

**MINUTES
CITY OF LAUREL
EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMITTEE
MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 2020**

An Emergency Services Committee Meeting was held in the Council Chambers and called to order by Committee Chair Bruce McGee at 6:03 p.m. on January 27, 2020.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bruce McGee, Chair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Richard Klose
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Irv Wilke	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heidi Sparks
<input type="checkbox"/> Pat Kimmet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Taryn Massa
<input type="checkbox"/> Richard Dawes	

OTHERS PRESENT:

Brent Peters, Fire Chief
Levi Vandersloot, Ambulance Director
Stan Langve, Chief of Police
Bethany Langve, Clerk/Treasurer

Public Input: None.

The Chair introduced Council Member Heidi Sparks, who is the new member of the Committee. She will be taking Bill Mountsier's recently vacated position on the Committee.

General Items:

1. Review and approve the minutes of the Emergency Services Committee meeting of October 28, 2019.

Motion by Council Member Wilke to Approve the minutes of the Emergency Services Committee meeting of October 28, 2019, seconded by Council Member Klose. A vote was taken on the motion, and all five committee members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

2. Update from the Fire Chief, Brent Peters:

The Fire Chief stated that they made it through the year, and he was going to give the annual report instead of the monthly report. They closed the year with 351 fire calls, which caused an estimated \$198,000 in damage. Considering that the pre-estimate incident value was \$750,000 this value is good. This value does include total losses on structure fires. The department ended just shy of 3,000 total training hours for 2019. This was a little higher than previous years. The Fire Chief has a program that shows statistics for calls. It shows when calls come in and Thursday and Friday are the busiest days of the week. This trend has been consistent for the past 5 years. The time frame is from 6 o'clock until 8 o'clock. This year the department is at 27 calls, and that is an average of about 1 call a day.

The Fire Chief is working on a business plan for the Fire Department. There have been groups come in over the years to try to do this for the Fire Chief is going to do one for the department. He began working on it in December and it will take him approximately a year. He is creating a 5, 10- and 15-year plan for the department. The Chief is looking at mid-March of 2021 as his completion date for this project.

The Committee asked the Fire Chief if the fire damage amount of \$198,000 included extinguished damages. The Fire Chief stated it didn't include damages from auto accidents or anything like that,

it was damages only from structure fires. He stated that it is hard to determine damages from wildland fires. For instance, if a hay field burns, it is hard to determine the cost of those damages, so these estimates are from structure fires. The Committee asked if damages from structure fires include the damages caused from extinguishing the fire, such as breaking windows and doors to get to the fire. The Fire Chief stated that it was from lost property, the contents or the structure itself, and not from the act of extinguishing the fire. The Committee asked if the 27 calls this year were a mix of fires and auto accidents. The Fire Chief stated that they were a couple of structure fires, one possible arson, and several motor vehicle accidents. The department has had multiple alarm calls. The Fire Chief stated that he has a meeting with the school superintendent to discuss the alarm system due to the amount of alarm calls. The Chief stated that two years ago a fee was put on the schedule of fees and charges for excessive false alarm calls. The first one of the year is free, and from there it goes up to \$100 a call, and then up to \$400 a call. The Fire Chief stated that the department is extremely under priced on this, as other communities begin their pricing at \$400 a call. The amount of resources it takes to respond to a false fire alarm call is the same as it takes to respond to a real fire call. In order to stay compliant with ISO, the department must respond with the same number of responders and trucks. The High School is a large building, that requires 7500 3500 gallons of water a minute if the High School was fully engulfed. So, the department has to respond with the proper number of responders and equipment to be able to flow that amount of water. So, it takes a lot of resources for a false alarm. They may not have the resources to fix or replace the alarm system, but something has to be done. Best Western's smoke detector will go off anytime popcorn burns in the lobby and the department has to respond. The Chief stated that one the alarm comes in, even if the place of business calls to cancel, the department must respond and verify that it is a false alarm. Not responding would be a liability issue for the City.

3. Update from Police Chief, Stan Langve:

The Police Chief stated that the total calls for Police, Fire, and Ambulance were 9,628. He does expect the total number of calls to exceed 10,000 for the year 2020. He stated that crime calls totaled 1,203 for 2019. He stated that it is busy, and it continues to get busier. The department worked on abandoned vehicles in December and took care of 46. There were 129 traffic stops in December. The Chief stated that he had one officer return from the academy, however, since Friday he is down an officer. He had an officer go to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The internal postings are up to replace that officer, and then the job will be posted externally. The Chief stated that he expects to have another officer move back to Helena so he will be hiring two officers. He stated that as of 5:00pm today the departments are at 607 calls for service already. He stated that the Police Department's case numbers are in the mid 70's. He said that since the last meeting the NextGen 911 system has been installed. He said that when the State is ready to switch over to this system, Laurel is ready to be fully compatible with them. The system is working with Zurcher. The Chief stated that he has new vests ordered through the bulletproof vest grant program. The three new MDTs should be delivered soon. The old ones are failing almost nightly, so these new ones are much needed. Another thing that has popped up is a camera system. With internet coming to the City Shop, the department wants to utilize that internet to monitor the Police storage area over there. There is a long list of items that need to be taken care of at the FAP but he is making some headway. A long-term item is the repeater/radio system. He is waiting on the VOIP system to be installed, and then the NextGen 911 system can be tied into it. This will allow an upgrade to the repeater system.

4. Update from the Ambulance Director, Levi Vandersloot:

The Ambulance Director stated that he is still going over the 2019 numbers. The department received 957 calls last year. The department missed 24% of those calls, however that was an improvement to 2018's 27%. In 2018 the department only received 929 calls. The department is improving, and this year's goal is 10% missed calls. With the 3 new hires, and other changes in the

department, the Director feels this goal is reasonable. He stated the department will never hit zero percent, and that is not reasonable. He stated that just the other day the department had three calls come in back to back, within 10 minutes of each other. He stated that the first two calls were not true 911 calls, however the department responds the same to all calls. The department is looking into adding a service fee for those calls that are non-emergent calls, because the department doesn't get paid for going to check on someone and then return, and also to try to curb the non-emergent use of the ambulance. The department is down volunteer, however with the hiring of the full-time staff, the first four days of the week are covered by them. The week is now about 75% covered now, between the full-time staff and the current volunteers. The current Director and the Mayor are working on hiring a full-time Ambulance Director.

The Committee asked if the Director had read about the Town Pump Grant published in the Laurel Outlook. He stated that it doesn't open until the 1st and they will be applying for it. He stated that the City Attorney must review the grant first. He stated that they must get a different stretcher system for the ambulances. The department bought a new stretcher last year and then six months later the requirements were changed regarding how it must lock into the ambulance. The system needed to allow it to lock into the ambulance is over \$20,000. The Committee thanked Levi for stepping into the Director roll. The Committee agreed that a non-emergent fee was a great idea and long overdue. They agreed it was a strain on the system. The Director stated that it was disheartening that the third call the other day was a true emergent call where an ambulance was needed but there wasn't one available because they were out on non-emergent calls. He stated that luckily there is still a good relationship with AMR, and they helped out with that third call. The Committee stated that is still time consuming because AMR must respond all the way out here, and the Director agreed. The Committee stated that they would still like to see zero percent missed calls be the goal of the department. They believe this is the best way to get the lowest percentage. The Committee asked if there are enough personnel available to send out two ambulances. The Director said that we currently have two ambulances ready to go if there are people ready to staff them. The Director stated that he doesn't want to provide the public with an unrealistic goal that cannot be met. He said that the department may be able to answer 100% of the calls but they may not be able to be answered within eight minutes. The Committee asked if some of the non-emergent calls are repeat clientele. The Director stated that is the case.

New Business:

The Chair wanted to discuss with the other Committee members changing the day of the week and/or the time of the meeting to possibly accommodate a better turnout. The Committee stated that they were fine with the meeting day and time the way it is. The Committee day and time will remain the same, which is the fourth Monday of every month.

Old Business:

The Chair stated that prior to the ambulance new hires there was a great discussion regarding the mill levy. The Chair stated that prior to going to the community and asking them to pay more taxes the Committee needs to have a substantial why. The Committee asked if the write up for the needs assessment ever get completed. The Ambulance Director was going to check on that. The Chair stated that the Committee needs a number for the community. He stated that the last mill levy amount was just too large, and the levy was not explained to the public very well. He doesn't want a repeat of that. If another levy is to move forward, he wants it to answer the who, what, when, how, and why questions. The Chair would like input on exactly how to implement a mill levy. The last mill levy was handed over to the Clerk/Treasurer, however he wants to know how all the dots are connected. The Committee agreed with the Chair, and stated that they feel this mill levy should be focused on the Ambulance Department as it is the most critical at this time. The Committee stated

that second to the Ambulance Department is the Police Department manpower wise. The Committee doesn't want to lose sight of this mill levy however, doesn't know where to go with it. The Chair stated that he has been talking with a Council Member in Billings that has stated after that last mill levy didn't pass for the Billings Police Department, they used some of the reserves and now they are facing shortfalls in funding. The Committee doesn't want to see the City of Laurel reserves fall so far that there are budget cuts and personnel being lost. The Chair is not going to remove this from the agenda. The Ambulance Director recommended the Committee speak with an outside person to help them. He stated there are people in Billings and in Belgrade. He stated that the outside firm would be able to walk the Committee through the process. The Committee asked the Director to provide them with the names of these firms or individuals. The Committee stated that Billings is currently considering a safety mill levy. Public listening sessions would be a very helpful item and the Committee would like to see this. All three-department having a 5, 10- and 15- year plan would be very helpful. Billings safety mill levy is all encompassing, and then from there they are prioritizing. Billings is working with a Lean Six consultant. The whole premise of Lean Six is cutting excess waste and making the department run as efficient as possible. Billings has BUFGA, and the Fire Chief stated that we have LUGA. The Committee stated that Billings was talking about charging for callouts to automobile accidents, and DUI cost recovery. The Fire Chief stated that the City annually increases the Fire District contracts by 3-5%. He stated that if people are already paying for a service, such as fire protection, we need to be careful when billing them for an additional cost. He stated that right now he can bill the residents of the City and districts for negligent arson. For instance, if someone starts a fire when they are not supposed to start a fire, he can bill them for that. Outside of that it gets hard to bill people for things, and we need to stay compliant with the laws. The Committee agreed that they need a plan from the departments, regarding their needs, before any mill levy can move forward. The Committee stated that they had heard homeowner's insurance would pay money to fire departments for certain calls. They wanted to know if that was a viable funding source. The Fire Chief stated that he had never researched that. He stated that he had never billed any insurance companies on a fire call. The Committee stated that they had heard some insurance companies would pay the whole "kit-and-caboodle" they are told. The Fire Chief stated they are trying to get more into the billing. He stated there are a couple of cases of negligent arson where he has billed for it. Most of the ones they get are accidents on the interstate, and things that are passing through. The Committee asked if there was insurance reimbursement from a car wreck. The Fire Chief stated that he has never had one come to the fire department. He stated that he will be looking into it. The Committee asked if we did begin billing for stuff like this could we utilize the current billing company we have.

The Committee asked if the Ambulance Director has received any reports from the current billing company regarding collection rate, how much debt is outstanding, how much they are able to collect, how much it's costing the City. The Ambulance Director stated that both him and the Clerk/Treasurer get monthly reports. The Committee asked if those reports were reviewed at Budget and Finance, or if that was something that the Emergency Services Committee could start seeing. The Committee asked if the Ambulance Director felt the current billing and collection company is more successful than the last company. The Ambulance Director stated that he did feel that the current company is more successful than the last.

Other Items:

The Committee discussed the removal of Committee member Richard Dawes. Two Committee members have tried repeatedly to get ahold of this Committee member to no avail. They have tried different methods of communication and none have worked. The Clerk/Treasurer stated that she will ask the City Attorney and Mayor what the correct method is and let the Committee Chair know.

The Ambulance Director reminded everyone to be cautious of the Coronavirus. He has been proactive with his personnel and they are being very cautious.

Announcements

Next Emergency Services meeting will be held on February 24, 2020, at 6:00pm

Motion by Council Member Klose to adjourn, seconded by Council Member Wilke. A vote was taken on the motion. All five committee members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

The Emergency Services Committee adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Bethany Langve
Clerk/Treasurer

NOTE: This meeting is open to the public. This meeting is for information and discussion of the Council for the listed workshop agenda items.