



City of Racine, Wisconsin
AGENDA BRIEFING MEMORADUM

AGENDA DATE:

November 18, 2024

SUBJECT:

Fire Department Referendum – April 2025 Elections

PREPARED BY:

Fire Chief Steve Hansen

SUMMARY:

For the 2022 City Budget nine EMT and Paramedic positions were eliminated from the fire department because of budget limitations due to levy limits. This had an immediate impact on Emergency Medical Service operations whereas we experienced increased emergency response times for both fire and EMS calls for service in addition to increased wear and tear on responding emergency vehicles. The elimination of the positions forced the department to downgrade front line Paramedic Ambulances from three to two resulting in a decreased ability to deal with life threatening and potentially life ending emergencies.

The department was successful in receiving a FEMA Assistance to Firefighters SAFER grant in 2023 which restored the lost positions for three years ending in March 2026.

Respectfully this referendum will restore the EMT and Paramedic positions lost so that we once again can provide a high level of medical care to our citizens who are experiencing life threatening or potentially life ending emergencies.

PROJECT BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS:

Since 2007 the fire department has been staffed with 141 firefighters, Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics all of whom are cross trained in firefighting duties, technical rescue, hazardous materials and of course emergency medical services. This cross staffing has allowed us the flexibility to deal with a multitude of emergencies in our community. In 2007 our calls for service for all emergencies was 8,925 including fire, medical and technical rescue. Of the 8,925 calls 86.24% or about 7,467 calls were medical emergencies. For 2022, the year we lost the nine EMT and Paramedic positions, we responded to 13,206 emergencies of which 85.01% or 10,489 calls were for medical emergencies. *This is a 48% increase in total calls for service, and a 40% increase in calls for medical emergencies.* We have done significantly more with less for over 15 years, facing increasing call volume each year.

We face many difficult challenges in our community from an Emergency Medical Services standpoint. As the baby boomers are retiring, we have an aging, mature population with challenging medical needs. We have a significant population under the age of 65 with numerous medical challenges and unfortunately, we also have several significant trauma related injuries that occur whether due to accidents, domestic violence, motor vehicle accidents, fires or unspecified weapons usage. All these challenges require a team of 3 or more highly trained and competent EMT's and Paramedics to deal

with those emergencies.

The reduction to two person ambulances, as required by the staffing reduction in 2022, resulted in struggles with having enough individuals available to deal with the medical emergencies. In a two-person ambulance situation one needs to drive while the other struggles to deal with the emergency. We solved this by sending a first responder company of three additional individuals to help the ambulance crew of two. This resulted in five or six EMT's or Paramedics responding to the call instead of three which had been the historical norm. This also means that first responder company is unavailable for other incoming calls while assisting the ambulance crews. Departmental efficiency went down. During the period between the staffing reduction and the SAFER grant we saw our emergency response times go up as first responder companies were out of service. We also saw our ambulances making more cross city responses going from the far south side to the far north side while north side ambulances were on other calls. Same with north side ambulances going far south. Cross city responses increased significantly.

It's been stated in numerous reports on EMS systems that the norm across the nation is a two-person ambulance. While true, what those reports fail to mention is those two person ambulances also get a first responder fire engine or another ambulance for the additional staffing. Racine, until 2022, was a visionary in maintaining three-person ambulance crews thus keeping other ambulances and fire engines available for the next incoming emergency call. Our need to restore these 9 positions is data driven. Based on our data for 2024 YTD we average 0.875 to 2.417 calls per hour. As we approach and go over 1.75 calls per hour daily, we run out of ambulances for those emergency calls which keep coming in. Each ambulance call, depending on the emergency, can take anywhere from 30 minutes to well over an hour to treat and transport.

Respectfully, this referendum will restore the lost positions and once again place the fire department on the cutting edge of high-quality care and rapid responses to pending medical emergencies in our community while maintaining the availability of other emergency resources for the next call.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Recommendation is to approve the resolution placing the fire department referendum on the April 1st 2025 spring elections.

FISCAL NOTE:

The referendum will increase the 2026 levy from an estimated \$58,672,922 to \$59,972,922 or \$1.3 million dollars which will cover the restored positions in perpetuity plus an additional \$150,000 increase annually to cover related costs. The funds will be segregated into a special service fund for tracking and accountability. These funds will also be used for replacement ambulances and medical equipment. Estimated cost for a home assessed at \$175,000 is \$53 year.