

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Safety/Finance Committees of Council  
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building  
On Monday, February 5, 2024, at 6:30 P.M.**

Scott Radcliffe, Chair of the Safety Committee, called the meeting to order.

**Safety Committee Members Present**

Chair, Ward 4 Council Member Scott Radcliffe

Council Member At-Large Brian Fischer; Council Member At-Large Michelle Patton

**Finance Committee Members Present**

Chair, Ward 3 Council Member Tony Moore

Ward 2 Council Member Dennis McBride; Ward 4 Council Member Scott Radcliffe

**Others in Attendance**

Clerk of Council Barbara Brooks; Council Member At-Large Mary Berges; Ward 1 Council Member Jennifer Demaline; Mayor Bryan Jensen; Planning/Economic Development Coordinator Pam Fechter; Finance Director Steve Presley; Safety/Service Director Duane Streator; Fire Chief David Swope; Asst. Fire Chief Brett Bruehler; Police Chief Dan Fischbach; Residents Larry Escalante, Pat Jankowski, Jimmy Fischer, David Brennon and Reg Brennon; Law Director John Gasior

**Discussion of a Fire Training Tower and an Overview of the Fire Department**

Safety/Service Director Duane Streator stated that he would give a little history of where we have been with the training facility and then Fire Chief Swope will give his presentation. As everyone on Council knows, a number of years ago there was a fire training facility that was approved that was to be built behind the Fire Station. With that, there was some controversy because it included a space to be able to do live fires and there were questions about being able to do that there. Shortly after that was approved and before it was constructed, COVID hit and at that time we ran into some shortages with it so there was a delay on that and during that time we were able to negotiate and purchase some property on Schneider Court. So the discussion then was should we move the facility. They were talking about having more room on Schneider Court and at the time, that was very favorable.

Mr. Streator said that during that time we decided to cancel the order with the original company and we were going to move the facility to Schneider Court. Since that time we have been working on the engineering on that site after purchasing it and we have also worked with an architect to come up with some preliminary drawings for not only the Fire Department but a City-wide training facility for some of the Police Department firing range and things like that on that property, which we are still interested in doing. But during that time after we got closer with the engineering, he went back to Chief Swope and they started looking at prices to rebid or re-look at the training facility that included a burn part of it for the Schneider Court property.

Mr. Streator said, since that, the Fire Chief and Asst. Fire Chief went back to the drawing board after we had some preliminary numbers and started looking also at the numbers of the way the Fire Department operates. Since that time they have come back with a new plan that outlines moving part of the facility back to the Fire Station to build onto that and which will not include a burn facility. That was the big controversy back when that was approved. Having the facility at the Fire Station allows us to do a lot more training but we still ultimately want to get a burn facility over at the Schneider Court property and

a training facility that would give us City-wide training for Police, Fire, and also our other City services that can use that property.

Mr. Streator said that he would then turn this over to the Fire Chief to explain the research and where the proposal is going from there.

Fire Chief David Swope stated that he appreciated the Committees seeing him. As Director Streator indicated, training has been something that the Fire Department has always done so it is nothing new to them. There are ISO standards and NFPA guidelines and OSHA requirements that outline what we are supposed to do but at the Avon Fire Department we are always training to exceed those minimums.

The Chief said although fire calls are down they still cause the most line of duty deaths and injury. And that really is the nuts and bolts of why we want to train and make sure our staff is up to snuff with everything that needs to happen, not only on fire but any EMS. An injured member impacts not just time off it also impacts the whole system from morale to workload to staffing and budgets. Although we are a small community, we still have full house fires and vehicle fires along with our 84% of EMS calls.

Chief Swope said that retention in the public sector is a hot button; people are not getting into public service like they used to and so we have to get creative with that. We are losing a lot of our older, more experienced members and so we have new members coming in and there is a void there that we have to be able to be on top of training, to make sure that they are knowing what they need to do. And then our job itself has multiplied several times, not just from fire and EMS; now we have hazmat, combined space, car seat checks, fire prevention programs, etc. so there are a lot of avenues that we have to make sure that we are really up to snuff on.

The Chief said that he has only been Chief for a little over 2-1/2 years and the one main focus when he came in was quality over quantity. He really thought, especially with this new generation, that we need to get their hands on everything. We had some guys that never started a chain saw before. We use chain saws to hole the roofs to get the smoke out; we use power fans and some did not know what the choke was on a fan. So we have to show them these things and training is a big part of that, hands-on training especially. The retention is much greater when they put their hands on something and do. We even saw inclusive and diversified parts of the Fire Department coming together as a team because they were working together and doing all the training together. We saw an increase in morale from that, and retention as far as being engaged and not just sitting there watching videos or doing the online training. So instead of just being a passive recipient of it, they were actively engaged in the training so we saw a ton of benefits from this hands-on approach.

Chief Swope said, unfortunately the reality is how do you do hands-on training when you do over 4,000 calls a year? And as you can see from the chart, back in 2020 our call volume was about 3,100. We were hitting the ISO standard of 16 hours training a month which was great. As the call volume went up, we tried to keep up. We are still trying to keep up but it is just not the reality. You can see it the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2023, we averaged 11.8 calls per day. So how do you get 16 hours of training per month when you are averaging that many calls a day? So that idea of off-site training, sending guys out to training, was just kind of a fleeting idea. The months that gave us the most hours were the ones where we did hands-on training in a house. Through a grant, the City had obtained a house in a floodzone and it was going to be torn down. We were able to use that house for a couple months and those were the months where we saw the most hours, 18.5 hours, and it was really good training. 2023 was the same thing although we only averaged 11 hours because of the number of calls. We still have the training house off Detroit that

the Schools bought; they allow us to use that house and in the two months we used it, hands-on training was 14.7 hours and 12.4 hours. In 2022, though, there were no houses available. So it is one of those things; we cannot base it on when a house is available and if it is available, is it safe to train in?

The Chief said, so you have those hulls and we really had to kind of look at that burn building training tower again. He and Mr. Streater talked; the original quote for the building was somewhere around \$400,000 and now it has doubled. So we said if we are going to invest this money, what is the best way to do it? And so it was back to the drawing board. He and the Asst. Chief took a road trip, basically two days, and looked at six different training sites all over three states – Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. They saw fire stations with calls that were very similar to ours. All of these departments had multiple stations but it was a combination of part-time and full-time. What we found was that 85% of them said that most of the training they do is not burning; it is hose length, laddering, window breaching and the walls, searching, etc. So we thought, wait a second, maybe we are looking at this the wrong way. Now burning, live fire, is the most dangerous thing we do so we still have to have that training but right now the most impact we are going to get for our dollars is the 85% of the training that we can do without the actual smoke going outside and into the environment. Most of these other stations said that they usually have one station covering another station so we do not have that advantage yet but in the same sense, even those times, surprisingly even if someone was covering the station, they said they modified their training because they knew they were next up as far as squad calls came in. Also, the majority of them said if the training facility was on-site they would use it more.

Chief Swope said, with that information in hand, we came back to our officers and said, here is our new strategy and asked for their thoughts. They came back with a lot of scenario-based ideas- skills that some of the senior guys have not done in awhile and some of the new members have never done. The problem is we really need a training facility so some of those next steps were looking at buildings in town and working with an architect to ask how he would design a training facility to get us the training we need for all these different types of buildings. He then pointed out the photo of the structure that was designed by the architect and all of its features. There is a delta window, a porch, interior and exterior patios, a loading dock – all those kind of things built into one structure. There are four sides and every side has a different advantage point that we can work with as far as doing those evolutions to make it different every time. It does residential and commercial and even parapet walls that you see on some of our commercial structures. The interior has stairs much like a hotel, so it is all those things put into one small package that we can do the training on and, yes, we are not burning, but the amount of training for everything else we do is huge.

Chief Swope said, in conclusion, we have seen enhancements with that hands-on training that we have done, especially with the younger generation on the critical thinking, and the problem solving techniques. The training that we did with the acquired houses is essential and with the practicing of those hands-on skills, morale and positive attitude has increased. Unfortunately vacant houses are not always safe or always available and it is very hard to build a training program around that so this new structure would do that and is why he was proposing that we have this purpose-built structure at the Fire Station. Our calls over the last four years have increased 21% and so how do we stay focused on training and still be able to respond to those calls? Having this purpose-built structure at the Fire Department gives us the best of both worlds of having that quality training and eliminating the off-site travel. Keeping our resources there at the Fire Station is really the idea here.

The Chief then said that he has another power-point presentation that Mayor Jensen wanted him to do on station location, but before he moves on to that, he asked if there were any questions on the training tower.

Mr. Radcliffe asked the Chief to explain a little more about retaining manpower and what this facility can do for retention. As far as he knows, this will be the only training tower that is in this general west side. Chief Swope said there is a volunteer fire department that has one that is dilapidated because they do not use it that often. As far as retention, we have hired eight firefighters in the last three years and most of them are younger generation. They are eager, they want to do training and you have to give them a place to do it. Right now they are throwing ladders against the back of the building. They are grabbing rope and gear and asking to be shown in the evenings about how to do the rope system and they are pulling one of our sport utility trucks across the parking lot. But the quality training is not there, so they are looking for that quality training.

Mr. Radcliffe stated so this facility would be a leading thing on the west side if he can compare it to other cities around us. Is this a common problem in terms of training going down as the percentages of the calls go up? Obviously Avon is still growing in terms of population and we expect our numbers to be going up for a little while longer here until it gets to a stationary status in growth. Is this facility going to be able to keep that training relevant and on the spot for the new employees for the next 5 to 15 years? Chief Swope said that he believed so. What is unique about this that he did not see elsewhere and they looked at a lot of different stations, is that we went with an architect that builds fire stations and we said that we wanted to have each side of the facility give something different to the training aspect. One of the people on their staff is a Fire Chief from Seattle and has built 14 stations so he had that knowledge to work with the architect and say what we needed. So it is unique because most of these are just a box and what we found was that, while we still need the burn building, it does not need to be near as intricate as this because you are going for one purpose and that is to put out the fire. In this facility there are multiple purposes: can you ladder it with a 25 ft ladder or do you need a 30 ft, how do you work around the steps, how do you bring that hose around on a loading dock, can you lower from the front, working with closed stairs and open stairs.... So there are a lot of things in there that are very specific. He thought that the biggest thing we learned from looking at all the different training sites were the things that they would do different and so that is kind of how we designed this one.

The Chief displayed photos of the proposed facility which will be at the back of the Fire Station. He said a new concrete pad will be poured for it and it will be about 10 ft off from the Fire Station. They looked at tying it in but it was cost prohibitive so they did keep it off the building. You can barely see one corner of it from the front of the building.

Mr. McBride noted that this facility would require a full foundation. He asked if this structure was tall enough; should it be four stories? And his next question is if it was going to get too crowded out back when we do training with other departments? Is it really practical? Should we push it away from the Fire Station; maybe put it on the other side of that rear service drive? Chief Swope said that he and Director Streater talked a lot about if we include other departments in this but this is really for Avon and their surrounding communities. He still likes the Schneider Court property for an all-hands type of training facility. Plus this structure does not burn; departments around us find ways to train but the lure of that facility is going to be to burn. But he thinks that right now for all that we can do with it, he says we put off the burning and focus on the rest of the training we do.

Mr. Moore asked if the look was going to be brick like what the Fire Station is? Chief Swope, said, yes, and they actually sent us a couple samples already which are very close to the brick of the Fire Station. Mr. Moore said that one of his concerns is keeping the charm of the French Creek District and as we are adding more to that, the playground and the pool, one of his concerns is, as Mr. McBride said, having multiple fire stations congesting the area. Chief Swope said that he did not really see that. This facility is not meant for full scale operations; we would need a facility off-site for multiple departments. Our normal response brings three engines and two ladders. That would not be here; that is not what this is for. This is for individual training of three to six members. It is more customized training. So would we have another crew from Avon Lake? Yes, if it was three members maybe because that is really what this is built for.

Ms. Berges asked what the estimated cost was of the training tower? Chief Swope said, \$840,000. and the good news with that is that we should receive \$100,000 through State Senator Nathan Manning and LCCC. The Chief said that he confirmed last week that it is still in the process of approval and was told that as long as it is a training facility, there would not be any reason why we would not get that money, and the money goes a lot farther now than it did before when we were looking at a much more expensive structure.

Mr. Radcliffe asked if this building has power and Chief Swope said only for lighting of the floors or whatever, just for the safety standpoint and it will tie in right to the existing. Mr. Radcliffe asked Mr. Streater if it would be possible to have City employees do part of the construction work for some cost savings. Mr. Streater said that they had talked about that and there is a possibility of some of that but the primary structure would need to be done by a construction firm. Chief Swope said that this does have the potential for a sprinkler system in it and he talked to Utilities Supt. Brian Bruce about his employees installing that as a cost saving measure. It is not going to be sprinkled as a protective system; it is more of a training system. Mayor Jensen stated that we just want to be careful in terms of liability.

Mr. Moore asked if the height of the facility is accurate to what is shown in the picture and Chief Swope said, correct. Mr. Streater added that you will not be able to see the facility from Detroit Road. With the roof height of the current building you will not see the rear addition. Mr. McBride asked what the height of the structure was and the Chief said that he did not know but estimated it to be 38 ft. It is enough, but not too big. He added that he wants this to look like it has always been here so that was a big focus and he wants it to look like this for years to come. One of the training towers they looked at was just repainted it at a cost of almost \$60,000 and it was only four years old. So our tower is expensive but will have longevity and will be almost maintenance free.

Mrs. Demaline asked how we would be paying for this and Mr. Presley answered that the initial would be to take out a note for the construction and then finance it through the Fire Department Fund. Mrs. Demaline asked what the rates were on a note right now and Mr. Pressley said a one-year note would probably be at 4-1/2% as long as you keep it under \$10 million as an issuance of the year. Mrs. Demaline asked if we were to move forward with this, what is the time frame for the project? Chief Swope said that he would like to have it this year. He said that the architect that they worked with has given them a quote to do the construction documents. He talked to Mr. Gasior about using them as a service and he said that would be fine. So we can move forward with construction documents and then we need to go out for bids.

Ms. Berges stated that in the Chief's presentation he said that most departments use the towers on average three times a week and she asked what he anticipated. Chief Swope said, at least that.

Mayor Jensen stated that the second part of the Chief's presentation is just to give Council an update on where we see the Fire Department going in the next few years. At some point, we are going to have the Police Chief come in and do the same thing. This part is not ready for Council to make decisions but he wanted to give Council an idea of what the Fire Department does all day long in terms of trying to improve the department. It is part of his job to look at where the City is going and how we are developing. So he asked Chief Swope to give them an overview of what has been looked at and alluded to a third fire station at some point. It is not something we just think about today; we think about it all the time and when we talk about full build-out of the City, what that could look like. So this is the first part of letting everybody know that this has been looked at ever since Chief Swope has been Chief, even before Mayor Jensen became Mayor, the idea of moving forward. It is closer than it has ever been and we will be coming before Council later on with a more formal presentation to show everybody how it is going to happen.

Chief Swope said that last April or May he came and did a presentation on the need for a second fire station. This is the same presentation but he has updated the numbers to January of 2024 so all the numbers in here are current. He made copies for everyone. He was not going to go through it slide by slide because the reasons that we need another station are in the presentation. Hopefully he convinced everyone of that last year. This time he really wants to focus on location. It is very interesting if you look at some of our surrounding communities. It is not just having a second station, it is the location of that second station because if you look at Avon Lake, they have a great response time but they are also half the size of us. N. Ridgeville's response time is actually more than ours but they are bigger. Westlake has a better response time but that is two stations and good locations. So it is not just about having a second station, it is also about having that good location. Chief Swope noted that Mrs. Demaline had asked for copies of the heat maps which show the areas where the majority of our calls are and those maps are included in this presentation.

Chief Swope stated, but what he wanted to speak on tonight was how they came up with the location for the second station. They did a lot of research; they went to different conferences and asked questions. So they came up with what they are thinking for the location. He pointed out on the map our current station. The red line is a 4-minute response and the blue the 6-minute response. They can see that our current station is pretty awesome as far as its coverage map of the City. A 6-minute response is the max that we want but for some of the far areas of the City, we are 7 and 8 minutes. The two things you want to keep in mind are people that have an established community do not like you talking about a fire station right in the middle of their nice community that is already built. And then if you do have a fire station in that nice community, they really do not like you taking it out. So we tried to keep those in mind.

The Chief said he knew we also looked at property that the City already owned. So the first thing we looked at was Schwartz Road Park. You might remember back when we were part-time, that was a second fire station. We kept an engine there, no squad but we did keep an engine there for awhile and it does have a great coverage map as far as the south part of the City. But again, it is right in the middle of a community and you do not have a lot of highway access and there are a lot of cut-through streets that you are going 45 MPH on to get to an emergency. It also gets very far into Westlake and very far into N. Ridgeville as far as its coverage map so though it benefits Avon, it benefits them a lot more than us or equally. It does have good coverage but we also have to think about we do not want to take any coverage away from the current station. So we want to be able to maintain the staffing of the current station and maybe augment it with a second station. Plus if you start putting the heat map on top of it where all our calls are, it covers the two big ones, St. Mary's of the Woods and Avon Place, but you are almost 7 minutes to get to Rose Group and Ganzhorn and Cleveland Clinic and then even UH and some other facilities. You are kind of stretching that 6-minute mark, so you want to try to encompass a little bit more of that.

Chief Swope said so then we looked at Schneider Court where we talked about having the training facility. What about if we put a station **and** a training facility there? And it just was way too far north; it cuts out the bottom half of the City. We do not get to fully use the advantage of the highway although it gets us to the Westlake and Sheffield borders but it really kind of lessens the lower half of the City. Although it does catch a lot of our big heat items, he just feels from a residential standpoint, that south part of the City is kind of left over so we have to balance that.

Chief Swope said they looked at the location they are proposing, which is at Nagel Road and Middleton. That area has a lot of advantages. It is underdeveloped right now so there is low impact on established neighborhoods, it is close to our commercial area so it will improve our ISO. ISO is based on needed fire flow so the bigger the building, the more fire flow you need so again, you can imagine the Bendixes, the Duck Tapes – those are big buildings and you need a lot of fire flow so it is closer to that. It has access to the highways to augment motor vehicle accidents and if we have to cover Station 1, that highway access will allow us to get off at Colorado and Rt. 83, and as the City grows and the infrastructure grows, help us get even further down in there. 33% of the time when we have one squad out another call comes in and that has been consistent for the last four years – anywhere from 29% to 34% of the time when one of our ambulances is out, another call comes in so we need to think about that second and third call.

Chief Swope pointed out the coverage map. He said that the “x” is the location they are proposing, that Nagel/Middleton area. Depending on the GIS, sometimes that 6 minutes has hit Mills Road, but the coverage west is very good, the 4-minute response is great and if we layer the heat map on top of it, it catches all our hot spots almost in that 4-minute response. It covers Station 1 if needed, is close enough to the highway and is covering that whole lower southeast part of the City a lot better than we are covering it now.

The Chief said, lastly, he did want to mention again as the Mayor had said, we have to look at the total City build-out and that third station somewhere along Detroit Road to catch the west side. Right now the infrastructure needs to continue to develop over there, for instance Long Road needs to connect, etc. Those things, in conjunction with the station, is what is going to get our response time better. It is not just one thing; we have to look at it as a whole City plan to do something like that but some of the proposed locations were right on that Detroit Road area by Avondale or Long Road, anywhere along there. If you look at the current calls or the current volume of calls and where they are coming from, it is not really in that area yet, but it is going to be. At some point, the City is going to build out and we need to think about that.

Mayor Jensen thanked the Chief again for putting the presentation together. He said they had talked quite a bit about costs, etc. Everything is expensive but we need to be prepared when we are ready to move forward and he thought that we are in real range of having this all done. We need to continue to look at the reasons why we would do it and the Chief stated those reasons in the presentation. Nothing that was done by any of us but by the Fire Department itself looking at it realistically and saying where is the cost and the value.

Mr. Moore asked what we are talking about engine-wise for the second station and Chief Swope said an engine and a squad; however, he would like to make it at least three bays because you do not know how the City is going to build out but he hates to make it too small. We would not need a second ladder; we would move the one that is currently in the center of town as it would benefit us more in that northwest quadrant. So he would like to have a third bay for the ladder to possibly go there and then just look from an ISO standpoint or a study standpoint, where it works out best but still having a total of three engines.

Right now we have an engine and a reserve at the station with the ladder truck and then we have a third reserve sitting at the water tower. With all the requirements of having to move engines around and having to keep up in service with the number of calls, we would still keep a three-engine fleet and one ladder. Mayor Jensen noted that Westlake only has one ladder and their population is much greater than ours, even at what our full build-out would be. Chief Swope added that, with mutual aid, ideally we bring in four engines and two ladders so we bring in another ladder with our mutual aid.

Mr. Fischer stated that, with the idea of a third station in the future, he thought it is probably smart for us to start thinking about buying property if the Chief has ideas in mind of location. Maybe that is something that the Chief can discuss with the Administration and then they can bring it to Council. Land is going quick and it is not getting any cheaper so it would be good to buy it now. Mayor Jensen said that they have already reached out based on where the Chief showed that the areas are.

Mrs. Demaline thanked Chief Swope and said that it was a great summary that he put together and she appreciates having this information to look at. She does not dispute the need for another station but this location for a station does not serve Ward 1 very well. It would be really helpful to see an overall comprehensive plan for this station and what our time lines look like. She said that she would love to see how we are serving our population overall and not just on the heat map. Chief Swope said that he was working with the GIS program to try to get some of that information so he will continue to work with that.

Mr. McBride said to Chief Swope that he did a great job in putting this all together and everyone agreed.

Mr. Radcliffe adjourned the meeting at 7:19 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Gail Hayden, Asst. Clerk of Council