

Report and Recommendations regarding a new Organizational Structure for the Police and Fire Departments

To: Walker City Commission
From: Fire Subcommittee (Commissioner's Deschaine, Holt and Kent and City Manager Cathy VanderMeulen)
Date: May 17, 2010

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The purpose of this report is to identify a new structure to align the Fire and Police administrative functions under one Director. With the recent retirement of Chief Schmidt, we had an opportunity to make some structural changes to both departments to better coordinate resources while being mindful of current budgetary challenges.

After a great deal of consideration, discussion and thought, the fire subcommittee recommends:

1. That the City of Walker would be better served to eliminate the full time position of Fire Chief and consolidate its administrative functions and create the position of Public Safety Director. The subcommittee recommends the appointment of Police Chief Catherine Garcia-Lindstrom to this position. The re-organization should take effect immediately upon mutual agreements with the affected personnel regarding compensation and other terms of employment.
2. The subcommittee recommends that the current deputy fire chief position be re-titled to Assistant Director for Fire Operations, and appoint Bob Walker to this position.
3. The subcommittee recommends that the City re-title one existing police captain position to Assistant Director for Police Operations. (This position would be a non-union position). The Committee recommends that Captain Greg Long be appointed to this position.

Both title changes are recommended to better reflect the new organizational structure and both Assistants would report directly to the Public Safety Director.

Please note that the subcommittee is not recommending the creation of public safety officers. The proposed new structure, commonly referred to as a "nominal

consolidation” is meant to provide the management accountability for functions that must work together while preserving the technical expertise of the current police and fire staffing.

At this time, the subcommittee is not recommending any further changes to the staffing in either the police or fire departments.

4. The subcommittee recommends that the City Commission allow the subcommittee to remain intact to assist with the reorganization and transition.
5. The subcommittee recommends that the Personnel Committee review any appropriate compensation adjustments, job description changes and any other details as a result of the new organizational structure and provide recommendations to the full City Commission for formal adoption.

Introduction/Background

In February of 2010, Fire Chief Bill Schmidt announced his retirement after 16 years with the Walker Fire Department. As a result of his retirement, an opportunity arose to review the overall administrative structure of the Fire department. Immediately following Chief's Schmidt's announcement, Mayor Rob VerHeulen appointed an ad hoc subcommittee consisting of Commissioner's Deschaine, Holt and Kent as well as City Manager Cathy VanderMeulen. The subcommittee was given the task to review different organizational models, and provide a recommendation to the full Commission.

Initial contacts with other municipalities determined that there are essentially three main types of organizational structures that are utilized in police and fire operations. The most widely used is often called the “traditional” model. The model is comprised of two separate departments, headed by a fire chief and a police chief. Occasionally, the departments share resources such as equipment, but for the most part operate independently of one another.

A model that is gaining popularity is the “nominal consolidation” model. This model is comprised of a Public Safety Director, Deputy Fire Chief and Deputy Police Chief (or equivalent titles). The Police and Fire Departments are maintained separately with a Director sharing administrative responsibilities with the Deputy Chiefs in each department. Although the departments remain separate, the creation of one Public Safety Director to oversee both departments creates opportunities to attain efficiencies (and therefore reduce operating costs), in day to day operations, including budgeting, purchasing, training, record keeping, and other areas. (Immediate cost

savings will be achieved by Walker if we do not replace the fire chief's position)_ A further benefit of this model is that an integrated administrative function will allow for better communication and understanding of specific roles of the police and fire departments.

The nominal consolidation model can (and does) work in career departments as well as combination departments like Walker. One of the largest communities to announce the change from a traditional to a nominal consolidation model is the City of Novi. Total budget for both its' police and fire functions exceed sixteen million dollars. The City of Holland recently announced it will also evaluate this organizational structure for police and fire operations. Although the subcommittee did not conduct a formal survey of Michigan municipalities, some communities that currently utilize this model are (among others), the cities of Alpena, Sturgis, Coldwater, Alma, Dowagiac, St. Johns and Garden City.

A third model that is utilized is a "total consolidated" model, or a "pure" public safety model. A single public safety director is appointed to oversee a combined department and staff is cross trained to perform both police and fire department functions. The cities of Kalamazoo, East Grand Rapids, Grand Haven, Ionia and Mt. Pleasant currently utilize this model.

Subcommittee Process

The subcommittee met on ten occasions over the last 90 days. In its' initial meeting, the subcommittee discussed the pros and cons of each of the models, specifically how a new model might enhance collaboration and improve departmental efficiencies. The total consolidation, or true public safety model was eliminated from further consideration due to the extensive up front costs as well as the time factor that would be necessary to fully integrate the two departments. By unanimous consent, the subcommittee agreed to focus its efforts on evaluating the current (traditional) model and the nominal consolidation model for the future.

The subcommittee held numerous meetings with various City staff to obtain input and comments on the current organizational model as well as the nominal consolidation model. The following staff was interviewed. (All staff was encouraged to provide additional information and/or follow-up comments to the subcommittee):

1. Deputy Chief Bob Walker (2 times)
2. All other full time fire department staff(Phil McCormack 2 times)

3. The captains, lieutenants and one paid on call firefighter (selected by the command staff) from each of the three fire stations.
4. Police Chief Catherine Garcia-Lindstrom (2 times)
5. Captain Greg Long (2 times)

In addition, the subcommittee met with various individuals who had extensive administrative experience with the nominal consolidation model. The subcommittee felt that the meetings were very productive and the information provided was extremely beneficial:

1. Ed Edwardson- former Public Safety Director in Kalamazoo retired Police Chief of the City of Wyoming. Ed served as the administrative head of both the police and fire departments for a brief period while working for the City of Wyoming.
2. Thad Taylor- City Manager for the City of Alpena. Formally served as the City's police chief and eventual Public Safety Director in charge of police and fire operations.
3. Michael Hughes- City Manager for the City of Sturgis. Assisted in conducting an operational analysis at the City of Sturgis in 2005, and eventually recommended the creation of a Public Safety Director's position with administrative oversight of both the police and fire departments.
4. Dave Northrup- Former Police Chief, currently Public Safety Director for the City of Sturgis. Acts as the administrative head of the police and fire departments.
5. City Manager VanderMeulen also spoke directly with Bill Stewart(former City Manager in Coldwater), Dave Harvey, current City manager in Garden City and Kevin Anderson, current City Manager in Dowagiac about their experiences with the nominal consolidation structure.

Conclusion and Justification

After a through and thoughtful review, considering all comments and input from all stakeholders as well as practitioners, it is the recommendation of the subcommittee that the City of Walker City Commission adopt a new organizational structure for the City's police and fire departments. The structure includes the creation of a single Public Safety Director, who will have administrative oversight of a newly titled position of Assistant Director for Fire Operations, and a newly titled position of Assistant Director for Police Operations. (Draft copies of the proposed job descriptions are attached to

this report). The subcommittee offers the following as the basis and justification for it's' recommendations:

1. The new organizational structure has proven workable and effective in many other communities. The existing Walker command staff has committed to making the change work and the command staff possesses the necessary skills, abilities and talent to guide a successful transition.
2. Approximately \$75,000 in savings will be achieved in the 2010/011 budget by not replacing the full-time Fire Chief position.
3. Consolidating the administrative function will allow for enhanced coordination, planning and communication between the two departments in many areas including emergency response, records management, technology improvements, purchasing, budgeting, and personnel functions.
4. The new structure will also create an opportunity to form a consolidated approach to staff training and development through the sharing of resources that are currently duplicated within the two departments. Additional cost savings can be achieved by identifying overlap and inefficiencies between the departments. The City's training program is highly regarded among other communities. The goal will be to maintain the high caliber of training opportunities.
5. Consolidation of the administrative structure will create opportunities for common problem solving. For example, the subcommittee has requested that one of the first areas that must be reviewed is in the area of police/fire response coordination. Common incident protocols should be created and reviewed to enhance response capabilities.
6. An integrated administrative function will allow for better understanding of the specific operational roles in both the police and fire departments.

Disadvantages/Main Concerns expressed

1. **Perceived loss of individual department identity and favoritism**-Input from City staff suggested that there is a fear that if the administrative functions were combined, one discipline will be favored over the other. This was a common concern initially expressed by fire staff in the communities the subcommittee contacted. Any morale problems experienced by other communities were short lived. The Public Safety Director in Sturgis made it a point to design a separate

shirt patch that incorporates both police and fire symbols to represent unity among the departments. He also wears a black (as opposed to a white commander's helmet) at all fire scenes. In this manner, the Public Safety Director distinguishes himself from the incident commander (deputy chief) on all fire calls. There will also be opportunities to re-arrange offices to a more central location in the public safety building.

2. **Lack of Expertise** - The individual recommended for the Public Safety Director position currently does not have expertise in fire operations-much like a City Manager does not have expertise in each area that requires his/her oversight. However, the candidate should have a basic understanding of fire operations. The committee's expectation would be that the Public Safety Director would acquire the appropriate certifications and training within a specific time frame. The draft job description includes this requirement.

Ongoing Role of the Subcommittee

The subcommittee feels that reorganizing the current management structure will provide the opportunity to build on the solid foundation already established in our police and fire departments. The main goal and focus of the reorganization will be to enhance the level of public safety in the City of Walker.

The subcommittee should remain intact throughout the transitional period. The role of the subcommittee will be to provide guidance regarding goals and objectives as well as periodic progress monitoring throughout the transition. The subcommittee will meet with the Public Safety Director and her Assistant's on a regular basis. The subcommittee will communicate things such as positives and negatives, and will provide suggestions for changes and innovations associated with the consolidated management structure. The subcommittee will provide periodic reports and will review and discuss these reports with the City Commission. The subcommittee, along with the administration will work together to identify areas that will result in additional efficiencies and reduce operating costs. The subcommittee is confident that the new organizational structure will provide a closer connection between police and fire planning, service delivery and staff utilization in both departments.

The subcommittee wishes to thank the Walker City Commission for the opportunity to provide its recommendations for a new organizational structure for our police and fire departments.

