

Fire Services Guidance Committee - Report to the Board

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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, 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:

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- 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 (BLS) transport capability
- 6) Ability to achieve Advanced Life Support (ALS) 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.

The department’s goal is to respond to calls in under 6 minutes 90% of the time. 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). 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

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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 always meet this goal in the northeast or southwest sections, 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 36 hours of outside training per year at a rate of \$150/hour at an approximate cost of \$7,500 annually. 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. Other companies use a Geographic Information System (GIS) to calculate road miles to the nearest Fire Station as a factor when determining rates for property insurance. Currently Scio Township has a 6/6W ISO rating, with 1 being the best rating and 10 being the worst. The "W" indicates the area has access to water (i.e.: hydrants). 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. The addition of a second station will be considered by companies who use the GIS system to help set rates.

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 to the community. 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, which is experiencing staff shortages like the rest of the nation. Fire departments in the county have begun addressing this

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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. The Township should consider pay rate incentives for staff who successfully complete paramedic training.

Achieving Advanced Life Support (ALS) would be possible if the department were to hire paramedic firefighters and license its ambulance for ALS transport. Currently all personnel are 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 and bill for either of these services, there would be minimal effect 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.

The cost models we generated assume that the \$1,500,000 liability has been removed and the funds returned to the Fire Department’s Fund Balance. In addition, we suggest that the Township evaluate a cost recovery model for excessive medical calls to commercial establishments. With the advent of senior housing, especially assisted housing, medical calls could become numerous.

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. Steps 1 and 2 would have to have completed 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 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

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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 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.

Step 1.5 is an intermediate Step that that could be started immediately after the completion of Step 1 and would require an additional 6 full-time personnel. The plan calls 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 meet our response time goal 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 of this plan given the prospect of 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 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 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 November 2023, and the ability to use some American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for architecture purposes, it's possible to have a building completed 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 6 more personnel in 2027. Only 6 rather than 12 additional hires would be required if we implemented Step 1.5.

Step 3 would build on Step 2 by adding a permanent rescue vehicle and an additional 6 personnel to

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the Wagner station 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 is likely the Township's 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 in 2030 and 7 more in 2031 (including an 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.

Committee recommendations:

The committee recommends the following:

- 1) The Township Board of Trustees should extinguish the \$1,500,000 "loan" from the General Fund to the Fire Fund. The committee believes that the repayment would essentially double tax the citizens who paid tax dollars to the General Fund - an unrestricted fund - which then "loaned" the funds to the Fire Fund for the cost of renovations. Additional taxes will have to be raised by the Fire Fund - a restricted fund - to repay the General Fund. The Fire Fund should be made whole for any repayments already made and the "loan" forgiven. In addition, the \$1,500,000 interest-free "loan", now a liability, is not earning interest for the Township.
- 2) The Township should 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. Step 4 could be looked in the future should the need arise. The committee believes this balances the current/future anticipated needs for the next decade and will take approximately 8 years to achieve. The ballot language should specify that the millage rate will only be increased based on need as documented by the Fire Chief and that the millage rate will be adjusted to ensure that the Fire Departments fund balance does not exceed 9 months of operating expense, 12 months if necessary.
- 3) Initial capital improvements would be funded through a bond issue with a dedicated capital millage at a rate of 0.67 mills for a term not to exceed 15 years and that operations (including reserve for equipment replacement) be funded through an operating millage of a maximum 3.75 mills for a term of 5 years, which would expire at the next presidential election - 2028.

Renewal/increases should be structured to be voted upon at subsequent presidential elections, ex. 4-, 8-, or 12-year terms. These two millages should be put before the voters in November of 2023 so that service improvements can begin as soon as possible. It is the recommendation that these two ballot

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proposals be tie-barred to safeguard against the unlikely possibility that only one of them passes. The ballot proposal for the operating millage should specify that should the capital millage fail and the operating millage pass, the Board will be allowed to levy the necessary millage to complete Step 1.

- 1) The Township Board should revise its fund balance policy so that equipment and vehicle replacement reserves are encumbered and do not count against the 9–12-month unrestricted fund balance.
- 2) Within the next 4 years the Township should purchase properties near the west Jackson Road 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.
- 3) The Township Board should make the Fire Services Guidance Committee a permanent body, meeting periodically, to evaluate progress, review current Township demographics and development, and make further recommendations.
- 4) The Ordinances with respect to Fire Services, Chapters 2 and 18, should be reviewed and brought up to current standards. This could be done by the Fire Services Committee.
- 5) Consider financial incentives to encourage personnel to upgrade medical licensure from EMT to Paramedic.

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-, mid-, or high-rise buildings in our water/sewer service district or significant changes in demographics such as construction of “age in place” facilities.

Estimate 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 an operating budget of approximately \$3,264,000 with a millage rate of approximately 2.0 mills.

Step 1.5 requires the leasing/building of a substation, the purchase of a rescue vehicle, and 6 additional firefighters. This option would involve an operating budget of approximately \$4,407,000 with a millage rate of approximately 2.7 mills.

Step 2 requires the largest purchase of capital and would require that a station be built, and apparatus purchased. This option would involve an operating budget of approximately \$6,039,000 with a millage rate of approximately 3.0 mills operating and 0.6 capital mills.

Step 3 builds off the capital improvements in option 2 and adds personnel. This option would involve an operating budget of approximately \$5,999,000 in operating expense with a millage rate of approximately 3.6 mills operating and 0.65 mills capital.

Step 4 builds off the capital improvements in option 3 and adds personnel. This option would involve an operating budget of approximately \$7,839,000 with a millage rate of approximately 4.8 mills operating and 0.7 mills capital.

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Revenue, Operating Expenses & Millage Rate Forecast Summary

	Step #1	Step #1.5	Step #2	Step #3	Step #4
Timeline (in years)	1.5	2.5	3.5 – 4.5	5.5 – 6.5	7.5 – 8.5
Employees	12	18	27	33	45
Est. 1st Year Revenue (million)	\$3.264	\$4.407	\$6.040	\$ 6.937	\$8.978
Est. Total Mills	2.0	2.7	3.7	4.25	5.50
Payroll Expenses (million)	\$2.251	\$3.083	\$3.950	\$5.185	\$6.950
Operating Expenses (million)	\$0.391	\$0.854	\$0.813	\$0.813	\$0.889
Total Payroll & Operating (million)	\$2.642	\$3.937	\$4.763	\$5.999	\$7.839
Est. Total Payroll & Operating Millage	1.62	2.41	2.92	3.67	4.80
Capital Expenditures (million)	\$0.510	\$1.442	\$11.718	\$11.052	\$12.716
Est. Capital Millage	0.00	0.00	0.48	0.45	0.520
Budget Year(s) Achieving 9-Months Reserve	2025-2026	2027-2028	2027-2028	2029-2030	2029-2030
Budget Year(s) Achieving 12-Months Reserve	2026-2027	2028-2029	2028-2029	2030-2031	2030-2031

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Example effect of proposed Fire Millage

									Avg AA School TV	Avg Dexter School TV
	Taxable Value /Mills	\$150,000	\$200,000	\$250,000	\$300,000	\$350,000	\$400,000	\$450,000	\$186,678	\$174,667
Current	1.35	\$203	\$270	\$338	\$405	\$473	\$540	\$608	\$252	\$236
Step 1	2.0	\$300	\$400	\$500	\$600	\$700	\$800	\$900	\$373	\$349
Step 1.5	2	\$413	\$550	\$688	\$825	\$963	\$1,100	\$1,238	\$513	\$480
Step 2	3.7	\$555	\$740	\$925	\$1,110	\$1,295	\$1,480	\$1,665	\$691	\$461
Step 3	4.25	\$638	\$850	\$1,063	\$1,275	\$1,488	\$1,700	\$1,913	\$793	\$742
Step 4	5.5	\$825	\$1,100	\$1,375	\$1,650	\$1,925	\$2,200	\$2,475	\$1,027	\$961

Proposed ballot language:

Proposed ballot language should be dedicated for fire only, not for a public safety millage. The committee believes that police and fire funding should stand on their own with individual justifications to the Township Board and citizens.

An operating millage should be presented as a stand-alone question and should include adequate funds for the following items:

- Personnel, including benefits
- Equipment and supplies
- Building operation, maintenance, and repairs
- Vehicle operation, maintenance, and repairs
- Equipment replacement reserve
- Vehicle replacement reserve

A capital project millage should be presented and tie-barred to the passage of the operating millage. The capital millage should be adequate to repay a bond issuance that funds:

- Construction and equipping of a second fire station
- All architecture and civil engineering costs
- Apparatus purchase for the second station