fire Department has evolved from a volunteer fire department protecting a primarily rural area to a combination emergency services agency providing protection to one of the busiest urban corridors in the Fox Valley. This dynamic change was not arbitrary in nature, but rather driven by community growth and corresponding service demands that accompany it. Funding to facilitate our expanding services was obtained through several means including a Federal SAFER Grant, and the successful passing of an Advisory Referendum in our community. While this dynamic process has taken place over the span of the last 15 years, constant evaluation and forecasting of incident response trends and data lends itself to preparation and planning efforts that allow the organization to “stay ahead of the curve” in providing service. As an example, our current staffing model has been in place since 2009. During that year we responded to 1,299 incidents. In 2015 we responded to 2,102 emergency calls for service, representing an increase of 803 incidents, or more than 60 percent when compared to the 2009 figures. Recognizing these trends, two additional full-time personnel were recently authorized. These additional resources will allow us to launch an Alternate Response Vehicle Program to improve our EMS response efficiency. Additionally, we are in the process of initiating a Mobile Integrated Healthcare Pilot Program aimed at proactively reducing our EMS service demand.

Recruitment and Retention Issue Hits Home

While there are common core recruitment and retention issues affecting the fire service nationwide, many of these challenges are unique to individual agencies and are defined by a number of factors including service area demographics and staffing and deployment models. For example, increasing time commitments associated with training and incident responses has been cited as a fairly universal issue affecting fire departments across the country. While this issue has had a palpable impact on our recruitment and retention efforts, an example of an organizationally specific issue we face involves our continued difficulty in developing and retaining company officers in our paid-on-premise ranks. This issue can be attributed to a variety of factors, however what we are primarily finding is that our newest generation of personnel are being hired as career firefighters for other departments within their first three to five years of service with our organization. Under these circumstances, these individuals leave the organization before even having the chance to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to fill company officer roles, leaving us with a gap in this particular area. Furthermore, labor agreements oftentimes preclude these individuals from continuing their service with our organization in a paid-on-premise capacity.

Battle for Time

As previously mentioned, one of the most common threads heard pertaining to recruitment and retention revolves around the ever-increasing time commitment associated with serving as a volunteer or paid-on-call / premise emergency responder. Using our organization as an example, a recruit must complete more than 300 hours of initial training just to be able to start responding as a member of our organization. While this may seem extreme, maintaining high standards for training and performance is a critical component to administering a successful combination organization, as well as fulfilling our obligation to provide these critical services to our community. In a day and age steeped in the concept of immediate gratification, it is a daunting task to engage prospective responders facing these types of requirements. This coupled with outside employment responsibilities and the commitments associated with raising

a family further aggravate the situation. These increasing time constraints placed on our modern households commonly consisting of two working parents balancing the previously mentioned responsibilities continues to have a measurable impact.

The Changing Landscape – From Family Farm to Suburban America

Reflecting on the changes that have occurred in Grand Chute over the last two decades we are reminded that the landscape of our state has and continue to change quite literally. What was once sprawling fields and farmstead homes is now apartment complexes, subdivisions, strip malls, and franchise eateries. While some of our longest standing family farmers cling to their hard-earned and well deserved slice of the “American Dream”, the lines that separate our community from our neighbors have blurred and given way to a universally indistinguishable urbanized landscape across our region. While not immediately evident to some, this evolution has had a tremendous impact on fire service recruitment and retention efforts in our community and countless others. What many fail to recognize is that these “family farmers” provided generations of volunteer firefighters to the communities they called home. As cliché as it sounds, the bounty of mechanically inclined and able-bodied young men raised by these community farmers always seemed to “trickle in” to the fire station around their 18th birthday, just in time to pledge their service to the local fire department as their brothers and father did before them. As these valuable human resources have diminished, we as a fire service have had to adapt both our attitudes and techniques to continue to meet the needs of those we serve.

The New American Fire Service

It is a universally accepted notion by both emergency responders and those stricken by emergencies that response time is of the utmost importance. The time-sensitive nature of EMS response is further supported by the “golden hour” for trauma patients, as well as numerous cardiac arrest studies indicating anywhere from a 7 to 10 percent decrease in survival rates for every minute in which defibrillation is delayed. In the case of our organization, fire department resources are strategically located at our two fire stations to facilitate the expedient deployment and arrival of emergency response equipment and personnel. In addition to the ideal geographical distribution of our resources, fire service personnel are unique in their ability to provide patient care in nearly any environment or situation. In other words, firefighters are able to bring treatment to the patient, initiating immediate care whether they are pinned in rolled-over vehicles, overcome by carbon monoxide, entangled in industrial machinery, or in the comfort of their own homes. Our community is not unique in capitalizing on these benefits, as more than 90 percent of career and combination fire departments nationwide are providing emergency medical services in some capacity.

Critical Partnerships

In order to be successful in fulfilling our mission of preserving lives, property, and the environment for the communities we serve we must be ever mindful of the changes taking place both inside and outside the boundaries of our respective municipalities. So what does that mean? It means maintaining open lines of communication with public safety officials in our bordering communities. In our case, several organizations including the Wisconsin State Fire Chief’s Association and the Outagamie County Fire Chiefs Association (which I currently preside over) provides the framework to facilitate dialogue amongst these stakeholders. The formation of organizations like these, and the subsequent partnerships formed help fire service leaders share ideas and often lead to agreements to provide mutual and automatic aid for large-scale and high-risk / low-frequency incidents which have the ability to tax the resources of even the largest agencies. In our case, we have successfully maintained mutually beneficial automatic aid agreements with three neighboring fire departments (one career, one combination, and one

volunteer) for several years, and are close to finalizing a fourth. These agreements allow us to rapidly give and receive help to our neighbors during these manpower-rich events, while ensuring continuous emergency response coverage is maintained throughout all of our communities to handle simultaneous service demands.

In addition to these automatic aid agreements, participation in the Mutual Aid Box Alarm Service serves to enhance our ability to respond to and mitigate these larger-scale incidents on a broader regional level. With the bulk of the state now participating in MABAS, these county-wide divisions allow for the quick mobilization of the resources needed to safely and effectively tackle the rapidly developing and complex incidents which we are seeing on an increasingly frequent basis. When implemented and managed correctly, MABAS has the ability to regionally address these “non-routine” situations outside the scope of our “bread and butter” house fires using pre-determined response plans that lend themselves to improved incident outcomes. It should also be noted that one of the less-known benefits of MABAS includes the ability to facilitate this regional sharing of resources while allowing participating municipalities and agencies to maintain the staffing and level of service they deem appropriate, ensuring an additional level of accountability to the tax-payer is preserved. Other opportunities for future success with MABAS include increased focus on regionalized specialty teams including hazardous materials, technical rescue groups. With a proven track record of performance, and an established plan to structure significant incident responses, MABAS should be seriously considered as an umbrella organization to oversee these types of resources on a state-wide and regional scale.

Other opportunities to improve efficiency and share resources include regional training. In Grand Chute we are exploring the feasibility of a “joint” recruit academy program. Recognizing the importance of a strong foundation of initial training for our newest personnel, we are envisioning a recruit training experience that familiarizes these new responders with our specific equipment and operational procedures, while also reinforcing the basic skills needed to safely and effectively serve those in need while working alongside our automatic aid partners. This allows for us to share the instructional load for these labor-intensive training sessions,

while also fostering cooperation with our partnering response agencies from “day one” for what we believe will be the future fire service leaders in our state.

Technical College Partnerships

An additional critical partnership exists with our area Technical Colleges. The regional hiring processes administered by many of these institutions assists agencies in controlling costs associated with screening candidates, while greatly increasing the size of the candidate pool itself. Recently, Fox Valley Technical College has offered to provide eligibility lists for agencies seeking paid-on-call / premise responders at no cost. This type of support greatly enhances the ability of these organizations to recruit qualified response personnel while also providing opportunities for students to gain invaluable experience to supplement their education. Recognizing the value of this continuous recruitment source, our department has developed targeted recruitment materials and programs to capture this specific cross-section of prospective firefighters. Additionally, we sponsor an Explorer Post in an attempt to engage high school students who may potentially serve as members of our organization.

Building a Sustainable Future for Public Safety in Wisconsin

- A one-size-fits-all approach will not work in Wisconsin
- Addressing retention and or recruitment issue head-on (grants and incentives)
- High School Vocational Training Programs
- Small regional / district concepts with regions / districts based on population, demographics, and organizational needs. Not based on take-overs and large regional developments to push out local fire or EMS agencies.
- Legislative changes to allow formation of fire districts (i.e. storm water districts)
- Technical College Districts CPAT exams should have portability between districts.
- Assistance to municipalities and agencies through the development of regional Fire / EMS Facilitators to assist with cooperative service agreements (Auto aid), leadership, personnel issues, dispute resolution, training development, recruitment and retention, and grant support.