

**THE CITY OF KENT, OHIO
FINANCE COMMITTEE
WED., JAN. 21, 2009**

This meeting of the Finance Committee of Kent City Council was called to order by Wayne Wilson, Chair, at 7:00 p.m. on Wed., Jan. 21, 2009. Chair Wilson explained the only item on the agenda was the Portage Area Fire and EMS Research Study Committee study of Fire service collaboration.

PRESENT: MR. AMRHEIN, MR. DeLEONE, MR. FERRARA, MR. HAWKSLEY, MR. KUHAR, MS. SHAFFER, MR. TURNER, MS. WALLACH, AND MR. WILSON

ALSO PRESENT: J. FENDER, MAYOR; D. RULLER, CITY MANAGER; J. SILVER, LAW DIRECTOR; L. COPLEY, CLERK OF COUNCIL; J. WILLIAMS, FIRE CHIEF AND W. LILLICH, SAFETY DIRECTOR

Dave Ruller, City Manager, explained that **Chief Jim Williams and Safety Director William Lillich** have been working for about eighteen months, to try and identify opportunities for the City to partner with sister cities and to collaborate under the basic heading of trying to save money for the City, while reducing redundancy. Mr. Ruller said that a few months earlier, Mr. Lillich had requested approval to apply for a grant to hire a firm to study the idea of fire service collaboration. He said that grant was not successful, but the need did not go away. He said the group continued to meet, and now are trying to raise the money amongst themselves. He introduced Mr. Lillich at this time.

Mr. Lillich said this idea began in early 2006, with some discussions about collaborating with some of the other service providers in the area. He said that Mayor Kevin Poland of Ravenna sent a letter to all public agencies, suggesting they talk about the collaboration of fire service. Mr. Lillich said the suggestion was for a fire district as a way to save money. Mr. Lillich said a committee was formed shortly thereafter, and began looking at ways to analyze how to do fire service more efficiency, with the same level of effectiveness. He said they looked at the issues for about one year, and recognized they needed professional advice from those who had performed the analysis previously. Mr. Lillich said that after considerable discussion, they decided that a seasoned consultant would be beneficial. Mr. Lillich said they developed a Request For Service (RFS), and began looking for people who had background in that type of service.

Mr. Lillich said that prior to the development of the RFS, they found four different groups who had familiarity with the issue. He said that three were academic groups, and one was a professional service who had been in fire service for thirty-five years. He said after they received presentations from the four groups, they created a Request for Proposal to identify the type of service wanted. He said the best proposal was from John Preuer and Associates, and explained that Mr. Preuer is a retired fire chief from Mentor who has been consulting for years. He said that Mr. Preuer had studies they could review to see the quality of their work.

Mr. Lillich said they found out about the Department of Development grant, and that it was looking for economic development and collaborative efforts. He said they had eight different communities willing to participate, and hoped to qualify for the full \$80,000 grant. He said the price quote from Mr. Preuer was \$98,000. Mr. Lillich said they felt they had a good opportunity, as they had pulled together a pretty good program. He said the grant selection committee went to a different direction, so they were left in a place of having a good definition, but no funds. He said they discussed it further in a few of their meetings, and by the first week of December, decided that communities would be willing to do a partial study. He said they did some analysis, and have returned to discuss the opportunity to go forward with some of the communities. He said not all eight have decided, and some of the smaller communities have pulled out. Mr. Lillich said that Tallmadge has decided to join, which takes the study into Summit County, across county lines.

Mr. Lillich said he would turn the discussion over to Chief Jim Williams, who would discuss the study areas and how the funding would work. He said the Chief did a spreadsheet that went out in their packets from

the City Manager's office.

Chief Williams said when they started discussions about a fire district, the term made people nervous. He said they think they have to give up their own buildings, trucks, etc. He said one recommendation from Mr. Preuer was to change the direction to a discussion on blending the services. He said it may lead to a fire district, but they have found it is more beneficial to blend services, such as administration duties. He questioned the need for all of the different chiefs, and said they might find a method to merge or blend the administrative functions, having one oversee the group, with some lower ranks assisting, ultimately reducing the administrative costs. He said blending would ease into a process for a fire district, and allow them to explore different things.

Chief Williams said the original RFP, which is on file in the Council office, had fifteen areas to be studied. He said that the cost was about \$98,000. He said that they realized that given the current economic times, and since most were beyond their budget process, this may be difficult to accomplish. He said the chiefs go together, prioritizing the fifteen items, and came up with five items to be studied. Chief Williams said this reduced the cost to \$61,000. He said when they met with Mr. Preuer, they added one more area, which is the financial component. He said it is hard to talk about the five items, without studying the financial impact. Chief Williams said the cost is now \$66,000. He said as other communities participate or pull it, the cost will be drive up or down. He said if Tallmadge joins in, that will reduce the City's cost.

Chief Williams said this was not a budgeted item, and they talked to the Budget and Finance Director. He said the Director believes they can "squeeze" the money out of their current budget, and may need monies at the end of the year.

Mr. Lillich said another thing that he would like Chief Williams to expand on deals with efforts evolving from this group. Chief Williams said when the chiefs starting getting together, they assigned different functions. He said the best example of one of the items where they collaborate is fire prevention, adding they now have a Portage County Fire Prevention Board. He said they invite all fire departments in the county to come and participate. He said that the fire inspectors are required to have continuing education, and get one hour of CE each time they meet, as they bring in instructors. He said they have a better relationship with the Portage County Building Department, adding they have to deal with them because of the Franklin Township contract. He said they are looking at computerizing the fire inspection process, and are looking for grants to purchase the computers. He said they are also looking at joint purchasing opportunities and training.

Chief Williams said that since this group started meeting, the entire Chiefs Association is a stronger group and is more productive. He said he has been a member for thirteen years, and has seen more work in the last four to five months than the last thirteen years. He said they are working together more as a group, providing better service in a more efficient way.

Mr. Lillich asked for their authorization to spend up to \$30,000, adding that a portion of that cost will be billed to Franklin Township, as part of their annual fee.

Ms. Wallach asked if there is an urgency to do this now, and asked when the next deadline is for the grant with the Department of Development. Mr. Lillich said there is no indication of that program continuing through ODOD. He said they are looking around for other opportunities. Mr. Lillich said they have been meeting for a few years, and some communities are anxious to move. He said they have change in services that they want to move forward, and could do better collaboratively. He said other funding opportunities would enable them to do the portion of the study planned for 2010. He said he did not know when they would have an opportunity to come up with the money in the near future.

Mr. Fender asked if there was an estimation of the savings in the future if this comes about, adding he knows it would take some time. Chief Williams said it is difficult to determine that, adding that is the reason they wanted to include the financial piece. He said to look at all of the components and to see where the cost savings are may require them to spend some money, which is very difficult at this time. Mr. Fender asked if he can assume there will be a savings, down the line, and Chief Williams said he

certainly hoped so. Chief Williams said that is part of the urgency, as they know about the economic conditions. He said if they do not do this now, it will cost more money to operate independently. He said other parts of the country that have merged found there is a cost savings.

Mr. Kuhar said they are talking about reducing the number of police chiefs, and having joint ownership and purchasing of equipment. He asked if there might be some adversity as to whom is in charge and who controls what, where, and when. Chief Williams said that is one of the biggest issues for regionalization of services. He said there can be issues about who is the fire chief and the color of the fire trucks. He said they have a great opportunity because all of the chiefs are willing to study and work together to solve those problems. He said they all want to know how to best provide service.

Mr. Kuhar asked if this would, in any way, reduce the level of service to Kent. He questioned what would happen if they had a special piece of equipment that was housed elsewhere, and had a need for it. Mr. Kuhar asked if they are going to sacrifice their service, and Chief Williams said that one of the items they have discussed from the very beginning is that they would not reduce the current service levels. He said there is a possibility of a piece of equipment moving, but an example of that is equipment at their station, used for Halloween, that they do not own. He said it is made available to them, adding he sees that continuing.

Mr. Lillich said that a program like this requires contingency planning. He said there have been a lot of planning improvements in emergency services over the last few years. He said they now have an alarm that goes out to all departments regarding different structures. He said it is more than mutual aid, as all of their responses are planned. He said this could affect purchasing or the siting of facilities.

Mr. Kuhar said he is sure he will receive calls from his constituents, with their concerns for the service. He said there have been some instances where stations were eliminated and manpower was missing. Chief Williams reiterated that as long as he is Chief and as long as Mr. Lillich is the Safety Director, they will provide the best quality service within Portage County. He said he feels very strongly about that, adding there is nothing they will do to reduce that level of service. He said he will not allow that to happen.

Mr. Lillich said it has become more and more apparent that communities have a greater sensitivity. He said they need to find a way to strike a balance. He said this is an effective way to attack that problem.

Ms. Shaffer noted there is probably some duplication of service in the smaller departments, and they are probably looking for better ways. She said that based on population figures, Kent will probably invest more in the beginning. She asked if there was some understanding and/or discussion about whether they should benefit proportionately as the savings occur. Chief Williams told Ms. Shaffer they have not gotten into that level of detail.

Mr. Turner asked what the governmental body's function would be, and Mr. Lillich said that the fire district would have a board, accountable to various jurisdictions. He said in some cases, there is an oversight board, with communities retaining responsibility, by way of a representative. Mr. Turner asked if the representation would be proportionate, and Mr. Lillich said that would probably be some factor. He said that nothing would be put in place until the legislative bodies made the final decision. Mr. Lillich said they are asking to have the study funded, adding that all communities will have final approval before any changes.

Mr. Ruller said it is always good to ask long range questions. He said that issues like the ones mentioned by Council member Turner are wrestling issues. He said there are benefits to be gained before that occurs, adding those are natural collaborations. Mr. Ruller said he did not want them to think that this is setting something in motion. He said they are trying to get the lower hanging fruit at this time.

Mr. Kuhar asked if they said each organization participating in the study would participate in the cost, or did they just mentioned Kent and Franklin Township, and Chief Williams said all would pay a share. He said they felt the fairest way was a per capita cost. He said the exact cost may vary because of the number of communities that participate.

Chief Williams said that Mr. Preuer and his group provides a step-by-step process afterwards. He said a lot of companies give recommendations, with no way to implement them, but Mr. Preuer provides implementation steps to go along with the recommendations. He said that is very important, and helps them guide the process. Mr. Lillich said another component that was not in the original proposal, was to have Mr. Preuer's group conduct public meetings to inform communities that may be affected by any change. He said that is not on their agenda for the initial phase, but is an important consideration. He said they need to make sure that the citizens do not feel threatened by any possible loss of service, and the best way to accomplish this is by talking to their constituents.

There were no further questions, nor audience comment at this time.

MOTION TO AUTHORIZE THE ADMINISTRATION TO CONTINUE THIS STUDY, AUTHORIZING THE FUNDS FOR SAID STUDY.

Motion made by Mr. Hawksley, seconded by Mr. Turner, and carried by a voice vote of 8-1-0, with Mr. Wilson abstaining.

Hearing no further business before this Committee, Chair Wilson adjourned this meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Linda M. Copley, Clerk of Council

ACTION RECOMMENDED:

- 1) **TO AUTHORIZE THE ADMINISTRATION TO CONTINUE THE FIRE-EMS BLENDING STUDY, AUTHORIZING THE FUNDS FOR SAID STUDY.**