Safety Service Committee Meeting

July 8, 2024

Council President King; Council Members Baltzell, Buxton, Clausen, Fleck, Gray, Sanford, and Wolfe; Mayor Hazel; Safety Service Director Hitchcock; Law Director Moore; Auditor Shinn; Fire Chief Lange;

CM Gray called the Safety Service Committee Meeting to order at 6:00 pm to discuss recruitment and retention and how Council and administration may be able to aid in their efforts.

CM Gray noted that he has had nurses approach him and ask if they are able to help in any way to reduce call ins.

Fire Chief Lange spoke about why they have a four-firefighter minimum and that is so they can have two in and two out in order to go into a burning building unless life is at risk and why they need at least four firefighters on station and noted that the nurses would have to have a firefighter level one cert and that the County may be able to answer any additional questions.

CM Sanford asked about the volunteers and if we had more would that help with the call ins and Chief Lange noted that the fire department needs people who are able to work full shifts and having more full-time firefighters would help. Chief Lange spoke about how the volunteer staff also would cost additional money to get their fire gear and how that makes it hard to hire an unlimited amount of volunteers to help when the gear expires every ten years, but he is crunching numbers. CM Gray asked if the nurses may be able to help during an off shift and volunteer eight hours of their time and Chief Lange noted that would have meet protocol within the County and something that can be looked into further but noted they would still need to be firefighter trained and mentioned the auxiliary firefighters need to be up to date on training and also mentioned that low pay may be stopping people from volunteering.

CM Baltzell asked what we can do to attract firefighters and Chief Lange noted that pay, the fire station needing to be addressed, and the call back system are three deterrents and cannot see a possibility of not having call ins and believes that is a huge problem and that possibly having another station would get rid of call backs but if we got rid of call backs that would drop firefighters pay significantly so they would like to see the wages increased as well if they got rid of call backs. Chief Lange noted he believes this is a serious issue and that they have worked a three person shift because people are burned out and noted that if they have one station with four and another station with three, they can get the truck out and noted there could still be call backs, but it would alleviate some. CM Baltzell asked if that second station would be in Celina and Chief Lange noted the second station in would be in Celina and noted it would cost a lot of money to have two stations staffed but noted we should have enough equipment already.

CM Clausen asked about the current staffing level and Chief Lange noted they are three short and next week will put us four short but noted we have a lateral transfer coming late July and will have three shifts of four when the lateral comes in but when one leaves in August, they will have one three person shift and that is with Chief Lange on shift. CM Clausen asked how the candidates are being found and Chief Lange spoke about how they are finding them on the National Testing Network, and we have been on there since January which has helped us find candidates. CM Clausen asked about the starting wage for a firefighter and Chief Lange noted it was close to seventeen dollars. CM Clausen asked if there are any companies out there that can help our staffing issues because we seem to always be one short and Chief Lange confirmed it has been almost a year of being short. Chief Lange noted that there are shortages nationwide right now and we usually compete with the local surrounding cities but right now people are leaving for further away jobs, and we need to blow our local competitors out of the water to help staff the fire department. Chief Lange noted St Mary’s and Van Wert are also short and we are competing for the same employees, so we need to outshine them. CM Gray asked how we could do that, and Chief Lange noted pay, new building, and a fitness room that they are in the process of getting. Chief Lange noted his belief that there is not much to offer these candidates during interviews other than a family-oriented group and noted that he foresees problems for years to come because the age and experience gap with our shifts soon. CM Gray noted that he has received questions about the nepotism and what the process could look like in order to hire someone within the family and as long as they are not a direct supervisor they would be able to be hired and asked if we are unable to because our department is so small it would be impossible to avoid and Chief Lange noted that are still looking at that and trying to understand the laws and see how other cities are able to do it. CM Gray asked if we are looking into the schools and Chief Lange noted they would like to start a cadet program and believes they are taking the right steps. Chief Lange noted that people who have left mentioned that they miss the family atmosphere that Celina Fire Department provided. CM Gray asked if it was possible to attract those people back and Chief Lange stated not at this time. CM Clausen asked if it was because of the call backs and Chief Lange noted that is a big part of it and Chief Lange spoke about the work life balance that is hard to achieve when trying to keep up with the call ins. CM Clausen asked how long call ins have been happening and when Chief Lange noted as long as he can remember, CM Clausen asked why it is now an issue and Chief Lange noted that the number of squad runs have increased about 40% since he has started from around 1350 to 2000 runs. CM Lange noted that we are losing paramedics, and he is worried about the care that will be provided. CM Clausen asked if the fire runs are also a problem and Chief Lange noted that is a different problem from the call ins and noted inspections as a big problem as well. Chief Lange noted that the training lately has been down and feels that we are not providing as good of care as we have previously due to the training. CM Clausen asked about the amount of runs inside and outside of the City and the previous meeting it was stated to be around 50% and the new data suggests a higher amount of calls within the City limits and Chief Lange noted that the 50% was a county number of calls. CM Clausen asked about the 2000 squad runs and asked how many are within the City limits and Mayor Hazel noted it is around 78%. Chief Lange noted that having so many nursing homes within range means a lot more calls than other cities without nursing homes. CM Clausen noted that we are stewards of the taxpayer’s money and how we can provide services and how we compare to other cities, and we seem to be very close to similar sized cities within the surrounding area. CM Clausen noted that we spend about 78% of the collected taxpayer money on our safety services which is a big chunk of money meaning we do not have a lot of additional money and noted if we do not spend the tax payer money appropriately it will make it hard to pass any levy’s and Chief Lange noted he wanted to let the tax payers know what is going on and how they may not be able to make a run or it will take up to twenty minutes to answer a call. CM Baltzell asked about the earlier comment about no nursing homes and asked if other cities make the nursing homes use private EMT services and Chief Lange noted that they have an Ordinance not allowing nursing homes within those cities. CM Gray noted that he better understands the position that Chief Lange is in and Council, Chief Lange, and administration will keep working toward solutions and noted that he will be spending some time at the fire department trying to see how he can help. Mayor Hazel spoke about the feasibility study that will be getting done this year and how after that they will be able to get into the design phase and it is not an overnight fix but something that needs to be done. Mayor Hazel noted that there was a hand out showing the wages from Celina, Huber Heights, and Mifflin and the difference in wages when it comes to the ending pay and can be up to thirty thousand dollars per year when it comes to the top of the scale and those cities have about thirty to forty thousand people and those are attractive wages to people within the City limits and although we have the ability to have people transfer in people also are able to transfer out.

CM Gray ended the meeting at 7:03 pm.