

Council Business Meeting

September 15, 2020

Agenda Item	Discussion of Fire Chief Recruitment Options	
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SUMMARY

David Shepherd announced his plans to retire as Fire Chief effective November 1, 2020. The City is currently engaged in informal exploratory discussions with Chief Hanley at Fire District #5 regarding the potential of combining Ashland Fire & Rescue with District #5 to reduce overhead management costs with potential gains through combined resources and staffing. At the same time, the Council authorized staff to move forward with a formal evaluation of the ambulance service, which will not be complete until 2021.

With these issues as well as the recent devastating fire event in the region, it is not the ideal time to launch a successful recruitment for a new Fire Chief. However, Staff and Mayor Stromberg have identified several options to consider and have made a staff recommendation of a limited duration recruitment and hiring process. Each of the three options are described in more detail below

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

N/A.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

The Council has not taken any formal action regarding the recruitment and selection of a new Fire Chief since Chief Shepherd's resignation was announced.

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

At the [September 1 Regular Business Meeting](#), Council approved a request for proposal (RFP) for qualified firms or individuals to conduct a financial analysis of the Ambulance Service to determine whether it is financially viable for the City to continue to be an ambulance service provider. Council has been made aware of informal discussions that have occurred regarding the possibility of merging Ashland Fire & Rescue with Fire District #5. No formal action has been taken by the Council or staff to consider integrating services. However, with our Chief retiring November 1, 2020, City Staff are requesting direction from the City Council on how to proceed with replacing Chief Shepherd. Below are three potential options for the Council to consider:

Option 1 – Move forward with recruitment for a new Fire Chief. Due to the timelines, the City will need to make internal appointments to backfill until a new Chief can begin work. Even if staff escalated the recruitment, a new Fire Chief would not start work until 2021, which also is a significant time of change for the City. A new Council will be seated, the search for our first City Manager will kick-off, and the City will embark on a challenging biennial budget process post-

pandemic. All of these factors will impact the success of a recruitment for Fire Chief along with decisions regarding the future of services provided by Ashland Fire & Rescue.

Option 2 – Advance more robust formal discussions with the Community and with District #5 regarding services, opportunities, and a timeline. Under this option, Ashland would postpone recruiting for a new Fire Chief. Chief Hanley would become the acting Fire Chief, and he would likely appoint someone within our department temporarily to provide on-site leadership in Ashland as a merger between the departments took shape. This option becomes complicated in that it could take several years to complete a merge, and it would be challenging for both departments to function under interim leadership for an extended time.

Option 3 – Pursue a recruitment that would result in a limited duration appointment for Fire Chief in Ashland. Option 3 is the most flexible of options in that it replaces leadership in Ashland following David Shepherd’s retirement. Yet, it does not promise long term employment, which allows the City to continue with a review of the Ambulance Service while simultaneously working with Fire District #5 to determine the feasibility of merging services. A limited duration appointment would ensure that whoever the City hired understood the position was limited, and the individual employed could be a partner in determining the most sustainable future for Ashland Fire & Rescue while providing experienced leadership during a time of transition.

FISCAL IMPACTS

Funding for the position of Fire Chief was approved in the current FY budget. None of the options impact the City’s budget negatively.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Council consider Option 3, which is the most flexible option. Staff could get started immediately on a recruitment for a Limited Duration Fire Chief to minimize the time Ashland would be without a Fire Chief. We may be able to find a very qualified Chief who would enjoy the challenge of a short-term assignment without a long-term commitment. He or she could play a vital role in supporting the department, staff, and Community during a time of transition.

ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS

- I recommend pursuing staff Option 3, authorizing staff to conduct a recruitment for a Limited Duration Appointment (1-3 year) of a Fire Chief to stabilize the leadership of the department.
- I recommend pursuing staff Option 3, with the following modifications...
- I recommend pursuing a different option...

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

N/A