

Village of Peoria Heights
Board of Trustees
August 1, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

Everyone stood for a moment of silence and the Pledge to the Flag.

Upon calling roll, the following Trustees were present: Sherryl Carter, Diane Mariscal, Beth Khazzam, Jeff Goett, Brandon Wisenburg, and Sarah DeVore. Others present included Mayor Michael Phelan, Village Administrator and Chief of Police Dustin Sutton, and Village Clerk Stephanie Turner.

Mayor Phelan opened the meeting to public comment.

Mr. Craig Masters approached to express his support for keeping the Peoria Heights Fire Department staffed internally. He recommended usage fees to pay for services. He mentioned Public Works, Police, Fire, and Water as important services which needed to be maintained by the Village. He said he felt his taxes were reasonable, and he's willing to pay more in order to keep the services under Village control.

Hearing no additional public comment, Mayor Phelan closed public comments.

Mayor Phelan turned the floor over to Trustee Wisenburg to introduce the proposal by Peoria Fire to provide contractual services to the Village. Trustee Wisenburg invited City of Peoria Fire Chief Ardis forward to speak about the proposal. Fire Chief Ardis came forward and explained there were three proposals provided by the City. The first option was year round, full-time fire service, including EMS service, at a cost of \$860,000 per year. The service would respond from Village Hall. The second option was to provide staffing from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm for 6 months at a cost of \$215,000 per year. The service would respond from Village Hall. The last option was to provide service to each emergency at a cost of \$750 per response from nearby stations. The estimated annual cost of that was \$742,500. Trustee Khazzam asked about billing for the final option, and Fire Chief Ardis said it would be billed once a month. Trustee Mariscal asked who would respond to calls after 7:00 pm in the second option. Chief Sutton answered calls would be staffed by PHFD volunteers. Fire Chief Ardis noted the second option included responses seven days a week. Fire Chief Ardis explained a fourth option had been discussed, but not listed, for full-time response to just fire related calls and cardiac arrests only at a rate of \$750 per call. That option would cost an estimated \$205,000 per year. Trustee Khazzam questioned how response volume would change, and Fire Chief Ardis stated EMS would be dispatched more frequently rather than the fire department. Trustee DeVore asked if the City fire services would be using Peoria Heights' equipment. FC Ardis explained they would be supplying their own engine companies and equipment. Fire Chief Ardis briefly explained the names and types of apparatus. Trustee Mariscal asked if there would be less cost if the City were to use the Village's equipment. Fire Chief Ardis explained most of the cost of the proposal was labor related. Trustee DeVore asked how many staff was in one fire company, and Fire Chief Ardis stated it takes 3 firefighter / paramedics to staff an engine. Trustee Khazzam asked about the transition of duties between Village volunteers and City firefighters in a hybrid option. Fire Chief Ardis explained there'd be communication, and they would treat the transition as a shift change. Their employees typically arrive early to get equipment in order and to speak to the previous shift about activity. Trustee DeVore asked how potential layoffs in the City department could affect its structure. Fire Chief Ardis stated if there was a contract then it would be honored. Trustee DeVore asked how multiple events influenced response time. Fire Chief Ardis explained there's a

procedure to move fire engines around when there are incidents so they can split coverage areas to better respond to additional calls. He stated trucks are pulled from the outside of the city into central districts. Trustee Mariscal asked Trustee Wisenburg if some of the regular budget costs would decrease if the City provided daytime service. Trustee Wisenburg noted most costs would remain as the volunteers would still need to equipment during their shifts. Trustee Khazzam asked if the City would be interested in purchasing the Village's equipment, and Fire Chief Ardis noted there had been very brief conversations, but nothing of substance had been decided. Trustee Mariscal asked if the Village could extend temporary service coverage beyond 6 months if needed. Fire Chief Ardis stated that could be discussed as the 6 month time frame had only been proposed to provide the Village with options.

Trustee Wisenburg introduced the discussion of the PHFD day duty crew and invited Fire Chief Walters to come forward to speak. Fire Chief Walters announced that Mr. Don Faulkner, a long time member of the Peoria Heights Fire Department, had been placed on hospice. Fire Chief Walters noted that the Village is growing which increased emergency calls. Fire Chief Walter acknowledged the decrease in volunteerism and stated that a paid day duty crew could fix the problem. He suggested scheduling 3 personnel to work from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm Monday through Friday. The crews would consist of part-time shift supervisors and two part-time firefighters and would be supervised by a part-time fire chief. Fire Chief Walters estimated the annual cost would be \$159,000. Fire Chief Walters noted that having 3 duty crew, in combination with the part-time fire chief, would allow enough personnel to respond safely to calls. Trustee Goett expressed support for the idea. Fire Chief Walter noted that many fire departments were struggling with volunteer recruitment around the country, and a part-time paid crew was a solution that worked successfully in other communities. Trustee Wisenburg asked Fire Chief Walters if the paid duty crews and the volunteers work well together. Fire Chief Walters noted they typically do because they're frequently the same people. He acknowledged there's occasionally friction but said strong leadership can fix the problems. Trustee Wisenburg asked about the fire chief newly elected by the PHFD, and Fire Chief Walters introduced Mr. Van Thompson. Fire Chief Walters explained that Mr. Thompson works as a contractor for fire services for Caterpillar and works in scheduling. Trustee Goett asked if it would be necessary to use City services if the Village hires a part-time paid day duty crew. Fire Chief Walters explained he thought a part-time fire chief could handle things initially, but he believes that long term a full-time fire chief will be necessary. Trustee Goett noted that Chief Sutton would need to review finances. Chief Sutton asked if the part-time fire chief's salary was included in the cost estimate. Fire Chief Walters explained that the average salary for a full-time fire chief was \$80,000 annually so a part-time chief could expect \$40,000 annually. Trustee Wisenburg asked again if Mr. Thompson had experience managing crews with both paid and volunteer employees. Mr. Thompson answered he had not. Trustee Mariscal asked about benefits, and Chief Sutton stated that part-time employees would not be eligible for benefits. Fire Chief Walters noted that was considered when planning as he knew finances were a concern. Fire Chief Walters said he didn't believe concerns about his leaving were founded as he was just 1 of 25 firefighters. Trustee Wisenburg asked if Fire Chief Walters had concerns about attracting qualified candidates without benefits. Fire Chief Walters explained that younger firefighters who are still building qualifications will find the positions attractive. He acknowledged the situation would be fluid with a high rate of turnover. Trustee Mariscal noted that there would be benefits for a full-time fire chief. Trustee Goett stated support for a part-time fire chief. Trustee Khazzam noted that the situation was unique because currently the Village didn't choose the fire chief. Fire Chief Walters agreed noting the position didn't currently have a salary attached to it. He noted that should a salary become attached to the position then that individual would be an employee of the Village and the by-laws would need to be rewritten. Trustee Khazzam asked Fire Chief Walters to speak about public safety, and Fire Chief Walters stated that the solution would be to have a paid duty crew. He said the PHFD wasn't able to handle some work currently

because of man power. Trustee Khazzam asked Fire Chief Walters if this could affect the safety of the residents. Fire Chief Walters stated having an employee available would help the safety of the Village. Trustee Khazzam asked Fire Chief Walters about finances. He noted he recommended a full-time fire chief, but he didn't know about benefit costs. Trustee DeVore said hiring personnel increased costs. She noted the wear and tear on equipment, extra gear, increased vehicular use as examples of indirect cost increases. She stated costs would be higher than the personnel estimates from Fire Chief Walters. Chief Sutton asked if the City of Peoria was the first call for mutual aid assistance. Fire Chief Walters agreed. Trustee DeVore asked about qualifications. Fire Chief Walters briefly explained the certifications and qualifications necessary for paid firefighters. Trustee DeVore asked if the proposed pay rates for the duty crew would be desirable for trained firefighters. Fire Chief Walter said they would be as a part-time job. Trustee DeVore asked the rates for a full-time firefighter and learned they were approximately \$10 / hour higher than the proposed wages. Trustee DeVore stated she's concerned about hiring inexperienced personnel. Trustee DeVore asked about cost estimates to hire experienced staff, and Fire Chief Walters stated hiring a paid duty crew was the first step. Trustee DeVore asked if the PHFD had had any discussion about fundraisers to offset costs, and Fire Chief Walters stated that was beyond his experience. Trustee Khazzam asked if the current fire budget included expenses that could be cut to cover the increased costs for staffing. Fire Chief Walters wasn't certain but agreed to review the budget. Trustee Carter asked about outstanding debt service for the fire department, and Chief Sutton stated debt service was just under \$500,000. Trustee Carter noted that the Village would still have to pay off debt service regardless of the Board's decisions. Trustee Carter stated she isn't in favor of contracting service from the City. She stated that she was in favor of hiring a fire chief on the condition that the PHFD met goals regarding fundraising, training, and response time. Trustee Carter noted she had concerns about the current composition of the volunteer roster, and the number of volunteers not living in the Village. Trustee Carter asked Fire Chief Walters to speak about a full-time chief instead of a duty crew. She also asked how many people would be necessary to staff 3 crew per day. Fire Chief Walters noted it would probably take a roster of 15 people. Chief Sutton said what Fire Chief Walters was presenting was similar to the format used when the ambulance went from a volunteer crew to a paid crew. Trustee Mariscal pointed out the costs of hiring personnel is similar to the cost of contracting with the City. Trustee Khazzam noted that the Board needed numbers in order to make further decisions. Fire Chief Walters stated he'd need to speak to others in order to provide that information.

Mr. Khazzam stated support for spending smaller amounts to invest internally. Chief Sutton noted that the first option presented by the City, which cost over \$800,000, wasn't actually an option. A member of the PHFD said while a paid duty crew might have initial costs those would decrease over time. A resident noted that she had received service from the PHFD several times over the last few years and appreciated their prompt service. A resident asked Fire Chief Ardis why the City would find this situation attractive. Fire Chief Ardis stressed the City didn't pursue this situation. The Village approached to ask for information, and the City has provided that information. Trustee Khazzam noted that the Board wants to keep jobs local but that those hired must be qualified. A PHFD volunteer noted that having a duty crew would increase positive public relations opportunities. Another volunteer questioned if the City would be using MABAS for additional response units or if they would be using their own department and increasing costs. Mr. Becker asked if a merger of the two departments was considered and who would have control. Chief Sutton noted that control would be outlined in the contract. Chief Sutton also stressed the Village had no control over the City's finances, and they had no control over the Village's. Trustee Wisenburg said that the Village is not discussing a merger but rather the possible dissolution of the PHFD. Chief Sutton noted that the situation is similar to the situation with dispatching. The state previously required the Village, along with other communities, to dissolve its

dispatching service. The Village contracted with the City of Peoria to provide those services and has done so for several years.

Mayor Phelan thanked the residents for a thoughtful conversation.

Trustee Goett made a motion to adjourn, and Trustee Wisenburg seconded. The Board voted 6-0 to adjourn the meeting at 10:49 am.

Michael Phelan, Mayor

Stephanie Turner, Village Clerk