

Dear Kirt and Members of the West Liberty Volunteer Fire Department:

I am in receipt of your letter that came to me via email on August 8, 2024. Let me state from the beginning that as Mayor, I believe the buck stops with me. Further, I think you and I agree that the most important outcome of any negotiations regarding fire and emergency services is that we leave the people of West Liberty and the surrounding areas with better protection instead of any system that leaves people more vulnerable.

I greatly appreciate the time, effort, and coordination that is needed to ensure the current system of services provided by both volunteers and paid staff.

You are correct that you have worked with several Mayors and members of the Council. However, I firmly disagree that any effort on my part is motivated by anything other than ensuring we come out of these negotiations with both high-quality fire and emergency services and an appropriate system to oversee their delivery.

For more than 50 years, I have worked to ensure quality emergency services, as well as working with fire fighters to receive the recognition and respect they deserve for the jobs they perform.

In those years as an Emergency Management Technician, a social worker, and a state representative, I know that the delivery of emergency services requires meeting rigorous requirements from Medicare, Iowa's Medicaid program, Iowa Code regarding qualifications/licensure and training, and standards set by insurance companies. We have an excellent paid staff who are currently employees of the City of West Liberty, which offers them participation in the Iowa Public Employees Retirement System, city health insurance coverage, and other benefits. If I were one of West Liberty's exceptional paid emergency services employees, the discussion at the July 24, 2024, meeting would cause me concern about the continuation of my employment under a yet-to-be-determined system. And, I understand, at least one staff member has left due to the uncertainty of the EMS program. I am happy to share the recording of that session.

Concerns were raised during the July 24, 2024, meeting about when employee health insurance coverage could be applied for and instituted. When I met with the fire department in April 2024, I suggested the directors of the new entity could be determined and ready to be put in place as soon as the agreement was reached. I don't see that this was ever done. And, the City of West Liberty is still waiting for portions of the 28E agreement that the rural trustees need to submit.

There is no bad faith on the part of the City of West Liberty. There is, under my leadership, a directive that implementation be done in a manner that keeps people safe and able to access emergency services in a manner that is funded. I believe that is consistent with my oath of office.

Given your communication to me and my response are public records, I will be making both available to the media and our community.

-Mark