

For
Immediate
Release



Contact:

Chief Mark Kirschhoffer -or-
Deputy Chief Paul Maplethorpe
Newport Township Fire
Protection District
39010 N. Caroline Avenue
Wadsworth, IL 60083
847-336-1080
chief@newportfire.org

FIRE DISTRICT PLACES BOND REFERENDUM QUESTION ON APRIL 2ND BALLOT

February 18, 2019: "Save our Firefighters" is the alarm that Newport Township Fire Protection District President Joe Stanonik hopes to ring through Newport Township as the Fire Protection District works to stave off rising costs to provide fire, emergency medical and specialized responses to the area of approximately 31.8 square miles. Financial forecasts for the next fiscal year, which begins on May 1st, show a deficit of over \$100,000. "We operate on a bare bones budget of less than \$1.7 million dollars and have no cash reserves," reports Board President Stanonik. "We've cut the budget in nearly every place possible and still be able to keep up with our emergency response obligations."

"No one wants to pay more taxes, me included," relates Board President Stanonik. "The Fire District Board of Trustees are very sensitive to this but does not see any other way to maintain the minimum staffing levels necessary to provide effective service to the residents and visitors." Newport Township Fire Protection District has not passed a tax referendum since 1993 when paramedic ambulance service was approved. Tax increase referendums in 2012 and 2015 failed by slim margins.

The looming budget deficit caused the Fire Protection District Board of Trustees to take recent actions to keep the operation solvent. Recognizing the need to raise additional revenue, the Board of Trustees voted to place a general obligation bond issue referendum question on the April 2nd consolidated election ballot. Understanding that without increased revenue, staff will have to be reduced, the trustees voted on February 13th to lay-off its three full-time employees and reduce part-time coverage effective May 1st.

“Reducing our staffing levels, and especially laying-off our dedicated employees, is the last thing the Board of Trustees wants to have happen,” laments President Stanonik who has been affiliated with the Fire District for over twenty years and has served as a trustee since 2006. “However, our responsibility is to take necessary actions to keep the Fire District operational and work within the budget while continuing to provide a high level of service to the citizens of the Fire District.”

Newport’s fire district is seeking authorization from the voters to issue \$3.5 million in general obligation bonds that will be repaid over a twenty-year period. The bonds will be used to purchase emergency response vehicles, improve and equip fire stations and pay outstanding debt related to fire station and fire truck acquisition.

Fire Chief Mark Kirschhoffer, who has volunteered for the Fire District since 1979 and helps maintain the fire apparatus, reports that the fleet of vehicles is aging. “Two of our three pumpers are twenty years old and our water tender (tanker) is nineteen,” relates Chief Kirschhoffer. “They are tired!” The Fire District’s Pumper/Tender is thirty years old and was recently condemned due to a failure of the truck’s frame. “Fortunately, we were able to purchase a twenty-year old used fire engine from Libertyville to help us get by,” says a grateful Chief Kirschhoffer. National standards recommend that fire apparatus that is 20 or more years old be moved to “reserve” status and thirty-year old apparatus be retired. Chief Kirschhoffer states, “Newport has had an apparatus replacement plan for years, there just hasn’t been money to fund it.” The proposed bond issue will replace three twenty-plus year-old units with two new pumper/tenders that will improve reliability and increase initial firefighting capabilities.

Stations are another area where the bond issue will free up funds that can be used to support operations. Station 1 was built by volunteers in 1946 and is located in downtown Wadsworth near the Post Office. As the Fire District began staffing the stations 24/7, temporary trailers were used to house personnel. Station 1 was updated in 2012 to provide living quarters, office and training areas. Funding for the remodel was obtained through a mortgage that has a remaining principle of over \$700,000. Paying off the mortgage with the bond issue will free \$65,000 per year for salaries and equipment.

Station 2 is a leased facility located on Old Route 41 north of Russell Road. This station is staffed by two firefighter/medics 24/7 and provides considerably improved response times to north and west portions of the Fire District as well as can easily access Interstate 94 and Highway 41. This station is also west of the heavily traveled Canadian Pacific Railroad's tracks that are frequently blocked by slow or stopped trains in downtown Wadsworth. The lease contains a purchase clause that, if funding becomes available through the bond referendum, would add an additional \$57,000 annually to the operating budget.

Bond consulting firm Piper Jaffray Company has assisted the Fire District preparing for a bond issue. Based on their calculations, the owner of a home with a fair market value of \$200,000 home will pay an additional \$74 per year. A home with a fair market value of \$400,000 will pay an additional \$156 annually for the twenty-year life of the bonds.

Newport Township Fire Protection District protects the majority of Newport Township including the villages of Old Mill Creek, Wadsworth and the western portion of Beach Park. Firefighter/paramedics responded to 1,297 incidents in 2018.

Citizens are encouraged to visit the Fire District's website at www.newportfire.org or follow us on Facebook at <https://m.facebook.com/Newport-Township-Fire-Protection-District-362742137654916/>.