

On behalf of MHAJFD we want to share some department information with you tonight, answer any questions on our 2024 budget proposal and talk about the Act 12 funding

I'll list a few of our department **highlights** since our last annual budget that I believe will give confidence to our residents:

First, our dedicated volunteers save this department more than one million dollars annually. If that isn't impressive enough, they've also donated \$400,000 in the past 5 years through their fundraising efforts.

We trained more than 7,000 hours in Fire and EMS skills since we've last worked our budget. We're not just ready, we're committed to improving our services.

And lastly, we made some big saves. In the last three months we have saved two people who were in cardiac arrest; their hearts were no longer beating. The last cardiac save before this was in 2014. We also delivered three babies in the last year, which is always exciting for the crews.

We've always stepped up to help. But the time has come when **we need help from you**.

Last year we ran a yard sign campaign and Facebook push to help recruit new members. We only recruited two new members. We offered up a Citizens Fire Academy this year, but only one person signed up. We also re-started our high school program after COVID to increase our pipeline of EMS and firefighter candidates. Three new students just signed up as Student Volunteers, but this program requires even more time from our current members to shepherd these students through the process.

In 2022, our fire and EMS calls increased 17% across the prior two years. As of June of 2023, our Fire and EMS calls are on track to be a startling 17% more than just last year. We need more firefighters in our engines, and we desperately need more EMTs in our ambulances.

Volunteer Fire Department's started out as associations of neighbors who banded together to provide a service the respective city, town, or village could not afford. We are no longer social organizations who put fires out, but have evolved into a multifaceted public service facing a challenging environment that includes legal accountability, declining human resources, and financial constraints. Many departments, particularly in more rural areas, are facing significant shortages of financing and manpower. Some are closing, being consolidated, or like Mount Horeb, begging for more funding.

We are committed to the sustainability of the volunteer fire and EMS service, but will be limited by the interest of people who want to serve their community in this capacity. Those with a strong value in public service will be more actively engaged than others. We have a lot of individuality within our society and that extends to the volunteer fire and EMS service as well. Everyone has more time constraints today with working full time and young families. Throwing too much on their plates and begging for more help could cause problems and possible loss of participation. We are always looking for more volunteer help. We brought a poster to hang on your bulletin board and encourage you to reach out to those folks who you know of that may be interested in applying.

Volunteer EMS signups are down 41% over the last 5 years. Most nights over the previous year, we were not able to keep the backup ambulance in service because of this lack of staffing. What happens when a citizen or visitor in our municipalities calls 911 and we're already gone? Mutual aid is called. What if mutual aid is busy or out of service due to their staffing challenges? Dispatch goes down the highway until it finds a department that can respond. This leads to long delays in getting medical help to the patient. In December 2022, Mrs. Smith waited 25 minutes for Cross Plains 32 to arrive at her house when she had a heart attack. This summer, Mr. Smith waited 26 minutes for Barneveld 83 to arrive at his house when he had an allergic reaction. This is unacceptable, and we cannot in good conscience wait for more of these stories.

As firefighters and EMTs we are not scared of a large fire, a bad accident or chemical release, we are scared of getting two calls at the same time. We are scared of going out the door with only two people on the firetruck. We are scared of being at the station when a call comes in and no one else shows up.

We are responsible for providing our community fire and EMS response, we are responsible for going when you call 911. We are not meeting your expectations.

This was a difficult budget process. With each adjustment we debated if we really needed this, if maybe there was some way we could "just get by for another year" But we have been doing this thought process too long and for too many years. We can't "just get by for another year" again. It has been enough years that we shorted ourselves that we can no longer provide what our community needs. We need help.

We are asking for a budget increase of \$298,800. That number is hard for to say aloud, because it represents a 24% increase over our last budget. As folks who have a hard time with even a \$500 category increase, we are very sensitive about this figure. But this increase is primarily going toward needed personnel, the largest piece of our budget, to ensure public safety.

The **consequences** of keeping our budget the same without addressing these personnel changes is already felt. We need some help and that is hard to ask for. We are caregivers, the helpers, there to fix things. It is hard to say we can't fix this ourselves. We have tried lots of different approaches with little success.

We want to highlight the three staff positions that make up our budget request, since that amounts to the greatest percentage of the increase.

First, the Deputy Chief position has sat vacant since 2019 when current Chief Minter moved up into her current role. We had a part-time (at least 24 hour a week) Chief and full time Deputy Chief in 2018. Now we have one Chief that is responsible for running all aspects of a mid-sized business alone. We have 70 members and the Chief needs help to manage and be accountable. The Deputy Chief role will assist with management and administrative tasks, oversee state mandated programs that include training, health,

safety and wellness. The position will respond to fire and EMS calls and help fill Officer in Command evening and weekend shifts where we have a lot of current openings.

Second, the part-time Admin Assistant position. This position will be a non-response position so that when we are all out on calls, the urgent matters, mandatory reports, and phones can be attended to while we are doing Fire and EMS things. The Chief is not like other full-time Fire or EMS department chiefs, she is on the first truck out the door on every call while working. The Admin Assistant position will be 20 hours or less a week, assist with time sensitive tasks, grants, EMS billing, review reports for accuracy, scheduling, invoices, data entry, federal and state reports, and financial paperwork.

Third, an additional Full Time Firefighter/AEMT to help fill some of the holes in the schedule left by declining volunteer hours. When we go on ambulance calls, we have a 2-hour turnaround time from the page to returning to the station in service. Our call volume increase means even more transports and less availability for the next call. We do all the cleaning and work around the new station, inside and out. With mandatory reporting, building inspections, and training there are few hours left in the day to stay caught up on other department needs.

A reminder that our budget has no separate capital expenses. All our capital purchases happen through funds collected each year in the Operating Budget. We started this fund in 1995 and in 2018 it was finally fluid enough to be at a steady maintenance amount. There are no extra monetary requests when we purchase a truck.

We continue to apply for grants, they have been essential to get our basic needs met. Most grants are one-time funding or for certain equipment. This doesn't work for adding staffing. Thankfully, we believe there is a way forward to obtaining this 24% budget increase from the state level that will not unduly burden our municipalities and our taxpayers. Act 12 contains funding for public safety needs.

Act 12 is a new law that provides new funding sources for municipalities. The supplemental funding portion is to be utilized for law enforcement, fire protection, emergency medical services, emergency response communications, public works and transportation. The goal of this restricted use is to target a municipalities greatest and urgent needs. Act 12 has a commitment to public safety. To avoid penalties, police, fire, and EMS must annually certify that things are going well. For fire and EMS, we will have to demonstrate that we have not decreased the number of full-time equivalent firefighters and EMS personnel (which includes volunteers), have not decreased the level of training and licensure for firefighters and EMS personnel, and that response times for fire and EMS adjusted for call location are not worse. The MHAJFD goal for this budget year was to repair our staffing shortages with the hope that each municipality will apply some of this new funding.

You received a packet with itemized budget changes for 2024. At this time, we are happy to answer any questions about our department, our staffing or our budget. Thank you for your support.