

# NEWS RELEASE

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CITY OF WEST LIBERTY – February 10, 2021

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## **City considers ways to revitalize the Fire and Ambulance Department**

The City Council Public Safety Committee has been meeting bi-monthly since July 2020 to review the operations of the City's Fire and Ambulance Department. The scope of the review was determined from input provided by the Fire Chief, Ambulance Board, City Council members and City Management. The Council Public Safety Committee and City Management identified the following topics: human resource management, financial administration, equipment needs and planning, recruitment and sustainability, permanent staffing plan to accommodate a proposed 24/7 ambulance service, Fire and Ambulance 28E Agreements, and Fire Department Chapter 1 of the City Code.

City Council held a public work session on February 2, 2021, to review the Code of Ordinance Chapter 1: Fire Department, both Fire and Ambulance Agreements and the list of operational concerns. At the meeting, the City's Attorney reviewed and discussed proposed amendments to Chapter 1 and both agreements.

Since no action can be taken in a work session, the Mayor requested Interim City Manager Elizabeth Hansen, City Clerk Lee Geertz, and the Council Public Safety Committee members, Jose Zacarias and Robbie Rock, to present a list of recommended actions for the City Council to consider in upcoming meetings. The list of solutions includes:

1. Set the public hearing and consider recommended amendments to Chapter 1 - Code of Ordinance.
2. Submit notice of nonrenewal of the Fire Protection Agreement and Ambulance Service Agreement and establish a series of meetings with the Fire and Ambulance Boards to discuss recommended amendments.
3. Consider approval of hiring a full-time Fire Chief and approving all department job descriptions.
4. Consider approval of a recommended FY 22 budget that is balanced.

5. Consider approval of a personnel and wage resolution for the department; and
6. Consider the City Clerk to follow the Government Accounting System Board (GASB) per the city's auditors for the department in the proposed FY 22 budget.

"The City Council, staff, and I respect and support the volunteers and staff members of the West Liberty Fire and Ambulance Department," stated Mayor Robert Hartman.

"The City will continue to explore, evaluate and consider options for the current needs and the future of the Fire and Ambulance Department, and we support the opportunity to evolve and modernize the organization to successfully provide quality protective service and build relationships with City and Rural Community members. We are considering hiring a full-time career Chief to administer all the required training, protective equipment, and apparatus to provide this service within the financial ability of the City's budget, just like any other department of the City", he added.

The needs for the West Liberty and Rural Communities have had little change over the past 50 years, but what has changed for the City's Fire and Ambulance protection is a reduction and limited funding resources, little political financial support from the state and federal level, State mandated minimum training standards and continuing education hours, increase desire for a volunteer paid service, increase in an aging volunteer base, more volunteers who commute out of town for work limiting volunteer availability, and additional volunteer and staff time needed to meet the compliance expectations on emergency scenes and the non-emergency activities of the department.

Over the next week the Mayor, Council Public Safety Committee and staff will hold a series of meetings with the Rural Fire District Trustees and EMS Rural Ambulance Board, and Department Officers to collaborate with consideration to implement the next step towards a professional, united, and supported Fire and Ambulance Department equipped to provide our communities with the outstanding emergency services that they already strive to provide.