

MEMO

TO: Finance
FROM: Chief Reynen
DATE: September 18, 2025
RE: Personnel Request- 2026 Budget

Background

Since 2010, the Fire Department has operated without a second administrative Chief Officer. When fire inspections were transferred from Building Safety and Zoning in 2013, that department reduced staff, but the Fire Department never gained the additional position needed to manage the workload. *As a result, one Deputy Chief has been expected to cover three distinct areas: EMS/Training, Fire Marshal/Prevention, and Operations.* This has left critical gaps in inspections, training consistency, fire prevention, EMS, and long-term planning. Our shift commanders, Deputy Chief and Fire Chief carry these additional duties on top of daily workload and emergency response, leaving gaps in key areas such as inspections, training consistency, fire prevention, and long-term planning. This has been manageable only because of personal sacrifices by staff, who often work outside scheduled hours to cover training and inspection needs.

I understand that the previous Fire Chief was requesting the Deputy Chief of EMS as a priority, this is mostly due to the previous Deputy Chiefs strong preference for Fire Prevention efforts as opposed to other duties and EMS training was hired out to a local training center in attempt to fill that gap.

I want to be clear: the department needs both a Deputy Chief Fire Marshal and a Deputy Chief of EMS/Training. When taking this position, I developed a multi-phased plan for strengthening the department. Phase one focuses on fire prevention and inspections; phase two focuses on EMS education and development. I have prioritized the Fire Marshal role because it creates the most direct impact on the community by addressing overdue inspections, code enforcement, and prevention programs.

While I currently serve as the department's EMS Service Director, this arrangement is not an effective long-term solution and divides leadership across too many areas. I can support EMS operations given my background for the short term, but I do not bring the technical expertise that a certified Fire Marshal provides. Without dedicated leadership in fire prevention and inspections, we leave the community exposed to risks that could otherwise be mitigated.

Today, the Deputy Chief oversees more than 1,200 inspections annually with help from part-time inspectors. While this covers some needs, it does not provide the technical expertise, consistency, or accountability that a trained Fire Marshal brings. A Fire Marshal ensures compliance with codes, manages inspections and re-inspections, attends site plan reviews, investigates fires, enforces standards, and works directly with businesses and contractors. The role also strengthens community safety through public education, school outreach, and serving as a resource for property owners and builders.

Ultimately, the Deputy Chief workload must be divided to support the department in meeting the state's legal requirements and national standards. Adding leadership capacity in any area will help, but prioritizing the Fire Marshal ensures that prevention, inspections, and risk reduction keep pace with community needs. This role also relieves the Deputy Chief of competing duties, allowing greater focus on critical operations, while aligning with the department's phased plan to support the city and its residents.

Financial Impact

In 2025, the City will receive \$98,000 from the Wisconsin 2% Dues Program, with additional 2% revenue from township contracts. These funds depend on the Fire Department maintaining fire inspections and prevention programs. Failure to meet these obligations risks both the loss of this revenue and increased fire hazards in the community. While funds support essential needs such as turnout gear, equipment, and inspector wages. Establishing a Fire Marshal allows us to reallocate \$20,000 from part-time inspector wages.

Recommendation

Fund the fire department's position request in 2026.