

Report of the Fire Services Guidance Committee

Executive Summary:

The Fire Services Guidance Committee was established to review steps for improvement of fire protection within Scio Township. The committee was representative of various stakeholders within the community and local government. The committee reviewed steps previously provided to the Township Board and subsequently to this committee. The recommendations have been provided by the Township Fire Chief. Upon completion of its work, the committee is recommending that the Township Board begin implementation of service improvements with the end goal of reaching Step 3 (as needed), upon establishment of millage rate sufficient to support the necessary infrastructure.

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.

Full 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 of the committee were:

1. Identify which service improvement is the preferred plan to meet the needs of the citizens 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 9 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 a consensus was reached on a "Stepped" implementation of the various improvements needed.

The timing of these Steps will be a decision made by the Board of Trustees in consultation with the Fire Chief.

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. Before firefighters can 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 minutes, 10 seconds (from when the call was received to when personnel arrived on scene). The department's goal is to respond to calls in under 6 minutes 90% of the time. Year-to-date the department meets its response time goal 39% of the time. While not statutory, 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 anyone who can deliver EMS continuing education. This function is currently provided by an outside contractor who provides 26 hours of outside training per year at a rate of \$150/hour at an approximate cost of \$7,500 annually. Annualized, this hourly rate is equivalent to a salary of \$312,000/year. The addition of a training officer, who would be a fully trained firefighter at an annual rate of approximately \$140,000 with benefits, can give us the ability to not only provide the required EMS continuing education, but also provide consistent daily firefighting training to each shift as well as training on new procedures, equipment, and refresher training courses as needed. 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 incident reporting (both fire and EMS), would handle billing inquiries should the Township decide to enact a BLS or ALS charge for service, 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 that are 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 (HVA), which 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 has decided to purchase an

ambulance of their own. 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 providing a more reliable service to our residents. Staffing for BLS or ALS transport, while challenging, will be facilitated by the fact that these staff members will be trained as firefighters as well as EMT's or Paramedics. This dual role model is often more appealing from an employment standpoint than just EMS service.

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 expanding our service to our residents.

Should the Township decide to provide either of these services, there would be no additional burden on the Township administrative staff. We would contract with a third-party provider who would have access to our medical incident reports/records which are completed by staff upon the conclusion of all medical calls. The third-party provider would bill the insurance company of those who we are able to bill for, and then the third-party provider would pay the Township, minus their fee, by direct deposit or single check on a specified periodic basis. Any questions about the medical records/incident reports would be directed to the Training Officer, who is charged with the quality assurance of our reporting.

Review of Steps and timeline:

The Steps centered around addressing the 6 factors identified above and are intended to "stack" together. That is, Step 1.5 or 2 should be preceded by Step 1 and would build upon the improvements made in Step 1. You would have to have completed Steps 1 (1.5 if chosen) and 2, to then start working on Step 3. Another way to look at this: to achieve Step 3, you must also achieve Steps 1 and 2, but you do not need to complete one before beginning the others.

All Steps include the addition of a training officer and a half-time fire inspector. Additionally, all steps include land banking of a parcel of land in the northeast quadrant and in on the west side of the Township. Within a 5 to 10 -year period, growth on the west side of the Township may necessitate a 3rd fire station. The parcel in the northeast quadrant would be used to replace the Zeeb station when it reaches the end of its life expectancy.

Step 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 Step requiring only the addition of 3 personnel to achieve. The Zeeb station is equipped to handle 4 response staff 24/7. This Step 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 the sick or injured (estimated 10% of the time), there would not be sufficient personnel to achieve 2-in/2-out if a fire were to occur.

Step 1 could be accomplished within 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.

Step 1.5 is an intermediate Step that would provide for a "sub-station" somewhere nearer the Southeast quadrant of the Township that would provide housing for two firefighting personnel and garage space to park a rescue vehicle. This step would most likely require the Department to purchase a second rescue so as not to compromise medical response to the rest of the Township. It would also require the department to build or rent living quarters and garage space for an indefinite period of time (2 - 3 years?). These personnel would respond primarily to medical calls and would only be called into "fire service" when needed. This step would improve our response time to medical calls (50% of our calls), especially into the southeast portion of the Township. This would not affect the 2in/2out requirements, would meet response time to medical calls in the southeast section of the Township, have no effect on ISO score, and allow for BLS and possible ALS transport capability, an important feature this plan given the prospect on an increase in medical calls due to the addition of senior and assisted living developments in the community, With implementation of Step 2 (below), this facility would no longer be needed and the staff and equipment would be reassigned when the Wagner station is opened.

This Step has significant hurdles for implementation which include finding a suitable building to house a rescue vehicle, building code compliance if one were to be found, increased housing cost, and the fact that it only addresses 50% of the call types. Step 1.5 does not have to be completed to go from Step 1 to Step 2.

Step 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 Step 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.

Step 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 mid to late 2026. To accomplish this step, the department would hire 6 personnel and have them trained within a year, then hire 4 more personnel in 2027 (only 4 rather than 12 additional hires would be required if we completed Step 1.5).

Step 3 would build on Step 2 by adding a permanent rescue and an additional 6 personnel in 2028 and 3 in 2029. By 2030 the department would have all personnel in place and trained. 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.

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

Review of costs:

Step 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.

Step 1.5 requires the leasing/building of a substation, the purchase of a rescue vehicle, and 6 additional firefighters. This option would involve a total budget of approximately XXX with a millage rate of approximately XXX.

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

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

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

Committee recommendation:

The committee members recommend the Township pursue a millage rate increase that will allow for the eventual implementation of Step 3, as needed, to be the final service delivery model to the Township within the next ten years. The committee believes this balances the current/future anticipated needs for the next decade and will take approximately 8 years to achieve. It is the expectation of the committee that the capital improvements would be funded by bonding.

We have had discussions regarding the possibility of a 5-year millage. This would require the Township to reconvene this or similar committee in 3 to 4 years to assess the then current and future needs of the Department and make recommendations accordingly. This has the danger of “voter exhaustion”, i.e.: one too many millages in too short a time. In order to accommodate a 5-year plan using a 10-year millage, the ballot language will include “throttle” and “governor” mechanisms: one to limit the rate of millage increase (the throttle) and one to limit the millage to be levied (the governor). The rate of increase will be guided by the needs of the Department as presented to the Board on a periodic basis by the Fire Chief. The limit of levy will be guided by the Department’s Fund Balance the target of which would be a reserve to accommodate 9 months of operating expenses, 12 months if the needs arise.

We also discussed the possibility of two millages, one for operating expenses which would be adjusted as described above and one for capital improvements which would be fixed for the life of the millage and be set to the rate needed to repay the bond in the required timeframe. The danger here is that only one might pass leaving the Department and the Township in a quandary. One solution to this problem would be a single millage with two parts similar to the two separate millages. The part needed to fund capital improvement would remain fixed for the life of the millage and the operating part would vary in respect to the Department’s documented needs. The committee recommends the latter option.

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

These recommendations are based on the current character of the Township and may need to be amended/updated if that character changes considerably. Those factors may include increases of housing density such as low/midrise buildings in our water/sewer service district or changes in demographics such as construction of “age in place” facilities.

Proposed ballot language: