

# WEEKLY MEMO

**Date:** August 9, 2013

**To:** Mayor Lynn Stauss. Council President Craig Buckalew, Vice President Greg Leigh, Council Members Clarence Vetter, Ron Vonasek, Henry Tweten, Mark Olstad, and Chad Grassel

**RE:** Weekly Update

## **UPCOMING MEETINGS:**

*Special Meeting – August 13, 2013 – 5:00 PM – Training Room*

*Work Session – August 13, 2013 – 5:00 PM – Training Room*

*Regular Council Meeting – August 20, 2013 – 5:00 PM – Council Chambers*

*Work Session – August 27, 2013 – 5:00 PM – Training Room*

## **WEEKLY UPDATE:**

This past week the City received a letter from the Minnesota Department of Revenue stating our certified LGA amount for 2014 is \$2,514,148. This will be an increase of \$42,598 from 2013.

## **DEPARTMENT REPORTS:**

### **Park & Recreation Department, Dave Aker**

The Park and Recreation Department will start taking trees down next week; we have until the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August to get all the trees we need to take down. The by August 30 the stumps will all be removed and filled in with grass seed and dirt. The playground at O'Leary is finished and has been getting a lot of activity, we have mulch coming for the other playgrounds and the rubber mulch for Sherlock Forest is in.

### **Fire Department, Chief Larson**

The Fire Department has remained busy; we are at 601 calls for the year.

Department training has been located at our acquired burn house for the past three months. This has been a huge asset to our program to have a 2 and ½ story house for training. Our firefighters have been very impressed with the training received at the house.

The Fire Chief and Three Asst. Chiefs attended a 4 day program in Manvel ND on Incident Command System, Expanding Incidents. It was a great class that is put on through FEMA, and is required to continue receiving grants.

The nine new POC Firefighters have completed the entry level training required to enter a burning structure. They have also completed a First Responder Medical Course. They have put in a total of

approximately 120 hours to complete the training. Many cities are having trouble getting new personnel that will commit to the hours and work it takes to be a Firefighter. I have attached an article that some Minnesota towns are struggling to get new and trained people.

We are just wrapping up a two day search for a missing child. The outcome was not what we wanted, but there is some closure to the incident. There was between 20 to 30 Agency's involved in the search. Station 1 was the Emergency Operations Center. Many thanks to all City Departments for the help in making it work so well. There were huge compliments from all outside Agencies.

## **Agenda Items:**

There will be a special meeting first to award a job for repair work to storm sewer pipes on Demers Ave. This project is being coordinated with the MNDOT project.

Item one for the work session will be a bid opening for cleaning services for three city buildings.

Item two will be considering approval of the MNDOT Transit Application for 2014.

Item three will be a request for purchasing a microprocessor panel for the Civic Center compressors.

Item four will consider the replacement of the computer system in Lift Station 5.

Item five is regarding the current massage ordinance and if medical facilities would be exempt from being considered a massage parlor.

Item six will be considering hiring the current intern for the 2013-2014 school year.

Item seven will consider if the Water and Light Commission should be reporting their own pay equity reports.

Items eight and nine will be discussing future auditing services and refuse collection.

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## Help wanted: More than a few good part-time volunteer firefighters

Article by: KEVIN GILES , Star Tribune Updated: August 7, 2013 - 9:52 AM

Cities across state struggle with shortages. Commuting, unpredictable on-call schedule at blame, chiefs say.



As part of training, the Stillwater Fire Department burned down a four bedroom, 2,000 square-foot house on the edge of town, on land that will become a 15 lot subdivision Saturday, August 3, 2013, in Stillwater, MN. Here, after the training had ended and the...

Photo: David Joles

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Critical staffing shortages are hitting fire departments across Minnesota, leaving the ranks of many dangerously thin because far fewer people want to commit to years of demanding training exercises and unpredictable emergency calls.

The problem surfaced most recently in [Stillwater](#), where Fire Chief Stuart Glaser sounded the alarm to the City Council that the city's pool of on-call, part-time firefighters was evaporating. Some recent recruits, Glaser said, didn't stay long enough to learn how to drive a fire truck and others left the job after the city had invested thousands of dollars to train them.

"We're constantly burning through people," said Dan Concha, 24, a part-time firefighter at departments in Roseville, Maplewood and North [St. Paul](#) who's heard of shortages. "People had to drop out because it was too much. They don't see the benefit of getting 10 bucks for spending an hour on a unit call. Every unit is struggling to keep enough guys."

State Fire Marshal Jerry Rosendahl said rural departments, too, are desperate for help, including one that had only four volunteers whose average age was 76.

"It probably is a crisis in some communities. This is a problem nationwide. It's not unique to Minnesota," Rosendahl said.

Minnesota has more than 20,000 firefighters, most of them on-call volunteers who are paid only when they're needed. They receive the same training as chiefs and their assistants, requiring long hours at firehouses, but many of them leave the job after cities invest tens of thousands of dollars in teaching them how to fight fires, save lives and operate sophisticated equipment.

"The turnover rate is extremely high," Glaser said, naming [Bloomington](#), Excelsior, New Brighton, [Woodbury](#), [Minnetonka](#) and [Plymouth](#) among those cities experiencing similar problems.

The "combination" strategy that cities have used for years — retaining a volunteer force of paid, on-call firefighters to supplement a minimal full-time crew managing the station — isn't working anymore in many cities.

Reasons vary, but most often it's that potential firefighters lead busier lives with family obligations, sports and electronics. In the metro area especially, commuting has bled many suburban cities of prospects who work miles away and spend hours on the road. Cities' emphasis on cutting spending and taxes also has distracted residents from the

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#### Photo gallery: Firefighters needed

Wednesday August 7, 2013  
Stillwater's approach to firefighting just wasn't working, because the city couldn't find enough "on-call" firefighters to safely staff the...



All IN THE FAMILY: Three generations of firefighters posed for a photo after a Stillwater Fire Department training burn, including, from right, Tim Bell, 65; Jon Bell, 45; and Jake Bell, 27. At top, Brad Junker rolled up hose after the exercise.

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life-or-death importance of firefighting.

“Society has changed,” Glaser said. “It’s not easy for people anymore to drop everything and come to the fire department for a call. It’s busier, everybody is expected to do more, and it’s getting tougher and tougher to meet all those requirements.”

Glaser said he expected five retirements on top of eight current vacancies in the on-call ranks. There are 24 now in on-call. The City Council responded by voting 5-0 to hire two full-time firefighters to enable Glaser to assemble three-person “duty crews” at the station. The posting for the two full-time firefighters attracted 36 respondents.

“In 30 years I’ve been pretty much against full-time fire departments but after meeting with Stu, and looking at the issue, our current model is broken,” said Stillwater City Administrator Larry Hansen. “It’s been slowly losing its way for 30 years. In the immediate future I can tell you we have a problem and this looks like the least expensive way to correct it.”

### New approach

In Cottage Grove, 26 miles from Stillwater, chronic problems with on-call shortages led to a new approach where part-time firefighters work 12-hour “duty crew” shifts. “Instead of living by the pager they’re already at the station. They’ve already committed themselves to working a block of time,” said P.J. McMahon, the city’s assistant fire chief.

In [Roseville](#), another city that adopted the duty crew approach, more part-time firefighters leave nowadays because they’re hired at full-time departments in [Minneapolis](#), St. Paul, Rochester and other larger cities, said Fire Chief Tim O’Neill. When prospective firefighters learn they’ll have to complete 500 hours of classroom fire and medical training, and operate big trucks, “they go back to their families and say, nah, I can’t do that,” O’Neill said.

Concha, a native of White Bear Lake, hopes to land a full-time job, with benefits, at a larger department. He got married in May and said his wife asked about hours required for training and emergency calls.

“She lets me know when things are getting out of hand,” he said. “Sometimes it just feels like my life is the fire department and that feels emotionally exhausting.”

### “Down quite a bit”

To head off potentially dangerous shortages, chiefs everywhere rely more and more on strong “mutual aid” agreements with neighboring cities to make sure sufficient help arrives at the scene of fires, Rosendahl said. Some cities employ “automatic aid,” when emergency dispatchers alert several fire departments to save precious response time.

“It’s not just the fire chiefs’ problem,” Rosendahl said. “Communities need to pay more attention to the services that are there. What most citizens believe, quite frankly, is that their fire departments have full-time staff which is not the case.”

As part of training, the Stillwater Fire Department burned down a four bedroom, 2,000 square-foot house on the edge of town, on land that will become a 15 lot subdivision Saturday, August 3, 2013, in Stillwater, MN. Firefighter Brad Junker rolls up hose following the training.] (DAVID JOLES/STARTRIBUNE) [djoles@startribune.com](mailto:djoles@startribune.com) Stillwater’s approach to firefighting just wasn’t working, because the city couldn’t find enough “on-call” firefighters to safely staff the department. The City Council decided to let Fire Chief Stu Glaser hire two full-time firefighters to staff the department. This comes in addition to another hot topic still under debate, which is... **DAVID JOLES •** [djoles@startribune.com](mailto:djoles@startribune.com)



For training, the Stillwater Fire Department burned down a house on the edge of town on Saturday, atop land that will become a 15-lot subdivision. Here, firefighters Derrick Nelson, Jake Bell and his grandfather firefighter/engineer Tim Bell, discussed the training. **Photos by DAVID JOLES •** [djoles@startribune.com](mailto:djoles@startribune.com)



Stillwater can’t find enough “on-call” firefighters to safely staff the department.

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In Bloomington, which has six fire stations, three-person duty crews are scheduled at three of them. Chief Ulysses Seal said, "You'll find a lot of different flavors" in how duty crews are configured as cities try to find the best use of their money. His department, authorized for 155 firefighters, has 120.

"We're down quite a bit," Seal said.

The Stillwater Fire Department, with a \$1.1 million annual budget, covers a 61-square-mile area. That zone includes 24,000 people, nine schools, the St. Croix River, the Washington County Government Center and several senior apartment buildings with hundreds of residents.

The vote to loosen the budget for more full-time firefighters in Stillwater came after Council Member Doug Menikheim delivered an impassioned appeal for more resources.

"We're playing with life and death here, you know that," Menikheim said after Glaser's presentation.

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### Minnesota firefighters

Minnesota has more than 20,000 firefighters. Most are on-call volunteers. Minnesota has a higher percentage of volunteer firefighters than every state except Delaware.

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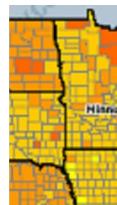
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