

West Liberty & Rural Townships Fire & EMS Association
PO Box 284
West Liberty, IA 52776

April 7, 2022

Katherine McCullough
Mayor
City of West Liberty
409 N. Calhoun St
West Liberty, IA 52776

David Haugland
City Manager
City of West Liberty
409 N. Calhoun St
West Liberty, IA 52776

Dear Madam Mayoress McCullough and Mr. Haugland,

The West Liberty Volunteer Fire Department and has been operating since 1875 helping the community when its residents needed them most – and earning the trust and respect of our community members. The Department continues to help admirably and is one of the most trusted and respected institutions we have. Although years have passed, the Department's record of serving bravely to help their neighbors in need has never changed.

Unfortunately, for reasons unknown to the Department, the administration of the City of West Liberty has changed the way it views the Department. The City is making arbitrary demands of the Department, and personnel at the City have become territorial about micromanaging the Department. The Department has repeatedly asked how it can continue to volunteer in a way to make everyone happy while still providing this essential service to their friends and neighbors. However, the responses from the City Manager, the City Clerk, and 3 members of the City Council have made it clear that it wants to micromanage, control, and harass the Department for reasons only they know. This is not about failing to provide an excellent service to the community as volunteers. This has become an ugly battle waged against the Department for control over the operations and finances of the Department.

The Department knows that the actions of the City are wrong. The Department can see incorrect accountings, mixing of Department funds with the City's general account, incorrect classification of expenses and donations, and the City will not provide transparency with respect to financial reports.

The City has actively waged a war upon the Department through dangerous bureaucratic moves that endanger the community, including deliberately stalling attempts to hire EMS personnel. In addition to making it more difficult for the volunteers to help the community when seconds matter, multiple unfounded grievances have been filed against volunteer members of the Department, with the intent to manipulate the process while attempting to cover their tracks.

These City officials have actively worked to avoid any transparency hoping that residents will be left in the dark wondering how this happened and who is to blame.

The Volunteer Fire Department has done everything, withstanding all attacks to their brotherhood and sisterhood, to avoid the logical conclusion of this situation because they care about their neighbors and put their lives on the line as proof of that dedication to their neighbors.

The logical conclusion to this situation has now arrived. On April 5, 2022, the Department held a special meeting. The City has created an environment and enough obstacles to cause these volunteers to make the unanimous decision to stop volunteering under the current system. The Department cannot keep enough volunteers or recruit more volunteers into the situation that exists today.

Instead of waiting for the Department to be without volunteers within 5 years, the men and women of the Department have made a reasoned--but difficult--decision. These men and women will not continue to volunteer in this environment. Since the City has made it clear over the last three years that it will not change course, these volunteers are forced to end their association with the City while continuing to make themselves available to save lives. This can be achieved through a new association, called a 28E Agency, that will be governed by a Board in which the Department will answer to representatives from the rural areas as well as the City. Only through the establishment of an area board for Fire and Rescue will this problem be resolved since the City cannot be trusted by the Department or City residents to make rational decisions without letting the personal vendettas and demand for absolute authority enter into all decisions, which is how it is under the current system.

This has been and remains a very difficult decision for these volunteers. This is the only way these men and women on the front lines can save volunteer Fire and Rescue. The Department is writing this letter to inform the residents and governing bodies served by the Department of this decision. In the event this is not resolved by May 1, 2022, other arrangements for Fire and Rescue service will need to be made. It is important to remember that this situation will need to be reported to the regulatory authorities in accordance with state and federal law as it will affect the ISO rating for insurance coverage for all property owners that have been served by the West Liberty Fire Department. ISO ratings for the area will elevate creating a significant increase in homeowner's insurance, business insurance, and insurance for the City of West Liberty.

This needs to be resolved immediately.

Respectfully,

Members of the West Liberty & Rural Townships Fire & EMS Association

Maria M. Cruz Ambrosio

~~Yann Wilton~~

Paul A. Paul R.

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Alexis Manning

Blair Kelly

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Mary Ann

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Brian Grant

Ally Zogger

Mindy Sichelstempel

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