



Town of Wheatland
34315 Geneva Rd. New Munster, WI 53105
Clerk Katie Sweatman

Town Board Meeting
Monday, June 18, 2025 – 6:00 P.M.

The Wheatland Town board met at the Town Hall in New Munster on Wednesday, June 18, 2025 at 6:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Roll Call:

Town Chairmen: Jeff Butler
Supervisor #1: Kyle Madsen
Supervisor #2: Kelly Wilson

Also in attendance were

Verification of public notice was done through Facebook, Wheatland Grade School and our Subscription list.

No public comments were noted.

Chief Lou Denko presented a Power Point about the history and standing of the Wheatland Fire Department. Fire Department started in 1942 in Uhen's Barn. It then transitioned into our Town Hall building then to the current fire house in 1976 which is a 4200 square foot building. At this time, the Fire Department has to pull out all the vehicles to have a meeting due to no room.

History of how the fire department has operated since the beginning was stated. In 2024 there were 50 fire calls. Changes from last year include mutual aid calls. Pros include more manpower cons is we have more overall calls. 181 total EMS calls for the year so far projected around 370 by the end of the year. A concern so far was noted that between Randall, Twin Lakes and Wheatland there were 5 calls at one time this past Monday.

Our Mission was to fight fires in the beginning. Now we have EMS calls, a lot more training is needed. We also do welfare checks, alarms, fire prevention, fire investigation, technical rescue, HASMAT, down power, lock outs and permits.

Training in the beginning was very general. Now it is 200-300 hours to have a well trained fire fighter. EMT starts at 150 hours. Gateway charges approximately \$10,000 between tuition and books for the complete classes.

Fire Department (PSPS) Position of State and Professional Services. Wisconsin started using their own standards with NFPA1. Everything we have to use to comply with is NFPA standards. A meeting with Ms. Winefski out of Pleasant Prairie confirmed that when Wisconsin started using NFPA standards it was to much for departments to comply.

Equipment back in the day was very simple boots, a jacket and hat maybe about \$100-\$200 Now if you do not have an air pack you will be trouble costing \$12,000 - \$14,000 per fire fighter. This is not



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just the cost of equipment, but maintenance of it too. Some of this is shared but not all.

Aging in the volunteering personnel. In 1987, 15% were over 50 years old and 34-35% were under 30 years old. 2020 - 50 year olds increased to 27% and under 30 has decreased almost matching the 50 year olds. The reason is because of life changes, retirement prospects and aging.

When people want to come in and volunteer but do not stay it is because they need dual incomes, more time with family, kids need more time for sport activities and other events. We have lost some of our 30–40-year volunteers due to parenting reasons that we can't fault them for. Also, people have other commitments with their own parents or requirements that are outside the home. Most of our volunteers work outside the home and outside of the community so we lose our personnel during the daytime. Not every employer is accepting of the volunteers leave their job when they are committed and on the clock. This is another reason when we are helping other communities like Randall and Twin Lakes because they are running into the same problems with their personnel. Fewer people are doing more and this is making them burned out.

Possible solution is to consolidate Wheatland with Randall and Twin Lakes for EMS and Fire Department. Other communities would not be a good fit for multiple reasons. The three current towns work very well together. Consolidation may save money but it may cost more money. Losing resources, labor or building and vehicles to the other locations. We lose volunteers and would have to become fully paid. Benefits include that we will always have people at the station. Legally, to fight a fire we should have about 9 people on to fight a fire. Improved efficiency, the ladder truck is being repaired is being shared across municipalities. A ladder truck is able to be used in multiple ways. Our ladder truck is also considered an engine. Putting a pump on our tanker is making it more efficient too so we have more availability for water. For a better level of service to be offered we can't have personnel on staff without paying them.

What happens when we consolidate. If we remove the station our response time will increase per call and location. A positive effect will be that we are able to get out of the station faster. A swing crew could be an answer. However, when we start doing this we are looking for more manpower further out. Our call volume will also increase because of the area we are covering.

If we collaborate with other municipalities we will spend more on overall costs. Also, are we comfortable with our decision-making control being put with those other municipalities? Our allocation of resources and we are debt free, if we take on collaboration with the other municipalities are comfortable with their debt and resources they are bringing.

ISO rating is an insurance rate. Insurance rates are affected when there is a fire department in the area with a rating system. As well as staffing at the fire department. The lower the rating the better the pricing is. It is also based on other factors but there are things that we cannot fix. Water supply has to be hauled to every scene. Staffing would help within 5 miles of the fire house to bring down the ISO rate.

Regardless of what we decide if we want to recruit, train and retain volunteers we need a better



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facility than what we have. If we do not get a better facility, we start losing our volunteers and will have to hire people. We cannot do that because we are grandfathered in for compliance issues. There are a lot of stations that have used their buildings to help retain their memberships by putting community items in their buildings like workout rooms or meeting rooms. There are students that are volunteering at a station and are receiving a room as long as duties are performed for the station. This type of internship could save a good amount of money and possibly retain that fire fighter in the future.

We have to understand that our facility is not conducive to zones that are needed for decontamination, cleaning the vehicles or maintaining a vehicle or holding meetings. With hot and cold zones each stage is contaminated right now because we cannot be clean within the building after a fire. An example was made with bed bugs. This isn't fair to the volunteers to have contaminated materials that have to be brought home to decontaminate, especially to people that are not paid for the position.

Challenges for the fire department. The doors just clear some of the trucks by 4 inches at the top. Storage is very limited for items that need to be housed. We do not know what we are exposed to when we are on a call but we are bringing it back to the station. Pleasant Prairie with a top-notch station, what are we bringing to the table to compete with them to retain our personnel? Recruitment, with what we have now, what is the reason that makes them stay here over the top-notch facility and resources of Pleasant Prairie. Lack of public awareness that change is needed. We are not asking for a lot but for the things that are needed to survive for a few more years. Fire Fighters risks are not known by the community. Carcinogens are brought in from the scene then not decontaminated right then brought home or to work with us.

Future Fire Station 15000 to 16000 square feet was looked at previously but voted now. Now that same building has gone up \$1.8 million. Inflation on fire station has gone up 15%. Right now we are looking at about \$5 Million to build fire station. This would include proper decontamination station, stations to be able to work on all trucks with walk around space, proper door sizes for the engines, bathroom facilities that do not have a community area but private sectors for everyone.

If we continue to put off change, change will happen anyways. Paid staffing is the way of the future. To offset this is consider putting paid fire department staff into other positions like maintenance and public works. This could include snow plowing, cutting grass and transfer station positions.

The battery facility needs to be considered with the fire department. If money is received for the battery facility it should go to the fire department for safety. If we do not move forward with a new fire department we will be back to where we were 5 years ago. A document was given with a study of the area for the battery facility to review for the board. Right now our budget is run approximately \$99,000 which is less than one paid fire fighter for a medium size community.

Supervisor Madsen commented consolidation is definitely an option to explore. Right now a grant is being explored with Randall and Twin Lakes to have a survey done and explore this option. There is an option to get money back with this grant. But at this time we are in a hold with the grant



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information.

Chief Denko states that he is not opposed to collaborating with Randall and Twin Lakes however, as discussed in the presentation he is worried about response times and resources. When calls come in it goes from busy times and slower times in matter of a very short spans.

Supervisor Madsen to Chief Denko do you see pros with consolidation at all in your opinion? Chief Denko stated no.

Gerry Sherman if we decide to consider the consolidation route are we going to maintain a station nearby? Chairmen Butler states he has never heard of consolidation but they have not mentioned getting rid of the fire station here in Wheatland.

Sheila Siegler asked what is the purpose of the study? This study was done by Jensen Hughes in order for the battery study to move forward a plume analysis done and a fire department capability analysis. Our equipment, trucks, personnel, neighboring departments and our water supply were looked at to see how we would handle situations. The biggest thing that they faulted us on was our facility. This is a component of the battery storage facility, it just happens that it became available at the time of this meeting. The study Chairmen Butler is referring to is different. The state is offering a grant for the 3 municipalities at \$75,000.00. This is for the EMS and Fire Department collaboration.

John Silvia commented on a concern that there are no fire hydrants.

Robert Santelli commented on a concern that no matter what we say in the community if the state or a different entity says we will have to live the decision of putting in the battery storage facility so we should get in front of the fire department facility while we still have a say.

Chief Denko states he isn't for or against doing another study but we have to figure out who is going to do it because of what we are servicing. Having a water tower or hydrants is just not an achievable goal due to pricing. We work together well with the other municipalities it is something to consider. Also consider Country Thunder July 17-20 that is sold out, an event at the Kenosha County fairgrounds during the same time and Alpine Valley another big concert event with Nickleback and Creed plus the hotels and campgrounds are all sold out and over 50000 cars will be going down highway 50 if we can make it though that weekend however, we are relying on other municipalities for help. Personnel are going to be sleeping at our facility during that weekend just to man the facility due to the overwhelming events that are going to be taking place.

Vince Mosca comments presentation was great regarding needing a fire station and why. He is not exactly sure on certain issues. Cost on new building and staffing for example. There are too many unknowns to figure out what is best for us. I am also a little annoyed that the survey conducted by Jensen Hughes wasn't brought through the board instead of through the fire house.

Chief Denko stated Somers looked at the cost of adding personnel \$100,000.00 to \$113,000.00 per employee per year. Once you start paying your full-time volunteers you have to have your volunteers paid on call. Which means they are paid on an hourly rate. There have been 8 people in our town that



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have died in fire related automobile accidents. You are 4 times more likely to die in an automobile accident than a house fire. Looking at staffing models gives us different options that can be discussed in detail. Benefits and flexibilities are available with two different options discussed. Nothing was put on paper, it's all in your head. Stated Mosca

Chief Denko stated if we collaborate with the other two municipalities are we really ahead?

Sheila Siegler asked aren't we talking about what should be in the study? We don't know what we are doing right now with the study because we haven't ordered the study. Stated Chairmen Butler.

Traci Denko asked what is the vision of the town? Chairmen Butler states we have a vision. With approximately 3300 people in the town our vision may be different than what the fire departments is. We understand that the fire department needs more room.

Other people in the room speak up with what is the plan 20, 30 years down the road? Chairmen Butler states we do not have a plan.

Supervisor Madsen mentioned outside of the fire department on paper we need to predict what the future looks like in our community.

Chairmen Butler states that because we do not offer sewer and water we will always be a bedroom community. At this time it is not feasible for us to bring sewer or water to our community.

Chief Denko stated that Burlington is bringing water down to JB, can we look into contracting with Burlington? Sheila Siegler said that if we looked into that we would be annexed with Burlington so this is not an option.

Chief Denko states then we would be considered more residential and those are the factors that need to be looked into.

Vince Mosca states that we should be just happy with being a small residential community because everything else is unobtainable at this time.

Chief Denko states that we need to look at the total community growth completely to understand fully our needs.

Sheila Siegler asked in the study we are going to look at EMS and fire department and what is there now and what could be done. Once that is done then we would have something more to discuss.

Chief Denko says that the timing is something to consider too. It seems as though we have timing issues with getting the studies done compared to what we know and have decided in the community.

Sheila Siegler asked what stage is the battery storage facility at? Chief Denko stated it's still in the plum analysis stage and an event for the community to attend an informational meeting.



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Chief Denko says he is concerned about the timing of the events because of the possibility of losing money through the grants or for tax purposes.

Vince Mosca asked if there is a design for the fire department being looked at? Chief Denko said yes. Mosca also states that he would encourage information to be put on paper to show the citizens of the community what is being proposed with numbers. Without that information a referendum would fail.

A question was asked if we could help move the grant information along for the study to be completed because this could help us with other information and timing.

Vince Mosca asked we understand that cost will go up but where and why is that cost going up on what? If you want something soon, we need to know in details on paper what is that and what does it look like. We would like a professional outside opinion on what is needed for the community.

Supervisor Wilson spoke up regarding our agenda and our discussion was regarding the goals of the Town of Wheatland. Lou gave us the discussion for the fire department and it was a great presentation. Now as a board it is our decision to create a committee for the planning board.

Chief Denko states the study will give us all the figures and recommendations on what is needed. Understanding that I take pride in what I have built in this town I am hoping that this opportunity that we are seeing is better for someone in the future. Laying the ground work is what we are doing now and it's important.

Assistant Fire Chief states that we could look into the Sherrer contract and see what opportunities we still have with them.

This is a possibility however, what are we bringing to them for a quote for a new building? Asked Vince Mosca this is something we need to bring to the people to understand and convince.

Motion to adjourn made by Supervisor Madsen and seconded by Supervisor Wilson. Motion passed.