

HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES
November 15., 2021

In Attendance: **Vermilion City Council:** *Steve Herron, President of Council; Monica Stark, Council at Large; Frank Loucka, Ward Two; Steve Holovacs, Ward Three; Barb Brady, Ward Four; Brian Holmes, Ward Five. Absent: Emily Skahen, Ward One*

Administration: *Jim Forthofer, Mayor; Susan Anderson, Law Director; Tony Valerius, Service Director; Chris Stempowski, Fire Chief*

Call to Order: Brian Holmes, Chairman, RESOLVED THAT this Health & Safety Committee comprised of the committee of the whole does now come to order.

TOPIC ONE: Fire Chiefs Report

Chief Stempowski reported the department responded to 19 incidents in October for a total of 218 through the end of October. He thanked the fire personnel who helped with Fire Prevention Week, Open Houses, and safety visits at day care centers. It takes a lot of hours for personnel to donate their time and he appreciated it.

He said SCBA bench testing has been completed for the year and all SCBA's passed the test. They currently have three firefighters enrolled in a Confined Space Rescue Operations Level Class that is put on through the Lorain County Tech Rescue Team and Cleveland State University. It is a total of 24 hours, and it will be beneficial to their training. He said he talked to T. Valerius about training down at the Wastewater Treatment Plant which kickstarted today and they will continue this training. He said they have plenty of confined spaces throughout their jurisdiction and it is a scary endeavor if they ever get involved in this, so the more people they have trained the better.

He said at Station No. 2 they have been accommodating for the Police Department and Lifecare EMS. It has been beneficial to the citizens. Lifecare has 18 hours of response times when they have staffing, which is great for the east side. This Segway's into the bridge closure and the fire department is responding differently during this closure. He said it is all hands-on deck and if it falls on the east side, they have personnel covered on the west. If they do not need them, then they are staging them for the next call until the initial incident is over. He said with the bridge closure and railroad maintenance issues it has been challenging, but they are being very responsive and there have been no major issues so far. They are looking at December 1 for the bridge to be complete.

He mentioned that Lieutenant Tom Burger who has been serving out of Station No. 2 announced his retirement effective November 20. He joined the force December 1, 1993 and was promoted to Lieutenant on November 1, 2005 and has obviously served as a firefighter EMT as well as a training officer. He has been a phenomenal asset to the department, and he will be missed. He thanked him for his many years of service.

Lastly, he reminded all the residents of the importance of working smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors as they do save lives. If the fire department can assist in any way with their

detectors or locations they usually refer to the manufacturer's instructions, but they do save lives and the department is here to help anyway they can.

B. Holmes said the department has been doing an excellent job with the closure of the bridge and he can tell it is all hands-on deck because sirens are everywhere. He said he appreciates it and knows the citizens appreciate it, so he thanked the Chief and his crew.

Bob Leimbach of 1425 Claus Road asked the fire chief how they protect a 65' high building – does this involve special equipment? B. Holmes clarified that he is talking about the property on Baumhart Road with regards to the proposed possibility of a warehouse facility going in on the 119 acres and the ordinance Council is proposing to change in the I-1 with the height requirement of 45' to 65'. He asked if the fire department is equipped if the building goes to 60' to 65'. Chief Stempowski said they are certainly well-equipped, and he would have to see how the building is structured, so it would be hard to answer until there are specifics. However, the building has to be built to current fire codes. B. Brady said they would need to have a sprinkler system as well.

Mayor Forthofer said they need to see specifically what the structure is, and they would have to look at codes that apply to this building that would be required. B. Holmes said they cannot throw up any building without meeting fire safety codes, so this would have to be engineered and it would have to meet codes set by the State of Ohio.

TOPIC TWO: Police Chiefs Report

Mayor Forthofer conveyed that Chief Hartung is attending training in Columbus. He noted that he has reshuffled the schedule for the police department to double up shifts. There are usually three officers on the road during any given shift, but because of the bridge there are now two on each side of the bridge that requires some of the officers to get out in the car and renew themselves with the road. It has been a busy time for the police department, and they are looking forward to this project ending as much as anybody.

B. Holmes said with the closures he wanted to remind the residents and folks traveling through Vermilion that if the road sign says 'Road Closed Ahead' do enter the road closed area, including any type of bridge or railroad track. S. Herron said especially to their high school students that they love – please - road closed means - road closed.

TOPIC THREE: Review of Ordinance 2021-72 (Full-Time Fire Chief)

Steve Herron said he requested this item to be on the agenda because when they have ordinances on the council meeting agendas they have limited discussions when reading an ordinance, so he would like to address any questions council might have on this matter. He said council received a job description of this position.

Mayor Forthofer noted that once council gives final approval to the expenditure for funding the chief, then he will work with the Ohio Fire Chiefs and Chief Stempowski to put this advertisement in the media to request applicants for this position.

S. Holovacs said his only concern with this issue is that when they first started talking about this they said they might have money for a 10-year period, but not it is down to six and possibly

passing a levy. He said they need to look at how they pass levies in Vermilion as this is a consideration if they feel strong enough to proceed with this. In five or six years if they have a levy, they shouldn't include a street levy too as it would never pass.

S. Herron asked if this position would be civil service. Mayor Forthofer said no as he checked this out with the previous law director who assured him it is not.

B. Holmes said they need to keep in mind with Tom Burger retiring and Assistant Chief Coen retiring and a couple others, that they keep the timeline and consider the postings of these positions and whether they will be civil service or not, and they should look at a job description for these positions as well and keep moving forward with this whole process with the positions and the new facility. Mayor Forthofer agreed it has a lot of moving parts. B. Holmes asked if the interview process will be a board and who will the interviewees be made of. Mayor Forthofer said there would probably be a board and he has several people in mind for this position. Under the Charter, it is the typical Mayor's appointment to Council for confirmation. Susan Anderson clarified this would not be civil service as this is not a position that would be filled through promotional or competitive testing as the city's ordinances provide this as being appointed by the Mayor, but under state law it would be considered a classified position, which is the same as Chief Hartung's position right now. Mayor Forthofer said they are modeling the Fire Chief position to the same of Chief Hartung's position.

Chief Stempowski said they mentioned the promotion relative to the assistant chief and the lieutenant and explained these were promotions that happened inhouse. There is a promotional process which is a lengthy process. He said that Lieutenant Burger's position will not be a vacancy when he retires. He said Lieutenant Burger had approached him with some concerns, so they went to fill his position and he did not remove him. The ordinance says the fire department can have so many officers, and he didn't exceed that by keeping him in that position. He was a training officer and he felt it was beneficial to leave him in the position knowing ultimately that this day was coming, so this slot has already been filled, so it will not be a promotion. He said Assistant Chief Coen when he chooses to retire will be through the promotional process.

TOPIC FOUR: Update of Inoperative Fire Hydrants

T. Valerius reported that recently Councilman Loucka had asked for an update on the fire hydrants, and they have been keeping good records over the past five years. Currently, there are 630 fire hydrants in the city, and they do not include private hydrants. Over the past five years, they have installed 57 new fire hydrants – most of these have been part of watermain replacement projects, but the crew has installed a few on their own. Over the past five years they have repaired 49 hydrants from all stages of repairing the tops to actually taking the hydrant out and taking it back to the shop and repairing it from stem to stern and getting it back in service. Currently, there are 27 out of service fire hydrants in the city. About 17 of the 27 are worth fixing and there are 10 that are not worth fixing due to the low flow, which is less than 150 gallons per minute. The out of service hydrants and the ones that have the low flow do have the tops painted yellow on them.

Chief Stempowski said this is a critical statement made by the Service Director. He appreciates and understands people wanting to spruce up their hydrants, but if there is a yellow cap hydrant out there, then it is critical to their operations and if somebody paints that red or white or

whatever other than yellow, then it could be a delay in their response if they're looking to a non-working hydrant, so the bonnet needs to stay yellow if it is yellow.

B. Brady said in VOL they do not have enough water pressure, so they probably would not use a hydrant. Chief Stempowski said no, and their standing directive is that anything in the Village they will hook on Edgewater and not the north and south streets. B. Brady said even Edgewater is suspect. Chief Stempowski said this is correct. B. Brady said this is a waterline problem and not a hydrant problem. She asked if it is worth keeping these hydrants functional. Chief Stempowski said he will leave this to the Service Director as a Fire Chief never wants to see a hydrant go out, but if they're not serviceable or usable, then it would fall on the Service Director. B. Brady asked if the city has checked the pressure and flow in those meters. T. Valerius said yes, and it was better to answer Councilman Loucka's question regarding hydrants until after they were done flushing hydrants because when they do flush hydrants, which they just finished the east side of the river – they do check the pressures on all of them. There was 10 in the city that were on the east side that had a low flow of 150 gallons per minute. He did not know what flow the fire department looks for, but he was told today that there is one on Berkely by Overlook that pushes out like a 1,000 gallons a minute, which is one of the highest-pressure hydrants in the city. Chief Stempowski said they can meet to discuss these hydrants specifically, but they are aware of the distribution lines, and it is not beneficial to hook to those. It would actually be detrimental.

M. Stark said to reduce anxiety of anybody in the community hearing this conversation, the city is fully equipped to fight fires in this area with inadequate hydrants because they have water trucks. Chief Stempowski agreed and said he will never negate the importance of water distribution systems and fire hydrants. However, they are fortunate to have the fleet of apparatus as every engine carries 1,000 gallons of water and they do have foam casting systems, which is another bonus for them. They also have a tanker which carries 3,000 gallons of water. Also, they have automatic mutual aid agreements with neighboring departments, so any structure fire is automatically dispatched, and they do not have to request them.

F. Loucka asked T. Valerius if he had a schedule on which hydrants will be repaired next year. T. Valerius said he is still working on this.

Gary Dodson of 3015 North Ridge Road asked for forgiveness if he missed it, but what was the end answer to Mr. Leimbach's question about whether or not the current fire department could fight a fire on the 60' to 65' structure. B. Holmes said it is based upon the structure, but the structure would have to meet all state fire suppression codes. The fire department is equipped with all kinds of equipment. G. Dodson understands any structure would have to meet code. However, should a fire be suppressed by that – it doesn't mean just because you put up fire code stuff in there that fires aren't happening – are you equipped to fight that fire today if that structure existed right now, or will you have to purchase additional equipment to fight a fire in a building that is 60' to 65' high and 1.4 million square feet that is filled with cardboard and plastic? Chief Stempowski said knowing what he knows which is very little about this building, he wouldn't see the fire department needing anything additional. G. Dodson asked if they could get access to the roof with current equipment – what is the height of your ladder? Chief Stempowski said it is 95' but noted that everything is speculative, and he cannot react to what he doesn't know is there.

Tom Palmer of 1680 Cooper Foster Park Road asked what the water availability is out in the southeast quadrant of the city – are fire hydrants out there? T. Valerius said it is run by Northern Ohio Rural Water. T. Palmer asked if they are at capacity of where they need to be. T. Valerius said he does not know this. T. Palmer said he understands the hydrant next to his house is really not viable for firefighting, but he does not know this for sure. T. Valerius said these would not be the city’s hydrants, so they do not flush them. B. Holmes said this is the responsibility of Northern Ohio Rural Water, and this question would need to be asked to them.

B. Holmes adjourned the meeting after no further discussion came before the committee.

Next Meeting: December 13, 2021 @ 6pm at the Vermilion Municipal Complex, 687 Decatur Street, Vermilion, Ohio (Immediately following a Public Hearing and Special City Council Meeting).

*Transcribed by:
Gwen Fisher, Certified Municipal Clerk*