

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, February 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 February 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 January 14, 2025, Minutes (Exhibit A) *
5. Strategic priorities review (Exhibit B)
6. Strategic plan draft (Exhibit C)
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)
 - a. Temporary contracting services opportunity?
3. Should the department add full-time paid employees?

Recommendation: Draft paragraphs based on discussion for inserting into the draft strategic plan.

8. Benefits & risks to expanding coverage or merging departments preliminary discussion.
9. Public comment (maximum of 2 minutes per speaker)
10. Member comments
11. Next strategic planning meeting: March 11, 2025, at 8:30 am
12. Adjournment*

*Requires motion/vote

MEETING MINUTES

Long Range Planning Subcommittee, Lowell Fire Authority
Tues., January 14, 2025 / 8:30am

Meeting called to order at 8:50a.m. (Weather delay) by Brinks

1. **Roll call:** Tim Wittenbach, Kate Dernocoeur, Emma Wikstrom, Carl Blough. Also present: Chief Cory Velzen, Cal Brinks (facilitator), Jessica Marks (Lowell Twp), Shantell Ford (Clerk, Vergennes Twp)
2. **Public Comment re: Agenda:** none
3. **Approval of agenda & exhibits:** Motion to approve by Dernocoeur, seconded by Wikstrom. All approved.
4. **Approval of Nov.12, 2024 minutes (Exhibit A).** Motion to approve by Wittenbach, seconded by Wikstrom. All approved.
5. **Strategic priorities review (Exhibit B):** We will be discussing items 5 & 6 today.
6. **Strategic plan draft (Exhibit C):** Brinks has begun a draft document. Opener was taken from McGrath study. P.2 sections will be filled out as we go through the process. Maybe add a line for capital expenses (new buildings) as a major line item, not to be lost in the “other” category. In the end it will be a usable working draft for public/governmental presentation.
7. **PowerPoint presentation (temporarily on hold).**
8. **Capital fund budget equipment discussion (i.e. fire truck purchases, cont.) / Exhibit D:**
 Comments: wondering about the amounts (\$200k annually) - they are derived from the 20-year projection broken down annually and divided among the 3 municipalities. To be reviewed at least every 5 years. Is \$1.5million enough for a fire station? (That number geared for remodel.) Numbers reflect what we learned in the survey. Numbers will inevitably need to be adjusted over time. Planning now will make future decisions more possible because it’s a long-term plan that is not a surprise to the governing bodies. Looking at the projections out to the far future, it’s a place to start. Cost of a new station? Cascade’s new building was \$11million, done from scratch, brand-new. Byron Center: building a 2nd station for \$2.5million now (3 bay double deep with sleeping quarters). Fund balances will probably not cover it all = need other fundraising will probably be needed, as in the final line of the draft document. (Building upgrades were already recommended by McGrath in 2019.) Keeping up and not skipping years will matter. (Minor: round numbers for public documents.)
9. **Staffing (preliminary discussion) and next steps (Exhibit E).**
Decision Points (3):
 1. *Should the department add full-time paid employees?*
 2. *Should the department add a fire inspector?*
 3. *Should the department add a dedicated admin support position?*
 Comments on the three Decision Points:
 2. *Should the department add a fire inspector?* Yes. There is a clear liability not to be doing fire inspections. Also, a full time firefighter (maybe more expensive but serving dual

purpose but inspections being priority). Do we have enough to hire someone full-time? How to balance with where inspections are needed re: the three governing bodies. Having a fire inspector does give another management leadership position in addition to the chief. Money toward fire prevention versus money spent toward fire suppression. Let that person hold dual roles (e.g. deputy chief? I would want to consider more deeply.) Elsewhere: 11 of 13 respondents have them (10 fulltime). Sometimes they work in tandem with the building department. Fire inspector credentialing: 80hr course + other credential certifications & experience + annual continuing education. ISO rating can be influenced. Should the township/city do their own inspections if there's not enough volume to justify the position? Job share (Cascade, Caledonia) has been happening to a small extent, but it's not thorough, e.g. kitchen hoods should be checked two times a year & it's not happening. Site plan reviews aren't being done, either (now). Requires risk analysis. Options for fire prevention/inspection: hire, or contract for the short term to see how it goes, don't hire. What time frame and how to budget for it + job description + put that person in charge of fire prevention events, etc.? A cost-effective position would be to have this person be the inspector plus be able to respond to calls. Is there a privatized fire inspection company (would that be less expensive)? Or is this dual role? Conclusion: develop a scope of a plan, a 5-year plan (see Exhibit E) + costs will increase annually, too. After having some experience with inspections, some inspections are done by independent companies, and would it be more cost-effective for an admin assistant to be sure they are being done rather than paying for an inspector? Reply: with a person on the FD staff there is a direct contact = strategic advantage for the department. If hiring full-time, make one of them an inspector re: the cost.

Action Item: Velzen to ask Cascade (for example) to contract us for a portion of time/week to gain insight into what the work entails and does on our behalf (and the bill would go direct to the municipality = one benefit)?

3. Should the department add a dedicated administrative support position?

Advocate for having someone in the building not necessarily also a firefighter = having someone here able to manage the administrative details & continuity of the work being done (coupled with a fire-savvy person). Velzen is currently doing too much admin work and could use his time better. Ideas: write a job description & note who's currently doing those things. Someone has to be the face of the operations. A lot has been put onto the operational staff (officers) & that's a burden to them. They've been making it work, but it's not ideal. E.g. putting out an annual report is a big time pull. Also, the PR side of things. Even media posts = 3-5 hrs/month that someone has to do. Velzen: this may not be a full-time position, but certainly would be a part-time position (32 hours/week). Consensus: yes. It makes sense to give the command staff more time to do their parts better. We could put this back in the budget for next year. Not refilled because it was a firefighter/admin position that morphed to all firefighters (no admin support). Action Item: ask other departments to get job descriptions from them for our next meeting + a tally by command staff showing who's doing what.

1. Should the department add full-time paid employees? [We will come back to this next time]

General comments: you can hire part-time people but when you go all full-time, the costs are really big. You can contract some professionals and not have to pay for a full-time position.

10. Public comment: none

11. Evaluation of process:

Kate: Good & well-guided, with open conversation

Emma: setting a framework for future versions of this Board whether it is us or others + clarity is going to help perpetuate what we are working towards. The guidance is invaluable.

Carl: on the right track. Lots of information here and it will be good in the end for everyone, even the municipalities.

Tim: said a lot, it's great.

Cory: day to day these are good conversations, and I appreciate it- as we make decisions things fall into place. It is a strategic long-term perspective for what to fix/do for the next 10-20 years. Roadmaps & framework are of goof value.

Cal: we are addressing the future, not necessarily fixing something that is broken today.




12. **Member comments** [as under evaluation line above]

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

14. **Adjournment:** Motion to adjourn by Wikstrom, seconded by Wittenbach. The meeting ended at 10:15a.m.

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 2/11/2025

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 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 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.

Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority
10-year Strategic Plan
Revision: Draft 2/11/2025

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

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.

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.

Staffing

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

Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority

Department Administrative Policy

Subject: **Job Description – Administrative Coordinator**

AP Reference#: **A00325**

Original Effective Date: 01/25/25

Revision Date: 01/25/25

Job Description

PURPOSE

- I. **Job Description:** Under the direction of the Fire Chief, the Administrative Coordinator is responsible for performing various administrative duties to facilitate effective and efficient operations of the Lowell Area Fire Department. The Administrative Coordinator serves as an “at will” employee and may be terminated from employment at any time, with or without cause, and with or without notice.

PROCEDURE

II. Essential Duties & Responsibilities:

- A. Reports to the Fire Chief (or designee).
- B. Performs general administrative, secretarial and clerical assistance duties in a confidential and professional manner, including correspondence, forms, notices, invoices, statistical tabulations and data, reports, requisitions, purchase orders, memoranda, ordinance resolutions, and other such items.
- C. Answers and transfers phone calls into the department in a professional and courteous manner. Takes accurate and complete messages. Also, responds to and welcomes visitors who come into the Fire Department.
- D. Responds to routine inquiries from the general public such as fielding complaints and/or questions about fire-related ordinances, standards, and codes, and also their questions related to fire regulations, procedures, records and reports.
- E. Opens and screens incoming mail (written or electronic) to facilitate timely responses to such materials, and processes outgoing mail.
- F. Establishes and maintains effective filing systems for written and electronic materials.
- G. Enters payroll data for the Fire Department and maintains payroll spreadsheets monthly.
- H. Processes Fire Department invoices accurately and promptly.
- I. Reviews Personal Protective Equipment checklists for fire personnel to ensure proper protection of firefighters in a timely manner.

LOWELL AREA FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES AUTHORITY RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER, AMEND, MODIFY OR ELIMINATE THIS POLICY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

Authored by: Corwin Velzen, Fire Chief

Reviewed by: Command Staff

Approved by: LAFESA Board

Related Policies/Procedures/Guides:

Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority

Department Administrative Policy

Subject: **Job Description – Administrative Coordinator**

AP Reference#: **A00325**

Original Effective Date: 01/25/25

Revision Date: 01/25/25

Job Description

- J. Orders fire apparatus equipment, supplies and firefighter gear as needed.
- K. Maintains departmental, organizational and statistical data as needed.
- L. Works in conjunction with the Fire Chief (or designee) to submit informational articles (written and/or electronic) for Township and city newsletters.
- M. Compiles and prepares information for Monthly and Annual Reports and other departmental reports, which may require creative and/or statistical skills.
- N. Assists in coordinating requests from businesses, schools and residents who are planning special events for area businesses, safety days, fire extinguisher training, car seat installation, open burning permits (residential and agricultural), and any other services offered by Lowell Area Fire Department.
- O. Assists with coordination of corporate sponsorships for public fire safety educational materials and schedules Fire Department personnel for Fire Prevention Week activities at area schools.
- P. Registers Fire Department personnel for classes.
- Q. Assists the Training Coordinator as needed with preparations for onsite training.
- R. Consistently and promptly updates Fire Department training records.
- S. Coordinates with the State of Michigan and Kent County EMS regarding licensing of EMS vehicles as well as assisting coordination of EMS continuing education programming for personnel.
- T. Maintains and updates State of Michigan driver's license subscription service regarding employee driving records as needed.
- U. Maintains and updates the State of Michigan Log and Summary of Occupational Illnesses and Injuries sustained by department employees. Also, prepares the year-end summary for the Department of Labor.
- V. Assists with insurance company inquiries about property loss and damage.
- W. Sends False Alarm Notifications and other cost-recovery invoices to businesses and residents as needed.
- X. Compiles and submits annual information to the Michigan Department of Consumers & Industry Services for renewal of the department's First Responder License.

LOWELL AREA FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES AUTHORITY RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER, AMEND, MODIFY OR ELIMINATE THIS POLICY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

Authored by: Corwin Velzen, Fire Chief

Reviewed by: Command Staff

Approved by: LAFESA Board

Related Policies/Procedures/Guides:

Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority

Department Administrative Policy

Subject: **Job Description – Administrative Coordinator**

AP Reference#: **A00325**

Original Effective Date: 01/25/25

Revision Date: 01/25/25

Job Description

III. Minimum Required Skills & Training:

- A. High school graduate or GED equivalent (preferred: experience and/or additional education in public relations skills)
- B. Computer/technological and typing skills sufficient to carry out the above essential duties and responsibilities.
- C. Interpersonal communication skills for effectively working with the general public, departmental vendors, and Fire Department personnel to ensure appropriate responses to interpersonal situations and administrative matters.
- D. Ability to read and comprehend detailed and sometimes complicated information such as rules, regulations, policies and procedures.
- E. Ability to prioritize work based on its relative importance to the various responsibilities of the position.
- F. Able to work independently in order to schedule and complete tasks in a timely fashion in an environment where interruptions are frequent.
- G. Physical ability and manual dexterity to use equipment typical of an office setting, including lifting of office equipment and supplies weighing 25 pounds or more to waist-high levels. This position requires prolonged sitting.

LOWELL AREA FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES AUTHORITY RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER, AMEND, MODIFY OR ELIMINATE THIS POLICY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

Authored by: Corwin Velzen, Fire Chief

Reviewed by: Command Staff

Approved by: LAFESA Board

Related Policies/Procedures/Guides:

Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority

Department Administrative Policy

Subject: **Job Description – Fire Inspector**

AP Reference#: **A00315**

Original Effective Date: 01/25/25

Revision Date: 01/25/25

Job Description

PURPOSE

- I. Job Description:** The Fire Inspector shall be a member of the Lowell Area Fire & Emergency Services Authority. 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 reports to the Fire Chief and serves as an “at will” employee and may be terminated from employment at any time, with or without cause, and with or without notice.

PROCEDURE

II. Essential Duties & Responsibilities:

- A. Enforces all applicable fire prevention laws, regulations, codes and ordinances related to the protection of life and property.
- B. Participates in public education programs including conducting the fire prevention and safety programs in conjunction with other members of the department.
- C. Assists Vergennes and Lowell Townships and Lowell City building departments as needed.
- D. Makes regular and periodic inspection of churches, industrial sites, apartment buildings, commercial buildings and places of public assembly to detect and correct possible fire hazards and to ensure compliance with applicable codes, laws, ordinances and regulations.
- E. Follows-up on all legal, code, regulatory, ordinance violations to ascertain and achieve compliance.
- F. Prepares and maintains correspondence, records and reports relating to the Fire Inspection activities of this department.
- G. Prepares, conducts, documents, and properly files pre-fire incident surveys for all non-residential properties in the Fire Authority coverage district.
- H. Responds to complaints from citizens as it pertains to fire safety.

LOWELL AREA FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES AUTHORITY RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER, AMEND, MODIFY OR ELIMINATE THIS POLICY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

Authored by: Corwin Velzen, Fire Chief

Reviewed by: Command Staff

Approved by: LAFESA Board

Related Policies/Procedures/Guides:

Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority

Department Administrative Policy

Subject: **Job Description – Fire Inspector**

AP Reference#: **A00315**

Original Effective Date: 01/25/25

Revision Date: 01/25/25

Job Description

- I. Serves in the rank of Lieutenant (minimum), and performs all of the functions of a firefighter in all phases of fire protection and emergency medical services as needed.
- J. Follows the departmental Chain of Command with regard to all activities.
- K. Fire Inspectors holding specialized certifications, such as Investigator/Rope/Haz-Technician, may be tasked by the department to work under those qualifications as needed.
- L. Performs other duties as identified and assigned

III. Qualifications for Employment:

- A. Knowledge and application of current firefighting equipment and techniques
- B. Knowledge of departmental rules, regulations, administrative policies and SOPs
- C. Knowledge of the principles of hydraulics as applied to firefighting
- D. Knowledge of EMS and rescue operations
- E. Knowledge of laws relating to the fire service
- F. Five (5) years of experience in fire service, to include three (3) years with the Lowell Area Fire Department.

IV. Minimum Required Education & Training:

- A. High school graduate or GED equivalent (preferred: two- or four-year college degree in a relevant field of study such as fire- or emergency-services or business).
- B. Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council – Inspector I certification (to be completed within one year of initial hire).
- C. Successful completion of NFPA 1582 exam
- D. Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council - Firefighter I & II Certification
- E. Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council - HazMat Awareness
- F. Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council - HazMat Operations

LOWELL AREA FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES AUTHORITY RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER, AMEND, MODIFY OR ELIMINATE THIS POLICY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

Authored by: Corwin Velzen, Fire Chief

Reviewed by: Command Staff

Approved by: LAFESA Board

Related Policies/Procedures/Guides:

Lowell Area Fire and Emergency Services Authority

Department Administrative Policy

Subject: **Job Description – Fire Inspector**

AP Reference#: **A00315**

Original Effective Date: 01/25/25

Revision Date: 01/25/25

Job Description

- G. Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council - Drivers Training Certification
- H. Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council - Company Officer I & II Certification
- I. Michigan Fire Fighters Training Council - Fire Instructor I Certification
- J. NIMS ICS I00, 200, 300, 400, 700, and 800 or equivalent
- K. Current CPR/AED certification
- L. Michigan EMT license or higher
- M. Valid Michigan driver's license

LOWELL AREA FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES AUTHORITY RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER, AMEND, MODIFY OR ELIMINATE THIS POLICY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

Authored by: Corwin Velzen, Fire Chief

Reviewed by: Command Staff

Approved by: LAFESA Board

Related Policies/Procedures/Guides: