

LYNCHBURG FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION | IAFF LOCAL 1146

P.O. Box 2274 | Lynchburg, Virginia 24504-2274 | www.local1146.com



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CONTACT: Lynchburg Fire Fighters Association – President Jamie Maxwell
P.O. Box 2274
Lynchburg, VA 24504-2274
(434) 420-5345
info@local1146.com

Lynchburg Fire Fighter's Association launches campaign to generate support during City Budget Process

LYNCHBURG, VA – The Lynchburg Fire Fighter's Association wants the public to know we need your help to generate support from Lynchburg City Council during the Fiscal Year 2020 budget process. Our organization feels that the Fire Department and the brave men and women that serve the city have been left behind for the last decade as city council has chosen to give away millions to the private sector in tax relief downtown and bloated other portions of government with funding for unnecessary positions and programs.

Since 2010, relatively flat funding has led to a \$1.8 million shortfall in funding for fire suppression and emergency medical service delivery in Lynchburg. This has impacted every part of the department and forces our members to be stretched thin on a regular basis with an inadequate relief factor for operational service delivery, flat compensation with rising costs to access and use of benefits, creates substantial risks for the health and safety of our members, and increasing recruitment and retention issues. We are also losing members at an alarming rate to other employment. As funding and staffing issues have presented themselves over the years, we have also been presented with extraordinary operational challenges as our city continues to grow and develop at a rapid pace.

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) completed an Emergency Response System Evaluation after a request by the Lynchburg Fire Fighters Association (IAFF Local 1146) was made for assistance last year. The Lynchburg Fire Department and the City of Lynchburg Information Technology Department contributed by offering data from the city's Geographic Information System (GIS) and other data sources to complete the study.

The GIS study completed by the IAFF is a service provided to local affiliates to support their endeavors to address staffing issues, but also provides vital data that is used on the national level to assess the occupational health and hazards associated with careers in fire and EMS, and IAFF related firefighter safety research. They also use the information to support fire-based EMS systems over private ambulance services, and evaluate a departments compliance with standards established by the National Fire Protection Assoc. (NFPA), which are widely recognized when followed as standards that not only provide the safest possible situation for fire fighters, but also promote the best possible outcomes for victims who experience fire-related hazards.

Statement from Local 1146 President: "it's important for this organization to pursue our agenda with reliable information based on national standards and historical data. The goal is to provide [the City of Lynchburg with] the most capable, competent and professional fire suppression and EMS response in the state, and it takes public information sharing to get there. Lynchburg property owners pay nearly double the property tax than neighboring jurisdictions, and the department our members serve provide a big part of what they are paying for. I've heard many of our customers, and particularly the ones that are in a stage of life where they value peace of mind, say that they are willing to pay the extra price because someone will show up quickly when they dial 9-1-1. Frankly, that's just not the case any longer. This study shows gaps in our coverage for fire protection and EMS response, and we feel the public deserves to know this information. Our members will always give 110% effort to answer the call, but when you

run out of resources routinely, and don't have adequate staffing to take time off, the department reaches an unhealthy breaking point where something will eventually give."

The Lynchburg population has increased by 16% between the last two censuses, with an equal rise in housing units. For the fire department, more people and housing units means more medical emergencies, a greater chance for fires, and more buildings to protect. [The city budget has failed to provide for adequate funding of the department since the recession.](#) Over the last decade, funding for the department has remained relatively flat as the cost of goods and living has increased, presenting a large deficit in funding during that time span.

There has been a 40% increase in EMS calls in over the last 10 years. The department started moving in the right direction by adding "power shift" medic units. Station 2's unit was cut in 2017, and as of January 2018 Station 8's unit was cut after 5 years of service. This impacts fire and EMS response. LFD ambulances are part of our rapid deployment strategy for fire suppression resources, because everyone is cross-trained, and the ambulances have air-packs for firefighting. NFPA standard recommends 4 people for initial firefighting operations, which means residents in the Timberlake/Wyndhurst/Greenview/Leesville areas of the city may have to wait for another resource from an outlying station before fire fighters come in to put the fire out. This move puts lives and property at risk.

He also stated that fire engines provide EMS as well, but can't transport people to the hospital. "So if you're having a heart attack in one of those communities, you are going to have to wait a little longer to get to the cardiac catheterization lab at Lynchburg General where the more permanent life-saving begins," he said.

"Let's take a look at the Timberlake Rd. corridor," President Maxwell stated. "When you've got an area of the city that sees rapid growth, [50% population increase and nearly double the housing units according to census data], you would think the city would invest more into protecting the people and buildings, like you pay more for insurance when you buy another car. We have one fire engine protecting almost a quarter of the city's property tax revenue out there, and they just put the ambulance from that station out of service indefinitely last year, leaving that part of the city underinsured."

"Running out of ambulances used to be the exception, and now it's the norm. Life threatening medical and traumatic emergencies have one solution in common to be definitively stabilized and treated, and that solution requires an ambulance – because the solution is the emergency department at the hospital. As a city we have come a long way making this one of the safest places to experience cardiac arrest and have been recognized by the American Heart Association for our cardiac arrest care, which isn't just our providers, but the state-of-the-art equipment on our ambulances like the Lucas 2 automated chest compressor. When we run out of ambulances on a daily basis, the best tools for the job of saving lives can be delayed to those who need them most. When we tie up fire engines on medical calls that wouldn't normally need them because we can't get an ambulance to them, we expose a portion of the city to increased risk for loss from fire, because response times will be delayed during the early stages of fire growth, where it grows the fastest. When you run our providers into the ground on sometimes sleepless 24-hour ambulance shifts, then hold them over for another 24 hours on mandatory overtime because we don't have enough people, you increase their risks of fatal heart attack, cancer and behavioral health crises. Funding levels have got to change, because it's not safe for the people we serve, and it's definitely not safe for us," said President Maxwell.

Over the next week you will start seeing yellow signs all over the city calling the community to action to support Lynchburg Fire Fighters in the city budget. The Lynchburg Fire Fighter's Association wants the public to know they are ready to take the fight to City Hall for adequate resources to keep delivering some of the best emergency medical care and fire protection in the commonwealth, because that's what city residents and business pay for. Firefighters in Lynchburg are asking for your support by visiting their website, www.local1146.com, where you can learn how contact City Council members and voice your support for public safety. President Jamie Maxwell will also be making a presentation during the public information session in City Council Chambers regarding the FY2020 budget, and they invite members of the public to join them as a unified community supporting public safety.

View the IAFF Emergency Response System Evaluation at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b40247_13165330bd1b4a6a989bf62cd10ab10b.pdf