

Intergovernmental pact finalizes plan for village to oversee fire, ambulance service

An intergovernmental agreement paving the way for the creation of a village-based fire department was signed Monday by Grafton officials.

During a joint meeting Monday, the Village Board and Town Board unanimously approved the agreement, which changes the all-volunteer department from private, nonprofit status to a village-run operation the town will hire for fire protection and ambulance service.

The three-year agreement comes in the wake of major department upgrades approved by voters in a referendum last fall, including the hiring of Grafton's first full-time fire chief.

The agreement was praised by Fire Chief John Place, who requested the referendum on behalf of his 69-member department. In lobbying for the changes, Place said the department has struggled to attract and retain members and needs upgrades to maintain a high level of service in a growing community.

"I applaud both of your groups for making the transition as smooth as you have," Place told the boards.

"This is not common in other communities. It's good to see that you can work together."

Under the agreement, the town will pay the village 40% of the department's operating budget, with the balance paid by the village. Those percentages are unchanged from a previous arrangement in which both municipalities hired the department for services.

The agreement also calls for restructuring the village's Public Safety Committee to include town representatives. The renamed Public Safety Commission will now include three village representatives and two town members, with the latter two only allowed to vote on fire department-related items.

Village President Jim Brunquell said the agreement was worked out after months of meetings between village and town officials, including himself and Town Chairman Lester Bartel.

"We're looking at a three-year agreement so we can address any changes in demographics and look at how it's funded," Brunquell said.

"We expect there will be changes. It's something. But three years will provide continuity.

"Residents will know it's business as usual, that they will continue to receive the excellent service they have always gotten in the past.

The Nov. 6 referendum, which was approved by 64% of village voters and 55% of town voters,

Village, town sign GFD agreement

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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calls for residents in both communities to pay a combined \$410,085 annually to upgrade the department.

The upgrades include \$105,000 for a full-time chief and \$305,000 for part-time emergency medical technicians and per-call payments of \$20 for firefighters and emergency medical responders.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said village and town residents will continue to receive the same level of services they have when the department operated independently.

Under the agreement, the village will submit the department's proposed budget and other financial records to the town for annual review.

Whenever the department's 20-year equipment plan is updated, any proposed costs exceeding \$10,000 must be submitted to the Public Safety Commission by April 1 each year, the agreement states.

The boards decided that a division of other department assets not in the operating budget will be covered in a separate agreement between the village, town and department.

The village has begun the search for a full-time fire chief, including advertising the position nationally.

The new chief will be appointed by the village's Police and Fire Commission. The Village Board will ultimately finalize the hiring following negotiations on salary and benefits.

Place will continue as the interim chief until his successor is named.