

Jimmy Parker

From: Jimmy Parker <jparker@co.titus.tx.us>
Sent: Wednesday, August 19, 2015 1:59 PM
To: 'Brian Lee'
Subject: Fire Committee Recommendations

Judge Lee,
The Fire Committee met 8/18/2015

Members present:

Jimmy Parker

Al Riddle

Larry McRae

Jerry Clark

Colby Gilliean

Larry Cox

Tim Dale

Absent:

Nathan Carroll

Committee made the following Recommendations

Hire a consultant to conduct a compressive evaluation and analysis of the fire protective services county-wide with county and city sharing the costs.

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County to provide additional funding, of 25,000, to volunteer firefighters. The purpose of this is to help keep the current firefighters and get them to respond and entice others to join the volunteer fire departments. This will be a one year experiment to see if it is effective and any monies not paid to the volunteer firefighters would be returned to the county at the end of the year. If it is determined it has been effective then the program may be continued in the next budget.

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Establish tiered monthly payments to the volunteer fire departments from the county based on the busiest departments getting more the less busy departments.

Add 3 additional career firefighters to the MPFD this budget year with the city and county splitting the costs. This would be a start to addressing the need for more personnel. The approximant cost of this is about \$ 90,000. (Al Riddle made this motion.)

90

We did not discuss the cost of another truck yesterday but it was talked about at one of our budget workshops.

Thanks,
Jimmy

\$ 130

Committee meeting minutes
8/18/15 @ 10am

In attendance: Larry McRae, Jerry Clark, Jimmy Parker, Al Riddle, Larry Cox, Tim Dale, Coby Gillean.

The meeting was called to order at 10 am.

Chief McRae gave a weather/fire condition update. Talked about burn ban going into effect. He then passed around a weather condition packet. Currently in a severe drought—it's been 46 days without rain.

Chief McRae explained the process of what happens when implementing a burn ban into effect. He added there is a helicopter stationed at airport to assist with wildfire needs.

Chief McRae outlined the volunteer availability county-wide for the past 7 days. Numbers have been low. Some days none are available, other days the level of experience varies so often times there's not a whole lot to work with. Some have had training but lack experience.

Larry Cox asked historically if more fires happen on weekends versus weekdays.

Answer: They do not. Higher numbers generally happen on weekdays.

Wind-So far the winds have been down which has helped be able to put fires out quickly.

Fires- Luckily all large fires the department has been on units have been in the right place at the right time. The public doesn't know how close it comes to not having enough resources.

The county contract requires 2 men/2 trucks. Mt. Pleasant has always exceeded that. With the recent annexations Chief McRae stated he doesn't know how much longer his department can keep sending more than the required 2/2.

It's the consensus of the committee that the City and county need to continue working together.

For the past year and a half the county departments have had a huge volunteer recruitment push with little to no return. Have advertised at the movies, on facebook, on the radio, etc.

Some of the problem is lack of time. Volunteers are required to have training, attend meetings and respond to calls. Many do not have the extra time to do this.

All departments nation-wide have seen a decrease in members.

Volunteers have increasingly become less and less effective. If the trend continues it will steadily get worse. Chief McRae said he doesn't see the volunteer fire service being a viable option 10 years from now.

The hope with this committee is that solutions will be found, and also so that the public will be enlightened.

Tim Dale added, "The perfect storm hasn't occurred yet."

Chief McRae said we need more resources. Tim Dale agreed the obligation rises as we annex.

Discussion ensued. Talks continue of annexation, but career staff has not grown since 2004.

Jimmy Parker added that it's known an overnight solution doesn't exist, but something needs to get started so that in 3-5 years we have something in place.

Chief McRae said a consultant needs to come in to give an idea of what is needed. (Chief McRae then passed around a draft of the scope of what is needed from a consulting service).

Coby Gillean asked if the committee would be opposed to him bringing in a friend to look over and oversee our consulting service. Tim Dale said input from someone like him would be invaluable. Chief McRae agreed.

Jerry Clark brought up Tri-Lakes and the City of Mt. Pleasants' low ISO ratings. If ISO was recalculated, both would likely go up, resulting in rates going up. Chief McRae explained how ISO is calculated. The city takes a slight hit because the city is contracted to assist with the county.

Coby asked Chief McRae to go over what Mt. Pleasant currently has staff-wise. Larry Cox inquired if we have people we can hire if positions became open. Chief McRae explained that historically employees are hired from within the part time staff to fill open fulltime positions. Chief McRae explained how Mt. Pleasant compares to other surrounding towns of like and kind. Titus County is 400 square miles.

Tim Dale said the consultant definitely needs to not only consider our population size, but also ALL of the potential hazards that are dealt with on a daily basis.

Jerry Clark pointed out how experienced the career staff is at Mt. Pleasant. He cautioned that turnover could happen quickly. Staff is overworked and underpaid. Higher paying jobs exist in metroplex with a lot less work/stress and that is hurting us. MPFD has 5 employees currently testing elsewhere.

Developing an ESD was brought up. If voters vote it down, then the county turns around and taxes the residents they will be mad. Chief McRae made the suggestion that we start off with a low tax then do low steps to raise it so it's not high all at once.

Coby Gillean again stated that public education is key. He thinks the fact that the fire dept has had NO turnover alone should justify a pay increase. He said that the public has no clue how underpaid the employees are.

Tim Dale added that the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

Al Riddle suggested the city pay for one employee and the county for one employee. Chief McRae said we need a 3rd station, which would work out to 18 employees. That would just cover the city. Additional staff is still needed to cover the county even after the new station would be built, especially if volunteer numbers continue to drop.

In addition, some annexed areas do not have hydrants. The city depends on County volunteers to bring water (in Tankers).

Chief McRae said that the idea is to send extra resources to overwhelm the problem before the problem overwhelms the fire department.

Equipment isn't the problem, people/manpower is.

Larry Cox asked when a new station is needed---a new station is needed NOW.

Chief McRae mentioned TFS may be interested in leasing office space if the city gets a new station. That would help to slightly offset the cost.

Larry Cox then asked what the fire department does if a railroad car comes through town, leaking. Chief McRae went over what would happen.

Coby Gillean discussed his fears when the coal industry leaves our area. What will the railcars then begin transporting? This is something to be concerned about. Coal will be replaced with something (cars, natural gas, etc).

Jerry Clark said that the committee sees the concerns. He said the committee needs to begin making recommendations as to how it will move forward. Jerry then passed around a proposal to be submitted before the county commissioners that would offer incentive pay to volunteers responding to calls. He also stated the committee needs to look at getting Mt. Pleasant more employees and make a proposal of that now.

Lastly he said the committee needs to make a proposal to get current firefighters a pay bump now so we don't lose them.

He pointed out that the committee has the ability to make those three recommendations now as opposed to waiting until another meeting.

Chief McRae interjected that the recommendation on staffing needs to come from the survey. Jimmy Parker said that the county Judge wants recommendations for this year's budget.

Al Riddle questioned why we're recommending anything to the Judge, when each commissioner has equal voting rights to the Judge. He also questioned an increase in pay to volunteers since the county already pays each department monthly.

Jimmy Parker explained that although each volunteer department gets a monthly check from the county they've had to make the choice to pay volunteers instead of purchasing needed equipment. Jerry Clark added each VFD gets \$1,200/month. A total of \$25,000 is being requested to conduct a one-year experiment to see if county vfd's would increase/retain members if they were paid for responding to calls.

Al Riddle said a long-term solution is needed, but that he would like to leave it how it is.

Jimmy Parker again said we need to get a recommendation to the County Judge. His suggestion is to do a tier for each department based on responses; and also put something in for the consultant for this year's budget. Jimmy Parker would like to recommend to the judge to hire a consultant, and to add \$25,000 to the budget to pay volunteers for a tiered pay-scale.

It was also agreed that the city needs help now.

Al Riddle again stated that he would ask that the county pay the cost of one employee if the city will match that and also pay for one.

Chief McRae said that we need to hire in 3's. Tim Dale then said that the city can attempt to do 1 ½ and the county can match the 1 ½ .

Tim Dale clarified with Al Riddle that he would be asking for this for this upcoming budget year. Al Riddle said yes, they're submitting their budgets now for the upcoming year.

Tim Dale said there's no doubt the city and county needs to continue working together to reach a solution.

Larry Cox asked if anything existed in the schools to get awareness out.

Chief McRae said the Mt. Pleasant Fire Department will be offering a firefighting citizens academy to get the idea out to the public.

Chief McRae then asked if anyone wanted to give feedback regarding the consulting request. The committee agreed they liked it and wanted to proceed forward.

Chief McRae suggested the committee appoint a chairman. Jimmy Parker was nominated. appointment was unanimously approved.

Tim Dale again clarified with Al Riddle that the county will budget for 1 ½ firefighters for this year's budget. Al Riddle and the committee is in unanimous support of this recommendation. Al Riddle and Jimmy Parker both agreed that this request would be presented and made for this upcoming budget year.

Coby said he liked the idea that the county help with the burden of the cost.

Jimmy Parker asked if the consultant should be brought before the committee so everyone is on the same page in expectations. The committee agreed that all potential candidates should be brought before the committee as an interview to confirm they know what is being expected of them. Coby suggested we break down how they will be paid so a timeline is established.

Jimmy Parker will report to the Judge and make the recommendations.

The next meeting will be September 1st 2015.

Meeting adjourned @ 12:12pm