

July 9, 2024

Lou Little, President and Fire Chief
c/o Michael Caler, WMVFD Secretary
West Mayfield Volunteer Fire Department
706 37th St Ext., Beaver Falls, PA 15010

Wendy Harker, President
c/o Michael Caler, WMFRA Secretary
West Mayfield Volunteer Firemen's Relief Association of West Mayfield
706 37th St Ext., Beaver Falls, PA 15010



Dear WMVFD & WMFRA officers:

The West Mayfield Fire Service Review Committee (FSRC) respectfully requests your attendance at a meeting to further our fact-finding efforts and to better understand issues regarding fire prevention and fire protection matters pertaining to the borough's current fire service provider.

The FSRC Fire Service inquiry is focused on the following areas:

- Borough Ordinances
- Fire Service Agreement
- Fire Service Charter
- WMFRA
- Fire Service Duties and Obligations
- Mutual Aid Agreements
- Real Estate
- Fire Prevention Code
- ISO Public Protection Classification
- Fire Service Leadership, Membership, Organizational Standing
- Job Performance
- Council's Fire & Police Committee
- Professional Reports & Confirmation of Public Safety Readiness
- Public Education & Communication
- Confirmation of West Mayfield Special Fire Police
- Municipal Fire Support for the Fire Service
- Fire Service Budgeting & Appropriations Process

FSRC FINDINGS - COMMUNITY SURVEY

As you may know, the first phase of our work involved a robust gathering of community opinions that should be concerning to your organizations. Here's an overview of some responses to our community survey:

WMVFD Leadership – Qualifications, managerial competence, job performance - A super majority of citizens surveyed (75%) think the WMVFD leadership team is not sufficiently qualified, competent, and/or able-bodied.

WMVFD Firefighting Staff – Qualifications, training, and job performance - A majority of citizens surveyed (68%) think the WMVFD firefighting staff is not sufficiently qualified, trained, and/or able-bodied.

Neighboring Fire Services: Mutual aid leadership, staffing, qualifications, training, equipment, availability - A super majority of citizens (74%) think our neighboring fire departments offer better quality fire services than the WMVFD.

Community Confidence: Community trust, faith, and confidence in the WMVFD to fulfill its mission - Another super majority of citizens (71%) think the community has lost trust, faith, and confidence in the WMVFD.

Future of the Fire Service - A super majority of citizens (90%) are split over whether the borough and WMVFD should create a fire service corrective action plan or the borough should decertify WMVFD and outsource its fire service needs.

A summary of findings can be found on the [FSRC Community](#) page.

FSRC FINDINGS - FIRE SERVICE ECOSYSTEM

The second area of our inquiry has been looking at our fire service ecosystem. To date we have held meaningful conversations with several local fire departments. Most of our neighboring municipalities, in partnership with their designated fire services, have begun to lean into the future regarding the many serious challenges facing their communities' fire prevention and fire protection programs. They are welcoming the adoption of higher standards of emergency response professionalism, industry best practices, rigorous training programs, and higher levels of materiel readiness guided by the National Fire Prevention Association and other industry-leading organizations as well as standards set forth by the Office of State Fire Commissioner and the Department of Community and Economic Development.

Our findings show that in most neighboring municipalities, forward thinking local government officials and fire service leaders are working together to negotiate pathways forward to better serve and protect their communities. Most important, a growing number of municipalities surrounding West Mayfield are proactively organizing themselves into a formal fire district or merging their departments.

A summary of findings can be found on the [FSRC Fire Service Ecosystem](#) page.

FSRC FINDINGS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The third area of our inquiry has been looking at local government in relation to fire prevention and fire protection matters. FSRC held a special “Local Government” meeting on June 19, 2024. All elected and appointed borough officials were personally and individually invited to this meeting, which was also announced at council’s regular June meeting and promoted publicly on the borough’s website and social media platform.

We’ve noted that no one associated with the WMVFD or WMFRA was present at this meeting to help us understand important questions overlapping local government and the fire service; absent were Fire Chief Little (who currently chairs council’s Fire & Police Committee), WMFRA president Wendy Harker (who is also WMVFD’s Assistant Fire Chief and a former councilmember who had for many years served as chair of the Fire & Police Committee), WMVFD treasurer Eli Kosanovich (former councilmember who had previously served on Fire & Police Committee), and Emergency Management Coordinator and current member of the Fire & Police Committee Bill Heaton (also a long-time member of the WMVFD).

A summary of findings can be found on the [FSRC Local Government](#) page.

FSRC CURRENT INQUIRY - FIRE SERVICE

As part of our fourth and final area of inquiry, the FSRC seeks to better understand a wide range of fire prevention and fire protection issues related to the borough’s current fire service provider.

Based on our research, the FSRC has developed a list of relevant questions for WMVFD and WMFRA officials. As a professional courtesy, we’ve included these questions in the addendum to this letter and available online: <https://www.westmayfieldborough.us/fsrc-fire-service-provider/>

FSRC Fire Service Meeting

So that WMVFD and WMFRA officials have a fair and reasonable opportunity to address our questions and concerns about the fire service, we respectfully request a meeting with you and your representatives.

Please RSVP as to a specific date, time, and location that you would like to meet, but no later than Wednesday, July 31, 2024.

We look forward to hearing from you **by July 16th** regarding your chosen date, time, and location to meet with the FSRC. Please note, the information discussed during this meeting will be on the record.

Please note: FSRC members unanimously stipulated that if we do not receive your RSVP by July 16, 2024, we will assume this to mean that your organizations have decided not to cooperate with the Fire Service Review Committee. We will therefore conclude this phase of inquiry and continue on with our report and recommendations to council and the citizens of West Mayfield.

If you have any questions or concerns about our inquiry or this meeting, please feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Kevin Farkas, FSRC Citizen Co-Chair

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412-423-8034

Addendum

FSRC Fire Service Inquiry

Note: References to the “fire service” or “fire department” are synonymous with the West Mayfield Volunteer Fire Department (WMVFD). We assumed that the line and administrative officers of the WMVFD are able to represent and speak for this organization. We also assume that the administrative officers of the West Mayfield Firemen’s Relief Association (WMFRA) are able to represent and speak for this organization.

Borough Ordinances

1. Does the fire service recognize a need to update and recodify borough ordinances related to public safety, especially fire prevention and fire protection matters?
2. What recommended changes or amendments to the borough’s public safety ordinances would be favored by the fire service?

Fire Service Agreement

1. Does the fire service know of and have access to a written service agreement (i.e., contract) between the Borough of West Mayfield and the West Mayfield Volunteer Fire Department?
2. If currently no written fire service agreement exists defining the legal terms, conditions, operational duties, and financial obligations of the working relationship between the municipality and the WMVFD, would the fire service recommend the drafting of such a contract?

Fire Service Charter

1. Does the WMVFD have a fire service charter, and can it produce this document?

Fire Service Duties and Obligations

1. Other than borough ordinances, what specifically defines the duties and obligations of the fire service?
2. Is there any written policy?

Mutual Aid Agreements

1. Has the fire service included borough council and committees (e.g., Fire & Police Committee, Finance & Litigation Committee), solicitor, emergency management coordinator, or other borough officials in the planing, drafting, and approval process of any specific mutual aid agreements currently in effect and operationalized by WMVFD and other municipal fire services?
2. Other than the basic county-wide mutual aid agreement, is the fire service engaged in any other mutual aid agreements with neighboring fire departments? Are these mutual aid agreements in writing? What are their terms and conditions?
3. Does the fire service enlist any local fire departments as automatic aid?
4. What is the fire department's call box list?
5. Is the Beaver Falls Fire Department on the WMVFD box call list?

Real Estate

1. Does the fire service know of and have access to a written lease agreement between the fire service and the Borough of West Mayfield regarding the use of the borough owned property currently known as WMVFD's rear parking lot (plot #57, PARID: 520020116000)?

Fire Prevention Code

1. During 2022, the fire service informed council that the ISO insurance auditors recommended the adoption, by ordinance, of an international fire code. Has the fire service acted in any way to assist council in adopting this recommendation?
2. Does the fire service work with the Fire & Police Committee to regularly review and update if necessary the borough's Fire Prevention Code?

ISO Public Protection Classification

1. Does the fire service provide council, other borough officials, or make public in any way a current, complete, and unabridged copy of the ISO PPC report?
2. Has the fire service ever worked with borough officials to review and evaluate the ISO PPC report.
3. Has the fire service ever created a corrective action plan to improve upon the report's shortcomings and weaknesses? Has this plan ever been shared with local government officials?

Fire Service Leadership, Membership, Organizational Standing

Leadership

1. What are the fire service's qualifications (competency & experience) for the ranks of Fire Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain, 1st Lieutenant, 2nd Lieutenant, Safety Officer, Fire Fighter?
2. What are the roles of these positions?
3. Does the fire service abide by a written set of job descriptions?
4. Can the fire service provide documentary evidence of the leadership's experience, qualifications, certifications, and training?

Membership

1. How does someone become a member (active emergency responder) of the fire service?
2. Does the fire service require any professional pre-conditions or job experience to become an active emergency responder?
3. Does the fire service require that all active emergency responders be able-bodied (i.e., pass a basic physical fitness exam consistent with the duties of firefighting)?
4. Does the fire service require active emergency responders to obtain any particular qualifications and certifications?
5. Does the fire service require emergency responders to complete a training and job performance curriculum?
6. Can the fire service provide documentary evidence of the membership's experience, qualifications, certifications, and training?

Organization

1. Does the fire service hold any special recognition or professional status as an emergency response organization, such as a ranking in the State Fire Commissioners' Certification Program? (Note: A good example would be Patterson Heights VFD's Bronze Level Status, signifying that at least 50% of their members are Pro-Board Firefighter I certified.)
 2. Does the fire service have a good working relationship with other fire departments within the local fire service ecosystem?
 3. How does the fire service compare itself to other local fire departments in terms of emergency response readiness and capability?
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Job Performance

1. For the years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 (YTD), how many incidents and of what type has the fire service responded to within the borough?
 2. For the same years, how many out-of-borough incidents has the fire service responded to (i.e., mutual aid calls)? For these incidents, how did the fire service assist other municipalities?
 3. What would be considered the fire service's average incident response time, both within the borough and for mutual aid calls?
 4. Between 2020 and 2024 (YTD), has the fire service dropped any calls (i.e., not been able to show up to the incident scene)?
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Council's Fire & Police Committee

1. How often and in what ways does council's Fire & Police Committee formally meet with the fire service to discuss fire protection and fire prevention matters?
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Professional Reports & Confirmation of Public Safety Readiness

1. Does the fire service have a written policy that sets forth requirements and expectations for monthly and annual reporting to council?
 2. Has the Fire & Police Committee ever established written requirements and expectations for monthly and annual reporting to council?
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Public Education & Communication

1. In what ways does the fire service provide public education regarding fire prevention and fire protection matters? Is there an established program with goals, objectives, timeline, budget?

2. Has the fire service ever asked council for monies to create such a program or to perform specific public education activities?
3. Does the fire service have a designated public education officer?

Confirmation of West Mayfield Special Fire Police

1. For those WMVFD members currently serving as special fire police, are there any documentary records attesting to their having been duly confirmed by the mayor (i.e., sworn into office), as required by state statute Title 35 §7434?

Budget & Finances

Fire Service Spending

1. What is the WMVFD's actual annual cost of providing fire service to the Borough of West Mayfield?
2. Has this pattern of spending kept up with inflation and the rising costs of providing fire prevention and fire protection?

Budgeting Process – Appropriations

1. How does the fire service communicate its financial needs to local government officials?
2. Does the fire service work with the Fire and Police Committee (or any other public safety representative in local government) to create a listing of financial or in-kind needs based on documentary evidence (e.g., financial records, invoices, receipts, cost increase notices, inflationary projections) that help justify appropriations requests?
3. Does the fire service agree that the borough's "Public Safety-Fire" budgets for 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 sufficiently satisfied the fire service's operational needs? If not, where does the fire service locate budget deficiencies? Does the fire service recognize any areas of over budgeting?
4. Does the fire service agree that the borough's 2024 Public Safety-Fire budget will sustain the fire service through this year? If not, where does the fire service locate budget deficiencies?
5. In January 2023, the fire service provided a roster of 20 names to the borough secretary to submit to the borough's workers compensation carrier(s) the purpose of fire department workers compensation insurance coverage. Can the fire service identify and justify with supporting documentation each and every person on this list as to their active firefighter or emergency responder status or

their “participating member” status providing regular support to the fire service (as defined in the state’s Workers Compensation Act)?

6. Based on fire department reporting in the public record, the borough’s budgeted cash value of fuel provisioned in support of the fire department appears to be grossly and consistently miscalculated between 2020-2024. How can this be explained?
7. How are future Public Safety-Fire budget amounts calculated (e.g., based on multi-year actual spending trends, documented needs, invoicing, contract agreements)?
8. Actual spending data for Public Safety-Fire are missing or indeterminate in many public records, such as annual financial audits, council meeting minutes, Fire & Police Reports, Annual Fire Dept. reports. Can the fire service provide actual spending data for at least the Public Safety-Fire budget line items, such as gallons of gasoline and diesel fuel used for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 YTD?

Budgeting Process – Forecasting

1. With respect to near and long-term needs of the fire service, who in the organization is responsible for analyzing these needs, calculating costs, and conveying this information to council and the public?
2. Does the fire service work with neighboring fire services to help identify future issues, costs, trends, etc. within the firefighting ecosystem?

Municipal Fire Support Assessment

Fire Tax

1. What is the position of the fire service regarding the creation of a millage-based fire tax or a flat fire protection fee based on utility billing or count of taxable properties?

Tax Credit Incentives

1. What is the position of the fire service regarding the creation of a tax credit incentive program for members of the volunteer fire department?

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