



## Antioch Fire Department First Fire Protection District

Jon Cokefair, Fire Chief  
835 Holbek Drive, Antioch IL 60002  
Phone (847) 395-5511 Fax (847) 395-1018

### PRESS RELEASE

#### Antioch Fire Officials release their second Friday Five (#FridayFive)

Good afternoon. We at the Antioch Fire Department/First Fire Protection District of Antioch continue to monitor social media since first announcing the proposed Fire District referendum.

To be completely transparent to voters, we will continue to do a #fridayfive (#Friday5) until the referendum takes place June 28. We feel this is the best way to get the truth out to everyone in a clear concise manner. Remember, these are your questions you placed on social media. We found them while reviewing social media across multiple outlets.

Now, we also realize there were some questions after last week's #FridayFive. We will be answering those soon. However, we are trying answer questions in the order we received them. These next five questions are from the first week after our first press release. We will circle back to your questions from last week when we get through the first ones.

Ultimately, we want the truth out there to give the most accurate information possible before residents vote June 28. So, we plan to do a #FridayFive every week. If we didn't get to your question this week, we'll try to get to it next week.

Q: What happened to all the federal money? Maybe villages can stop giving grants to businesses. A paper company was given \$20 or \$30 million grant to keep them here just before the pandemic. What happened to that?

A: The Village has nothing to do with the Fire District as these are two completely separate taxing bodies. What the Village does with any federal money they received AND any grants they gave to businesses – that's up to them. We have no idea what happened to it or – even – if what you said is true about a paper company. If you want an answer to this question, feel free to contact the village for further verification.

In that regard, though, our tax levy is directly tied to the Equalize Assessed Value (EAV) of the property in the entire Fire District. If the Antioch Township Assessor determines your property value increases, your taxes increase. So, let it be known that a Township or Village without emergency medical service will see a significant decrease in property values.

The Antioch Fire Department/First Fire Protection District of Antioch is asking for the maximum tax levy rate allowed by law at .8 percent. Once this is attained, we cannot come back to the taxpayers for an increase. Now, to be completely clear: this referendum is for our levy rate, which is restricted on how high it can go. The .8 percent was established by the state legislature as the maximum amount allowed. Most fire districts in Lake County have attained this rate. The story on how Antioch DID NOT establish the .8 rate was because previous fire protection district boards decided to only seek what was needed so as not to burden taxpayers when they took over the previous ambulance provider (which we discussed last week.) The board at the time said they didn't know exactly how much the district would need to run the new ambulance services and, if more was needed, they would come back to the residents for additional funding. It has been determined that more is needed which is why we are here.

The estimated increase of \$1.8 million dollars from this increased tax levy will be directed primarily to building repairs the first three years, then added to increase the competitive wage and benefits package for our valued staff members. The eventual goal will be to create a full-time staff and continue with our vehicle replacement plan.

The person who asked this question also asked to see the budget again. That link is here:

<https://www.antiochfire.org/content/info/2021-03%20Budget%20and%20Appropriation%20Ordinance.pdf>

Q: After the Lake County Board did away with the burn ban, why should anyone vote for this?

A: The burn ban established by a controversial vote by the Lake County Board has very little to do with the Antioch Fire Department/First Fire Protection District of Antioch. The only aspect of the ban that may involve this fire department is when an enforcing agency requests us to come out and extinguish any fire banned by the county board. Ultimately, this would be an unfunded county ordinance that we are charged with responding to. The tax levy increase we are seeking is to ensure your fire department assets your taxes have paid for is well cared for AND you are getting well-trained staff when you call for an ambulance or fire engine.

Where the burn ban is related to the Fire District is we anticipate an uptick in calls for service due to the number of anticipated complaints of burning.

With that being said, we have seen an uptick in ambulance/fire calls since 2018, and we are on pace to see another increase in 2022. This information is readily available on the front page of our website at [antiochfire.org](http://antiochfire.org), but the Antioch Fire Department/First Fire Protection District of Antioch responded to 2380 ambulance and fire calls in 2018, then increased to 2546 ambulance and fire calls in 2021. So far we have responded to 432 ambulance and fire calls in the first two months of 2022, while only responded to 375 ambulance and fire calls at this same point in 2021.

Q: Can we take money that was approved from the library referendum last year and give it to the fire department?

A: This simply can't be done. The residents of Antioch voted yes on the library referendum last year, and that vote was certified by the Lake County Clerk's Office. Because the library is a separate taxing body, the funds the library generates through a referendum is strictly for the library, similar to the funds generated by the Village of Antioch or Lake County.

Q: People on social media have been mean. Can we tell them – especially the ones who say they are associated with the fire protection district – to be nicer?

A: We have stated several times we want people – both for and against the referendum - to be respectful of each other in public and on social media. Whether these voters understand the need for the tax levy increase or not, I plead with our community to keep these conversations civil rather than allowing the mudslinging and backbiting that oftentimes creep in during elections.

In that regard, I would also openly request people do not harass paramedics and firefighter of the Antioch Fire Department about the referendum should you see them around town, in a grocery store or anywhere else. We have a very young, dedicated staff that are focused on helping you and your neighbors. These employees did not stand up and demand a referendum be placed on the ballot. That decision was made by the Fire District Board. We recently held a meeting to educate our employees on the needs for a referendum and told all of them to be nice and civil should they wish to speak openly to the public about this vote. However, in the past, we have seen our employees confronted when out in the public by angry people who "don't want their taxes raised." So, we ask again: please remember we are all neighbors and will continue to be neighbors when the final votes are counted.

Q: Are the issues at the firehouse due to a lack of leadership OR lack of funding, and why? Then continuing, did you hire a full time DC (Deputy Chief) despite saying you would only IF the referendum was passed last time. Then, what is the justification of hiring a full-time deputy chief? Why not use his salary for repairs on the building instead?

This is a great question, one we would love to answer. Let's start with: Which is a greater contributor to our situation? Funding or Leadership? The short answer is the lack of funding has compounded over the years to a point where we are doing all we can to keep our head above water.

Our calls for service exploded in 2013 after we took on the unfunded ambulance service and became the sole provider for ambulance service in Antioch. When that happened, the money we held in reserves for important items like vehicle replacements and building repairs started to be depleted. Simultaneously, we needed to bring in personnel to address our rapidly rising calls for ambulance service. This seriously diverted funds away from

building maintenance. It has been said we should “bring a bucket of tar on the roof” to fix some leaks. But, large projects like the crumbling tower, the sanitary issues at Station 1 and 2, parking lots, doors, roofs and mechanicals can’t all be fixed or simply repaired slightly and hope for the best. A perfect example is the sewer issue at station 2: we need to hook into city water and sewer to stop the sewer from backing up at that station. However, to tie into city water and sewer, it will cost the department approximately \$1.2 million. This doesn’t even touch our salary issues: How do you retain staff for the long term if we are unable to offer a competitive package? With experience you can develop leadership, but other departments offering higher wages and better benefits ALSO recognize the leadership qualities in our staff members. Right now, we are lucky to have a handful of staff members that care enough about this community and are willing to do the job for less, but the truth of the matter is that Antioch has been producing and training Firefighters and paramedics for other communities for many years.

To compound the problem, Antioch Fire was a workable model when there were lots of interest in the EMS and Fire fields. But, as we discussed last week, there is an industry wide shortage of Firefighters/Paramedics/EMS trainees out there because of low wages, COVID-19 and unfunded school requirements. Many have heard me say our people are our most important asset. We need to invest in them. We need to ensure they are educated in the EMS and Fire disciplines. We need to ensure they are safe and are making the right decisions at the right time. Therefore, we felt adding a full-time Deputy Chief with significant experience and leadership qualities was the best way to assist our employees. The full-time Deputy Chief and Medical Officer has been an identified need going as far back as 2012.

In promoting our past failed referendum attempts, I did say if we passed the referendum these positions would be filled. However, I never said these positions would be filled “ONLY IF” we were successful. We needed these positions - we still need these positions. We need quality men and women to lead our young EMTs out there. Because of the high turnover rate of employees leaving with 3-4 years’ experience for departments that had better pay, pension and benefits, we need someone to keep leading these training recruits who have little experience.

To bring in these leaders, I had to make the hard choice to allocate money away from Building Maintenance and Vehicle replacement to invest in the safety and education of our personnel. In July of 2021. I proudly added the positions of Deputy Chief and Medical Officer. The Deputy Chief position is primarily focused on the safe training of ALL personnel. He is responsible to ensure our two in-house fire academies in 2022 produce well-trained firefighters for the public. He continually works to develop and mentor our young staff by sharing his 32 years of EMS and Fire experience. Because of our youth, this includes mentoring our trainees on everyday life experiences.

Our Medical Officer has 36 years of experience and has a primary responsibility in guiding and training our EMT-B’s and Paramedics. At any given time, we have 10 paramedic students and 6 EMT-B’s working to attain certifications. We also must continually monitor the performance of our newly certified EMT-Bs and paramedics. To my knowledge no other department carries this large of training regimen.

So, as you can see, I wholeheartedly disagree with the opinion we didn’t need to bring in a Deputy Chief or Medical Officer at this time because of our finances. This was far and away the most absolute time to hire these two positions because our most experienced staff have left our department (37 people in 3 years). If we didn’t have these two positions on staff, we would be in serious trouble.

This is just one piece of a complex puzzle to ensure we continue to deliver quality and efficient care to our community every day.



