



**MINUTES
FIRE COMMISSION MEETING
MAPLE PLAIN CITY HALL
July 08, 2025
4:00 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Maas-Kusske called the meeting to order promptly at 4:00 PM

Present: Commissioner Julie Maas-Kusske, Commissioner Andrew Burak, and Commissioner Brad Spenser

Absent: Commissioner Steve Grotting

Staff Present: Maple Plain City Administrator Jacob Kolander, Fire Chief Rick Denneson, and WHPS Director Matt DuRose

2. ADOPT AGENDA

Commissioner Spencer made a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Seconded by Commissioner Burak.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Maas-Kusske, Commissioner Spencer, and Commissioner Burak

Motion passed 3-0

3. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes for Approval from April 14th, 2025

B. 2nd Quarter 2025 Financials

Commissioner Burak made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Seconded by Commissioner Spencer.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Maas-Kusske, Commissioner Spencer, and Commissioner Burak

Motion passed 3-0

4. OLD BUSINESS

A. Fire Merger Updates

Background & Transition Process

The Transition Team was formed in late summer and early fall of 2024 with members from both Maple Plain and the West Suburban Fire District. Following a pause during the winter months, the group resumed its work in spring 2025, focusing on the operational aspects of the merger. On April 7, West Suburban Chief Luer and his team visited Maple Plain to provide an update and participate in a question-and-answer session. Additional meetings were held twice in May and twice in June, emphasizing the transition list and collaborative problem-solving. Chiefs Luer and Denneson have since developed a comprehensive master task list that includes administrative, operational, and city-agreement components.

Key Operational Integration Initiatives

Work is ongoing to address key areas of integration. Equipment compatibility has been a focus, with SCBA inventories and compatibility assessments underway and plans in place to align models. Discussions with vendors are also occurring to explore the resale of slightly used SCBAs, as Maple Plain's equipment, only three to four years old, remains in high demand. The cost of transitioning to a shared SCBA system is expected to be minimal and will be included in the initial merger expenses. In addition to equipment, efforts are being made to integrate record management systems, align vehicle branding, uniforms, and social media for a unified identity, and maintain transparency by circulating meeting notes after each Transition Team session.

Setting a Merger Timeline

The Transition Team has set December 31, 2025, as the target date for finalizing the operational merger. While firefighter-level integration is progressing, the team noted that administrative and legal tasks now represent the critical path. These tasks include the development of joint powers agreements, service contracts, and building leases. To ensure engagement and address growing questions, the intent is to provide clear and consistent timelines to all firefighters and both city governments.

Recent & Upcoming Engagements

At the June 12 meeting, both departments reported strong progress, describing the process as positive and collaborative. Consensus was reached that the merger is now a matter of "when," not "if." A subsequent meeting brought together members of both fire departments to review task lists and answer questions, with invitations extended to city mayors. Only Mayor Brad was able to attend due to scheduling conflicts. Looking ahead, the Transition Team agreed to pause meetings in July due to West Suburban's annual commitments, particularly the rodeo, and to resume the first week of August.

Firefighter and City Buy-In

The merger effort has been distinctive in that it began with the support of firefighters rather than being driven by top-down administrative action. This approach has fostered strong engagement and buy-in among personnel. However, significant work remains at the city governance and legal level, particularly around budgets, contracts, and council-level approvals. Budget discussions for the new entity only began two weeks ago, and a third draft has already been circulated. While the concept of a taxing district

was originally considered, it has been determined to be legally infeasible under current state law. At this time, no taxing district is being pursued, though future implementation would require legislative change.

Administrative and Legal Hurdles

The Commission acknowledged that many City Council members remain only generally informed about the merger and are not familiar with the specific details of the process. The next steps will require moving beyond firefighter-level consensus to formal City Council action. This includes the development of legal frameworks, the approval of budgets, the negotiation of contracts between the municipal department and the 501(c)(3) entity, and the finalization of building leases. A preliminary 2025 combined budget has already been introduced and will serve as the starting point for these discussions.

Financial Planning and Budget Drafts

The Commission reviewed the financial planning elements of the proposed merger. The 2024 combined budget stands at \$464,000, while the draft 2025 budget—assuming the merger proceeds—is projected at \$552,000, representing an \$88,000 increase. The primary drivers of this increase include a pension “catch-up” cost of \$62,000 per year over five years, a shared contribution toward fire chief and employee salaries and benefits, and an adjustment to firefighter wages from \$14 to \$16 per hour, with further increases planned. Liability and vehicle insurance costs remain under negotiation due to differences in current insurers and coverage arrangements. To provide predictability, the operating budget includes a specific escalator clause: a five percent annual increase cap for the first five years, after which a new funding formula will be determined.

One-time merger costs were discussed separately from the operating budget. These upfront “soft” costs—covering uniforms, vehicle rebadging, and SCBA upgrades—are estimated at \$37,000 to \$39,000 and will be funded through previously set-aside public safety aid. Additional legal fees associated with drafting merger documentation will also arise but are not included in the operating budget and will be managed separately.

Capital improvement commitments were also reviewed. Both cities will retain their proportionate shares of current capital improvement balances, totaling \$240,000, with Independence holding \$129,000 and Maple Plain holding \$114,000. A commitment has been made to replace the main engine, which currently has a leaky tank, within five years. Existing equipment will remain in service locally, though legal transfer and acknowledgment procedures will need to be finalized. In terms of facilities, Maple Plain will retain ownership of the fire station and lease it to the merged department for \$1 per year. Maple Plain will remain responsible as landlord for structural elements such as the roof, mechanicals, and exterior, including possible exhaust system adjustments for truck placement. Interior modifications, however, will become the responsibility of the fire department once the merger is completed.

Other negotiations remain pending, including the allocation of insurance, maintenance, and facility expenses. Issues such as hazardous trap cleaning, fuel systems, and routine maintenance will need to be resolved as part of the building lease terms or departmental operating budget.

Legal and Procedural Path Forward

The Commission noted that several key legal agreements remain outstanding. These include the transfer and receipt of equipment, the final building lease, service contracts, and the formal operational merger documents. It was recommended that the work be undertaken by an attorney with prior experience handling similar mergers to ensure efficiency and clarity.

A structured process for council approvals was also outlined. First, each city council will hold its own workshop to address preliminary issues and “low-hanging fruit” before moving to joint sessions, thereby avoiding inefficiency. Following these workshops, each council would adopt a resolution to formally pursue the merger. Only after both councils have taken this step would a joint council meeting be convened for public transparency and final symbolic approval. The attorney would then begin drafting the legal documents after resolutions are passed, ensuring unnecessary legal fees are avoided if the process stalls.

Several timelines were discussed for key actions. Individual council action is targeted by the end of August. While an initial joint council meeting was tentatively set for August 12, this date was deemed too early for full documentation, and August 21 at 6:30 p.m. is now under consideration pending final confirmations and council availability. The goal remains to secure final approval by Thanksgiving 2025, which would allow the operational merger to take effect on January 1, 2026.

Additional considerations emphasized the importance of ensuring that all councils, commissioners, and key staff are thoroughly briefed and supportive before holding a public joint session, particularly given the involvement of absent members and newly elected councilors. Future planning was also highlighted, including the ongoing fire station siting study, which may determine whether a new facility should be located behind the existing station or elsewhere in the broader community, such as near the intersection of Highways 90 and 12. Finally, the Commission acknowledged the potential for future expansion should other departments or cities request inclusion in the merged district.

5. NEW BUSINESS

A. End of Year 2024 Payout

2024 Financial Payouts to Cities

The Commission reviewed the audited 2024 financial payouts to participating cities. Distribution is scheduled to occur following final approval at the end of July. Based on the same calculation formula used in 2024, Maple Plain will receive \$11,988.38, and Independence will receive \$13,255.62. Checks are expected to be disbursed in early August to support each city’s planning processes.

B. 2nd Quarter MPFD Fire Chief’s Report

Fire Chief’s Q2 Report

The Fire Chief presented the second quarter report, noting that call volume increased by six compared to the same period last year. Detailed figures and breakdowns were provided in the distributed written report.

The Chief also highlighted the May 9 Awards Banquet, which was successfully organized and well attended. Recognition was given for leadership and team support, with commendations expressed for the department's ongoing commitment to service.

6. FUTURE MEETING DATES

- A. September 9, 2025 @ 4pm- Budget Discussion?
- B. October 14, 2025 @ 4PM
- C. December 9, 2025 @ 4pm

7. COMMISSION OTHER BUSINESS & REPORTS

Additional Commission Business

The Commission received an update on the upcoming community event, the Battle of the Badges Softball Game. The promotional flyer has been finalized and distributed across social media, city websites, and newsletters. The event will be held at 6:30 p.m. and will encourage donations of non-perishable food items in support of Delano Helping Hands. The revised flyer highlights both city websites, displays the departments' patches, and announces a special guest umpire, Blue Loo. Commissioners also discussed how future flyer designs and related outreach materials might evolve to reflect the joint department's developing identity and branding.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Spencer made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Burak.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Maas-Kusske, Commissioner Spencer, and Commissioner Burak

Motion passed 3-0

The Commission Adjourned at 5:21 PM

I, the undersigned, Jacob Kolander, City Administrator in and for the City of Maple Plain, Minnesota, do hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct copy of the minutes.

Respectfully submitted by:

