

**SANDSTONE CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING – SANDSTONE FIRE HALL  
February 4, 2019, 7:00 p.m.**

**CALL TO ORDER:** 7:05 p.m.

**ROLL CALL:**

Council Members present: Pete Spartz, Phil Kester, Brandon Devlin

Fire Department Members present: Ross Degerstrom, Nick Eberhardt, Matt Haugen, Matt Johnson, Chaz Mann, Andrew Wilkening

Staff present: Administrator Kathy George

Township Representatives present: Jeff Schute (Danforth), Keith Carlson and Gary Hinsch (Sandstone), Jerry Volk (Finlayson), Dan O’Flanagan, Nick Harris and Randall Davis (Dell Grove), Bill Erickson (Kroschel)

**SPECIAL ITEMS OF BUSINESS:**

2018 Review

Assistant Fire Chief Degerstrom provided information regarding 2018 fire calls and training. The Fire Department received training throughout the year from Fire Instruction & Rescue Education, which is reimbursed through the MN Board of Firefighter Training & Education. The Department conducted one training burn in 2018 and has two more planned for 2019. There are currently 18 firefighters on the Department and they are always looking for more.

There was some discussion about the number of firefighters reporting to calls and how that is determined. Attendance is reported on the State Incident forms and staff uses that information to calculate manhours for each entity.

2019 Plans

Degerstrom reported that the Department was offered a used 1992 Tele Squirt in exchange for their 1996 Freightliner Pumper and a cash payment of \$7,500. The Tele Squirt will allow safer access to rooftops and will help fight fires on 2 and 3 story buildings. Firefighters will receive additional training on the new equipment. The Department is also planning to apply for FEMA funding to replace air packs.

Administrator George updated the Townships on the Fire Hall repair/improvement project. The City has been looking into options for an air exchange/exhaust system and other steps to remedy moisture problems that are causing issues with mold and deterioration of the cement block walls. In 2017, the City had some work done on the roof, added some gutters, and did some grading work around the building. The City has contracted with an engineer/architect to design a project to address the issues and also to update the outside appearance of the building. The scope of the project includes:

- Replacing exterior windows and pedestrian doors
- Exterior masonry repair and tuck-pointing
- Replacing exterior wall paint finishes
- Adding insulation
- Adding a new makeup air system and dehumidification units in the Apparatus Bay
- Adding a CO/NO2 gas detection system in the Apparatus Bay

- Adding a condensing unit to the existing forced air furnace
- Adding a compressed air system
- Modifying 1 garage door to accommodate the new ladder truck
  - Addressing the fill pipe in the ceiling
- Siding material
- Architectural improvements

A plan sketch of the exterior design was shared. The final plans still need to be approved by the City Council, and the project will be bid out. The City plans to finance the project through MN Rural Water Association's MIDI Loan Program.

George reported that the City Council has been discussing Fire Call Fees. She reviewed the following points Council Members had made during a recent work session:

- Whether or not to continue to charge property owners for fire calls:
  - Currently, the charge is \$750 (minimum 1 hour) and \$250 each additional hour, plus the cost of chemicals.
  - Some thought that property owners already pay property taxes, which pays for the Fire Department budget; therefore, charging them for calls is like charging them twice.
  - Some did not want property owners to be discouraged from calling the Fire Department because of a potential charge.
  - Some thought that property taxes are for the basic presence of the Fire Department and that those who actually use the services should pay an additional charge.
  - After much discussion, three Council Members felt that property owners should not be charged for fire calls, and two Council Members felt that they should be charged.
- Whether or not to continue to charge for Traffic Control/Vehicle Assistance:
  - Currently, the charge is \$450
  - Some noted that these situations can result in serious injury or death to the parties involved; therefore, sending a bill seems rather harsh and can give people a negative impression of the City of Sandstone and the Sandstone Fire Department.
  - Others stated that, unlike house fires, these calls typically involve people who do not pay taxes in the City or covered Townships; therefore, they should have to pay a fee.
  - The conversation turned to the question of why the Fire Department is called out to provide traffic control on the Interstate and on Trunk Highways, when the State has emergency response vehicles.
  - Consensus of the Council was to begin discussions with MN DOT and the County (Sheriff, Dispatch) regarding the practice of calling out the Fire Department for these situations – perhaps an agreement can be reached wherein the State reimburses the Fire Department for these calls (similar to the DNR grass fire agreement).
- Whether or not to continue to charge for Extrication & Technical Rescue:
  - Currently, the charge is \$500 per half hour.
  - Consensus of the Council was to continue charging for these services.
  - It was noted that sometimes the Fire Department has not charged for Technical Rescue when perhaps they should have or could have. The incident that occurred

in 2018 with a teenager getting stuck rock climbing at Robinson Park was discussed. The Fire Department did not actually provide the technical rescue (others with appropriate equipment had to be called in); however, they were still there providing assistance.

- Security after call (after 1<sup>st</sup> hour) was then discussed:
  - Currently, the charge is \$380 minimum per hour; \$350/hour per rig (minimum 1 hour), \$15 per fireman (2) per hour (minimum 1 hour).
  - This charge hasn't been used very much and is confusing.
  - Consensus of the Council was to change it to "Scene Security - \$380 minimum per hour; \$350/hour per rig (minimum 1 hour)" and increase the \$15 per firefighter to cover today's cost for a firefighter.
  - Scene Security includes securing the area for things like gas leaks, downed power lines, vehicle crashes (when the Fire Department is needed to control traffic, clear the scene for investigating personnel, etc.)
  - Clarification is needed regarding whether or not Scene Security fees kick in after the 1<sup>st</sup> hour, or immediately.
  - Council Member Devlin, also a member of the Sandstone Fire Department, will review this change with the Firefighters so that these calls will be appropriately coded.
  
- Fire Call – Auto was discussed:
  - Currently, the fee is \$450.
  - Consensus of the Council was to continue to charge for this service.
  
- Fire Call – False Alarm was discussed:
  - Currently, the 1<sup>st</sup> call is no charge; the 2<sup>nd</sup> call is \$350, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> call is \$650.
  - It was clarified that this item pertains to hard-wired, automatic dial-out alarm systems. These are typically in commercial and industrial buildings, as well as in the larger apartment complexes. The purpose of the fee is to encourage entities to properly maintain their systems so that false alarms are kept to a minimum.

George stated that no final decisions have been made. It is anticipated that the Council will discuss this further at their February 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. Comments from Township representatives include the following:

- Agreement that the City should talk to the State about the Fire Department providing traffic control on State Highways.
- The City should charge non-profits a fee for fire protection.
- It was noted that \$15,400 was billed out in 2018 by the City; with \$11,200 received so far – these funds are not included in the budget but help to increase the Fire Fund balance and allow for the purchase of equipment and other needs.

### 2020 Fire Formula

Administrator George then reviewed the packet of information that had been sent to all Township representatives regarding the proposed 2020 Fire Formula.

Proposed 2020 Fire Department Budget – The proposed budget shows total expenses of \$199,815, which is \$11,507 less than the 2019 budget. The biggest change is in depreciation, which is \$10,748 less than it was in 2019. Fire Hall Rents has been eliminated because Essentia

Health is building a new facility to house the ambulance and personnel; therefore, they will no longer be renting space at the Fire Hall.

Cost Share- This sheet takes the percentage of the 5-year total manhours for each entity and the percentage of valuation to come up with the overall percentage for each entity that is applied to the total needed. George explained that in the past, a 30% reduction was applied for the townships, with the City picking up the balance. The Council is considering phasing out the 30% reduction so that each Township pays their fair share according to manhours and valuation. The 2020 proposed formula reduces the reduction to 20%. Dell Grove Township noted that their annual allocation increases by \$1,388, stating that this is too much of an increase for them to cover. They voiced their concern regarding this change; however, it was pointed out that the City Council needs to look out for the taxpayers of the City, just like the Townships are looking out for their taxpayers.

Market Value – This sheet shows the breakdown of each entity’s market value, along with prior years for comparison purposes.

Fire Call Hours – This sheet shows the total fire call hours for each entity for the past 5 years, along with prior 5-year totals for comparison purposes.

Comparison of Fees – This sheet shows a comparison of fees for each entity for each year from 2014 to 2020. It also shows the breakdown of Operations, Long Term Equipment Depreciation, and Building Fund amounts for each entity.

Equipment Depreciation – This sheet shows the equipment that is being depreciated, both long term (15 years) and short term (5 years).

Equipment Fund / Bldg Rep & Maint Fund – This sheet shows the breakdown of depreciation for each entity, along with an accounting of the Equipment Fund, the Building Repair & Maintenance Fund, and the two loans the City has been paying into the fund (building improvements and fire truck purchase).

It was noted that the proposed budget and formula will be finalized at the February 20<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting.

## **ADJOURN**

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m. Township representatives were invited to stick around for a tour of the Fire Hall.

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Peter Spartz, Mayor

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Kathy George, Administrator