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FEATURED

City fire chief wants to hire deputy chief, firefighters

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City of Lancaster Fire Chief Justin McLellan is expecting to get two new trucks this spring and hopes to hire a deputy chief and part-time firefighters later this year.

Haley Jones

Lancaster Fire Chief Justin McLellan hopes to be able to start building a third fire station, as well as hire a deputy fire and some part-time firefighters this year. He also hopes to have three two trucks in service this year.

He updated the Lancaster Fire Department Standing Committee — Lancaster Mayor Alston DeVenny, City Administrator Flip Hutfles and District 3 Councilwoman Jackie Harris — on Feb. 3 at Fire Station 1.

Third fire station

The city has been working on buying land for a third fire station, due to demand. McLellan said he had all of the paperwork from city attorney Mitch Norrell, and McLellan and his team would be taking the offer to the landowner.

McLellan said the new station will likely be located west of West Meeting Street. The new fire station will cost between \$8.6 million and \$10.6 million, according to a June 2022 environmental study of the site.

The fire chief said the department is already aware that the city will need a fourth fire station, as it continues to annex land up U.S. 521.

New positions, career ladder

The city fire department is also looking to hire a deputy fire chief and four part-time firefighters, positions that would be added during mid-year budget adjustments.

“Manpower is where we got hit,” McLellan said, referring to an evaluation conducted during training last year. “The deputy fire chief is a key valuable position to our department, as far as our command structure falls.”

McLellan said he now has six people reporting directly to him, with no one in between. He said a person should have three to seven people reporting directly to them at one time, but five is optimal.

“We have nobody that’s here to take over day-to-day operations per se if I’m out of the office sick or at a conference,” McLellan said.

Hutfles said there was room in the city’s budget in extra revenue to try to add a deputy fire chief position during the mid-year budget adjustment. McLellan said that an already existing fire department employee would likely fill the position, and the four part-time employees would be compensated for a 16.25-hour week.

Adding more staff allows the station to continue to be in compliance with its IOS 1 rating, which scores the fire department, water supply, emergency communications and community risk reduction in cities. IOS 1 is the best rating and can positively impact personal insurance rates.

McLellan also presented a career ladder plan, with incremental salary increases for educational degrees earned and time served as an incentive to stay.

“With the career ladder, we’re not taking any action yet, we’re just working on that and that’d be part of our budget cycle,” Hutfles said. “We’re gonna start basically running numbers now, just like if we do different scenarios, what would be the fiscal impact?”

New trucks

McLellan said the station's new trucks — a ladder truck, fire engine and rescue and special operations truck — are being built in Wisconsin, and the station has been receiving weekly status updates.

“They’re showing the end of March for completion on the engine and the beginning of the March for completion on the rescue (and special operations truck),” McLellan said. “They hope to get those closer together, so that there’s one final inspection done and both trucks will be completed at the same time.”

The ladder truck, which the county is purchasing for the fire department, is expected to be completed by the end of September.

Haley