

**City of Oelwein, Iowa
Fire Department
Organizational
Assessment
Fall, 2021**



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Executive Summary

The City of Oelwein hired a consultant in July of 2021 to assess the Oelwein Fire Department. The process utilized by the consultant for this assessment is outlined in section 2, "The Process," of this report. The consultant is a neutral, third-party with no previous relationships with any stakeholder involved in this process. The information contained in this report was generated directly from a thorough survey of several stakeholders, both within the Fire Department and within the Community; and based on the consultant's education and more than 30 years' experience in the fire service.

The Oelwein Fire Department is currently led by a Volunteer Fire Chief, with the assistance of a Volunteer Assistant Fire Chief, a Volunteer Deputy Fire Chief, and four (4) Volunteer Fire Captains. The City of Oelwein also employs one (1) full-time Firefighter who works Monday through Friday, from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm. The full-time Firefighter has no organizational authority or rank within the Department, albeit this is the only member of the organization who is on site daily. Finally, the Oelwein Fire Department is staffed by fifteen (15) Volunteer Firefighters. As the Oelwein Fire Department is currently structured, 30% of the members are Volunteer "Officers," holding a rank of Captain or above, yet there is no organizational structure to the department outlining a chain of command or identifying roles for these officers.

The Oelwein Fire Department's strengths include their response to calls for service and ability to mitigate those calls; updated and quality equipment, specifically related to apparatus; a culture of safety; they are community minded; and they regularly host training opportunities.

The Oelwein Fire Department currently suffers weaknesses including, communication; leadership; consistency; accountability; and respect for all members across the organization.

Opportunities exist for the Oelwein Fire Department, and the City of Oelwein, in the areas of Volunteerism (base/knowledge/seniority); leadership; organizational structure; recruitment; equipment replacement; and an opportunity to rebrand the organization to generate renewed interest and excitement of the Fire Department.

Future threats to the Oelwein Fire Department, and the City of Oelwein, include a critical lack of training records; a lack of organizational structure; a lack of leadership; a belief by Volunteer Firefighters that they are not employees of the City, nor bound by City policies; accountability; and having a command level officer who also serves on the City Council.

This report will detail the above strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, as well as outline ten (10) recommendations of the consultant to help the Department, and the City, avoid future liability; create future sustainability; promote harmony within the organization; and create an organizational structure which will serve the Department and the City in both the short-term and long-term.

Important to note, the SWOT analysis and consultants' recommendations were driven directly from interviews with stakeholders, both internal and external. While it is common for differences in perceptions among various stakeholders, the information documented in this report is the result of honest, open, and candid feedback from those with an interest in the well-being of the City and the well-being of the Oelwein Fire Department. It is always crucial to remember everyone involved in this process wants what is best for the Oelwein Fire Department, and strengths / opportunities should always be recognized in contrast and comparison with weaknesses / threats to ensure a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view of the organization.

The Process

The process used for the analysis of the Oelwein Fire Department included research, one-on-one interviews with stakeholders (both internal and external), and analysis of statistical reports.

A total of 13 one-on-one interviews were conducted, six (6) with stakeholders from outside the Oelwein Fire Department, and seven (7) members of the Oelwein Fire Department.

The interviews were conducted over two visits to Oelwein by the consultant and those involved with the interviews were encouraged to offer open, honest, and candid feedback to help move the Oelwein Fire Department forward.

Those surveyed during the interviews answered a series of questions, carefully designed to elicit information necessary for this report without turning the interviews into a negative experience.

Stakeholders from outside the department were asked questions including those listed below:

1. What two things do you feel the Oelwein Fire Department does exceptionally well?
2. What two things do you feel the Oelwein Fire Department could improve upon?
3. What two goals should be the focus of the Oelwein Fire Department going forward?
4. Do you support additional taxation to support funding for the Oelwein Fire Department?
5. Do you have any thoughts on what the Oelwein Fire Department could do to increase and/or support volunteerism?

Members of the department were asked questions including those listed below:

1. What two things do you feel the Oelwein Fire Department does exceptionally well?
2. What two things do you feel the Oelwein Fire Department could improve upon?
3. If you were put in charge right now, what single thing would you change immediately?
4. What is the most important factor in your desire to remain a part of the Oelwein Fire Department?
5. What is the single most important factor causing you stress/angst with regards to the Oelwein Fire Department?
6. What are your personal goals with regards to your career?

The questions above were structured to illicit responses and give insight as to the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the Oelwein Fire Department. Follow-up questions and discussions took place based on each participants responses to clarify and / or obtain deeper insight into the operations, management, and organizational structure.

All responses received during the in-person interviews were combined to form the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats listed in this report. However, no individual responses or identities will be shared by the consultant, as doing so would jeopardize the integrity of this report.

The consultant reviewed the City of Oelwein budget, the Oelwein Fire Department budget, Oelwein Fire Department calls for service for the past three years, and other reports to develop data to support this process.

Unfortunately, training records beyond certificates of attendance for various events, are not kept and therefore the consultant was unable to form opinions or recommendations related to Oelwein Fire Department training methods beyond what was revealed from the one-on-one interviews.

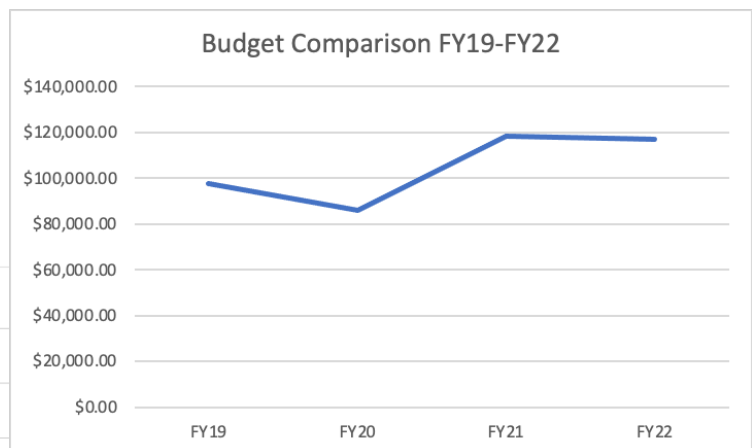
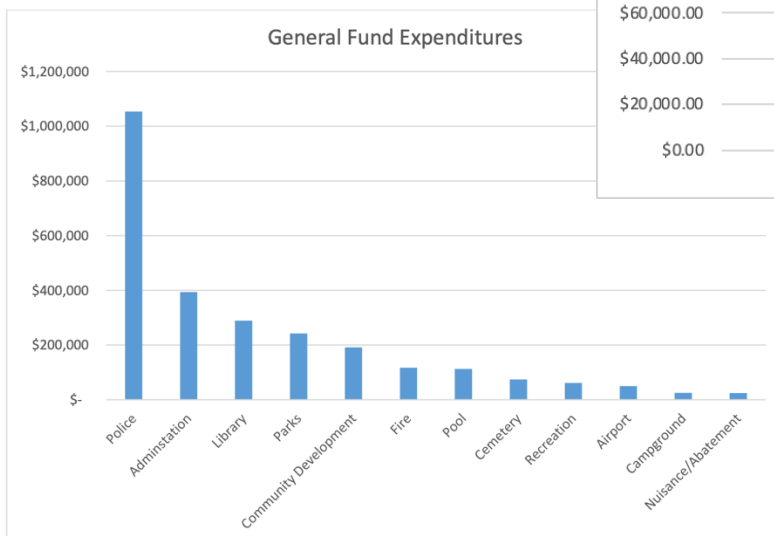
Additionally, the consultant was unable to collect thorough data for time spent on tasks - outside of the actual time spent on calls for service - by members of the Oelwein Fire Department, which makes it impossible to determine a complete unit-hour-utilization metric.

Finally, the consultant completed surveys of like sized / positioned fire departments across the State of Iowa for comparative analysis, and the consultant conducted directed research on some topics to provide resources supporting the consultants' recommendations.

Oelwein Fire Department Overview

The Oelwein Fire Department currently struggles with organizational structure. The department, as well as stakeholders interviewed, noted a desire for strong leadership, direction, and cohesiveness. Without significant changes, the culture and the direction of the department going into the future will suffer. Opportunities currently exist for the City of Oelwein to realign the Oelwein Fire Department and restructure the Department to allow for sustainability and growth moving forward.

The City of Oelwein expends a relatively low amount of the City budget on the Fire Department. In FY21, the actual expenditures for the Fire Department were \$121,228.79 – which was 96.35% of the FY21 Fire Department budgeted \$125,820.00. The FY21 total expenditures and fund transfers out for the City budget were \$16,454,249.00. The FY21 percentage of expenditures for the City toward the Fire Department were approximately 0.74% of the FY21 budget, less than one full percent. The FY22 budget for the Fire Department is \$116,801.00, a reduction of 3.6% over the actual spent in FY21. The FY22 percentage of the entire City budget (\$16,378,264.00) dedicated to the Fire Department is approximately 0.71%, again less than one full percentage.



* The graph to the left was taken from the Oelwein Work Session Packet dated 2/1/2021. The graph above showing the budget comparison was developed by consultant.

A survey was sent to twenty-one (21) similarly sized and positioned Fire Departments to inquire about their budget, staffing, call load, and other metrics. Seven (7) of those communities responded to the survey, including Charles City, Knoxville, Centerville, Clarinda, Nevada, Washington, and Anamosa. Of those responding, compared to Oelwein, Clarinda had the next lowest FY22 budget with \$155,000 and Nevada has the second lowest comparative budget at \$192,000. Both of these comparables are significantly higher than the Oelwein Fire Department budgets. The average of the seven departments who responded is closer to \$550,000. This information is provided for comparative analysis only, and to show where fire departments in like communities fall in regards to their budgeted expenditures.

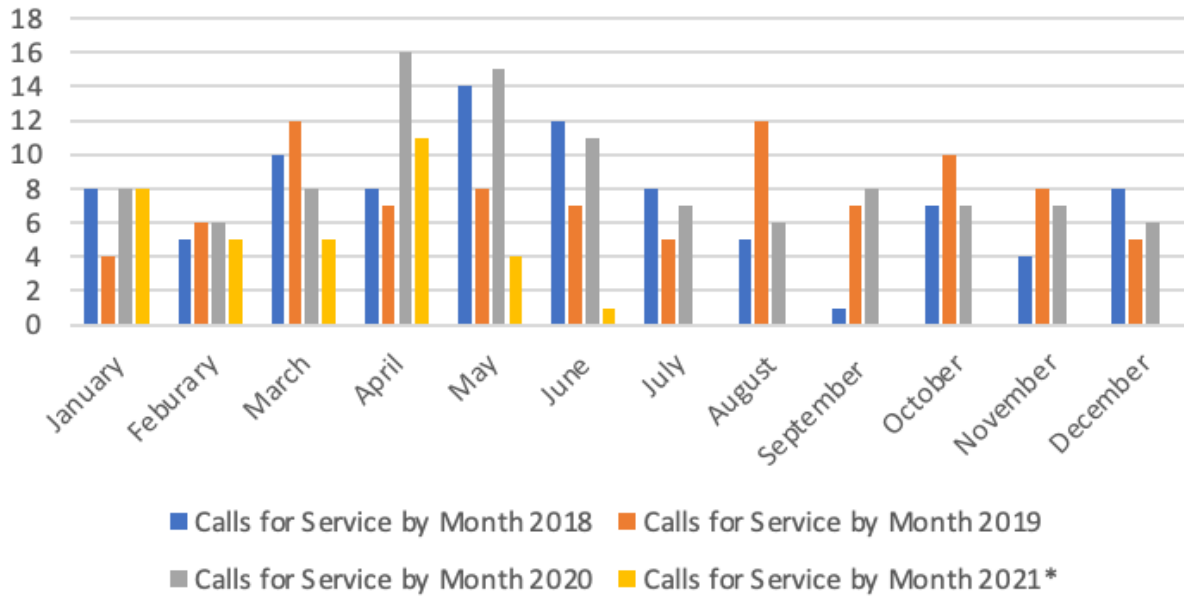
The Oelwein Fire Department responded to 90 incidents in calendar year 2018, 91 incidents in calendar year 2019, and 105 incidents in calendar year 2020. This is an average of 95 calls per year over the past three years. For comparison, the Clarinda Fire Department ran 130 calls in calendar year 2020.

One challenge the consultant encountered while pulling statistics was the fact the fire reports were not up to date in the ImageTrend Elite (online reporting software) system. Consultant pulled the statistics on August 28, 2021, and found several recent calls had yet to be entered by the Oelwein Fire Department, with the last incident entered was in early June. Fire reports should be entered immediately, while incidents are fresh and documentation can be complete. In addition, the ImageTrend Elite system is used by the Iowa State Fire Marshal's Office for statistics and outstanding fire reports not being entered in a timely fashion can affect State reporting as well.

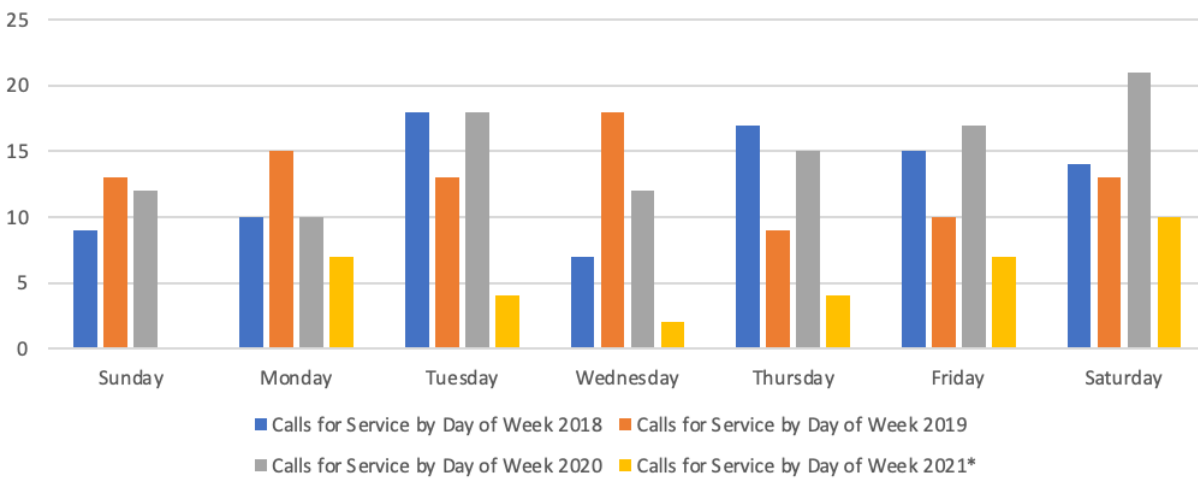
As of August 28, 2021, thirty-four (34) incidents had been entered for the City of Oelwein, through early June. Those numbers are included in the following graphs detailing various reporting metrics.

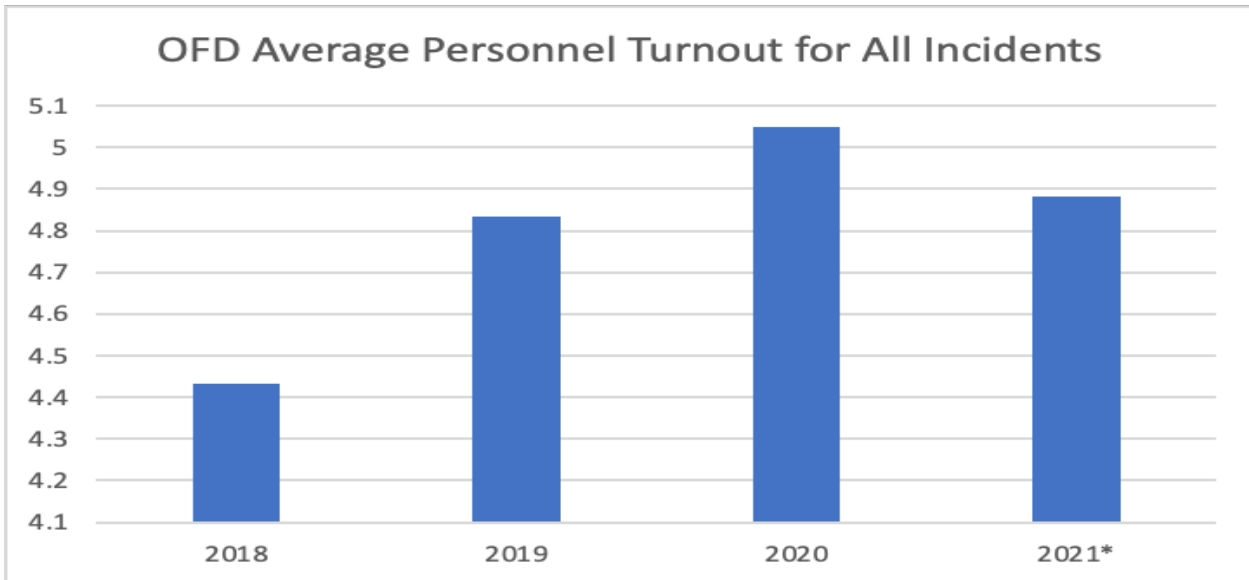
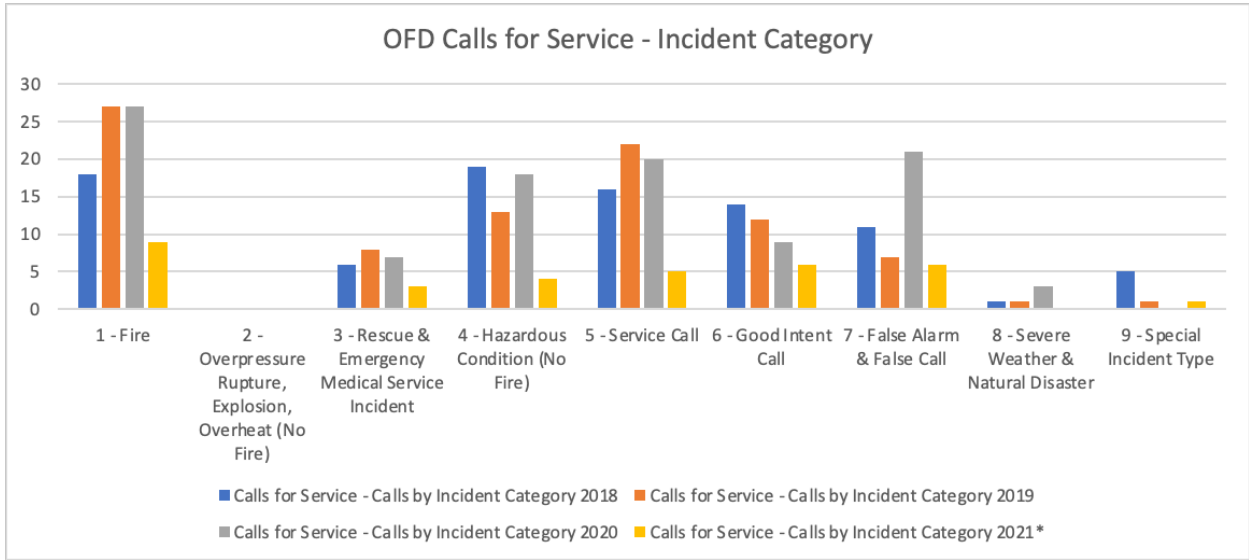
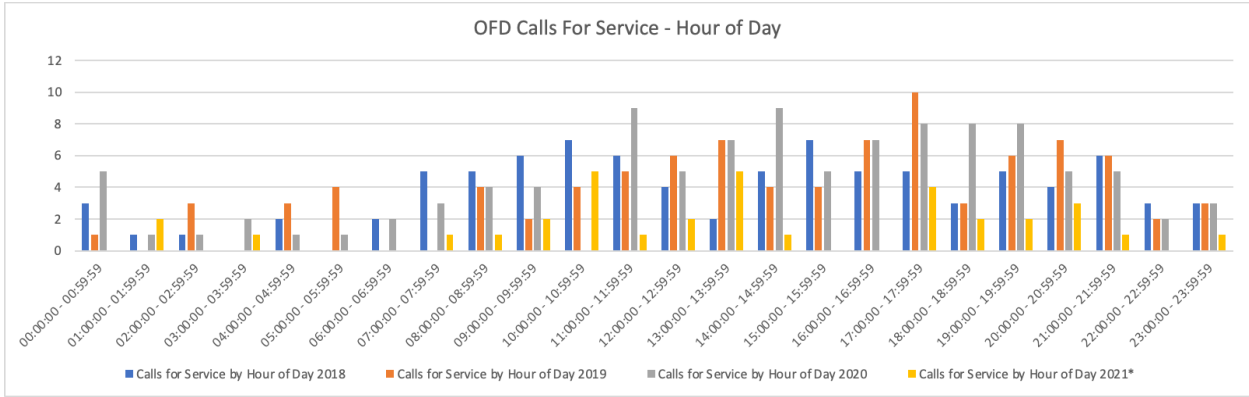
The graphs below give insight into the call load and incidents to which the Oelwein Fire Department responds.

OFD Calls For Service by Month

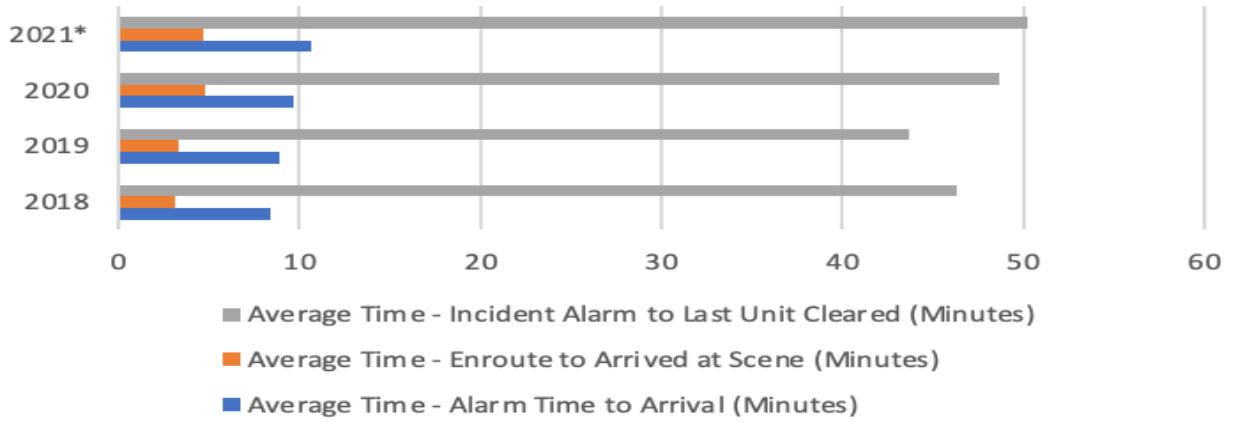


OFD Calls For Service - Day of Week

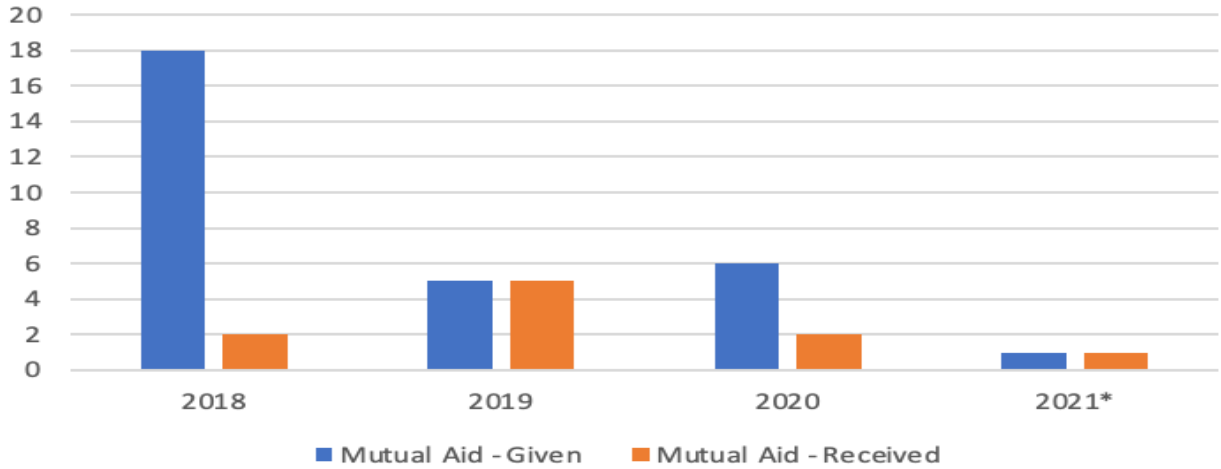




OFD Calls for Service - Benchmark Times (Minutes)



OFD Mutual Aid Comparison



Calls for Service - Calls by Incident Type				
	2018	2019	2020	2021*
100 - Fire, other	0	1	0	0
111 - Building fire	9	8	10	3
112 - Fires in structure other than in a building	0	2	1	0
113 - Cooking fire, confined to container	0	1	0	0
114 - Chimney or flue fire, confined to chimney or flue	0	1	0	0
131 - Passenger vehicle fire	3	4	5	2
132 - Road freight or transport vehicle fire	1	0	0	0
133 - Rail vehicle fire	0	0	0	1
134 - Water vehicle fire	0	0	1	0
138 - Off-road vehicle or heavy equipment fire	1	2	1	1
140 - Natural vegetation fire, other	0	0	1	1
143 - Grass fire	1	3	1	1
151 - Outside rubbish, trash or waste fire	0	1	1	0
154 - Dumpster or other outside trash receptacle fire	2	1	2	0
161 - Outside storage fire	0	1	0	0
162 - Outside equipment fire	0	1	3	0
170 - Cultivated vegetation, crop fire, other	1	1	0	0
171 - Cultivated grain or crop fire	0	0	1	0
311 - Medical assist, assist EMS crew	1	0	2	0
322 - Motor vehicle accident with injuries	0	1	0	1
323 - Motor vehicle/pedestrian accident (MV Ped)	0	1	2	0
324 - Motor vehicle accident with no injuries.	0	1	0	2
352 - Extrication of victim(s) from vehicle	2	4	1	0
357 - Extrication of victim(s) from machinery	0	1	2	0
360 - Water & ice-related rescue, other	1	0	0	0
363 - Swift water rescue	2	0	0	0
411 - Gasoline or other flammable liquid spill	2	2	1	0
412 - Gas leak (natural gas or LPG)	2	2	6	1
413 - Oil or other combustible liquid spill	1	1	0	0
424 - Carbon monoxide incident	3	3	2	2
444 - Power line down	1	2	1	0
445 - Arcing, shorted electrical equipment	1	1	0	0
460 - Accident, potential accident, other	0	1	0	0
463 - Vehicle accident, general cleanup	9	1	8	1
500 - Service call, other	1	0	1	0
510 - Person in distress, other	0	0	0	1
511 - Lock-out	2	0	1	1
531 - Smoke or odor removal	2	11	2	0
550 - Public service assistance, other	0	0	1	0
551 - Assist police or other governmental agency	2	0	1	0
552 - Police matter	0	0	0	1
553 - Public service	8	2	3	0
561 - Unauthorized burning	1	8	11	2
571 - Cover assignment, standby, moveup	0	1	0	0
600 - Good intent call, other	0	1	0	0
611 - Dispatched and cancelled en route	8	11	3	4
631 - Authorized controlled burning	1	0	1	0
632 - Prescribed fire	1	0	1	2
651 - Smoke scare, odor of smoke	3	0	2	0
652 - Steam, vapor, fog or dust thought to be smoke	1	0	1	0
671 - HazMat release investigation w/no HazMat	0	0	1	0
700 - False alarm or false call, other	1	0	2	0
715 - Local alarm system, malicious false alarm	0	0	1	0
730 - System malfunction, other	0	0	1	0
733 - Smoke detector activation due to malfunction	2	0	3	2
735 - Alarm system sounded due to malfunction	2	0	2	0
736 - CO detector activation due to malfunction	0	1	0	0
740 - Unintentional transmission of alarm, other	0	1	1	0
741 - Sprinkler activation, no fire - unintentional	0	0	1	0
743 - Smoke detector activation, no fire - unintentional	0	0	1	0
744 - Detector activation, no fire - unintentional	0	0	2	1
745 - Alarm system activation, no fire - unintentional	4	5	1	0
746 - Carbon monoxide detector activation, no CO	2	0	6	3
812 - Flood assessment	0	0	1	0
813 - Wind storm, tornado/hurricane assessment	0	0	1	0
814 - Lightning strike (no fire)	1	1	0	0
815 - Severe weather or natural disaster standby	0	0	1	0
900 - Special type of incident, other	5	0	0	1
911 - Citizen complaint	0	1	0	0
Total Incident Count:	90	91	105	34

Calls for Service - Calls by Member				
	2018	2019	2020	2021*
Weber, Benjamin	9	5	0	0
Haar, Betty	12	23	7	4
Brunscheon, Chris	0	0	29	6
Lindstrom, James	26	19	12	4
Tuecke, James	19	19	33	13
Hoveland, Jason	11	16	25	4
Melchert, Jay	9	12	9	6
Paul, Jesse	3	4	13	3
Richter, Jordan	11	0	0	0
Ericson, Joshua	13	19	20	0
Johnson, Justin	0	0	48	14
Ritter, Justin	0	0	2	8
Haar, Kimberly	5	17	2	1
Haar, Lance	9	0	0	0
Randall, Kyle	0	0	1	6
Begley, Makayla	11	2	0	0
Baerg, Matthew	49	51	48	14
Conry, Matthew	0	0	0	2
Derifield, Matthew	56	65	71	20
Weber, Matthew	11	16	16	9
Fauser, Michael	4	4	9	4
Hillman, Michael	51	52	60	17
Close, Nathan	0	0	11	0
Thoma, Michael	3	6	0	0
Westendorf, Nathan	54	72	82	22
Palmer, Nicholas	3	13	22	5
Gish, Ronnie	1	0	0	0
Haar, Ryan	28	22	3	5
Meaney, Timothy	1	1	0	0
Palmer, Timothy	1	0	0	0
Weber, Timothy	14	18	0	0
Hanaway, Travis	2	0	0	0
Thronson, Tasha	0	0	1	3

The statistics above are derived from the ImageTrend Elite system and are easily generated. Statistics and data are critical to evaluate efficiency, effectiveness, and workload of the fire department.

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Code 1720 sets the standards for the minimum requirements relating to the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by volunteer and combination (career and volunteer) fire departments. The City of Oelwein population density is estimated at 1,214 residents per square mile and NFPA 1720 categorizes this density as "Urban." (National Fire Protection Association, n.d.)

While not requirements, but rather guidelines or standards, to meet NFPA 1720 requirements, a minimum of fifteen (15) staff members need to respond to the initial full alarm assignment to a structure fire in a typical 2000 square foot, two-story, single-family dwelling, without a basement, and with no exposures, to provide full support to the operation. This number includes those responding from the Oelwein Fire Department, as well as automatic / mutual aid assignments for such incident. The NFPA 1720 recommended response time to get the fifteen members on scene is 9 minutes and this standard should be met 90% of the time for compliance. In addition, NFPA 1720 requires the fire department to have the capability for sustained operations, including fire suppression; engagement in search and rescue, forcible entry, ventilation, and preservation of property; accountability for personnel; the deployment of a dedicated rapid intervention crew (RIC); and provision for support activities for those situations that are beyond the capability of the initial attack.

It is not uncommon for smaller, rural agencies to struggle with meeting the guidelines outlined in NFPA 1720. In fact, some larger metropolitan departments occasionally struggle to meet NFPA standards. The Oelwein Fire Department appears to have good turnout numbers for fire assignments and, from talking with members, fire assignments seem to be adequately covered and resolved in an efficient and effective manner. The chart on the next page outlines *average* personnel turnout numbers for various call types.

Calls for Service - Average Number of Personnel Responding by Incident Type				
	2018	2019	2020	2021*
100 - Fire, other		2		
111 - Building fire	7.89	9	8.6	12.33
112 - Fires in structure other than in a building		7	10	
113 - Cooking fire, confined to container		3		
114 - Chimney or flue fire, confined to chimney or flue		13		
131 - Passenger vehicle fire	4	4.75	5.8	7.5
132 - Road freight or transport vehicle fire	6			
133 - Rail vehicle fire				4
134 - Water vehicle fire			8	
138 - Off-road vehicle or heavy equipment fire	6	4.5	7	6
140 - Natural vegetation fire, other			8	2
143 - Grass fire	10	9.67	3	3
151 - Outside rubbish, trash or waste fire		1	4	
154 - Dumpster or other outside trash receptacle fire	3	6	6	
161 - Outside storage fire		12		
162 - Outside equipment fire		17	8.33	
170 - Cultivated vegetation, crop fire, other	3	9	7	
171 - Cultivated grain or crop fire				
311 - Medical assist, assist EMS crew	2		1.5	
322 - Motor vehicle accident with injuries		2		11
323 - Motor vehicle/pedestrian accident (MV Ped)		4	6	
324 - Motor vehicle accident with no injuries.		4		6.5
352 - Extrication of victim(s) from vehicle	8	5	9	
357 - Extrication of victim(s) from machinery		7	3.5	
360 - Water & ice-related rescue, other	7			
363 - Swift water rescue	6			
411 - Gasoline or other flammable liquid spill	3	4.5	3	
412 - Gas leak (natural gas or LPG)	5	3.5	4.83	17
413 - Oil or other combustible liquid spill	4	2		
424 - Carbon monoxide incident	3.67	3.33	4	1
444 - Power line down	8	6	3	
445 - Arcing, shorted electrical equipment	8	2		
460 - Accident, potential accident, other		6		
463 - Vehicle accident, general cleanup	4.33	5	4.14	2
500 - Service call, other	1		2	
510 - Person in distress, other				1
511 - Lock-out	2		2	2
531 - Smoke or odor removal	4.5	4.36	4	
550 - Public service assistance, other	2.5		1	
551 - Assist police or other governmental agency	2.5		2	
552 - Police matter				3
553 - Public service		5	2.67	
561 - Unauthorized burning	1	2.88	3.64	2
571 - Cover assignment, standby, moveup		3		
600 - Good intent call, other		6		
611 - Dispatched and cancelled en route	3.63	4	2	1
631 - Authorized controlled burning	1		9	
632 - Prescribed fire	14		11	9.5
651 - Smoke scare, odor of smoke	4		5	
652 - Steam, vapor, fog or dust thought to be smoke	3		12	
671 - HazMat release investigation w/no HazMat			5	
700 - False alarm or false call, other	4		5	
715 - Local alarm system, malicious false alarm			4	
730 - System malfunction, other			9	
733 - Smoke detector activation due to malfunction	3.5		3.67	5
735 - Alarm system sounded due to malfunction	3.5		1	
736 - CO detector activation due to malfunction		2		
740 - Unintentional transmission of alarm, other			3	
741 - Sprinkler activation, no fire - unintentional		2	6	
743 - Smoke detector activation, no fire - unintentional			4	
744 - Detector activation, no fire - unintentional			5.5	3
745 - Alarm system activation, no fire - unintentional	4	2.2	1	
746 - Carbon monoxide detector activation, no CO	2		2.67	1
812 - Flood assessment			13	
813 - Wind storm, tornado/hurricane assessment			16	
814 - Lightning strike (no fire)	1	11		
815 - Severe weather or natural disaster standby			4	
900 - Special type of incident, other	4			7
911 - Citizen complaint		3		

A question with the Fire Service arises surrounding the recommended maximum utilization percentage of a firefighting unit. Various industry studies, including the Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District study completed by Citygate Associates in July of 2016, discuss utilization percentages.

“During the 9-hour daytime work period, when crews on a 24-hour shift need to also pay attention to apparatus checkout, station duties, training, public education, and paperwork, plus required physical training and meal breaks, [Citygate] believes the maximum commitment UHU (Unit-Hour Utilization) per hour should not exceed 30%. Beyond that, the most important element to suffer will be training hours.”

In May of 2016, Fire Engineering Magazine published an article discussing UHU analysis. “The one common denominator throughout much of the research is the term “utilization.” Unit Hour Utilization (UHU) is a general term you may know. Unfortunately, it is used to refer to many methods for analysis. UHU, in its proper form, is not appropriate for our industry’s decision makers when considering average call lengths and per-hour call rates. Since we don’t respond to average calls and are probably not attempting to break hourly records, UHU is not the answer. To distance ourselves from averages, numbers of incidents, transport-only analysis, and private industry profit goals, we needed something easy and effective.”

Furthermore, the Fire Engineering article suggests, “The basic answer is found in unit commitment, somewhat similar to utilization. We can determine how busy we are by analyzing our unit utilization through querying our total commitment. We simply divide the total seconds (yes, we’re counting seconds here) a unit is assigned to all calls by all the seconds in a year. With some easy math, the “commitment factor” is revealed.”

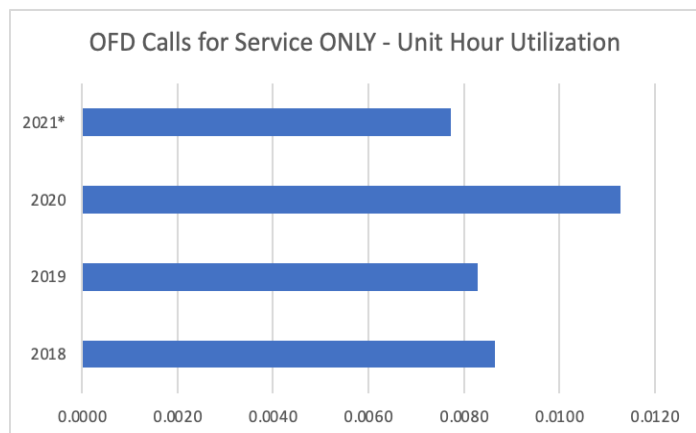
Fire Engineering cited a study involving Henrico, Virginia’s fire department and analyzed direct community impact of the commitment study based on travel time data and identified where and when are benchmarks consistently missed when compared to commitment factors. The benchmarks noted below were identified:

0.16 – 0.24	“Ideal Commitment Range”
0.25	“Indicates System Stress”
0.26 – 0.29	“Evaluation Range resulting in delayed incident responses”
0.30	“Line in the sand : not sustainable : commitment threshold when community see’s less than a 70% chance of timely emergency service and immediate relief is vital.

The benchmarks noted by the Fire Engineering article match the Citygate opinion that maximum commitment should not exceed 30%.

In attempting to calculate the commitment time for the Oelwein Fire Department, the consultant quickly found the true commitment time impossible to determine due to a lack of adequate task and time record keeping. During interviews with the full-time Oelwein Fire Department employee, substantial metrics such as time spent on tasks each day, what tasks are completed regularly, and estimated “down time” were not quantifiable.

Without quantifiable metrics for tasks other than responses alone, the consultant is not able to quantify the commitment time of the duties and tasks completed by the Oelwein Fire Department beyond responses to incidents, alone. Looking at responses alone (excluding training, vehicle maintenance, station



maintenance, reporting, and other tasks), the Oelwein Fire Department is well below the “ideal commitment range.” In 2018 and 2019, the response commitment time was less than 0.01 (0.0087 in 2018 and 0.0083 in 2019), and in 2020 the commitment time was 0.0113.

The Oelwein Fire Department does not conduct commercial fire inspections, any residential or rental inspections, nor were ancillary duties identified in the interviews beyond the full-time employee verifying occasional high grass / weed complaints and garbage container complaints surrounding refuse containers being left at the curbside. The full-time employee is also responsible for mowing the City office / Fire Department campus, however actual time spent on these tasks was not identifiable. These tasks would normally be used to calculate commitment time, however it was clear to the consultant even in the light most favorable to the Fire Department, commitment time of the full-time employee likely leaves significant time for additional task assignments.

Additional comments from the consultant with regards to commitment time are included in the recommendations section of this report.

A SWOT analysis (short for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) is a useful tool for any organization to conduct some introspective research into their operations. Developed in the 1960's by Albert Humphrey, the tool was originally designed as a business strategy to assess how an organization compares to their competition. However, the tool has become widely recognized as a preferred method when conducting assessments of all organizations, to include non-profit and government organizations.

The SWOT analysis gives insight into what the organization does well, what the organization can do better, what opportunities exist for the organization, and threats which may adversely affect the organization.

Important to note, frequently items listed in one category may be found in other categories as items may very well fit within multiple categories. For example, a weakness of leadership may also present as a threat to the organization. What's more, leadership may also present as an opportunity should the organization take the weakness / threat assessment and use the present state as a means to create organizational change bettering the organization.

The following SWOT analysis of the Oelwein Fire Department was developed from the interviews / surveys with the stakeholders during the process of research for this report.

▼ Oelwein Fire Department Strengths

Strengths of the Oelwein Fire Department, as determined from the stakeholder interviews, include the following:

- Response to Calls for Service and Working Together During Calls;
- Equipment, specifically apparatus;
- Safety and a department culture of safety;
- Community minded and community involvement;
- Training (emphasis added this does NOT include record keeping as record keeping is non-existent), but rather the fact the organization holds regular training.

Response to Calls for Service and Working Together During Calls

According to stakeholders, both internal and external, surveyed the Oelwein Fire Department is efficient and effective when responding to calls for service. The Incident Command System (ICS) is utilized on incidents, and there is structure during emergency calls for service. Stakeholders reported all members work well together on active incident scenes, and they do well with resolving incidents to which they respond.

Equipment, Specifically Apparatus

The Oelwein Fire Department enjoys good equipment, especially with regards to apparatus. Fire apparatus is very costly and the Oelwein Fire Department owns mostly modern equipment. In addition to replacing two pieces of apparatus under the current City Administrator, the City of Oelwein is in the process of purchasing a new Aerial Platform unit as a cost exceeding \$1 million. Many departments similarly sized and positioned are not as fortunate to have newer apparatus.

Some members did mention "hand me down" radios from the police department, and some mentioned turnout gear being outside of the 10-year recommended service life. However, in visiting with City Administration the consultant is not sure this is a result of the lack of leadership / management at the Fire Department level. If strong leadership / management were in place where these items were part of a budget plan, the consultant feels as though these things may not be an issue. City Administration seemed open to making necessary purchases for the Fire Department and City Administration shied away from the idea of getting used equipment because it was cheaper.

Safety Culture

The internal stakeholders reported a culture of safety within the Fire Department. The consultant did not receive any information related to injuries or deaths within the department. Those surveyed reported the organization does a good job managing scene safety, ensuring safety around the station, and the consultant found the station to be clean, organized, and free of clutter during a tour.

Community Minded / Community Involvement

Stakeholders surveyed reported the Oelwein Fire Department enjoys solid community trust, and the department does a good job being visible in the community during various events. "Everyone loves firefighters," was a common statement throughout the interviews.

Training

As noted in the preface of this section, some items may fall under multiple categories in this SWOT analysis. Training is one of these topics. The Oelwein Fire Department holds monthly in-house training, and the members occasionally attend training at other departments around the area. The full-time employee reports attending annual Fire School offerings, and the fact the department holds regular training is certainly a strength. However, issues with training records, quality of training, and a training plan also lend to this topic being listed as a weakness as well.

Oelwein Fire Department Weaknesses

Weaknesses of the Oelwein Fire Department, as determined from the stakeholder interviews, include the following:

- Communication;
- Leadership;
- Consistency;
- Accountability;
- Respect for Members Within the Department by Peers.

Communication

Every internal stakeholder surveyed reported communication as one of the issues needing addressed within the department. Communication is nearly non-existent. Internal stakeholders reported not knowing what was going on around the department, and stakeholders said when something needs to be communicated, the only current method for communicating with members is a group text message. Stakeholders reported this as a major issue. Many stated "officers" will be in one group talking (for example at training) while others are in another area visiting. There were also comments made about cliques / segregated groups with a belief that some department decisions are made by these segregated groups.

The implementation of a formal, strong leader within the Department and gaining continuity in operations could likely help with this issue as well. In addition, the implementation of policies and procedures would help the entire Department understand expectations of them.

Leadership

The lack of strong leadership was also mentioned by nearly every internal member surveyed. Most reported they either talk to the full-time employee or the Fire Chief when they need something, however there are four Captains, an Assistant Chief, and a Deputy Chief who are not relied upon for organizational management. A lack of leadership will typically lead to a lack of direction, accountability, and consistency within any organization and the Oelwein Fire Department is no exception. The department needs to be structured in a way that allows fair, consistent, and strong leadership from the top down. Leadership would include discipline, praise, planning and preparation for the department's future.

Consistency

As mentioned above, without leadership there will be no consistency. The Oelwein Fire Department suffers from a lack of consistency in everything from day-to-day tasks, to training. The lack of formal, written policies and procedures only highlights the issues surrounding consistency.

Accountability

Accountability is another source of stress among the department. Some feel only smaller groups are held accountable, while others are not. Many of the volunteers complain about accountability in things such as truck / equipment checks by the full-time member, while the full-time member often notes a lack of respect and accountability by the volunteer members in things such as completing written reports and/or reporting things needing repaired/replaced. The organizational structure of the Oelwein Fire Department breeds some lack of accountability as the Volunteer Fire Chief is not in the station on a daily basis, and the one person who is on site daily has no authority over the department.

Respect for Members Within The Department by Peers

Many of the internal stakeholders report a lack of respect by their peers and the command staff. Some concerns surrounded the way the Deputy Chief treats others on the department; constant conflict between the volunteers and the full-time member; and cliques or segregated groups within the department. There have been no efforts made towards teambuilding or cohesion of the department members, and the lack of leadership seems to foster the division within the department.

Oelwein Fire Department Opportunities

Opportunities of the Oelwein Fire Department, as determined from the stakeholder interviews, include the following:

- Volunteer Base, Knowledge, Tenure;
- Leadership;
- Organizational Structure;
- Budgetary Support;
- Recruitment and Explorer / Junior Firefighter program;
- Rebranding.

Volunteer Base, Knowledge, and Tenure

The Oelwein Fire Department enjoys some long tenured members, who bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience. The Department currently has a good cadre of volunteers, with over 20 volunteers on the roster. Especially in the current times, volunteerism is down and finding volunteers is a challenge, not only locally but across the United States. The tenure of the department and number of volunteers offers opportunities to bring on new volunteers and have a solid foundation for those new volunteers to learn the operations of the Oelwein Fire Department.

Leadership

While leadership is currently lacking in the department and is a source of many of the challenges within the department, the City also has a unique opportunity to implement meaningful change to rebuild the Department and sustain the Department into the future. The opportunities to grow and restructure the Department based on this process is something which should excite stakeholders.

Organizational Structure

As with leadership, the organizational structure of the Oelwein Fire Department currently is inefficient, and ineffective. The City should take this opportunity to restructure the Department and implement purposeful, strategic change to move the Department forward. Opportunities for significant restructuring of Departments are typically few and far between due to personnel issues, organizational processes in place, history of the Department, and support from decision makers. The City of Oelwein, based on the stakeholder interviews, recognizes the need for change and those stakeholders interviewed appeared to have support for meaningful change to make the Oelwein Fire Department the best organization possible.

Budgetary Support

The Oelwein Fire Department is fortunate to have budgetary support. Simply looking at apparatus alone, and the pending replacement of an aerial apparatus, the Department is obviously supported to attain the needs of the department within the constraints of the overall organizational budget confines. While some members commented about protective clothing or other equipment being outdated, it would appear such issues may be more related to the lack of leadership and communication within the Department on what is needed, justifying what is needed, and explaining why the needs exist rather than budgetary support. There appears to be opportunities for budgetary needs of the Fire Department to be aligned with the City budget, resulting in both short-term and long-term needs being properly forecast and met.

Recruitment and Explorer / Junior Firefighter Program

The Oelwein Fire Department currently has some unrealized opportunities for recruitment, based on the stakeholder interviews. Some ideas include conducting recruitment drives at local high schools, community colleges, and larger businesses in the community. In addition, while the Fire Department is present at community events, opportunities exist to have a more focused goal at community events surrounding recruitment. Recruitment publications, banners, talking with adults about volunteering while children are looking at apparatus, and an online presence (both website and social media) are some cost-effective and efficient ways to build some recruiting efforts by the Oelwein Fire Department.

One topic mentioned by some stakeholders surrounding the opportunity to recruit younger members of the community through a Junior Firefighter or Explorer program. Many Fire Departments, especially in smaller communities, offer such a program as a method to recruit new members who may be interested in the field. In fact, the Consultant started his career in the Fire Service at the age of 13-years-old in a Junior Firefighter program. Frequently, Junior Firefighters / Explorers grow into full-time positions, and even Chief Officers. This is a great way to find new recruits and get them into the Fire Service at a young age.

Should the City of Oelwein wish to explore this option further, the Boy Scouts of America has an initiative supporting these programs and more information can be found at <https://www.exploring.org/fire-ems/>.

Rebranding

As outlined in the organizational structure section above, the Oelwein Fire Department has a unique and exciting opportunity to rebrand the Department. Refreshing the Department brand can drive excitement, anticipation and renewed interest in the Department. Rebranding should include items such as marketing and branding on the Oelwein Fire Department Facebook page (which exists, but has no recruitment content), regular updates on social media about opportunities to join the Fire Department, regular posts about what the Department is doing, etc. Additionally, having the members of the Fire Department create a new Department patch can develop ownership in the process, lead to increased internal excitement and give the Department an opportunity to have a fresh look to their uniforms at a relatively low cost.

\\ Oelwein Fire Department Threats

Threats of the Oelwein Fire Department, as determined from the stakeholder interviews, include the following:

- Lack of Training Records / Training Plan / Quality Training;
- Lack of Organizational Structure;
- Lack of Leadership;
- Volunteer Members Belief They Are Not City Employees;
- Accountability;
- Council Member Serving as Command Staff for Fire Department.

Lack of Training Records / Training Plan / Quality Training

Training records are non-existent, creating a huge liability to the City of Oelwein. While those interviewed reported certificates for courses where certificates are issued (typically outside training) are kept in a file cabinet in the department, there is no record keeping or log of all training for members of the department. ImageTrend Elite, the software used to input fire reports, contains a module for training which could be used – at no additional cost to the City – to record training, dates, time began / time ended, attendees, and other important data. This is something that should be implemented immediately and something that should be a critical focus of the department going forward.

Should the Oelwein Fire Department suffer a horrific incident involving a firefighter serious injury or death, the City can be assured one of the first things investigators and insurance companies will ask for is training records. With those records being non-existent, this presents a very serious liability to the City should such an injury or death occur. For example, the Iowa Municipal Workers Compensation Association (IMWCA), which is the entity who provides Workers Compensation Insurance to the City of Oelwein, report an employer liability claim resulting from an incident within the Department would have a liability **starting at \$2 million**. Furthermore, if you visit the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program website (<https://tinyurl.com/cx63d3ze>) and read through the investigations you will find each and every investigation into a firefighter death mentions training records. Simply stated, a lack of thorough training records is unacceptable by modern standards and this should be remedied immediately.

Additionally, there is no training plan and training topics are often developed within hours of the actual training event. Most internal stakeholders reported not knowing what training would cover until they arrived, there is no communication with regards to an annual training plan, and – as a direct result – the quality of training suffers.

Lack of Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of the Oelwein Fire Department is not ideal, nor does it lend toward organizational efficiency. Based on feedback received during the in-person interviews, the organizational structure of the Oelwein Fire Department should be a priority going forward.

According to those interviewed, the current organizational structure of the department is very linear and does not appropriately divide responsibility and supervision across the department. The current structure also creates significant challenges, as all ranking members of the organization are volunteer, yet a full-time, paid member who is on site Monday through Friday has no authority or responsibility for department operations. Further complicating the current structure is the lack of continuity between the Oelwein Fire Department and the City of Oelwein management team. Fire Department leadership do not attend City staff meetings; updates and information sharing are infrequent and inconsistent; and the City Administrator encounters struggles with direction of the department due to the current structure of the organization.

The current structure for the Fire Department is such that a single Volunteer Fire Chief has twenty-two (22) personnel reporting to him. While an Assistant Chief, a Deputy Chief, and four (4) Captains exist, information gleaned from the interviews indicated none of the command staff have any direct supervision or responsibility over any other members outside of the Volunteer Fire Chief, unless the Chief is absent. According to the interviews, the Captains do assist with training, however there are noted deficiencies in training as well. When asked the current role of the Captains, the responses indicated there was not currently significant structure to those positions. Additionally, when asked about roles of the Assistant Chief and Deputy Chief, the responses indicated they fill in when the Chief is absent, however these positions also appeared to lack structure and responsibility.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Emergency Management Institute has set standards related to the National Incident Management System (NIMS), specifically regarding span of control. According to FEMA NIMS 2008 standard, "the span of control of any individual with incident management supervisory responsibility should range from 3 to 7 subordinates, with 5 being optimal. During a large-scale law enforcement operation, 8 to 10 subordinates may be optimal." The NIMS 2017 standard reads, "The optimal span of control for incident management is one supervisor to five subordinates; however, effective incident management frequently necessitates ratios significantly different from this. The 1:5 ratio is a guideline, and incident personnel use their best judgment to determine the actual distribution of subordinates to supervisors for a given incident or EOC activation."

While the NIMS standard is geared toward incident management (incident related), these practices are also generally accepted as guidelines for emergency services responsibility and supervision. A single person, in this case the *Volunteer* Fire Chief, cannot effectively and efficiently manage twenty-two people. The number of people reporting to the Volunteer Fire Chief is only exacerbated by the fact the Fire Chief is a Volunteer member of the organization and is not on site regularly as would be the case with a paid Fire Chief. Finally, having a full-time, paid, career member of the department who is on site daily, with no authority or administrative responsibility, only creates additional challenges for the organization as a whole; from day-to-day operations, purchases, and oversight to members expressing conflict over going to the Volunteer Fire Chief with individual needs versus going to the full-time member with individual needs. As a result, interviews indicate the full-time, career member operates with very little supervision, direction, or accountability.

In addition, the current organizational structure of the Oelwein Fire Department, eight (8) of twenty-three members – nearly 35% – are "ranking officers," yet the interviews revealed the Fire Chief is the only "supervisor." The organization appears to be top-heavy with ranking officers who hold little or no actual authority/responsibility. The department could easily be restructured to provide for appropriate spans of control, a defined chain-of-command and better continuity in the organization.

Lack of Leadership, Communication, and Accountability

All of those surveyed reported a lack of leadership, communication, and accountability within the Oelwein Fire Department. A lack of leadership creates a situation where the department does not grow, the department does not move forward, the department suffers from a lack of communication, and – arguably most important – the department and its members have no accountability.

Evidence of the lack of accountability can be seen in the lack of training records, the lack of timeliness in entering fire reports, and the fact those within the department could not tell the consultant who reports to whom beyond the Fire Chief. Furthermore, there is no accountability with regards to daily tasks, quality of training, or management of the Fire Department as a whole.

Communication is currently through group text messages, yet some reported they are not confident all information gets to all members. Rather, there is division within the Fire Department, cliques or segregated groups exist, and there is little cohesion within the Fire Department members.

Not having a strong leadership structure in the department leads to disfunction as well. For example, the Fire Department has no written policies, procedures, standardized operating guidelines / policies, or job descriptions. Without written job descriptions, policies / procedures there can be no accountability as there are no rules to enforce. Should discipline be necessary, there is no documentation to support the discipline. This leads to additional liability for the City should a member of the Fire Department need to be disciplined, suspended, or terminated.

Volunteer Members Belief They Are Not City Employees

There appears to be a belief by volunteer members of the Oelwein Fire Department they are not employees of the City of Oelwein. The consultant recommends the City consult with their legal counsel for an official legal opinion regarding the status of the Volunteer Firefighters as City Employees. In most Fire Departments familiar to the consultant, there is no question the volunteer firefighters are, in fact, employees of the organization for which they serve.

The City pays workers compensation insurance for the volunteer firefighters, the City funds the department budget, the City provides the necessary equipment and protective gear for firefighting, and the City likely provides additional benefits and / or insurance for the Fire Department volunteers. The City has the ultimate responsibility for the operation, effectiveness, efficiency, and management of the Fire Department.

While many Fire Departments may have separate Volunteer Firefighter Associations, those Associations have no management authority over the day-to-day operations of the department, nor do the Associations fund the Fire Department operating budget. As such, the governing body would have management and oversight responsibility for the department and any member – paid or volunteer – of the organization.

According to the United States Internal Revenue Service (<https://www.irs.gov/government-entities/federal-state-local-governments/issues-for-firefighters>), "Generally, tax laws apply to firefighters in the same manner as for other types of workers. It does not matter whether firefighters are termed "volunteers", are considered employees, or are identified by any other name, if the work they do is subject to the will and control of the payer, under the common-law rules, they are employees for Federal tax purposes. The determination as to whether workers are common-law employees or independent contractors is made applying the same standards used for other workers. See IRS Publication 15, Employer's Tax Guide PDF, for more information on determining whether a worker is a common-law employee." Furthermore, Publication 15 reads, in part, "**Employee status under common law.** Generally, a worker who performs services for you is your employee if you have the right to control what will be done and how it will be done. This is so even when you give the employee freedom of action. What matters is that you have the right to control the details of how the services are performed. See Pub. 15-A for more information on how to determine whether an individual providing services is an independent contractor or an employee" (see <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p15.pdf>).

According to the United States Social Security Administration, "Under the common law rules, volunteer firefighters are employees when they are subject to the will and control (i.e., how he or she will perform the work) of the person (or entity) for whom they perform services. A fire captain or a fire lieutenant supervises the volunteers. The rules on whether workers are common law employees or independent contractors are the same for firefighters as they are for other workers. Generally, volunteer firefighters are employees of the fire department or district where they provide services. Receipt of, or absence of the receipt of, payment for services does not alter the common law employment status of a volunteer firefighter. For rules on common law standards see common-law control test, in RS 02101.020." (see <https://secure.ssa.gov/poms.NSF/lrx/0302101260>)

In a 2013 lawsuit, the United States Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Volunteer Firefighters are “Employees” for the purposes of FMLA and FLSA (see <https://www.nhmunicipal.org/court-updates/sixth-federal-circuit-finds-volunteer-firefighters-are-%E2%80%9CEmployees%E2%80%9D-fmla-and-flsa>).

Finally, in *Bryson v Middlefield Volunteer Fire Department*, “The EEOC found that the Middlefield [Ohio] Volunteer Fire Department’s firefighters were employees: the Department “exercise[d] sufficient control over the actions of the Members,” and they received some compensation for their services, even though they were not on payroll,” in a sexual harassment lawsuit.

The consultant *is not* an attorney, nor can the consultant give legal advice aside of recommending the City obtain an official legal opinion on this matter. That said, if the City is responsible for workers compensation insurance, the budget funding all equipment and protective clothing for the members, FMLA / FLSA considerations, and liability for the actions of those volunteers, it would seem to be common sense the volunteer firefighters serve as City employees, and thus are subject to the management, oversight, and personnel policies of the City of Oelwein.

This is another issue which needs to be resolved in a timely manner so the City and the Fire Department members are all clear on the expectations going forward.

Council Member Serving as Fire Department Command Staff Member

Nearly every stakeholder surveyed mentioned the perceived conflict of interest in a member of the Fire Department Command Staff, a Deputy Chief, also serving as a City Council member. While it is common in smaller communities to have elected officials who also serve on volunteer boards or as a volunteer firefighter, for example, such situations create a certain amount of conflict of interest regardless.

When an elected official, such as a council member, serves in these capacities care should be taken to ensure the roles are separated and organizational structure is not diminished. In the case of the Oelwein Fire Department, the third highest ranking member is also a City Councilor. This creates a situation where the person is, in effect, a decision maker for the Fire Department, but who then is also one of the final decision makers for the City as a whole. In essence, the person exercises ultimate authority as a councilor over his own decisions on the Fire Department, with little separation under the current structure – only that of the Fire Chief.

Many communities have conflict of interest policies which help to eliminate these situations. In lieu of such policy prohibiting an elected official from serving as a City employee, the Iowa League of Cities also cites an option for Abstention from Voting on anything related to the position of conflict.

According to the Iowa League of Cities, “In Iowa, officers and employees of governmental entities are required to avoid “conflicts of interest.” Conflict of interest is a broad and often misunderstood concept. There are numerous sections of the Code of Iowa, as well as case law developed by Iowa courts over many decades, that describe the types of activities that will constitute a conflict of interest. The consequences of a conflict of interest, both in terms of its impact on the validity of an action taken and in terms of the effect upon an official or employee engaging in a conflict of interest, varies depending on the application of the relevant laws or cases.”

“According to the Iowa Supreme Court, the basic premise and purpose of all conflict of interest requirements, is “to avoid subjecting public officials to the difficult and often insoluble task of deciding between their duty to the public and their own private interest or advantage.” Keeping this principle in mind will help government officials and employees understand the purpose, intent and effect of all conflict of interest Code sections and case law.”

Furthermore, according to the Iowa League of Cities, “Code of Iowa Section 362.6: Conflict of Interest. This section of the Code addresses conflicts of interest by city council members, providing that, “A measure voted upon is not invalid by reason of conflict of interest in an officer of a city, unless the vote of the officer was decisive to passage of the measure.”

“In this context, “measure” refers to any legislative matter coming before the city council – a motion, a resolution or an ordinance – where council members will be expected to vote. In those instances where a council member knows he or she has a conflict of interest, the appropriate thing is for that council member to declare the conflict and decline to vote. If a council member votes on a measure in which he or she has a conflict of interest, that measure is not invalid unless that member’s vote was necessary to its passage.”

“For instance, if the measure before a five member council is an ordinance to rezone a business property that is owned by a member of the council, and that member casts the deciding third vote in a 3-2 vote to approve the rezoning, the rezoning would be invalid. On the other hand, if that measure passes on a 4-1 vote, with the member voting in favor of the rezoning, there would be no impact on the validity of the rezoning ordinance.”

Whether a true conflict of interest exists or not, the fact that the current situation was mentioned by a majority of those surveyed creates a situation where the consultant recommends the City consult with their legal counsel to ensure they are meeting both the letter of the law, as well as the intent of the law. Additionally, the City should implement policies to prevent further examples which may be actual or perceived conflicts of interest. In the right situation, this type of situation could quickly erode public trust by the community and create foreseeable challenges for the City which could be, and should be, mitigated.

Consultant Recommendations

1. Fire Chief – Critical for Organizational Structure

The consultant highly recommends the City of Oelwein consider one of the following paths:

- A. Hire a full-time Fire Chief to manage, oversee and supervise all aspects of the Oelwein Fire Department and eliminate the other full-time position; or
- B. Restructure the Oelwein Fire Department to an all-volunteer organization serving under a Volunteer Fire Chief.

Regardless of whether the City elects “Option A” or “Option B” above, the consultant recommends the Fire Chief be appointed by the City Administrator, with approval of the City Council. The current challenges experienced with continuity of the Fire Department among City Government, as a whole, will not be corrected using “Option B,” with a Volunteer Fire Chief as that position will likely not be engaged and involved with other Department heads within the City at an appropriate level. The Fire Chief must be someone with actual and apparent authority over all aspects of the Fire Department, and someone who displays strong leadership skills, superior communication skills, and someone who is not averse to managing the Department, including the difficult aspects needing addressed.

Regarding a full-time Fire Chief, there was discussion in the process about the workload being significant enough to warrant a full-time Fire Chief. It is critical to keep in mind the Oelwein Fire Department currently has no policies, procedures, standardized operation guidelines / procedures (SOGs / SOPs); and the Fire Department is in dire need of proper and timely documentation of incidents and training records. A full-time Fire Chief could likely expend a significant amount of time the first year, or even longer, on the job doing these tasks alone. If the City were to add in regular statistical reporting, budgeting, strategic planning, and recruitment efforts there would likely be plenty of workload to justify the full-time Fire Chief, at least in the shorter term (one to three years) to get the Department going in the right direction.

One idea the consultant offered was the possibility of recruiting a senior fire service member, for example a retired command level officer, who would want to work for the City for a term of three to five years to address issues within the Department and bring consistency and continuity to the Department. Once the Department obtains some stability and foundation, the City could re-evaluate whether they want to keep a full-time Fire Chief or transition to a Volunteer Fire Chief.

2. Organizational Structure – **Critical for Organizational Structure**

The consultant also recommends the organizational structure of the Oelwein Fire Department be reimagined to provide support to the organization. Currently, the organization has over 1/3 of its membership as “officers” with apparently no responsibility or structure, based on the stakeholder interviews. The organization should be structured in a way that allows for a span of control in the three to seven range, without being “top heavy.” One example could be a Fire Chief with three Captains, and each Captain having six or seven volunteer firefighters reporting to them. This model would allow the span of control to be separated among those with responsibility, it would create structure and organization for the members, and this model would create a chain of command helping stabilize the overall operations and efficiency of the organization. Of course, on emergency scenes the Incident Command System would be used, but the model listed as an example would allow for continuity in day-to-day operations and training outside of incidents using the Incident Command System.

3. Policies, Procedures, SOP's / SOG's – Critical for Liability of City

The City of Oelwein and the Oelwein Fire Department **must immediately begin the process of developing written policies, procedures, SOP's and/or SOG's.** As outlined above, the liability for not having these written documents is simply too high and the City is assuming a huge risk by not having these documents.

4. Training Records – Critical for Liability of City

The Oelwein Fire Department should immediately start documenting and retaining documentation related to all incidents and training in a timely and efficient manner. The consultant recommends the Fire Department take advantage of the training module with ImageTrend Elite, as the Department already has access to the software at no charge and the capabilities currently exist, they just need to be used. Again, not having substantial and complete training records adds incredible risk to the City and greatly increases the City and the Department's liability.

5. Annual Training Plan – Critical for Liability of City

The consultant recommends the Oelwein Fire Department implement an annual training plan, outlining what topics will be covered when, and post the training plan at the Department so all members are aware of the plan. While some may argue "volunteers won't show up if they know what training is," the Consultant would argue creating transparency, expectations and setting the training plan out annually is a way to increase communication, reduce liability to the organization, and ensure quality training versus last minute identification of a topic. Furthermore, if volunteers are not showing up for training (regardless of an annual plan), this is a management and accountability issue which should be resolved on a personnel level. A training plan will help show what is being covered, what has been covered, and helps ensure critical training components are met each year.

6. Continuity in City Governance – Critical for Organizational Structure

As eluded too above, continuity within City governance is currently an issue for the Oelwein Fire Department. The Department is part of the City governance, and as with every department of the City, there should be continuity to ensure all departments are working towards the common goals of the City, as a whole. In addition, the City should have a strategic plan under which the Fire Department (and other Departments) fits. Without continuity, the Department being segregated creates inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and a lack of accountability. The consultant recommends getting a formal, legal opinion with regards to the volunteer firefighters being City employees, and then communicating the expectations of the City with all employees. Going forward, employees should be held accountable to the standards set by the City. Continuity of the Department within the broader City governance staff fosters this accountability and helps overcome this challenge.

7. Recruitment Campaign – Important for Sustainability

The Oelwein Fire Department should conduct some strategic planning with regards to the path forward for recruitment and sustainability. The City and the Department should develop a plan for recruitment efforts, to include SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) that can be measured to evaluate effectiveness of the efforts. Realignment of efforts which do not result in valuable rates of return should be conducted and the efforts should be evaluated regularly. The recruitment campaign should include social media marketing, visiting educational institutions and larger community employers/partners, and having a focused, consistent recruitment message coming from the City and the Department.

8. Statistical Reporting – Important for Management and Oversight

The consultant recommends the Oelwein Fire Department begin the process of regular statistical and operations reporting and retention of records. This can be done monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, or annually as desired by the City and the Department. The Oelwein Fire Department is fortunate in the fact they utilize ImageTrend Elite for incident reporting (and ImageTrend can / should be used for training documentation), and ImateTrend Elite includes some rich data and reporting elements within the software. Reports are easily created so they can be run on a regular basis to update the City, the Governing Body, the Community, and the Department on various reporting metrics.

9. Teambuilding Exercises – Important for Internal Harmony

The consultant recommends the City and the Department explore team building exercises, facilitated by an outside facilitator. Team Building exercises can add cohesion to the organization, they can demonstrate individual members strengths to be married with other members weaknesses for the most efficient operations, and team building exercises can promote harmony within the organization. The exercises could also result in members treating all other members with due respect and reduce the instances of cliques or segregated groups.

10. Consistent Communications Platform for All Members – Critical for Organizational Structure

A consistent communications platform should be developed for all members. The use of City email servers, bulletin boards, regular reports / updates, and other platforms to keep an open and constant flow of communication is critical to the success of the organization. Additionally, the use of City email servers could allow for communication pathways in case of emergency or necessity by the City without the complication of asking one person to share information and having no control over the timeliness, accuracy, or widespread sharing of the information to the members. While a text message list may be sufficient for informal communications, there should be a formal communications path developed and implemented for the Oelwein Fire Department.