

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, January 14, 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 January 12, 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 November 12, 2024, Minutes (Exhibit A) \*
5. Strategic priorities review (Exhibit B)
6. Strategic plan draft (Exhibit C)
7. PowerPoint presentation (temporarily on hold)
8. Capital fund budget equipment (i.e., fire truck purchases) discussion, continued (Exhibit D)
9. Staffing preliminary discussion and next steps (Exhibit E)  
Decision Points (3)
  1. Should the department add paid full-time employees?
  2. Should the department add a fire inspector?
  3. Should the department add a dedicated administrative support position?
10. Public comment (maximum of 2 minutes per speaker)
11. Evaluation of process
12. Member comments
13. Next strategic planning meeting: February 11, 2025, at 8:30 am
14. Adjournment\*

\*Requires motion/vote

MEETING MINUTES  
Long Range Planning Subcommittee, Lowell Fire Authority  
November 12, 2024

1. **Roll call:** Jessica Marks, Kate Dernocoeur, Emma Wikstrom, Carlton Blough, Tim Wittenbach. Also present: Cal Brinks, Jerry Hale (Lowell Twp Board), Cory Velzen (Fire Chief)

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

3. **Approval of agenda & exhibits:** Cal gave overview. Motion to approve by Bough, seconded by Wikstrom. All approved

4. **Approval of 10/8/24 minutes (Exhibit A).** Motion to approve without changes or edits by Wikstrom, seconded by Blough. All approved.

5. **Strategic priorities review (Exhibit B):** We will be discussing items 5 & 6 today.

6. **PowerPoint presentation (temporarily on hold):** The initial version's audience will be member agencies. After the next meeting, we should be in a position to begin drafting the PowerPoint. A version geared towards the general public will be built afterwards.

7. **McGrath Study remaining recommendations 2020 (Exhibit C):**

a) Items falling within the scope of the Strategic Plan Priorities: emergency back-up power to the station, emission exhaust management, part-time personnel, administrative support. See Agenda items #9 & 10.

b) Items outside the strategic plan priorities: Board authority, governance, recruitment age & year analysis, fire pre-planning, personnel records, performance management record-keeping, policy manual. The question remains as to how to address these things.

c) Ongoing: Age & Year analysis, accreditation, NFPA

Cory: re-reading the McGrath report was a good review & it lent perspective to re-read it. The study/report was done during COVID leading to some limitations for McGrath. Many items here apply to the building remodel as a later priority.

Kate: Some "out of scope" items are actually either on-going or within the scope of this project at least by implication. Would add Governance to #1 & administrative assistance and pre-planning to #12.

8. **Survey Tally (Exhibit D):** The purpose is to build the "why" of this long-range process & planning. Cal gave an overview of the Nov. 2024 Fire Department Survey (13 out of 18 departments responded). Tim: Fire departments report typically to just one entity (such as a city manager), whereas LAFD reports to three municipalities. But here there is a softer reporting/governance process as compared with other (such as Ada, which reports daily to the city manager).

Question #5 distance in miles: Lowell was among the highest mileages.

Question #6: there are Master Plans at 4 of the departments (Cory to ask for copies)

Question #7: LAFD equipment is similar to peers. Carl: this data also has to do with who has more than one station.

Question #8: aerial ladder trucks are typically in urban departments, although Sparta has one for barns / LFD should focus on other things for now.

Question #9: LAFD is similar to peers

Question #10: one of LAFDs is a hybrid

Question #11: [nothing to report]

Question #12: It is unclear if this info is helpful without finding out what each is (LAFD has a boat & a UTV). Discussion: what happens when the population will support another station & all the equipment that would then be needed? / Tim: our equipment looked like more than average in a way. Cory: we have more engines, but Carl's point is right & you have to know your response area, we have a higher than average number of smaller vehicles. No one could loan LAFD a temporary piece of equipment when we needed one, whereas we were able to loan one to Grattan when they needed an engine. Carl: Our equipment line-up is average or a little better. Cory: also, grants & Community Fund has been a big help to get us to the above-average optics. Tim: a map of proximity of other community stations might show others that are closer by mutual aid.

Question #13, re: paid full-time employees: Gaines has 38 but that is apparently an outlier

Question #14, re: paid part-time: this is the paid-on-call volunteer scenario (and the answers showed lots of variation) - to be discussed. Carl: shows there's not one way to staff a fire department.

Question #15: training hours: LAFD is in the highest group in terms of hours of training

Question #16: fire inspector: LAFD is one of 2 without a fire inspector

Question #17 re: dedicated administration:

Question #18, re: medical certification: the majority are EMT including LAFD

Question #19, re: # of calls/month

Question #20, re: non-medical: LAFD is about the mean (Industry average = medical calls are 60-75% of everyone's call loads)

Question #21, re: average response times: Cory: Lowell's numbers are skewed by distance & staffing

Question #22, re: total annual budget: note that the number includes capital funds (and one respondent was in the middle of a capital improvement project), another throws leftover from millage into their capital fund.

Question #23, re: capital fund budget: the data is muddled and a little difficult to interpret. Three had zero capital funds, including LAFD. Note: the median was \$600k. Tim: what would the 10-year rolling average be? LAFD has bought equipment in the past several years. Carl: if trying to compare, we have to consider the support from Lowell Area Community Fund; a lot has come in from them. Cory: one needs some history to see the big picture. Kate: this is why this is such a complex, complicated process without a straight, transparent answer as we go forward (there are things we cannot control, e.g. LACF). Tim: could re-ask the survey departments for a historical picture.

Question #24, re: how annual operations are funded

Question #25, re: activities solely performed by FD staff: LAFD handles quite a bit internally.

Question #26: all respondents agreed to be recontacted.

Discussion: Cal: did this accomplish what we were interested in knowing? There was general agreement that it was worth the effort, and Tim said it has been a huge help.

## **9: Capital fund budget equipment discussion (continued) / Exhibit E:**

Using the 20-year spreadsheet created by Cory, with reminder that this is a fluid set of data

## Exhibit A – Draft Minutes

depending on how vehicles/equipment hold up. He has added a “Station Remodel” line + other needs for the future with a “Future Apparatus” line. If the numbers are added, then divided by 20 (years) it demonstrates the validity of putting around = \$600k/yr into a capital fund (+ the annual inflation rate should also be added). Could add a line item for local partnerships with a deduction if that’s “do-able.”

Cory: If we are looking at doing a station remodel in 2027-28, it is possible that many of us may not be in the room. Moving forward: a thing like a station remodel doesn’t happen in a month or two but it takes time to do it right. A significant remodel would cost at least what’s on this estimate (\$1.69k-ish). To look at these numbers: a consistent amount going in re: capital fund, it could scale back based on grants, etc. These are big numbers. There may be more vehicles needed over time. The survey is providing us with good perspective. You have to know yourself & your area to respond to your own jurisdiction. One also needs to be mindful of government regulations, and risk assessments with their liabilities need attention as well, incl. determining what mutual aid partners can do to support.

Cal: leaders from each municipality will have to turn to their constituents. If you lay out a 20 year plan you should revisit it every five years.

Tim: we’ve always come to the window when the FD has needed us. Lowell Twp has done so as well. We’ve never said “no” to the FD, whether it was planned or a surprise. We know it’s coming. We’re prepared. This is a big leap to start including the capital planning. It doubles out twp budget.

Jessica: As a taxpayer, I’d rather see funds go towards essential things e.g. fire, roads, security. Would rather know the number up-front for planning. It’s a big number but in my 24 years here, I’ve done more to my house than this station has had in upgrades, and you have to keep investing in capital needs.

Emma: As with Jess & Tim, it’s a big number but the planning, thought, care is evident. Nothing has changed in years. Fire & EMS as essential cornerstones of the community the planning matters and what we’re doing is preparing for those questions.

Carl: Would like to see the life expectancy of apparatus on a list. Capital budget demands putting the numbers together. Municipalities will have to figure it out according to what we eventually decide for a method, but we need to know the amount, and how it’s funded is up to the municipalities. Capital funding as shown this shouldn’t be too out of line according to the survey

Kate: worry about the sustainability of approaching Municipalities for more money without a plan. We may have always come to the window, but the mumbling has been how big these numbers are getting....

Jerry Hale: commended the committee. It’s scary, and it’ll be a big budget impact, and how do we get there? With the 425 agreement, there is tax benefit and would make this more do-able (wouldn’t help Vergennes) and would help keep citizen millage rate as is. Otherwise it’s possible we would have to look at doing another millage.

Carl: Cory’s spreadsheet projections came out in basic agreement with the survey results.

Cory: As you put money away for capital projects, you want to know the next year is clear, and it gets fuzzier going out, but there’s still a need to look ahead 20 years. Strategically, the Board may need to revisit annually without short-changing yourself in the long haul. Good transparency to those who support our department might be a good result by being diligent.

Cal: do you recommend to assess members annually and keep it in a fund or prefer to let the member department know it’s coming and they can figure out how to finance it?

Kate: that’s a matter of control. I worry about sustainability.

Tim: agreement is written that munis are responsible for their portion. If we have a 5-10

year plan, it works for us. We're in good shape when it comes to communication & not blindsiding the townships. (Jerry Hale: agreed)

Jessica & Carl: Item #11 – we will discuss if it's best to keep doing things this way.

Cory: it is a scary number, and I want to know my money is spent wisely. As community leaders, the transparency needs to be very evident.

Carl: a roadmap is better than no roadmap.

Jerry: Fire auth has grown a lot and there's more truth in the numbers we're getting to know you're doing the best you can and you need support.

Cal: suggest that we'll inform our members of this DRAFT capital fund budget. How we assess is, the number is the same regardless.

**10. Staffing (preliminary discussion).** Where do we go from here? To be discussed at the next meeting.

**11. Public comment:** none

**12. Member comments.**

Tim: doing well

Carl: doing well + hard work ahead. If capital is hard, staffing will be more challenging – would like to see different methods of how staffing can be done. Then put a dollar figure to it. (Cal: it's coming, but don't shoot the messenger!) Need to do it right.

Jerry: nothing to add

Cory: appreciates the transparency in these hard discussions. It takes lots of time & effort to look through these numbers.

Jessica: we are getting into the meat & potatoes of what we started & on right track. It's a lot but it needs to be done.

Emma: echo Jessica.


Kate: thanks and on a good track.

**13. Next meeting:** Cal has a conflict. Move to January. Second Tuesday, January 14 ,0830hr (there was discussion about seeing if the 0830hr time is best for the majority of people)

**14. Adjournment:** Motion to adjourn by Carl, seconded by Kate. Meeting ended at 1005hrs

# 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 1/14/2025

**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 60 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 insure 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.



Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority  
10-year Strategic Plan  
Revision: Draft 1/14/2025

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.

**Capital Fund**

**Staffing**

**Financial Considerations**

**Cost Allocation Formula**

**Joint Services Agreement**

**Other Considerations**

DRAFT

## **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 calculated based on a 3% annual inflation rate.

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 to 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.

	Current	Future	Future	Future	
	8 hr 5 day week	48/96	Inspector Position	Admin	Total Cost Future Staffing
<b>Hourly Rate</b>	\$19 per hr	\$25-28 per hr	\$27-\$32	\$20-24 per hr	
<b>Benefit Package</b>	No	Yes	Yes	no	
<b>Benefit Package Cost per person</b>	N/A	\$31,000	\$31,000	\$3,000	
<b>Shifts</b>	N/A	3	45 hr	32 hr	
<b>Personel</b>	2 per day	2 per shift / 24/7	5 day per week M-F	4 day per week M-Th	
<b>Salary</b>	N/A	\$75,000	\$80,000	\$40,000	
<b>Annual Cost</b>	\$82,000	\$636,000	\$111,000	\$43,000	\$790,000
<b>POC cost</b>	\$230,000	\$230,000	\$230,000	\$230,000	\$230,000
					\$1,020,000

Added Positions	Estimated Salary	Health Insurance	Non Benefit Estimate	Total Compensation	#	Estimated Total Cost
Full-time FF	\$75,000	\$21,000	\$10,000	\$106,000	6	\$636,000
Inspector	\$80,000	\$21,000	\$10,000	\$111,000	1	\$111,000
Administive Assistant	\$40,000	N/A	\$3,000	\$43,000	1	\$43,000
					8	\$790,000

**1. Does your department have paid full-time employees?**

<u>Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>
Yes	13
No	0

*Lowell has one full-time employees.*

Full-time employees by shift				
<u>Fire Department</u>	<u>First</u>	<u>Second</u>	<u>Third</u>	<u>Total</u>
Allendale Fire	5	0	0	5
Byron Township Fire Department	9	0	0	9
Caledonia Fire Department	2	2	2	6
Cascade Fire	11	6	6	23
Gaines Charter Township Fire Department	14	12	12	38
Grand Haven Township Fire Rescue	2	2	2	6
Grand Rapids Township Fire Department	1	1	1	3
Grandville	3	3	3	9
Ionia Department of Public Safety	7	0	4	11
Kalamazoo Township Fire Department	9	9	9	27
Lowell Area Fire Department	1	0	0	1
Texas Township Fire Department	4	2	2	8
Walker City Fire Department	13	0	0	13

Note: Shifts/coverages vary i.e. 24-hour shifts, weekends, etc.

**2. Does your department have paid part-time employees?**

<u>Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>
Yes	11
No	2

*Lowell has thirty-one part-time employees.*

Allendale Fire	31
Caledonia Fire Department	17
Gaines Charter Township Fire Department	6
Grand Haven Township Fire Rescue	26
Grand Rapids Township Fire Department	10
Grandville	22
Ionia Department of Public Safety	12
Kalamazoo Township Fire Department	45
Lowell Area Fire Department	31
Texas Township Fire Department	19

Walker City Fire Department

24

**3. On average how many hours of training per month does each firefighter take?**

10 responses

<u>Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>
Less than 2 hours training per month	0
2-3 hours training per month	0
4-5 hours training per month	5
6 or more hours training per month	6

*Lowell has six or more hours training per month.*

**4. Does your department have a fire inspector?**

<u>Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>	<u>Type of Position</u>
Yes	11	10 full-time, 1 part-time paid
No	2	

*Lowell does not have a fire inspector.*

**5. Does your department have a dedicated administration position(s)**

<u>Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>	<u>Type of Position</u>
Yes	8	7 full-time, 1 part-time paid
No	5	

*Lowell does not have a dedicated administrative position.*