

Lowell Area Fire and
Emergency Services Authority
Lowell Area Fire Department, 315 S. Hudson St. Lowell, MI 49331
616-897-7354



LOWELL AREA FIRE AND EMERGENCY
SERVICES AUTHORITY
MEETING NOTICE

Tuesday June 24, 2025, AT 8:30 A.M.

AT

LOWELL FIRE DEPARTMENT
315 S. HUDSON
LOWELL, MI 49331

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87417872392?
pwd=iWyShuHqvrz3vbMxbqfav5cjxbxVvR.1](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87417872392?pwd=iWyShuHqvrz3vbMxbqfav5cjxbxVvR.1)

Meeting ID: 874 1787 2392
Passcode: 985499

Lowell Area Fire and
Emergency Services Authority
Agenda for the work session of
Tuesday June 24, 2025, at 8:30
AM Lowell Fire Department

AGENDA

1. Roll call of members
2. Public comment RE agenda (maximum of 2 minutes per speaker)
3. Approval of the agenda and exhibits*
4. Approval of May 13, 2025, Minutes (Exhibit A) *
5. Strategic priorities review (Exhibit B)
6. Finalize strategic plan draft & confirming the numbers (Exhibit C)
7. Next steps:
 - a. July – approve strategic plan & set September joint municipalities date, agenda.
Preliminary discussion on ad-hoc financing committee
 - b. August – finalize PowerPoint & joint municipalities meeting details
8. Public comment (maximum of 2 minutes per speaker)
9. Member comments
10. Next strategic planning meeting: July 8, 2025, at 8:30 am
11. Adjournment*

*Requires motion/vote

MEETING MINUTES

Long Range Planning Subcommittee, Lowell Fire Authority

Tues., May 13, 2025 / 8:30am

Meeting called to order at 9:05a.m. when quorum was met

1. Roll Call of Members. Present: Kate Dernocoeur, Misty Anderson, Carl Blough, Beryl BartkusTim Wittenbach audited the meeting via FaceTime. Also present: Cal Brinks (Facilitator), Cory Velzen (Fire Chief), Mike Burns (Lowell City), Shantell Ford (Vergennes Twp)

2. Public Comment re Agenda. None

3. Approval of agenda and exhibits. Motion to approve by Anderson, seconded by Bartkus. All approved.

4. Approval of April 15, 2025 Minutes (exhibit A). Minutes were approved at the Board meeting last Thursday, with one change to reorder some words under item #7. Motion to approve by Blough, seconded by Bartkus. Question re: item #6 (paragraph 2): does it mean the department is out of compliance with that statement? Better wording to show “minimal availability” agreed upon. All approved with this additional change, to be resubmitted at the next Board meeting for approval.

5. Strategic priorities review (exhibit B). We are close to completing the initial phase with the draft plan to be wrapped up in the next month. We are almost ready to present the plan to the municipalities, either individually or together, in Aug. or Sept. Then, the ad hoc committee(s) will be formed to select the financial approach.

6. Strategic plan draft discussion continued (exhibit C). *(Reference cost allocation formula, joint services agreement, and governance, page 3.)* Kate has line-edited the document and she & Cal will meet separately to address the suggested changes (mostly gammar), to be resubmitted to the committee before the next meeting.

Re: Revenue Services Generation (p.3).

Re: Member Contract section: Carl: as written is ok for now, but we'll need to work with finances before addressing the formula. Add wording about reevaluating after that is addressed. Burns: the formula as it stands now is not sustainable as the area grows, so at some point we'll still need to look at other options.

Re: Capital Fund section: It would be pertinent to address what the fire station needs in terms of updating to allow & provide for 24/7 staffing. That needs to be included in this discussion. Where the document addresses funding for fire station upgrades (p.2), we can add wording to address needs to accommodate fulltime staffers to appropriate governmental standards.

7. Finalizing strategic plan draft. *(Recommendation: Insert a conclusion with timeline into the draft strategic plan and finalize draft at June meeting. Draft and approve a PowerPoint presentation at the July meeting. Vote on strategic plan at the July Authority meeting and arrange to meet with member departments in August.)* Much of the needs for finalizing were discussed in section #6, above. Cal & Kate (and others who want) will begin to build the

PowerPoint which will be used in presenting the strategic plan to the municipalities.

8. Public comment (max 2 minutes/speaker). Shantell Ford: remains concerned about the funding.

9. Member Comments.

Bartkus: the draft looks good. Having a timeline is important. This is a vital part. The finances are a big question but we should keep the citizens in mind while also affording what's needed, yet maintaining the ability to grow and be viable.

Blough: likes the timeline concept. Answers are needed to build in fulltime staffing by the next budget cycle, and it looks to be on track to do that.

Anderson: agrees, esp. re the timeline. We need to decide on a date ASAP for the August/September meeting with the municipalities. It would be best to have everyone there together so everyone hears the same thing & there can be open discussion. We'd want to get the plan to them early enough to give them time to read & come prepared to discuss rather than digest last-minute. Further discussion: we will come up with several dates to offer, and we will also have Authority reps + the fire chief go to City/Twp meetings after the Common Meeting to spread the plan.

Wittenbach: Getting everyone in the same room and hearing the same thing is needed. If all three municipalities are going to make this work we're going to have to work through it as a group.

Dernocoeur: How to choose potential dates? Agreed that we should come to the next Authority meeting in June with possible dates.

Brinks & Velzen: suggest that we schedule in September, given all that is happening in August in the community. We can work on the financial piece in August. This will also allow us more time to prepare.

10. Next strategic planning meeting: June 10, 2025 at 8:30am (tentative). NOTE CHANGE to June 17, 8:30-10am. Plan: it will be an especially important meeting, to finalize the draft strategic plan. Cal will get it out ASAP so everyone can read it with a fine-toothed comb.

11. Adjournment. Motion by Bartkus, second by Blough to adjourn. All approved. Meeting ended at 9:55am.

Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority

Exhibit B – Strategic Priority Schedule Review

- ~~1. Okay process recommendation, priority & meeting schedule~~
- ~~2. Determine master plan length~~
- ~~3. Develop and survey other fire departments to better understand their budgets and how their services are funded.~~
- ~~4. Development of presentation materials~~
- ~~5. Capital fund budget review (i.e. fire truck purchases)~~
- March { ~~6. Staffing model (i.e. 24/7 full time)~~
- ~~7. Benefits & risks to expanding coverage or merging departments~~
- April { ~~8. Recommend ways to finance capital equipment~~
- ~~9. Revenue alternatives~~
- May { ~~10. Cost Allocation Formula~~
- ~~11. Joint Services Agreement~~
- ~~12. Governance, Fire Preplan, Inspection and Administrative Services~~
- ~~13. Fire Station upgrades (existing)~~
- ~~14. Fire Station addition (2nd fire station)~~
- ~~15. Ambulance services considerations?~~
- June { ~~16. Other considerations & documentation~~

July – approve strategic plan & set September joint municipalities date, agenda. Preliminary discussion on ad-hoc financing committee

August – finalize PowerPoint & joint municipalities meeting details

Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority
10-year Strategic Plan
Revision: Draft 6/17/2025

Fire Department

Lowell was founded as a trading post in 1831 and incorporated as the Village of Lowell in 1861; at the same time, a group of civic minded citizens created the Lowell Volunteer Fire Department. Later, services were expanded to include Lowell and Vergennes Townships. In 1990 the fire department consolidated with the Lowell Area Rescue Squad, expanding the emergency services offered. In 2008 the governance of the fire department changed from being a municipal service of the City of Lowell to the Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority overseen by a Board of six members representing two members each from the City of Lowell, Lowell Charter Township and Vergennes Township. As of 2025, the Fire Department protected approximately sixty square miles and an approximate population of 15,624 residents.

The Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority and the Lowell Area Fire Department are comprised of highly dedicated, well-trained members providing department oversight and fire/emergency medical services to the citizens and visitors of the City of Lowell, Lowell Charter Township, and Vergennes Township.

Mission Statement

We are committed to providing fire suppression, medical services, and other emergency and non-emergency activities to the residents of the greater Lowell Area. We accomplish this mission through training, dedication, and education to ensure the protection of our membership and the community.

Vision Statement

The Lowell Area Fire Department will set the standard of excellence by honoring tradition, professionalism, customer service, and public education; we will also create leaders through training, education, and strong ethical values.

Core Values

Service: We protect and serve our entire community with a commitment to performance excellence.

Professionalism: We are dedicated to serving at the highest level of excellence, in a manner showing professionalism, commitment and respect for our mission. This commitment to excellence is demonstrated by a positive attitude, pride in the work we do, and conforming to a high standard of conduct.

Honor/Pride: The enormous commitment necessary to perform the Department's tasks requires excellence of character. We inspire each other through pride in our department, knowing that every action reflects upon every member of the department, both past and present. We take pride in ourselves as individuals, our members as a team, our department as a family, and our citizens as a community.

Integrity: We are committed to honest and ethical behavior. We will make decisions based on sound moral standards regardless of personal belief or benefit. We will work hard every day to maintain the highest professional standards possible, and to earn the public's trust through our actions.

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Family: We are a fire and emergency service family. We are committed to and accountable for each other because our lives depend on it. We value each member in our organization. We respect those who came before us and will strive to make the organization better for those who follow.

Staffing

Staffing is critical to operations committed to providing fire suppression, medical services, and other emergency and non-emergency activities to the residents of the greater Lowell area. Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority modifications to the 2024 staffing levels are necessary to accommodate ongoing growth in the member municipalities and to improve service delivery. These recommendations include adding one Administrative Coordinator position, six full-time 24/7 firefighter positions, and one Fire Inspector position.

The Administrative Coordinator position is intended to be part-time, not to exceed thirty-two hours per week. The person holding this position reports to the Fire Chief. Primary responsibilities include administrative, secretarial, and clerical tasks, such as answering phone calls, responding to public inquiries, communications, record retention, payroll, and equipment oversight. The estimated annual cost in 2025 is \$43,000 per year. The position will be filled at the earliest opportunity, but no later than the end of the 26/27 fiscal year.

The addition of up to six full-time Firefighter-EMT positions will provide two individuals per shift to ensure 24/7 coverage. These firefighters report to the Fire Chief (or designee). Adding these positions will enhance the quality of services and responsiveness to those in the department's service area. The firefighters will be stationed at the current facility. The estimated annual cost with benefits is \$636,000 per year. The positions will be phased in at the earliest opportunity, but no later than the end of the 26/27 fiscal year.

The Fire Inspector position is full-time. The person holding this position reports to the Fire Chief. Primary duties are the enforcement of all applicable fire prevention laws, regulations, codes, and ordinances related to protection of life and property. The Fire Inspector will obtain appropriate training and certifications to provide inspection services. The estimated cost with benefits is \$110,000 per year. The position will be filled at the earliest opportunity, but no later than the end of the 28/29 fiscal year.

Capital Fund

The purpose of a dedicated Capital Budget is to provide member municipalities with a financial forecast that allows sufficient time for member municipalities to strategically plan for maintaining current services and future fire department growth. Member municipalities are responsible for ensuring that sufficient funds are available at time of assessment.

The estimated capital budget for the twenty years from fiscal year 24-25 through fiscal year 43-44 totals \$11,851,566. The capital improvement budget includes \$9,351,566 for equipment replacement rotation, \$1,000,000 for additional equipment necessary for regional growth, and \$1,500,000 for fire station remodel upgrades, in part to accommodate full-time staff to appropriate governmental standards. These estimates include a 3% annual inflation rate. Member municipalities are notified in advance of planned capital equipment replacement and additions.

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The average annual capital cost is \$592,578 per year divided equally among member municipalities. Member municipalities are assessed at times of expenses occurred for capital equipment replacement and additions. The estimated total annual capital cost over the twenty-year forecast is \$197,526 per member municipality.

Member municipalities are responsible for planning jointly or individually for the appropriation of funds to support the Capital Budget. The Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority will review the capital budget annually and formally update the budget projections every five years. Budget projections will take into consideration such elements as public donations and grants to support the fire department.

Financial Considerations

The estimated annual budget increase for staffing and capital expenditures, once fully implemented, is \$1,381,578. The Fire & Emergency Services Authority surveyed thirteen comparable fire departments regarding their annual funding sources. The responses indicated a variety of revenue sources: 31% (8 departments) from dedicated fire millage, 31% (8 departments) from general funds, 19% (5 departments) from grants, 15% (4 departments) from other sources, 4% (1 department) from dedicated equipment/capital millage,

Feedback from member municipalities during the strategic planning process indicated that the current funding sources may not be insufficient to fully cover the \$1,381,578 implementation cost. The Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority plans to formally present the strategic plan to the member municipalities in 2025 and seek their input. After completing this process, the Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority will form an ad-hoc team of Authority member leadership, legal, financial, and emergency services experts to consider a sustainable approach to fire department funding. This may include a district or member municipalities dedicated fire millage in conjunction with the municipalities, along with other blended revenue sources such as increased general fund contributions, grants, and donations.

Revenue Services Generation

The Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority aims to implement the best practices to improve efficiency and lower member municipality costs. Various alternative revenue generation strategies have been assessed, including expanding coverage areas, consolidating fire departments, or providing medical transport services. Although these options might reduce costs in the future, they are not regarded as feasible at this time.

Member Contract

The Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority has reviewed and does not recommend any immediate modifications to the member municipalities contract and cost allocation formula. Subsequent recommendations to amend the contract or cost allocation formula will be reevaluated after the financial ad-hoc committee completes its process.

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Summary

Founded in 2008, the Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority (“Authority”) provides fire and emergency services for the City of Lowell, Lowell Charter Township, and Vergennes Township. This Authority is responsible for providing emergency services to an area of sixty square miles and a population of approximately 15,624 individuals. The Authority is overseen by a Board of six members representing two members each from the member municipalities.

In August 2024, the Authority Board formed a strategic planning committee to draft a 10-year strategic plan and a 20-year capital plan. This initiative aims to provide member municipalities with a financial forecast, allowing ample time for them to strategically plan for both the maintenance of current services and future growth of the fire department. As part of their thorough approach, the Strategic Planning Committee established strategic priorities, surveyed comparable fire departments and authorities, and examined the industry’s best practices.

The Strategic Planning Committee concluded that additional staffing is needed. The strategic plan includes adding one Administrative Coordinator, six full-time firefighter positions, and a Fire Inspector. These roles, to be fully phased in by the 28/29 fiscal year, will cost approximately \$789,000 annually once fully implemented.

The Strategic Planning Committee estimated capital budget for the twenty years from fiscal year 24-25 through fiscal year 43-44 totals \$11,851,566. The capital improvement budget includes \$9,351,566 for equipment replacement rotation, \$1,000,000 for additional equipment necessary for regional growth, and \$1,500,000 for fire station remodel upgrades, in part to accommodate full-time staff to appropriate governmental standards.

The projected annual budget for staffing and capital expenditure, upon full implementation, is estimated to be \$1,381,578 by the fiscal year 28/29. In September 2025, the Authority Board will present the draft strategic plan to the municipal governing boards to solicit their feedback. Following this, the Authority Board will form an ad-hoc team responsible for developing a sustainable funding strategy by 2025. This strategy may include a dedicated fire millage from the district or member municipalities, along with various blended revenue sources such as increased general fund contributions, grants, and donations.

The Strategic Planning Committee also considered various revenue generation strategies. Although these options might reduce costs in the future, they are not feasible at this time. The Strategic Planning Committee reviewed and does not recommend any immediate modifications to the member municipalities’ contract or cost allocation formula. The cost allocation formula will be reassessed after the financial ad-hoc team completes its work.