



A letter from the Interim Fire Chief

Dear Community,

I would like to take the time and address the current issues that have been seen within the community, and on social media regarding Florissant Fire Rescue. Let me first say, that our community is served by very dedicated and passionate first responders. The emergency services Florissant Fire Rescue and our mutual aid agencies provide will always be present and all calls for service answered. I have typed and deleted this letter many times over the past few months. Sometimes, in leadership the hardest thing a leader can do is remain silent and observe. Especially firefighters, we are geared to make decisions using our experience and knowledge in a split second that could mean life or death. This is a valuable and learned trait in leadership, and an important one to master as it allows conscious thought and evaluation before speaking. I feel now is the time to break that silence.

I have been serving as the Interim Fire Chief of Florissant Fire Rescue for three and a half months now. This was never intended to become such a long stay, as the original request was that I serve for a few weeks. I have stayed regardless of the stress and chaos directed towards me for taking on this interim position because I see a need in my community. I did not need a job and was happily employed.

Please understand that my role as the Interim Fire Chief is an operational role in training, preparing, and responding to emergencies to protect life, property, and the environment within the standards I have inherited. It is important to understand that the Fire Chief works under the governance and authority granted by the Board of Directors. As such, my role serving this community is separate from the board's role. My focus is serving this community, my community that I live in, raise my children in, and own my home in. At the end of the day my expertise professionally is firefighting, but I am a stakeholder as a community member first and foremost the same as everyone else. This was an unexpected role to fill for me. I received a phone call on April 2nd asking if I was willing to serve as an Interim Fire Chief for two weeks or so. I accepted the role without hesitation because this profession is my life's work and in my community. I had no idea of the situation or what I was stepping into beyond the call that Florissant Fire Rescue needed an Interim Fire Chief. Two weeks has turned into over 3 months of serving in this role. I have not received any pay, time off, or incentives and have stood strong in my beliefs that this community deserves to have the highest level of emergency services possible, and that I can provide that, regardless of the challenges. This has not been easy and has caused much personal stress and anxiety to myself and my family. However, even with these challenges I would never hesitate to accept this role again. This is my calling in life, my passion, and my expertise so I am proud to serve, and will continue to do so as long as I am needed.

There is only a one-sided story present in the community which as we all know never details the true and factual accounts. My only request has been patience as the process must take place before answers can be provided. For the past three months that process has been being worked out, and once completed a new board can address the concerns and questions appropriately. Due process does take time and unfortunately that process has not been quick enough for some, but I assure this community that as a stakeholder as well, I believe questions will be answered as soon as they can be.

As the Interim Fire Chief my focus has not been on the extenuating circumstances. There are challenges to operating with a tenure not guaranteed from one day to the next. I have operated the best that I can within the authority I have to serve this community. I am proud to say that of the concerns aired from community members there have been none that reflect any operational deficiencies from our emergency responses. That is a victory for an Interim Fire Chief. Despite all the negatives voiced, none have been from a lack of professionalism, effectiveness, or inability responding to emergencies when called upon by our residence of Florissant Fire Protection District, and something I am very proud of. Since April 2nd Florissant Fire Rescue has responded to many major emergency calls for service and all have been successful in protecting life, property and the environment. Not only has Florissant Fire Rescue answered every single call for service we have also supported every request for mutual aid.

This situation has not been an easy one to come into, and I have inherited a set of challenges that have not been my own creation but have done my best to handle them. I trust that the new appointees of the Board of Directors understand they must face challenges in their new role. I am confident that is clearly understood and will be a focus for this new board. From an elevated viewpoint and not being involved in the emotions I firmly believe the most destructive element that has existed is false information. This information has been harmful to this community by damaging the sacred institution of the fire department that selflessly answers the call to those in need within our community. They have posed as concerned citizens of a community but acted in a manner that is harming those that need our services. This is evidenced repeatedly as these “concerned citizens” questions were addressed and then turned into further accusations. I am here to say to our community that every concern has been addressed, oversight achieved, and proper procedure followed. If mistakes were made, they were corrected. Even after threats being made to board members and blocking the ability to move forward for over three months. Now, after fair and transparent board appointments by the County Commissioners in order to address these concerns, the false information continues and is continued proof this was never about the best interest of our community. Immediately, continued harassment and ultimatums given to new board members before they can even fully take their seats. To my community and those we serve I implore you to listen to those that understand the fire department and its mission, not those without experience in your needs for fire protection. Please take note the agenda of these individuals is a demand to return things to the way they were prior to April 2, 2022, while claiming the department is broken and needs to be governed by these same individuals. This coupled with a lack of journalistic integrity has created a narrative that does not reflect the reality of the department. Articles better suited for the national enquirer than the local paper have been constant with no proof to back them, and examples of directly working to cause subversion of the department between a journalist and those seeking their own agenda. I have been pushed and pulled to choose a side or pick a faction. I chose to not and adhere to the professional standards of the position maintaining my focus on this community’s needs.

The lens in which I view this department is one of a professional career in firefighting which comes without a preconceived bias or desire of this department. I came into this position with an open mind and no loyalty to anyone but you, my community and the professional standards of the fire service. After all as a community member my home, my family, my children, my friends, and neighbors all rely on this department the same as you all in this community do. My objective and professional viewpoint has made me a target for undermining my experience and making accusations against me. This will not distract me from my focus of providing exceptional emergency services to my community. As a reference to this point recently a complimentary post commending an emergency response was posted on social media. There was ten-fold the engagements in a positive manner than there have been to the negative and accusatory posts made the past three months. What stands out to me is none of these people that have perpetrated the negative accusations commented or liked this post. This is a clear example to me, as a

professional firefighter the concern has clearly never been on your best interest. Not one was proud to see the department they criticized served a resident in this community at the highest level in their time of need. In contrast posts making negative opinions are liked and commented constantly by the same group. Enough is enough, and I write this to stand against it. The community must stand against those that wish to tear into and control the fire department.

Those in our community that have needed emergency services over the past few months can attest the mission of the fire department is very clear and understood. These are the people in our community that need to be heard as they have seen the true measure of evaluating the fire department. It is hard to understand the importance and need of a fire department until you have an emergency. My focus is not on those that shout from the mountain top and do not place themselves in the fray, it is on those that are in need, and will continue to focus on those that need emergency services.

I have done this profession my entire life and am dedicated to understanding every aspect of how to protect every citizen in this district. I am a student of my craft and entirely dedicated to my life's passion despite any difficulty, any challenge, or any detraction of my personal character. My job is to respond to calls with professionalism and compassion for everyone, and I will maintain doing that regardless of any situation. The fire department in America has faced many challenges since the first fire company was formed in Philadelphia in 1736 by Benjamin Franklin. Many ups and downs and distractions, but what has always risen above all is a dedication to service. Florissant Fire Rescue is no different in that there are challenges that exist. There will be challenges in the future as well, but our community must understand that regardless of them, when they call for help, no matter the situation, or dangers men and women will suit up and put their lives at risk to do whatever is necessary to serve our residents. We must not lose sight of that as a community. That is what the fire department does, will continue to do, and has always done. The questions will be answered, the concerns addressed, and the emotions settled in time. Our community here in Florissant deserves that, and my role here is to honor those that have sacrificed (#169, #174) by continuing to provide emergency services at the highest possible level to our residents. I am dedicated to that role. To those that base their service on an ultimatum their mindset is not on service. Sometimes a cultural shift must happen in an organization, and when the mission focus is lost it is that time. My concerns are ensuring that my community is protected, and not allowing the active goals of a few destroy the needs of thousands. I will state that I have offered my time and expertise to those that have the loudest voices so they can understand the impact and mission of the fire department. None have accepted that offer and continue the public comments with no education is the fire service.

In closing, the definition of community is this: "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interest or goals." The fire department is a common place of fellowship as we serve our community. As stakeholders in the community our common interest and goals are serving each and every resident of Florissant. Despite personal opinions or desires we serve thousands of residents, and we must serve THEM. Many will never need the services we provide, but for those that do the fray and opinions do not matter when seconds count. The emergency response and people dedicated to community emergency services is what matters, and that is my focus. I have full faith that Florissant Fire Protection District and its new Board of Directors will take on every challenge. With patience those that have concerns will see the true role the fire department plays in the community and feel confident that they are protected. I want to ensure this community, my community, OUR community understands that although there may be speculation and concern, we stand ready to answer any call for service you may need us for. Our focus remains on our mission of life safety, property conservation, and the environment. YOUR safety, homes, and property are our mission to protect. Florissant Fire Rescue will continue to train,

prepare, and respond while working proactively to serve this community with the highest standards of professionalism. I am a public servant and have been my entire adult life. I am here to serve you all, this community, my own community. It is time that our community unite and stand against the thralls of those that wish to control and degrade the very fire department that protects you. I understand that breaking my silence will encourage continued attacks, but nothing will stand in the way of my desire to serve this community. I understand the mission of the fire department and will continue to serve that mission no matter the attacks. My tenure may soon end but I will work diligently until then to ensure my time here establishes a positive path into the future for Florissant and OUR fire department. I am proud of my tenure serving you all and have had a positive impact in this short tenure that has affirmatively given me the honor of saving lives, homes, and property within Florissant. That is what makes public service an honor to give my time and energy to and will continue to serve for as long as there is air filling my lungs. Thank you for having me!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erik Holt', with a stylized, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Interim Fire Chief

Florissant Fire Rescue