

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, March 11, 2025, AT 8:30 A.M.

AT

LOWELL FIRE DEPARTMENT
315 S. HUDSON
LOWELL, MI 49331

**Lowell Area Fire and
Emergency Services Authority
Agenda for the work session of
Tuesday March 11, 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 February 11, 2025, Minutes (Exhibit A) *
5. Strategic priorities review (Exhibit B)
6. Strategic plan draft discussion continued (Exhibit C): Note rearranged staffing and capital paragraphs. Added future committee discussions in to align with committee schedule.
7. Staffing discussion continued (Exhibit C, staffing paragraphs)

Recommendation: Approve the staff planning language and incorporate it into the draft strategic plan.

8. Finance capital equipment, revenue alternatives, preliminary discussion.
 - a. Recommendation: Approve adding draft verbiage to the strategic plan for review at the planning committee's next meeting. Request member departments form an ad hoc committee to develop financial recommendations, either individually or jointly, to support the strategic plan. These recommendations should be completed within three months after the plan's approval by the Fire Authority and then presented to the member departments.
 - b. Discuss possible financial options to include in the financial section of the strategic plan.
9. Benefits & risks to expanding coverage or merging departments.
10. Public comment (maximum of 2 minutes per speaker)

11. Member comments

12. Next strategic planning meeting: April 8, 2025, at 8:30 am

13. Adjournment*

*Requires motion/vote

MEETING MINUTES

Long Range Planning Subcommittee, Lowell Fire Authority
Tues., February 12, 2025 / 8:30am

Meeting called to order at 8:34 a.m. by Wittenbach.

1. **Roll call:** Tim Wittenbach, Kate Dernocoeur, Misty McClure-Anderson, Carl Blough, Beryl Bartkus (Lowell City rep, at 0845). Also present: Chief Cory Velzen, Cal Brinks (facilitator), Shantell Ford (Clerk, Vergennes Twp), Mike Burns (Lowell City), Dwayne Rasch (trustee, Vergennes Twp), Sherry Richmond (treasurer, Vergennes Twp)

2. **Public Comment re: Agenda:** None

3. **Approval of agenda & exhibits:** Motion to approve by Dernocoeur, seconded by Blough. All approved.

4. **Approval of Jan.14, 2025 minutes (Exhibit A).** Motion to approve by Blough with changes as noted, seconded by Dernocoeur. Discussion: minor grammar (corrected) and delete “(weather delay)”. Questions about site plan reviews (they are being done some, but they are being done sporadically, Velzen does not see them). All approved.

5. **Strategic priorities review (Exhibit B):** Cal gave an overview to guests about the process. Today, we are working on items #6 and #7. Item #13 was addressed in the capital discussion (Item #5) will be removed.

6. **Strategic plan draft (Exhibit C):** Under Capital Fund, numbers will be rounded off. As the committee works through the listed strategic priorities, the decisions and findings will result in a complete draft to go forward with.

7. **Staffing discussion, continued (Exhibit D)**

Decision Points (3):

1. *Should the department add a dedicated administrative support position? (Exhibit E)*
2. *Should the department add a fire inspector? (Exhibit E)*
3. *Should the department add full-time paid employees?*

Drafts of job descriptions are now written and presented.

Discussion:

1. Should the department add dedicated administrative support: Anderson inquired about re-writing the description according to typical HR job description parameters. (Discussion. The current format is what has been consistent with formatting throughout the wider policy handbook. **Action Item:** Misty, Kate and Cory to discuss separately.) Tim: should it be a person who can also do fire-related work? (Discussion: this person needs to be dedicated to the administrative role, so this person would better serve if able to focus skills/knowledge pertinent to solely performing admin duties, and not also need to spend time maintaining fire-related credentials.) Kate: how much time does Velzen currently devote to administrative work that a part-time administrative assistant could do? (Discussion: 15hours/month for payroll, 5hrs/mo for training records, 10-15 hrs/mo for invoicing, 10hr/mo pulling data and prepping board packets – totals well within range of justifying an administrative assistant. We could actually see this going to a full-time position before long. Need to balance the need for officers, chief and firefighters to do this sort of work.) Cal: is this a 32-hr position? (Discussion: yes, for now.) Blough: need to

consider this for this July's budget, not a year out (Discussion: general agreement, although we just did the budget - to be discussed by the Board). Cal: tentatively write in for 26-27 and the Board can discuss pulling it forward. Kate: where will this person fit logistically? (Discussion: we'll make it work.)

2. Should the department add a Fire Inspector: this position could be budgeted for the 28-29 budget, but could there be something in place in the meantime? (Discussion: Velzen-Cascade cannot absorb LFD into their current capability. We could look for internal support in the meantime. It's a good opportunity to build internal talent. That person would need to be certified (can take 6-12 months to be fully qualified) but can act in that role under Chief's guidance. Having an administrative assistant in place to help coordinate inspections would be very helpful.) Tim: is this person deputized? (Discussion: No, that's the next level. We use Lowell PD or KCSO for such levels of incidents.) Question: where would invoices for paying for review of plans be sent? Question re: length of service stipulation in the job description (Velzen: there is discretion to those figures. I would prefer to grow internal talent.)

3. Should the department add full-time employees? What's the long term view and most helpful in answering needs: Velzen: 24-hour coverage is expensive. The best plan is to have two people available at all times. Currently there are two people working part-timers 8-4 weekdays. The model is working, but within 4-5 years, we will want/need round-the-clock coverage because the call volume will be too much to ask of paid-on-call people. Paid-on-call people are the strength of the department but aren't always needed for smaller initial responses, so the Paid On Call (POC) staff is making it work. We are trending toward 1,400-1,500 calls/year within 4-5 years. Considering the staffing changes now will provide time to make it possible to build the means to pay for them. Meanwhile, we may need to leverage POC talent to weekends, but people are being over-taxed increasingly now. The model could also be a graduated process of 12 hrs/day building to 24 hrs. Question: would there be POC savings as a result? Possibly. Also, some reductions of POC response, but they are still very much needed and valued and are the strength of the department. Cal recap: recommending 2 full-time firefighters on duty per shift as a 4-5 yr growth strategy.

Tim: if a POC person fills in for a full-timer, would they make the full-timer's hourly rate? (Velzen: Questions like this create interesting dynamics between the groups, including morale. It is a crossroad, but where we are now is not sustainable. What motivates POC personnel - they want to run calls and feel valued. Plus: what's in the best interests of the citizens? Response times would improve overnight with someone staffing the station 24/7. Tim: voters will have to drive moving this forward. Building staffing can be done in stages. Velzen: Even now, part-timers are often here until 6pm even though they are asked to be here 8-4, so it's an increasing burden for them. Carl: how to build in a method to get from one point to the next? Affording this will probably include going to the voters. Until then, we will continue in increments and stages. Having a strategic plan will set us up better for going to the voters. Go big with the first "ask." Cal: the member governments are (now) responsible so building these increases into coming budgets should not surprise member entities. Cal to work on a draft to add to the strategic plan document.

8. Benefits & risks to expanding coverage or merging departments (preliminary discussion)
Discussion: Vergennes has a lot of outlying areas, re: run times, bordering Ada, Cannon, Grattan. Lowell Twp has Alto, Cascade, the city has Saranac, others. Mutual aid agreements are in place. Should we consider doing more? Velzen: is there a strategic point of seeing if it is a benefit to have others buy into the consortium, re: not doing everything by yourself, e.g. fire inspections.

9. **Public comment:** Velzen: Thanks to everyone for being here. Shantell: Are medical vehicles still going home with an officer at night? (Velzen: No, except for certain situations, because of the medications on the trucks. Some people do go direct when the situation suggests that they can make a real impact.

10. **Member comments** Bartkus: is president of Lowell Chamber of Commerce, so will be here ASAP after their regular meetings on Tuesday mornings. Blough: welcome to new members. Thanked Burns for participating. Burns: this is really needed. Anderson: Thanks for the welcome. Wittenbach: appreciation to everyone, and we need to work hard to cover all the concerns.

11. **Next strategic planning meeting:** March 11, 2025 at 8:30a.m.

12. **Adjournment:** Motion to adjourn by Dernocoeur, seconded by Wittenbach. All approved. The meeting ended at 10 a.m.

-Katie Dernocoeur, Recording

-Tim Wittenbach, Board Vice-Chair

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)~~
-  6. Staffing model (i.e. 24/7 full time)
-  7. Benefits & risks to expanding coverage or merging departments
-  8. Recommend ways to finance capital equipment
-  9. Revenue alternatives
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?
16. Other considerations & documentation

Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority
10-year Strategic Plan
Revision: Draft 3/11/2025

Fire Department

Lowell was founded as a trading post in 1831 and incorporated as Village of Lowell in 1861; at the same time a group of civil minded citizens created the Lowell Volunteer Fire Department. Later, services were expanded to the 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 Township and Vergennes Township. The combined square miles protected by the Fire Department is approximately sixty square miles protecting a non-transient population of approximately 15,624.

The Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority and the Lowell Area Fire Department is comprised of a number 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 task 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 fire operations committed to providing fire suppression, medical services, and other emergency and non-emergency activities to the residents of the greater Lowell Area. The Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority modifications of the current staffing model is to accommodate member growth and improve service delivery. These recommendations include adding one Administrative Coordinator position, one Fire Inspector position, and full-time 24/7 Fire Fighter positions.

The Administrative Coordinator position is a thirty-two hour per week position. The position reports to the Fire Chief. Primary responsibilities involve administrative, secretarial, and clerical tasks, including answering phone calls, responding to public fire-related inquiries, communications, record retention, payroll, and equipment oversight. The estimated annual cost 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 Fire Inspector position is full-time. The 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 take advanced training and obtain certification 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.

The addition of full-time Fire Fighter positions will include two individuals per shift to ensure 24/7 coverage. The positions report to the Fire Chief. Adding these positions will enhance the quality of services and responsiveness to the residents of the greater Lowell 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.

Capital Fund

The purpose of the Capital Budget is to provide Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority member agencies with a financial forecast so that the agency has sufficient time to strategically plan for maintaining current and plan for future fire department growth. Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority member agencies are responsible for ensuring sufficient funds are available at time of assessment.

The estimated capital budget for the next (20) years fiscal year 24-25 through fiscal year 43-44 is \$11,853,307. The capital improvement budget includes \$8,353,307 for equipment replacement rotation, \$1,000,000 for additional equipment necessary for regional growth, and \$1,500,000 for fire station remodel upgrades. The estimates are based on a 3% annual inflation rate.

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The average annual capital cost is \$592,665 per year. Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority member agency assessments are at time of expenses occurred for capital equipment replacement and additions. The estimated total annual capital cost over the (20) year forecast is \$197,555 per member annually. Member agencies will be notified (5) years in advance of capital equipment replacement and additions. The fire station remodel upgrades assessments are divided evenly over a (5) year period beginning fiscal year 25-26.

The Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority member agencies are responsible jointly or individually financially plan for 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 (5) five years through a strategic planning process. Budget projections will take into consideration public donations, and grants to support the fire department at time of receipt and financially responsible decisions.

Financial Considerations

- Cost Allocation Formula
- Recommend ways to finance
- Revenue alternatives

Joint Services Agreement

- Review
- Governance

Alternative Considerations

- Benefits & risks to expanding coverage or merging departments.
- Fire Station Addition (2nd fire station)
- Ambulance Service Considerations

Conclusion

- Summary
- Action