

Fire Territory Board of Directors

Meeting Minutes

April 8, 2025

The regular meeting of the Fire Territory Board of Directors was called to order.

Members present: Ben Blohm, Michelle Harris, and Mark McCall. Also present: Fire Chief Chad Dutz and Territory Attorney Patrick Lyp.

Motion to Approve February 6, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Motion Passes 3-0

Update on Station 4 Land

Chad Dutz, Fire Chief

On October 16, 2024, we came to the Board regarding the purchase of 500 North, 175 West. At the February 6, 2025 meeting we gave an update that they were going to the Plan Commission in March. The meeting was moved and they went to Plan Commission on April 1st. Oltoff uses Lake Acquisitions and Prairie Development and at the April 1st the Plan Commission meeting they petitioned for annexation. They are looking to annex 80 acres into the City. At the meeting there was a public hearing. Plan Commission moved to have final vote at the May meeting.

Patrick Lyp, Territory Attorney

It is a 2-step process. The property for the Fire Station is outside the City so as part of their residential development they're going to carve out about 1.75 acres for the Fire Station. That area meets the requirements for the Station and so probably at the June City Council meeting, the formal approval for the annexation will be accepted and the property will be in the City. The subdivision will probably a month or so later which will then carve out the 1.75 acres. We will then have to do appraisals to establish what the value of the property is. If it comes back and meets yours and Board of Works approval and we have the money then we will move forward to acquire that property. I would say it will probably be late summer/ early fall we will be in a position to finalize it. Based on discussions, the property owner/ developer is amenable and willing to work with us.

Chad Dutz, Fire Chief

Oltoff has been wonderful to work with. They have a plan in there, I think it's a combination of townhouses in one section and single-family homes so it's something to Valparaiso and I think the Council maybe excited about the possibility of what's coming in there.

Last meeting there was a question about how long construction will be. We have been meeting with Abonmarche. We have a contract that will be taken to Board of Works in the next couple of weeks to enter into an agreement with them to start doing the design and concept. Construction is going to be about 15 months after getting approvals and going through the acquisition process. We are looking at about 24 months to see the beginning of the Station completed.

Financially, Senate Bill 1 is out there and has multiple amendments so I don't know where that is exactly right now. They are looking at changing the way bonds are and all different stuff. So we have some time. We'll secure the land, make sure that is taken care of and then we'll go to the next step.

Plan Commission zoning area says that the Fire Station has to look residential. Also they are not giving us the land to be annexed in. We are acquiring the land as Patrick stated. We have been looking at this land for quite some time. We feel like this is the area to be. There's not a lot of green space out in that area so we feel we have to be out there before it gets developed.

Ben Blohm

So there is nothing for us to do until the other work is done and then we'll approve the buy is essentially the next step for us?

Attorney Lyp/ Chief Dutz: Correct.

Updates on Merit Board

Chad Dutz, Fire Chief

Since the last time we met, we had all active members vote in the election of their 2 candidates that they would like to serve on the Merit Board.

Jerome Davison was elected for 4 years (Democrat)

Art Elwood was elected for 2 years (Republican)

We have a Merit Board meeting on April 25th after Board of Works. Through that they'll set up their rules on how they govern the meetings.

Patrick Lyp, Territory Attorney

Under State Statute, since the Board of Works was the entity that handled disciplinary actions prior, the 3 Board of Works members plus the 2 elected members make up the Merit Board. The current plan is not to have a separate Merit Board meeting on a separate date since I have 3 Board of Works members already there and if acceptable to the 2 elected members we'll have the Merit Board meeting directly following the Board of Works meeting. This meeting will be important. One of the challenges we have is taking the state statute and following certain requirements under state law and marrying them with the Fire Territory's Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). We are looking at the proposed rules for the Merit Board and also hiring, discipline and termination. We will continue to give you updates on what is going on. I could see a few years down the road, assuming the active fire fighters want to keep a Merit Board, the authority of the Merit Board could come to this Board (if it wanted it and BoW wanted to do).

Chad Dutz, Fire Chief

Myself and President Rosinski met last week and looked over the CBA to see what ideas we had when moving forward. We had a great discussion and a lot of great ideas from Cass so we're excited about the possibilities of where this is going to lead us. As Patrick was saying, in 2029 I

believe the City, Fire Territory Board or the Active Members can opt out of the Merit Board and we may see switching to the Fire Territory Board.

Currently right now if there is any hiring or any discipline we're still using the Board of Works until the Merit Board is set up. After April I believe it is 60 or 90 days to do the rules.

Patrick Lyp, Territory Attorney

It is 90 days. So the rules will hopefully be done by April 25th and then going forward it will be under the Merit Board.

Michelle Harris

Is there is any benefit or would you like us to come to that meeting?

Chief Dutz: Sure. If you want to listen and see what's going on. In July we will also update you and give you a copy of the Merit Board rules.

Attorney Lyp: The meeting will be April 25th at 11:30am or immediately following Board of Works meeting. We do have the video option too. If you wanted to watch as opposed to being here. I think there could be some good reasons to have the Fire Territory Board Members as kind of a collective approach.

Ben Blohm

Is there anything else we can do to support the Merit Board?

Chief Dutz: You guys are always welcome to have some input in what's going on in the Fire Territory hiring. We can sit down with myself and Cass, if you guys would like to do that. We'd sit down and see what's going on, look at the CBA and talk about it. You're more than welcome to come sit down and learn a little bit more about what we're thinking and how we believe that would be a benefit for the Fire Department.

Attorney Lyp: I think once April 25th the rules and procedures are adopted, I think we'll get them to you guys immediately. You can look them over and then again certainly if you have any questions or concerns reach out to Chief Dutz. They're not etched in stone. They can evolve. The only think we need to be cognizant of is state law and anything that was in the CBA.

Overview of the Recent Equipment Upgrades

Chad Dutz, Fire Chief

The Fire Department had a department meeting a while back and one of our members David Beckwith asked since there is a time frame of us getting delivered an apparatus (about 2 ½ years out) would it be an opportunity for us to purchase some now and then the delivery would be later on, maybe 2027. It was a great idea so we tasked the Assistant Chief of EMS to look at that and we got lucky. There was a company called Braun out of Ohio that had about 18 ambulances coming off the line at that time. We went to Board of Works and we were able secure 2 of them. Those cost about \$730,000. We're looking at a lease option for \$160,000 for about 5 years. That comes out of our equipment fund. They should be here by the end of 2025. It is going to be

extremely helpful. Then hopefully the ones we have on order right now will be here sometime in 2026. By the time we get the 4 ambulances and 2 new engines in 2027 we should be pretty good right now so we wanted to bring that to your attention.

We also are in the process right to upgrade our water rescue. We have a boat that is probably about 30 years old. It's just a John Boat. We're looking to upgrade that and getting ready to purchase a Zodiac 15 ½ ft long with a 30 horsepower motor for about \$23,000 with the trailer. That will be in lieu of what we have now. Valparaiso does have some lakes that we do surface water rescues. We're doing a class for all the members. We will be upgrading our water rescue Mustang suits and ice rescue equipment. We hope to get that equipment by next month.

We had to buy a generator for Station 1 for about \$60,000. We are now looking to upgrade bunker gear. It has come out that our gear could cause cancer so they have a different material now so we're demoing the new gear that is PFAS free.

Ben Blohm

How many water rescues do you guys do on average a year?

Chief Dutz: About 1 or 2.

Mark McCall

Have any of them been pets? Do you go out for pets?

Chief Dutz: We do go out for pets. We've had some of those over the years where pets have fallen into the ice and water. We just need to upgrade to be better about our capabilities and also provide mutual aid.

Discussing Our Future Meeting Dates

Patrick Lyp, Territory Attorney

We can probably remove that. That was put on there because I got an email from Robert Cotton and misinterpreted it as being he couldn't come to meetings based upon the dates but I think it was just primarily this meeting. As we mentioned, our next meeting is July 8th so we'll keep that date unless for some reason the majority of you can't be here.

Board Comments: None

Chad Dutz, Fire Chief

Part of this Board's process is to recommend our budget. We've never had the Board be part of that. Usually in July we're starting the budget and we're midway through it. I didn't know if today we wanted to make a motion that one of you would meet with us and talk about the budget so the Territory Board would have kind of an idea of what's going on

Patrick Lyp, Territory Attorney

When do you think you will have the budget in a form where they could intelligently recommend it?

Chief Dutz: Usually by August. We'll probably have to have a special meeting in August.

Attorney Lyp: That or maybe push your July meeting to August when you will have it in a final form for approval. Certainly having input prior makes a lot of sense but in terms of having a meeting in July and then meet again in August to approve. It might make better sense to push your July meeting to August unless there is some reason you need to meet in July. Whenever you are at a point to present it so they can recommend it.

Chief Dutz: We usually try to bring it in August and then in September/October it usually goes to City Council. So we try to meet around August to go over that. It's quite the period. We start in May and then we'll be here in August so it will be a long process.

Michelle Harris

So when you are talking about one of us there, when would that be. What's the time frame?

Chief Dutz: We would say probably around July. We'd have you guys come in and we would talk to one of you and just kind of give a rundown. Give you the materials and then you can submit it throughout the Board. Instead of us always updating, we'd have one of you guys that would be a liaison for the Board.

Michelle Harris

I'm happy to do it. I'm off during that time.

Ben Blohm

We could both go. Budget is what I do for a living. I think putting our heads together on that I think the 2 of us can handle it.

Attorney Lyp: A maximum of 2 members can be there at any given time. As long as there is no more than 2 Board members.

Mark McCall

I'll be available if there is a need.

Michelle Harris: described a situation where Valparaiso Fire Department helped one of her family members with a medical emergency and she thanked and expressed her appreciation to the Department.

Public Comment: None

Meeting Adjourned.