

Report of the Fire Services Guidance Committee:

In October the Township Board of Trustees authorized the Fire Chief to form a committee to evaluate the Fire Chief's suggested service improvements, the charge being to make recommendations to the Board of Trustees on how to proceed with fire service improvements. The specific deliverables requested by the committee were:

1. Identify which service improvement is the preferred plan to meet the needs of the citizen of Scio Township.
2. If recommended, how long would any service improvement plan meet the needs of the community?
3. What would be an estimated ongoing personnel cost for any recommendation(s)?
4. What would be a needed millage rate to support any recommendation(s)?

The committee met 7 times in person and via Zoom in an open meeting with public participation. The committee reviewed recommendations provided by the Fire Chief and has come to a consensus on recommended service level improvements. Significant discussion took place and not all participants agreed on the final decision. Both the consensus decision and the minority decision will be represented in this report.

Recognition of committee members:

The Fire Chief would like to recognize and thank the members of the committee and staff for their time and commitment to the process. All members spent significant time both in meetings and preparing and reviewing documents for the committee. Members of the committee are Lance Baird, Jessica Flintoft, Mitch Goodsitt, Bob Groden (Vice Chair), Bob Hyde, Mark Perry, David Read (Chair), and Ryan Yaple (Secretary). Members of the committee represented both urban and rural areas of the community, Township officials, the planning commission, and firefighting staff. The Fire Chief assisted by providing resources, presentations, and otherwise answering questions and informing the committee. Administrative assistant Terry Soave managed the Zoom meetings, published agendas and minutes, as well as uploaded the entirety of the reviewed materials to the Township's website for public access.

Review of issues identified:

Several issues were initially identified by the Fire Chief and presented to the Township Board, who then authorized this committee. Those issues were expanded on by the committee which then became the basis of their work. The issues are as follows with a brief description of each:

1. Ability to meet OSHA/MIOSHA Respiratory Protection Standard (2-in 2-out)
2. Meeting the department's response time goal of under 6 minutes 90% of the time
3. Improvement of training with the addition of a training officer
4. Improvement of the department's Insurance Services Office score
5. Ability to achieve Basic Life Support Transport capability
6. Ability to achieve Advanced Life Support transport capability

The OSHA/MIOSHA Respiratory Protection Standard is an industry standard related to when employees who use a respirator can enter an immediately dangerous to life and health atmosphere (IDLH). While this generally relates to structural firefighting activities many other hazardous conditions also apply, such as gas leaks in a building or a carbon monoxide incident. For firefighters to enter these situations, they must be wearing a breathing air tank and mask, must work in a team of at least 2, and must have at least 2 outside the IDLH atmosphere ready to rescue them if they become unable to exit under their own power. This is commonly referred to as the 2-in/2-out rule. One exception to this requirement is when there is a known rescue to be made, 2-in/2-out need not be assembled prior to entering the area. Meeting 2-in/2-out requires a minimum of 4 personnel to be assembled before entering the area.

As of Dec 1, 2022, the department's average response time was 8:10 (from when the call was received to when personnel arrived on scene). Year-to-date the department meets its response time goal 39% of the time. The department's goal is to respond to calls in under 6 minutes 90% of the time. This response time goal comes from national consensus standards (National Fire Protection Association), and the department's response time data comes from its reporting software. Data shows that the area with the highest number of calls where the department is not meeting its 6-minute response time goal is the southeastern section of the Township. And while the department does not meet this goal in the northeast or southwest sections either, the population density of the southeast section is much higher.

Training of personnel has greatly improved over the last several years both in consistency and frequency, however the department is still lacking continuity with training. There is not one specific trainer that can train each shift the same way and the department is not currently staffed with anybody who can deliver EMS continuing education (this function is currently provided by an outside contractor). Training efforts are guided by several factors including ISO, MIOSHA, NFPA, and an evolving scientific knowledge of fire suppression tactics and strategies. Training can be greatly improved by having one person dedicated to this objective. Additionally, this person would be responsible for quality assurance of reporting (both fire and EMS) as well as fill a staff position on emergency scenes.

Insurance Services Office score (now Versk Analytics) is a measure of risk determined by evaluating all aspects of the fire department, including its 911 system, the fire department (engines, ladders trucks, reserve apparatus, deployment analysis, personnel/staffing, training, operational considerations, and community risk reduction/inspections), and its water supply, both in areas with municipal water and areas without. Some insurers use this score when underwriting a homeowner's policy, which may impact policy cost. Currently Scio Township has a 6/6X rating, with 1 being the best rating and 10 being the worst. Nationally, the department ranks amongst 6,964 other departments at a 6 (17% nationally), with 21,640 scoring better (1-5 or 53% nationally), and 12,573 scoring worse (7-10 or 30% nationally). Improvements in the above factors will improve our score/reduce our risk. The department is participating in a review of its ISO score in late December 2022 and may potentially be lowered to a class 5 upon completion.

Additionally, there are three corners of the township is more than 5 road miles from the Zeeb station, resulting in those homes having an ISO rating of 10/10W, 10W being areas with fire hydrants. In the southeast there are approximately 400 homes in this classification, in the northeast approximately 90, and in the southwest approximately 15.

Achieving Basic Life Support (BLS) transport has become more important since the COVID 19 pandemic began. Throughout the nation people are leaving the EMS field resulting in ambulances being short staffed. This both increases response times and decreases the ability to transport patients to hospitals. Locally, EMS service in Washtenaw County is provided by Huron Valley Ambulance, who is experiencing staff shortages like the rest of the nation. Fire departments in the county have begun addressing this through various methods. Chelsea Fire Authority has purchased and licensed an ambulance as a transport vehicle, Ann Arbor City has taken advantage of a “safety net” ambulance through HVA, and Scio Township has purchased an ambulance to be used as a non-transporting rescue. In certain situations where the EMS system is overextended, our department can transport someone in need to the hospital for definitive treatment. Licensing as BLS transport will allow the department to transport less serious calls freeing up HVA units for more serious calls.

Achieving Advanced Life Support (ALS) would be possible if the department were to hire paramedic firefighters and license its ambulance for ALS transport. Currently personnel are all basic EMT’s, and training for a paramedic role is intensive and time consuming. Not all firefighters are willing to take the training. ALS transport would add additional paramedic resources to the system further allowing HVA to allocate their personnel as needed.

Review of options and timeline:

Options centered around addressing the 6 factors identified above and are intended to “stack” together. That is, option 2 should be preceded by option 1, and would build upon the improvements made in option 1. You would have to have completed options 1 and 2, to then start working on option 3.

All options include the addition of a training officer and a half-time fire inspector.

Option 1 involves fully staffing the Zeeb station with 4 personnel daily. In most cases, this would achieve the deliverable of meeting the 2-in/2-out requirement immediately upon arriving on scene. This is the lowest cost option requiring only the addition of 3 personnel to achieve. The Zeeb station is equipped to handle 4 response staff 24/7. This option does not address the department’s 6-minute response time goal and would likely not change the department’s ISO score or ability to license as an ALS agency. The department could license as a BLS-transport agency, however when transporting (estimated 10% of the time), there would not be sufficient personnel to achieve 2-in/2-out if a fire were to occur.

Option 1 could be accomplished in a relatively short timeframe of receiving funding to do so. The department has all necessary apparatus and would only need to hire 3 full-time people.

Option 2 involves building and staffing a fire station on Township-owned property on Wagner near Liberty. The department would staff Zeeb with 4 personnel, an officer in charge and a 3-

person apparatus, and staff Wagner with a 3-person apparatus. That would allow the department to meet 2-in/2-out approximately 60% of the time. When the initial response is from the Zeeb road station, 4 people would arrive initially, however when the initial response is in the Wagner station area, we would meet that goal about 10% of the time. This option would address the 6-minute response time issues to the southeast and east sides of the Township (mostly), and likely allow the department to achieve its response time goal of 6 minutes 90% of the time. This would likely result in ISO improvements (4/5), particularly under the fire department portion of the assessment, as that component is 50% of the review. The department would not be able to achieve BLS or ALS transport, as it would not have sufficient personnel for either.

Option 2 would take much longer as it involves the construction of a building and the addition of apparatus. Assuming a millage vote and authorization in Fall 2023, and ability to use some ARPA funds for architecture purposes, it's possible to potentially have a building in the ground and apparatus purchased for it by spring 2026. To accomplish this option, the department would hire 6 personnel and have them trained within a year, then hire 6 more personnel in 2027.

Option 3 involves building and staffing a fire station on Township-owned property on Wagner near Liberty. Zeeb would be staffed with 4 personnel; an officer in charge and a 3-person apparatus, with Wagner staffed with a 3-person apparatus and a 2-person rescue. The department would meet 2-in/2-out approximately 95% of the time on initial arrival due to 4 people responding from Zeeb and 5 people responding from Wagner. This option would address the 6-minute response time issues to the southeast and east sides of the Township (mostly), and likely allow the department to achieve its response time goal of 6 minutes 90% of the time. It's likely ISO score would improve (4/5), particularly under the fire department portion of the assessment as that component is 50% of the review. The department would be able to achieve BLS or ALS transport, as it works to hire paramedic/firefighters.

Option 3 would build on option 2 by adding an additional 6 personnel in 2028 and an additional 3 in 2029. By 2030 the department would have all personnel in place and fully trained.

Option 4 involves building and staffing a fire station on Township-owned property on Wagner near Liberty. Zeeb would be staffed with 4 personnel; an officer in charge and a 3-person apparatus, with Wagner staffed with a 3-person engine, a 3-person ladder, and a 2-person rescue. The department would meet 2-in/2-out almost 100% of the time on initial arrival due to 4 people responding from Zeeb and 8 people responding from Wagner. This option would address the 6-minute response time issues to the southeast and east sides of the Township (mostly), and likely allow the department to achieve its response time goal of 6 minutes 90% of the time. It's likely ISO would improve (3/4), particularly under the fire department portion of the assessment, as that component is 50% of the review. The department would be able to achieve BLS or ALS transport, as it works to hire paramedic/firefighters.

Option 4 would build on option 3 by adding a second fire apparatus to the Wagner station, and by hiring 6 additional personnel in 2030 and 7 more in 2031 (including a FTE fire inspector). This option would be completed in 2032.

Review of costs:

Option 1 is clearly the cheapest option as it involved no additional building and only 3 additional personnel. It also offers the least benefit to the identified issues. This option would involve a budget of approximately \$2,550,000 with a millage rate of approximately 1.7.

Option 2 requires the largest purchase of capital. A station would need to be built and apparatus purchased. This option would involve a budget of approximately XXXXX with a millage rate of approximately XXX.

Option 3 builds off the capital improvements in option 2 and adds personnel. This option would involve a budget of approximately XXXXX with a millage rate of approximately XXX.

Option 4 builds off the capital improvements in option 3 and adds personnel. This option would involve a budget of approximately XXXXX with a millage rate of approximately XXX.

Committee recommendation:

Most of the committee members recommend the Township pursue a millage rate increase that will allow for option 3 to be the final service delivery model to the Township. The committee believes this balances the current/future anticipated needs for the next decade and will take approximately 8 years to achieve.

Additionally, the committee recommends the Township, within the next 4 years, purchase property near the west Jackson area and the Miller/Delhi area to add a third station when needed, as well as secure property for the replacement the Zeeb station for its replacement at the end of its expected life.

These recommendations do not include service delivery improvements if substantial building height changes to the Jackson Rd corridor are to occur.

Proposed ballot language: