

MEMORANDUM



TO: VICTOR CARDENAS, CITY MANAGER
FROM: ERICK W. ZINSER, DIR OF PUBLIC SAFETY/CHIEF OF POLICE
SUBJECT: FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFFING HISTORY
DATE: MAY 6, 2026

HISTORY

The Novi Fire Department has been practicing its current model, or some variation of it, since the 1980's. In 2008, the Novi Fire Department stopped the practice of toning out Part-Time Firefighters for medical runs. Circa 2010, the Novi Fire Department had adequate Part-Time staffing to strategically staff fire stations one and two on some nights and weekends, based on data-driven decisions and call volumes. We initiated a recruitment drive to build our Part-Time staff. By 2013, enough Part-Time personnel had been hired and trained to staff fire stations one, two, and three 24/7.

Through the following years, the fire department continued to hire Part-Time Firefighters. In January of 2017, the Novi City Council adopted two short-term goals;

1. Review current fire department staffing to ensure adequate city-wide coverage 24/7, and
2. Fund staffing for Fire Station Four 24/7.

By July 1, 2017, the fire department had hired and trained enough Part-Time staff to meet the goal. At that time, we had 64 Part-Time Firefighters to cover all our shifts for all four fire stations. This was, however, short-lived.

CURRENT MODEL

The Novi Fire Department is ONE department comprised of a combination system. It is a combination of Full-Time staff and Part-Time staff. We are authorized for 30 Full-Time personnel (1 Chief, 1 Assistant Chief, 1 Fire Marshal, 1 Training officer, and 26 Fire Protection Officers {FPO}). We have one open position. We currently have 55 Part-Time members; 31 Paid-On-Call and 24 Auxiliary members. However, only 35 Part-Time members are fully trained and eligible for shift coverage.

It is important to understand the distinction between a Paid-On-Call Firefighter and an Auxiliary Firefighter. The roles differ in only a few key areas (Chart 1). Auxiliary Firefighters typically join the department with all required certifications already completed, including Michigan Firefighter I and II, Hazardous Materials Operations, and Emergency Medical Technician-Basic (EMT-B). In contrast, Paid-on-Call Firefighters may enter the department with partial or no prior training and are subsequently provided with the

necessary training by the department. **Notably, it can take up to two years to fully train a Paid-On-Call Firefighter so they can cover shifts.**

Another distinction involves scheduling and deployment. Auxiliary Firefighters, once fully trained and in compliance with all required certifications, including the Volunteer Firemen's Insurance Services (VFIS) driver training program, are permitted to work weekday daytime hours (6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) alongside full-time personnel when additional staffing is needed. This provision exists because Auxiliary Firefighters are specifically recognized within the IAFF contract. While Auxiliary Firefighters may be utilized to supplement full-time staffing during daytime operations, per the IAFF contract, Auxiliary personnel may not outnumber FPOs at any station. Typically, no more than two Auxiliary Firefighters are permitted to work during a given daytime shift.

Chart 1

Category	Auxiliary Firefighter	Paid-on-Call Firefighter
Initial Training Status	Enters with all required certifications (Firefighter I & II, HazMat Ops, EMT-B)	May enter with partial or no training; training provided by the department
Department Training Requirement	Typically not required beyond department-specific onboarding	Required to complete all necessary certifications through the department
VFIS Driver Training	Required	Required
Work Availability (Daytime Staffing)	May work weekday daytime hours (6:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.) with full-time staff if needed	Not typically assigned to daytime staffing in this capacity
Contract Recognition	Recognized within the IAFF contract	Not specifically identified in the IAFF contract for daytime staffing provisions
Certifications Requirement (Ongoing)	Must maintain all required certifications	Must obtain and maintain all required certifications

Hiring Process	Same as Paid-on-Call	Same as Auxiliary
Probationary Period	Same requirements and duration	Same requirements and duration
Residency Requirement	Within 40 miles (straight-line distance)	Within 40 miles (straight-line distance)
Uniform & Gear Standards	Same standards and issued equipment	Same standards and issued equipment
Shift Requirement	Minimum 10 shifts per quarter after probation	Minimum 10 shifts per quarter after probation
Response to “All Call” Tone-Outs	Responds when available	Responds when available
Station Coverage Tone-Outs	Eligible to respond when dispatched	Eligible to respond when dispatched
Supervisor-Requested Callbacks	May be called during high-demand events (e.g., storms)	May be called during high-demand events (e.g., storms)

Aside from these differences, both Auxiliary and Paid-on-Call Firefighters share many of the same requirements and expectations. Both must obtain and maintain the same core certifications, complete the same hiring process, and undergo an identical probationary period. Additionally, both roles are subject to the same residency requirement of living within 40 miles (straight-line distance), adhere to the same uniform and equipment standards, and are required to complete a minimum of 10 shifts per quarter after successfully completing probation.

Emergency response procedures are also consistent for both roles. A “tone-out” is issued for every structure fire, referred to as an “All Call,” meaning any available department member—whether full-time, Auxiliary, or Paid-on-Call may respond regardless of the time of day. Tone-outs may also occur when multiple stations are simultaneously committed to calls. In such cases, dispatch will activate part-time personnel assigned to the last available station. For example, if Stations One, Two, and Three are already engaged and Station Four is dispatched to an incident, leaving all stations committed, dispatch will tone out the Part-Time personnel assigned to Station Four. If no response is received, dispatch will proceed to tone out personnel from the next station.

Supervisors also retain the discretion to request an “All Call” when circumstances warrant it, such as during severe weather events or other high-demand situations.

Weekday operations, Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., are staffed by Fire Protection Officers (FPOs), representing the department's full-time personnel. The typical staffing model is as follows:

- **Station 1:** Staffed with 4 FPOs (Engine and Squad in service)
- **Station 2:** Staffed with 4 FPOs (Engine and Squad in service)
- **Station 3:** Staffed with 4 FPOs; however, staffing may be reduced to 2 FPOs if personnel are reassigned to Stations 1 or 2 to maintain adequate coverage due to higher call volume
- **Station 4:** Staffed with 2 FPOs, reflecting its lower call volume

Under optimal conditions, total daytime staffing consists of 14 FPOs. This number may be reduced to 12 if Stations Three and Four are each operating with two FPOs. In accordance with the IAFF contract, the minimum required staffing level is eight FPOs, with at least two assigned to each station.

When a station is staffed with only two FPOs, personnel operate under a “jumping trucks” model. This means crews select the appropriate apparatus based on the nature of the call. For example, fire-related incidents are handled by an engine or tower, while medical calls are handled by a squad or rescue unit.

Evening, overnight, and weekend operations are from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. on weekdays and from 6:00 p.m. Friday through 6:00 a.m. Monday is staffed by Paid-on-Call and Auxiliary Firefighters who have successfully completed their probationary period.

Probationary Auxiliary and Paid-on-Call members may work limited hours (6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. on weekdays and 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on weekends); however, they are not counted toward minimum staffing levels.

During these periods, stations are typically staffed with a total of 8 personnel (a combination of Auxiliary and Paid-on-Call Firefighters), with 2 assigned to each station. Like daytime operations, crews utilize the “jumping trucks” model to determine apparatus response. There is no contractual minimum staffing requirement for these shifts. If sufficient personnel are unavailable to staff all four stations, total staffing may be reduced to 6 personnel, and Station Four will be temporarily not staffed. It is important to note that Stations One and Two are equipped with transporting squads capable of transporting patients to medical facilities, whereas Stations Three and Four operate non-transporting rescue units,

DECLINE IN STAFFING

In 2019, we started to see a decline in our Part-Time numbers. By 2022, we lost 25 Part-Time Firefighters. At one point, the number of Part-Time Firefighters was down to 44. Of those 44, eight were in training, and two were on leave of absence. That left us with 34 Part-Time Firefighters to cover all the shifts we had previously covered with 64 firefighters. Beginning in 2022, due to low staffing levels among part-time staff, we were unable to staff all our fire stations 24 hours a day, 100% of the time. However, the Novi Fire Department has never missed a call for service.

UNSTAFFED STATIONS/RUN VOLUME

On June 18, 2022, we began to not staff fire station four due to low staffing levels. There are two shifts per day. Unstaffed stations are calculated by shifts, not days. As seen in Chart 2, we have seen 400 occurrences, since 2022, where a shift has not been staffed:

Chart 2

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	YTD
January		5	2	4	8	19
February		6	14	5	11	36
March		8	16	4	9	37
April		16	6	7	6	35
May		15	9	16	1	41
June	2	13	9	13	0	37
July	5	14	6	9	0	34
August	3	11	11	16	0	41
September	1	16	6	9	0	32
October	7	19	5	15	0	46
November	5	1	3	8	0	17
December	5	3	4	13	0	25
Totals	28	127	91	119	35	400

When Station Four is not staffed, it can impact response times in that station's district. Our average response time for priority calls citywide is just over five minutes. When Station Four is not staffed, the average response time in that district is just over seven minutes. Since June 28, 2022, we have seen 480 calls out of station Four when shifts have not been covered. (Chart 3). **Call volumes for Station Four during unstaffed periods are relatively low, with 67% of shifts having 0 to 1 calls.**

Chart 3

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	YTD
January		3	3	5	7	18
February		10	20	6	12	48
March		9	22	4	6	41
April		22	11	16	3	52

May		15	17	17	0	49
June	1	26	14	12	0	53
July	4	20	6	5	0	35
August	2	9	12	24	0	47
September	1	18	12	11	0	42
October	7	21	6	19	0	53
November	1	1	1	8	0	11
December	11	4	5	11	0	31
Totals	27	158	129	138	28	480

AUTOMATIC MUTUAL AID

The Novi Fire Department takes advantage of shared resources through automatic mutual aid agreements with our surrounding partners, including Northville, Northville Township, Farmington Hills, Salem Township, Lyon Township, Walled Lake, and Wixom. This agreement/resource allows these agencies to invoke Mutual Aid whenever there is a confirmed structure fire in their respective communities. When it is used, the partner agencies will respond and assist as necessary in battling the fire, all at no additional cost to our residents.

MEDSTAR AMBLANCE SERVICE

More than 67% of our annual calls for service are medical runs. The city utilizes a private ambulance provider (Medstar) that maintains three Advanced Life Support ambulances in Novi, and those ambulances respond to all medical calls in the city at no cost to our residents.

RECRUITING

Since 2022, the City of Novi has made a significant investment in recruiting Part-Time Firefighters. Efforts included advertisements in the Engage magazine, banners, online recruiting through recruitment sites such as Mogul, Indeed, LinkedIn, and Google, the city website, Emagine Theater advertisements, and employee referrals. The Novi Fire Department hosted an open house at Station One in October 2022. Six residents showed up and yielded one applicant.

More significantly, the city took advantage of mailing postcards targeting several communities, including Farmington/Farmington Hills, Livonia, Milford, Redford, Troy, Walled Lake, and Wixom. More than 126,000 postcards were sent out over three different mailing periods in 2023, at a cost of \$10,919.50. In an effort to reach a broader audience, we purchased billboard space at two locations on I-96: I-96/Beck and I-96/Novi Road to advertise part-time (and police) openings for \$4,500/month. We ran the campaign for three months. Unfortunately, we did not see a return on investment from the billboard campaign, as it resulted in very few applications.



Examples of graphics displayed on the billboards

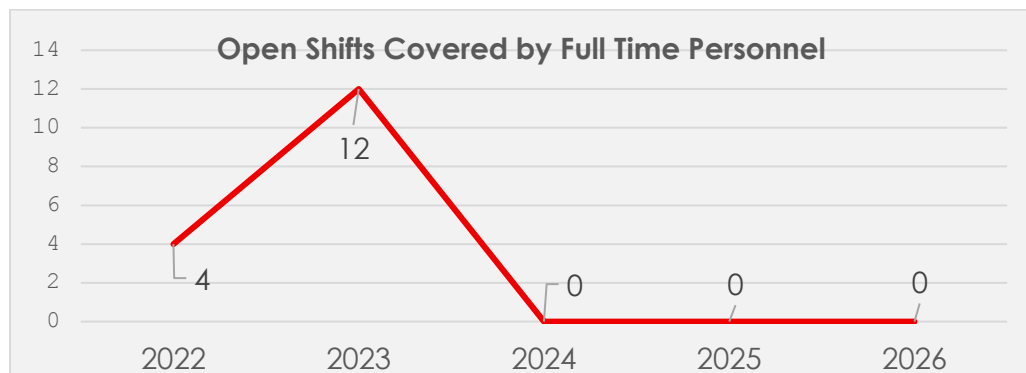
RECRUITING RESULTS

From May of 2022 through May of 2026. The Novi Fire Department received 816 applications. Applicant interest came from 32 QR Codes scanned from the postcards and 10 QR codes scanned from the Engage magazine. Further interest came from 22 different online recruiting sites. Of the 816 applicants, we have hired 62 Part-Time Firefighters since May of 2022. Of that 62, 42 have left the organization

BEYOND RECRUITING

- The City of Novi offered hiring bonuses to Part-Time applicants. The city paid out \$132,500 in bonuses, with \$50,000 still pending. We have recovered \$17,000 in bonus money from those who left the organization before meeting their years-of-service obligation. This practice bonus has stopped.
- The City of Novi entered into three Letters of Agreement with the Part-Time union-Michigan Association of Fire Fighters (MAFF).
 - 1) The city agreed to allow Part-Time members to work more than 36 hours in a pay period. This agreement is still in place.
 - 2) The City of Novi entered into an agreement with MAFF members to allow Full-Time-Fire Protection Officers (FPO's), members of the IAFF union, to work MAFF-dedicated hours to help cover some of the open shifts. **When there is an open shift, the FPO's are offered overtime. Unfortunately, the FPO's have only worked 16 shifts since June 18, 2022, with the last shift being worked on July 23, 2023 (Graph 1).**

Graph 1



- 3) The City of Novi entered into an agreement with MAFF members to pay stipends for those members who work extra shifts. This agreement is still in place.
- 4) The City of Novi changed the mile radius for Paid On-Call firefighters to 40 miles. Previously, the threshold was 5 miles; initially, all POC had to live within the city.
- 5) The City of Novi agreed to tone out FPO'S for "All Call" events such as structure fires or other significant events as deemed necessary by a supervisor. **There have been six occasions where the FPO's were toned out on an "All Call." On average, 1.5 FPO's responded.**

SUPPORT

I fully support our model and am committed to maintaining it. I support this model because it allows us to provide quality fire and EMS service while also being responsible with taxpayer dollars. I am committed to providing the very best fire service for our residents while being accountable to our community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I further recommend maintaining our current model. I recommend recruiting and hiring Part-Time Firefighters to support the 2017 Council goals. Additionally, I recommend we continue building our Part-Time staff to 80-100 members and reinstate the efforts used a few years ago.