



Police & Fire Commission Agenda

Monday, September 18, 2023 @ 2:00 PM

415 Main Street, Onalaska WI 54650

Meeting in person in Conference Room 112 & Remotely on Zoom

Members of the public wishing to attend remotely and provide public input:

Meeting Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81173403447?pwd=8jrqwLSiy3hHUxmUdm6a2xNnFDiHWi.1>

Phone Number: 1-312-626-6799 Meeting ID: 811 7340 3447 Password: 54650

1. Call to Order and roll call.
2. Consideration and action on minutes from the previous meeting (6/27/2023).
3. Public Input (limited to 3 minutes per individual).

Consideration and possible action on the following items:

4. Assistant Fire Chief Job Description Review.
5. Confirm and Set Dates for Police Officer Hiring Process.
6. Adjournment.

Notice is hereby given that members of and possibly a quorum of the Common Council of the City of Onalaska who do not serve on the Commission and members of and possibly a quorum of members of other governmental bodies may attend this meeting to gather information about a subject over which they have decision making responsibility. No action will be taken by any governmental body at the above stated meeting other than the governmental body specifically referred to above in this notice.

Notices also provided to: Police & Fire Commission (**Mark Dahlke - President, Lori Olson – Vice President, Jim Binash – Secretary**, Patty Fitzpatrick, Jim Wickizer), Common Council (Ald. Leanne Stokes, Ald. Shawn McAlister, Ald. Dan Stevens, Ald. Diane Wulf, Ald. Steven Nott, Ald. Larry Jiracek), Mayor Kim Smith, City Administrator Rick Niemeier, City Attorney Amanda Jackson, Department Heads, Media

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the City of Onalaska will provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with a disability to ensure equal access to public meetings provided notification is given to the City Clerk within seventy-two (72) hours prior to the public meeting and that the requested accommodation does not create an undue hardship for the City.

Statutory Notice Posted: 09/15/2023

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1 The Meeting of the Police & Fire Commission was called to order at 2:00 p.m. on Monday,
2 September 18, 2023. It was noted that the meeting had been announced and a notice posted at
3 City Hall.

4
5 Roll call was taken with the following members present: Mark Dahlke, Lori Olson, Patty
6 Fitzpatrick, Jim Wickizer.

7
8 Also Present (either in person or remotely): City Administrator Rick Niemeier, Mayor Kim
9 Smith, City Attorney Amanda Jackson, Human Resource Director Amy Frandsen, Fire Chief
10 Peter Fletty, Police Chief Charles Ashbeck, Assistant Police Chief Tim Berg, Ald. Diane Wulf,
11 Ald. Leanne Stokes.

12
13 Excused Absence: Jim Binash.

14 **Item 2 – Consideration and action on minutes from the previous meeting (6/27/23)**

15
16
17 Motion by Lori, second by Jim, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as printed and
18 on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

19
20 On voice vote, motion carried.

21 **Item 3 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

22
23
24 Mark called three times for anyone wishing to provide public input and closed that portion of the
25 meeting.

26 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

27 **Item 4 – Assistant Fire Chief Job Description Review**

28
29
30
31 Fire Chief Fletty noted he has examined the Assistant Fire Chief Job Description Review and
32 described it as being “very inclusive” of the duties that he would expect from the Assistant Fire
33 Chief. Fire Chief Fletty said, “The only thing I saw on the review ... I did a little research just to
34 see what other assistant chiefs’ responsibilities were, as well as education and everything, and [I
35 also looked] at supervisory experience. I know ours says right now it calls for five years of
36 supervisory experience, which I thought was a little bit high. Again, my research showed that
37 everything else was pretty well in the realm of what our description notes. However, I found that
38 progressive supervisory experience ranged anywhere from two to seven years, which kind of
39 puts us in the middle of the pack, but I felt that was a little high. My recommendation to the PFC
40 would be to reword that to [say], ‘*a minimum of two years supervisory experience required, and
41 two years collective bargaining required, with five years preferred.*’ ”

Reviewed 9/19/2023 by Amy Frandsen

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42
43 Amy directed commission members' attention to letter "C" of the "Training, Experience and
44 Other Requirements" section found on page 3 of the job description, and she noted that is where
45 what Fire Chief Fletty had described is currently found. Amy said, "Not looking to take away
46 the number of years of supervisory ... looking just to be a little bit lighter on the amount of years
47 for supervisory experience. We're still looking for supervisory experience, but not at five years.
48 I think two years will open it up to a wider candidate pool. Yet we'll still have five years
49 preferred if we have that particular candidate." Amy noted she and Fire Chief Fletty had
50 discussed this prior to this afternoon's meeting, and she said the entire job description needs to
51 be updated in the newest format. Amy said, "That would just be formatting, basically, to put it in
52 the same format as our other job descriptions, but that would be the other substantial change: just
53 to the supervisory experience."

54
55 Lori asked, "But not to the minimum of 10 years progressively responsible experience?"

56
57 Fire Chief Fletty said, "I think 10 years, from what I saw online, that was pretty accurate in that
58 range. I saw from five to 10 years, but I think 10 years for an assistant chief is probably
59 adequate. I mean, that's 10 years on the job, which I think is necessary."

60
61 Amanda said, "I'm thinking of our internal candidate pool. I believe having two years required
62 will knock at least one of our lieutenants out. I don't know how important it is to have the two
63 years required, or just a preference for supervisory experience."

64
65 Lori asked if there are any internal candidates for the Assistant Fire Chief position.

66
67 Amanda told Lori none of the internal candidates meet the five-year threshold, and she said she
68 believes two of the three individuals would qualify if the requirement is lowered to two years.
69 However, Amanda also noted that does not necessarily mean that two of the three internal
70 candidates wish to serve as the Assistant Fire Chief. Amanda said, "I'm just thinking if at least
71 all three had an opportunity, I guess I don't know how important the two years is. Is that the
72 threshold we want? I think the other candidate would have one year and nine months. That
73 would be my one question back [to the commission]."

74
75 Fire Chief Fletty reiterated he "was viewing this off of just what I found online and being in the
76 ballpark of what other fire departments are doing." Fire Chief Fletty said he believes Amanda's
77 comments have validity, and he told commission members he wants to see internal candidates
78 for the position.

79
80 Mark asked how the Assistant Fire Chief's job description lines up with that of the Assistant
81 Police Chief's job description. Mark also asked if perhaps the Assistant Police Chief's job
82 description will need to be updated in the future so that both positions are more in line. Mark

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83 said, "Not that they have to be, but it would seem logical."

84

85 Assistant Police Chief Berg noted he had served as a sergeant with the Police Department for
86 more than 15 years prior to being named Assistant Police Chief.

87

88 Police Chief Ashbeck noted that per the Assistant Police Chief's job description, the position
89 calls for eight years' experience as a police officer, with a minimum of five years in a
90 supervisory role in a law enforcement agency. Police Chief Ashbeck further noted the job
91 description also addresses training and education.

92

93 Amanda noted the positions are not on the same grades.

94

95 Mark said there might be some reasons for the two positions to have differences, and he
96 suggested that perhaps the commission can examine this at a later date.

97

98 Lori asked, "Do we need a minimum of one year? Do we need a minimum of two years?"

99

100 Fire Chief Fletty told commission members he is open either to one or two years, and he said, "I
101 think when we originally discussed this, we were looking at just having supervisory experience
102 preferred, but it seemed a little lenient compared to other communities our size. That was why
103 we put the two years in there: that seemed to be the threshold that other departments had." Fire
104 Chief Fletty reiterated he is open either to one or two years, and he said, "I think that would be
105 good to have as many internal applicants as possible, especially with me being so new. It would
106 be good have some people that are very knowledgeable with our department and our operations."

107

108 Patty said she believes two years is logical, and she also pointed out one internal candidate has
109 one year and nine months experience. Patty said, "You have to cut it off someplace. I don't
110 know how close this person is to ... Is it one year and nine months and he's almost at 10 months
111 or something like that? Is this third person even interested in [the Assistant Fire Chief
112 position]?"

113

114 Fire Chief Fletty told Patty he has had some discussions with Fire Department staff about this
115 topic, and he said he knows two of the three are interested in the Assistant Fire Chief position.
116 Fire Chief Fletty said he is not certain if the third individual is interested in the position.

117

118 Patty asked if the third individual is the one with one year and nine months experience.

119

120 Fire Chief Fletty told Patty he is not certain.

121

122 Patty asked, "Do you make an exception for this one?"

123

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124 Lori said no exception can be made if it is not stated in the job description. Lori also pointed out
125 that an individual might only have one year of experience in the Fire Department, but he/she
126 might have other supervisory experience in his/her lifetime.

127

128 Patty asked if perhaps the job description can be worded to read, “*with prior experience in other*
129 *areas.*”

130

131 Lori said, “I don’t know if you want to make it that messy or look at putting a minimum of one
132 year or a minimum of two years supervisory experience and just leave it generic. Ultimately,
133 they’re going to have to do well in the interview process and rise to the top.”

134

135 Patty asked if there could potentially only be one internal candidate.

136

137 Lori said it is possible that there could be no internal candidates.

138

139 Jim referred to the job description and noted it reads, “*a minimum 10 years progressively*
140 *responsible experience in fire service.*” Jim said, “Then you could read, ‘*including ‘x’ number*
141 *of years of supervisory experience*’ – not specifying a field – and, ‘*five years of collective*
142 *bargaining,*’ not specifying a field. To your point, if someone had experience supervising in
143 another business location or whatever – and likewise, collective bargaining elsewhere – that
144 could be factored in under that. If you read that to the letter, that’s how you could interpret it. It
145 doesn’t say, ‘*five years supervisory experience in fire.*’ Maybe that was the intention when it
146 was written, but you can make an argument for general experience in supervisory or collective
147 bargaining. I’m just saying that might widen the door a little bit.”

148

149 Lori said, “We’re stating what the minimum requirements are, and from there we can have other
150 preferences in the interview process. You give preference to someone who has more experience
151 if they’re the best candidate.”

152

153 Mark stated he is comfortable with two years.

154

155 Fire Chief Fletty said he is comfortable with what was proposed.

156

157 Motion by Lori, second by Patty, to adjust Item “C” under “Training, Experience and Other
158 Requirements” of the Assistant Fire Chief Job Description to include a minimum of two years of
159 supervisory experience, and two years of collective bargaining.

160

161 On voice vote, motion carried.

162

163 Mark asked if the city is ready to establish dates regarding the timeline for the Assistant Fire
164 Chief position.

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165
166 Amy told commission members that with the recent notice of the upcoming vacancy, no material
167 has been prepared for today's meeting. Amy told commission members that once the job
168 description has been updated, she can prepare the posting material and the timeline. Amy asked,
169 "Would you allow me to just go with that and get the position posted and get things moving as
170 fast as I can? Or do you want to meet again and approve a timeline and the posting? Again,
171 basically all I do is copy and paste what's in the job description and create the posting and get
172 that out there. I would suggest ... If you allow me that authority to get going on that recruitment
173 and get that posted ..."

174
175 Mark told Amy that part is satisfactory.

176
177 Lori asked if perhaps there could be a shorter timeframe for posting the position.

178
179 Amy said that would be her recommendation if there is internal interest for the position. Amy
180 told committee members she could work with Fire Chief Fletty, establish a comfortable timeline,
181 and proceed in that fashion.

182
183 Patty asked when current Assistant Fire Chief Les Norin's last day of employment is with the
184 City of Onalaska.

185
186 Fire Chief Fletty said Assistant Fire Chief Norin's last day is Monday, October 2.

187
188 Amanda noted October 2 is Assistant Fire Chief Norin's last official day, and she said she
189 believes his final working day is a few days before that (either September 27 or 28).

190
191 Lori asked if the commission needs to discuss its members' availability.

192
193 Amy said, "I think if as long as you give me that go-ahead to get it posted ... I can't promise that
194 I'll get it posted ..."

195
196 Mark told Amy to proceed.

197
198 Amanda said she believes Amy will send out a Doodle-type poll with available dates once she
199 has candidates. Amanda suggested to commission members that they keep in their head possible
200 meeting dates three to four weeks from today.

201
202 Amy told commission members there are several other priorities at this time in the Human
203 Resources Department, and she cautioned them that she cannot promise that the position will be
204 posted this week. Amy assured commission members she will make every effort to post the
205 position by next week.

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206

207 Lori suggested that perhaps interviews could be conducted the week of October 16-20.

208

209 Fire Chief Fletty noted he will be attending the Wisconsin State Fire Inspector Conference the
210 week of October 16-20.

211

212 Mark asked if there should be a discussion regarding the appointment of an Interim Assistant
213 Fire Chief.

214

215 Amy noted that typically has not been the process in the City of Onalaska; rather, an interim
216 appointment is typically made if there is a vacancy with the Police Chief, Fire Chief, or
217 department head positions, or if there is an extended absence.

218

219 Mark noted Troy Gudie, who retired this past May, had been serving as the Assistant Fire Chief
220 during past vacancies in the Fire Chief position, and he also noted it had been an easy transition
221 for Troy when he became the Fire Chief. Mark said, "We're in a little bit of a different situation,
222 but I appreciate that that might be unprecedented."

223

224 Amanda said she believes a negative aspect of naming one of the lieutenants as Interim Assistant
225 Fire Chief is, "one, if we're thinking we are going to have internal candidates ... are they going
226 to think, is that the person who is going to get the job? Then, we're also creating a vacancy in
227 our lieutenants, and we only have three lieutenants. So, it's sort of a trickle-down vacancy
228 issue."

229

230 Mark noted the city had brought in a retired captain to serve on an interim basis when Randy
231 Williams had stepped down as Police Chief, and he asked if perhaps that could be an option in
232 this instance.

233

234 Amanda said, "I think if we can get this going, even if it takes Amy a week to get it posted, but
235 we maybe give it a two-week window for applications and try to meet sometime mid-October ...
236 on a day where a majority can be here, I think we just [move quickly] through this process with
237 the hope to get somebody in place early November."

238

239 Fire Chief Fletty noted the Common Council had approved a temporary increase to Fire
240 Department Administrative Assistant Stacy Hoeft's hours.

241

242 Mark said he wanted to bring up the possibility of appointing an Interim Assistant Fire Chief
243 because he realizes Fire Chief Fletty is new to his role with the city, and that he did not want him
244 to feel beleaguered by having additional responsibilities.

245

246 Fire Chief Fletty told Mark he appreciates that and said the lieutenants and the firefighters have

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247 been both welcoming and helpful.

248

249 **Item 5 – Confirm and Set Dates for Police Officer Hiring Process**

250

251 Amy told commission members that city staff is in the midst of scheduling the first initial stage
252 of the process for the police officer applicants. Testing occurred in August, and testing is
253 scheduled for Friday. Amy said that testing will confirm who the candidates will be to advance
254 to the interview process, and she told commission members professional panel interviews will
255 then be held, followed by interviews with the Police and Fire Commission.

256

257 Police Chief Ashbeck said he would like to expedite the process based on the anticipated
258 vacancies that will be occurring in the Police Department. Police Chief Ashbeck said he would
259 like to establish dates for candidates to interview with the Police and Fire Commission.

260

261 Lori asked Police Chief Ashbeck how many vacancies will be occurring in the Police
262 Department.

263

264 Police Chief Ashbeck told Lori there will be three definite vacancies, and he said it appears that
265 there will be three more for a total of six retirements into 2024.

266

267 Mark asked if someone had accepted the Investigator position.

268

269 Police Chief Ashbeck told Mark that Tanner Sutton has accepted the position and will be
270 promoted to the Investigator position October 15. Police Chief Ashbeck noted Tanner will be
271 sworn in at the October 10 Common Council meeting, and he told commission members Tanner
272 will shadow Investigator Pete Jakowski through the end of the year.

273

274 Mark asked if the Investigator position is one of the vacancies.

275

276 Police Chief Ashbeck said that is correct.

277

278 Lori asked if there are three immediate vacancies.

279

280 Police Chief Ashbeck said a police officer position will be coming open due to Pete Jakowski's
281 retirement and Tanner Sutton's promotion. Police Chief Ashbeck also noted two officers who
282 work on the day shift will be retiring at the beginning of 2024, and he reiterated it is possible
283 there also will be three more vacancies.

284

285 Mark asked Police Chief Ashbeck if a list is being created for the first three vacancies, or if he
286 believes a list will be created for six vacancies.

287

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288 Police Chief Ashbeck said Mason DeBernardi, who the city hired as a police officer, is currently
289 at the police academy and will be filling one of the three positions. Police Chief Ashbeck said
290 there are two more immediate vacancies, and he told commission members, “We’d really like to
291 hire immediately off of this list – preferably if we’d get somebody who’s graduated from the
292 academy. We have a few who are in the academy right now, so it could work out that we could
293 hire somebody and they could start field training right away. We’d obviously still have some
294 gap from the beginning of the year to when they finish – probably late March is when they would
295 finish – so we just have to make it through until then with that shortage. But right after the first
296 of the year, ideally we’d have another candidate who has graduated from the academy so we
297 could hire them right away as well and fill those three slots.”

298

299 Mark asked, “So the timeline should work, then?”

300

301 Police Chief Ashbeck said yes, and he told commission members he is tentatively looking at
302 conducting professional panel interviews October 2 and then perhaps scheduling a Police and
303 Fire Commission meeting the week of October 9-13.

304

305 Mark asked when Jim Binash will return.

306

307 Amy said Jim Binash had not informed her of his return date.

308

309 Mark said he assumes Jim Binash will have returned by the week of October 9-13.

310

311 Lori said that while she will be gone that week, she would be available during the day on
312 October 10.

313

314 Mark suggested perhaps meeting the week of October 2-6 if Jim Binash has returned.

315

316 Police Chief Ashbeck indicated he would prefer not to meet either October 5 or 6 due to a family
317 commitment.

318

319 Assistant Police Chief Berg noted several of the applicants are currently students at the law
320 enforcement academy, and he said they might need more than a few days to make arrangements
321 to be absent from the academy if they come for interviews October 2 as they will be coming
322 from other parts of the state.

323

324 Lori said she does not object to having the meeting the week of October 9-13 in her absence.

325

326 Mark said the commission could look at holding the meeting the week of October 16-20.

327

328 Fire Chief Fletty noted he is unavailable the week of October 16-20.

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329
330 Mark said the commission could meet October 16 and focus on the Police Department, and then
331 focus on the Fire Department at another meeting the following week.

332
333 Lori noted she teaches Tuesday evenings and is unavailable then.

334
335 Mark asked if October 18 is a viable day to meet.

336
337 Lori indicated she is available both October 18 and 19.

338
339 Patty asked if the meeting would be held later in the day, such as 3 p.m.

340
341 Mark said that is his starting point and cautioned that the time might need to be adjusted
342 depending on the number of candidates.

343
344 Amy noted she has late afternoon/early evening commitments both on October 18 and 19, and
345 she said she would need to be done by those times depending on what time the meeting would
346 begin.

347
348 Police Chief Ashbeck asked commission members if there is another possible meeting date as he
349 believes both he and Assistant Police Chief Berg would prefer to meet later in the day as there
350 might be students driving from other parts of the state.

351
352 Lori and Mark both inquired about possibly meeting on October 20.

353
354 Police Chief Ashbeck and Assistant Police Chief Berg both indicated they would be available.
355 Police Chief Ashbeck asked if October 16 is no longer a possibility.

356
357 Mark noted he is unavailable that evening.

358
359 Patty asked if perhaps the commission could meet earlier in the day if the meeting is held
360 October 20, and she also asked if the students will be finished earlier that day.

361
362 Police Chief Ashbeck told Patty he does not know, and he said he is attempting to contact the
363 technical college director and ask if there will be any flexibility regarding dismissing students
364 early so that they may have sufficient time to travel and participate in interviews.

365
366 Lori asked who serves on the professional panel, and if it might be possible to meet in a
367 classroom in Angelo.

368
369 Police Chief Ashbeck told Lori the applicants would be driving from Wisconsin Rapids, and he

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10

370 said the department is trying to accommodate them the best it can.

371
372 Patty suggested to Police Chief Ashbeck that he should first find out the candidates' availability
373 and then inform commission members.

374
375 Police Chief Ashbeck told commission members he has no objections to doing that and said
376 perhaps adjustments can be made if everyone's schedule is known.

377
378 Assistant Police Chief Berg said the candidates likely could come to the city earlier in the day if
379 they have graduated.

380
381 Police Chief Ashbeck said he believes graduation will occur in December.

382
383 Lori asked how many individuals remain on the list from the previous time.

384
385 Police Chief Ashbeck said that list has been exhausted.

386
387 Mark asked who will be serving on the professional panel.

388
389 Police Chief Ashbeck said both he and Assistant Police Chief Berg will serve, and he noted there
390 also is typically a sergeant, a union member, an officer or an investigator, and a Human
391 Resources Department representative (either the Director or the Generalist).

392
393 Patty noted she had not scored candidates when she had sat in on a past professional panel, and
394 she noted a representative from the La Crosse County Sheriff's Department also had participated
395 during a past professional panel (Assistant Police Chief).

396
397 Mark asked if there will be a Doodle poll regarding the next meeting and the police officer
398 interviews.

399
400 Police Chief Ashbeck nodded in the affirmative and said it would be for the week of October 16-
401 20.

402
403 Mark asked if commission members also should be looking at the week of October 23-27 if it is
404 necessary to discuss the police officer positions in addition to discussing the Assistant Fire Chief
405 position.

406
407 Patty indicated October 24 is the only day she is unavailable.

408
409 Amanda's comments were inaudible on the Zoom recording.

410

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411 **Adjournment**

412

413 Motion by Lori, second by Patty, to adjourn.

414

415 On voice vote, motion carried.

416

417

418 Recorded by:

419

420 Kirk Bey