

City of Waupun

Fire and Emergency Response Staffing Study

July 26, 2023

In April of 2023, the Waupun Common Council approved an agreement with Public Administration Associates (PAA) to examine sustainability of the city’s current staffing models for fire and emergency response. The purpose of the study is to examine the long-term needs of the Fire Department and to map a plan that will ensure sustainability of this critical service.

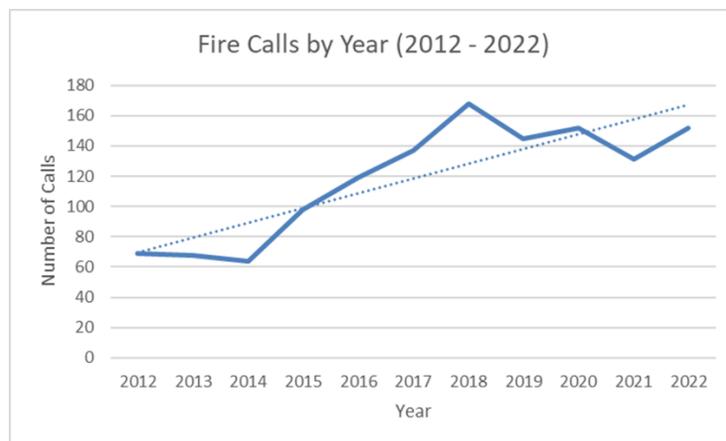
OVERVIEW OF WAUPUN FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

The City operates with a paid-on-call volunteer model of fire response, with thirty (30) members on the department roster (2 full-time, and 28 paid-on-call). The Waupun Country Fire Department operates from the Waupun Public Safety building with some of the same staff as City fire. For 149 years, the members of the Waupun Fire & Rescue Department have provided a tremendous level of fire service to the citizens of Waupun and the surrounding communities. The commitment of past and present members is truly remarkable. Their presence and actions instill a sense of security and confidence within the community, knowing that there are dedicated individuals who are always prepared to help. The City contracts ambulance service. Waupun is the hub for the Waupun ambulance district, which covers ten (10) jurisdictions and roughly two-hundred (200) square miles of service territory.

WHY IS THIS STUDY NEEDED?

1. Over the past 10 years, call volume for fire response has been increasing.

The graph below depicts call volume trends for fire service. In 2012, the city’s mostly-volunteer department responded to around 65 calls per year. Since 2018, the department is averaging closer to 150 calls per year (nearly 2.5 times 2012 levels). In the most recent full-month reporting period, ending May 2023, the Department averaged five (5) calls per day in the final two weeks of that month alone.



2. Volunteerism is declining as is the number of responders, regardless of the daypart, able to respond to an emergency.

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Serving in the role of a volunteer firefighter requires a level of selflessness and a high degree of commitment to the department’s mission. As such, the dedication of the department’s volunteers extends far beyond the time spent responding to emergencies. Firefighters invest significant time in training, maintaining equipment, and participating in community outreach programs to ensure the community is prepared and safe. It is a commitment that requires buy-in from an individual’s entire family and/or significant other. Members must juggle competing priorities related to work demands, personal and family commitments, and other responsibilities. Members must also be willing and able to leave their regular, full-time jobs; family events; and/or change personal plans to on demand to insure no call goes unanswered. This leaves people with limited time and energy to engage in volunteer activities. It is growing increasingly difficult to ensure the fire department has adequate numbers of responders available for emergencies that regularly come with no advanced warning, at greater frequency, and at all hours of the day and night.

The above scenario regularly plays out with the department’s current roster of thirty (30) firefighters on a daily basis. The table below shows the average number of responders by month for 2022. The standard number of responders needed to offensively fight a fire is eighteen (18) (National Institute of Standards and Technology). As shown, the city’s response is consistently below eighteen (18), regardless of daypart.

Average Fire Personnel Response (excluding mutual aid & shift calls) YTD:												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
4A – 8P	10.4	11.6	11.5	14.8	11.2	11.0	9.8	9.8	9.7	9.7	7.8	11.5
8P – 4A	13.3	5.0	11.6	11.5	16.0	12.3	8.0	10.0	17.0	14.5	NA	12.3

From 4 a.m. to 8 p.m. the department averaged 10.4 responders on calls for all of 2022. From 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. the department averaged 11.1 responders. Both averages are well below the standard. Thus far in 2023, average numbers of responders have declined to 9.6 and 8.7 responders across those two dayparts respectively. Increasingly, the City is reliant on mutual aid from neighboring departments, most that are facing similar staffing challenges, to respond to significant events. If teams from neighboring communities respond to our needs, it leaves those communities with inadequate coverage should an emergency occur during their response time here. Similarly, the fire department is being called for mutual aid to support other community’s emergency response for these same reasons.

3. Filling vacancies in volunteer firefighter roles is growing increasingly difficult.

In 2023, the department’s budget was increased to add 3 volunteer firefighter roles for a total of thirty-one (31), with the hope that an increased pool of volunteers would increase the number of responders to an emergency. After retirements in 2022, the department’s roster dropped to twenty-six (26) paid on call firefighters. In the most recent hiring process, the department received four (4) applications and was able to hire three (3) candidates for a total of twenty-nine (29) paid-

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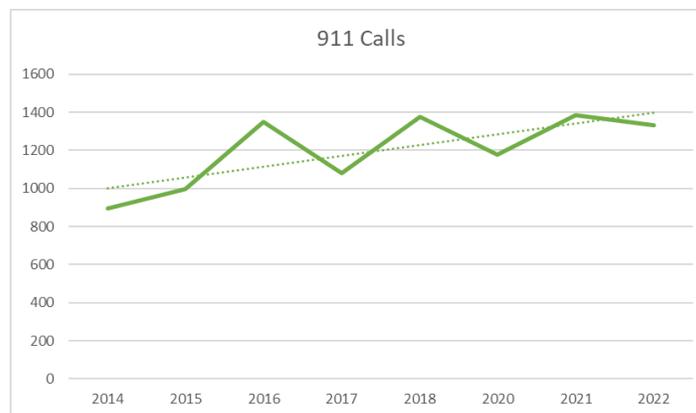
on-call firefighters. This leaves a vacancy of four (4) positions with no applicants expressing interest in the positions.

4. Across Wisconsin, the workforce is aging and that is seen within demographics of the city's workforce, including fire.

Prime working age is defined as the ages between 25 and 54 years of age. The average age of the city's firefighting department is skewed toward the high end of that range at 43.5 years of age, with no one on the current roster under the age of 32. To ensure sustainability of the volunteer response model, the city must be able to attract a younger group of volunteers to the department.

5. Demand for ambulance services is increasing and the city is experiencing more service failures where no ambulance is available in the community to respond.

The graph below shows increasing ambulance call volumes and there are times when the city's current contracted ambulance service is unable to meet demand. In 2022, fifty-one (51) 911 calls (essentially 1 per week) experienced a service failure. This resulted in delayed ambulance response. Thirty percent (30%) of the service failures resulted from no ambulance being available in the community at the time of a 911 call, forcing patients in a medical emergency to wait for mutual aid response from a neighboring community. This was a trend has been steadily increasing since 2021. In response, the City added an Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) program to supplement the service.



**2019 - incomplete data - research in process*

6. The EMR Program is working but is also volunteer dependent and faces some of the same staffing challenges as the volunteer firefighter model of response.

On average, EMRs respond to approximately 50 calls per month. In 2022, there were 9 calls (nearly 1 call per month) where EMRs provided greater than 10 minutes of care to a person experiencing a medical emergency and at least one life was saved. While initial results are favorable, the EMR staffing model is also volunteer dependent. At present, the average age of volunteer EMRs is 50 years of age. The city is currently recruiting for five (5) open positions and has insufficient applications to fill all vacancies.

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7. Adding another dedicated contracted ambulance to the community would come at a significant cost to the community

In negotiations with our current ambulance provider, adding an additional contracted ambulance dedicated to Waupun would increase contract costs by an estimated \$500,000. Completing this study before considering that level of increased investment provides a method for the city to evaluate the most effective use of those budget dollars to ensure a sustainable and reliable service approach.

8. Increasing demand with a shortage of volunteers to staff essential emergency response services is not unique to Waupun. The same problem is happening across the country, requiring different thinking to ensure sustainability of essential emergency response service for the community.

In addition to evaluating our local service delivery approach, staff are actively engaged in countywide discussions on changes to ambulance service delivery as many small communities in the county are struggling with these same issues. It is possible that those discussions will produce yet a different way to look at solving this mounting problem.

How Can I Learn More?

Intergovernmental Presentation Recording On Study: www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1AO-T7xgvM

Your Feedback is Needed. Please take ten minutes to complete a survey and share your opinions about the City's emergency response services. The Survey will remain open until August 23, 2023 and can be accessed here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HC9T6PY>

TIMELINE:

- Kick Off with City Staff held April 17, 2023
- May / June 2023 – Interviews of City of Waupun elected officials and jurisdictions in the service territory.
- May / June 2023 -- Data Gathering to examine call volumes, response times, etc.
- June / July 2023 – Data Analysis of information gathered.
- July 2023 – Define service delivery alternatives
- July 2023 – Community survey to assess expectations of emergency response operations
- August 2023 – Develop staffing model and budgets
- September 2023 – Report of Findings
- October 2023 – Intergovernmental meeting to discuss findings and implications

ABOUT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ASSOCIATES

Public Administration Associates (PAA) is a consulting firm based in Whitewater, WI that specializes in local government recruitment and management studies. Over its 25-year history, PAA has worked with over 175 Wisconsin municipalities on a wide-variety of consulting projects, including over 30 studies of fire and EMS service consolidation and staffing assessments.