



Antioch Fire Department First Fire Protection District

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PRESS RELEASE Antioch Fire Officials release fourth Friday Five (#FridayFive) 5.4

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 monitoring social media across multiple outlets.

Now, we realize there continues to be questions after previous #FridayFive entries. We will be answering those soon. However, we are trying answer questions in the order we received them. These next five questions are from previous press releases and #FridayFives. We will circle back to questions we missed along the way. Also, if you asked us questions on Absolutely Antioch or Absolutely Antioch - Unhinged – we are trying to get to those as well. But, because those boards are so active, the first releases have cycled through quickly and we are having trouble keeping up. If we have not answered your questions and you still want us to do so, you can either email it to us at info@antiochfire.org or post it on our Facebook page.

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

Q: Why are there not reserve funds to maintain, repair, and replace the buildings? There appears to be a lot of neglect to the building. Therefore, there are concerns about how you got to this point and what assurance can you give that we won't wind up here again. (This is almost identical to another question that read: I don't like where the Facebook comments have gone. This isn't a debate of whether people are for or against the FD, of whether or not we value their work in the community. I think we can all agree the fire dept. is an important and much needed part of our community. The issue is holding our government accountable - what is the budget of the FD? How did they get to this point? What assurance do we have that we won't wind up here again? And while the FD might be hurting, we are all hurting right now. And with COVID and the inflation of gas prices rising - is now the right time?):

A: When the Fire District took over Ambulance service for the entire District (including the Village), it had to spend down its reserves to provide that unfunded service until the referendum passed to fund the ambulance service as best as we could. The Fire District was initially required to take out an equity loan until funds started to come in. Since then, the district has been able to build up some reserves, but because our budget cycle runs May 1 through April 30, the reserves are used up quickly while waiting for anticipated property tax funding to come in. The major portion of our funding (property tax) does not

start coming in until the last week in June because your property taxes are not paid to the county until the first week in June, so reserves are needed to cover the cost while waiting for property tax payments from the county.

Repairs to buildings and equipment are always on the forefront of the district's priorities. Unfortunately, and as we have pointed out, those repairs are excessive. So, "Is now the right time for a tax increase?" We have answered this in a previous Friday Five – it is never a suitable time for a tax increase, but sometimes paying for important services like your fire department/fire district needs to happen. This is the third referendum we have asked for in the last three years. In response, we can ask if it's wise to keep kicking this can down the road until something catastrophic happens.

Again, other Fire Districts got to the maximum tax levy increase we are asking for many years ago because they sought incremental increases or increased funding prior to the tax cap instituted by the state legislature. Right or wrong, we held our tax rate steady for many years, but rapid growth and changes in our service resulted in us always being short. Because we are asking for an increase to the maximum tax levy amount, we will not be able to seek this increase in the future if this referendum is successful.

And, as we have said in every #FridayFive, our operating budget is and has been visible on our website at antiochfire.org.

Q: How come LC (assuming LC is Lake County) building and zoning not deemed this (assuming the training tower) an unsafe structure and ordered the demo of it?

A: Because the structure is in the Village of Antioch, it falls under the village building department and not Lake County. This specific part of Station 1 continues to be monitored for its deteriorating condition. While the structure remains in use and has not been condemned does not mean it isn't in dire need of major repairs. We are trying to continue to operate with what we have despite its deteriorating condition.

Q: I would hope you consider billing residents rather than writing the balance off. Do you bill for car accidents? How many contract employees do you have and how many village employees are there?

A: The reason we don't charge our resident the balance of what insurance doesn't cover is we consider the property tax you pay has already covered some of that portion. We do bill for extrication if needed, and extrication is billed if the patient is needed to be removed from the vehicle using tools like the Jaws of Life. We also have the mechanism to bill for a landing zone in the event a helicopter transport is needed. (\$400 for each)

We have a combination of Contract and Fire District employees, but we are not affiliated with the village and do not have village employees.

We have 22 Contract employees to ensure we have paramedics ready to respond at all hours of the day or night. All the contract employees come from the pool of District employees. Of the 22 contract employees, one is the Fire Marshall and 21 are emergency responders. The 21 are split into three shifts of seven (24/48) that cover seven of the 12 daily positions covering our three stations. The other five daily positions are covered by the 60 part-time district personnel. Each part-time employee can work up to 130 hours a month (12-hour shifts). There are four full-time Fire District employees. They are the Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, Administrative Assistant, and the Medical Officer.

Q: First, am I wrong to believe the EMS and Fire District: Chief, Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief and Administration Assistant are all the same people for EMS and the Fire District or are they different? I cannot find the names of these individuals on the Antioch website besides Cokefair and the late Len Sakalowski. Would it be incorrect to combine the Fire Dept and EMS salaries together for a correct annual salary of these titles? Who is the Fire Prevention Officer as well, the average FP officer makes 47k in IL, but we have very high earning FP Officer and I can't find his name anywhere?

A: Yes, you are correct in your assumption the Fire District provides both Ambulance and Fire Services. Taxes are levied in two separate lines EMS and Corporate. Salaries are divided between the two as we create the budget. Most salaries are split 65% EMS and 35% Corporate. This is because most of what we do is EMS. The EMS levy can only be used for EMS services, but the corporate levy can be used across the board.

The Fire District employs one Fire Chief, one Deputy Chief, and one Administrative Assistant. These salaries along with the firefighters/paramedics/EMT's are split 65% EMS and 35% Corporate. The Medical Officer is 100% EMS and the Fire Marshal is 100% corporate.

Salaries vary across the state based on services offered and call volume. When comparing salaries look to reasonable comparable departments in Lake and Cook counties. You will find we are at the bottom of the wage/benefit scale across the board from firefighter to the Chief. This adds to our issues with retaining and attracting personnel.

Q: I see they still "skirted" the issue of \$16 /mile. I was taken to Condell on 12/28 and gas was \$1.87. So at \$16 per mile that's a very hefty profit. Before everyone goes off the \$1808 charge covers vehicles main, crew, and insurance. I'll wait for an answer another week. I know other people are wondering the same thing.

A: We have been extremely transparent since we started doing Friday Fives, covering a range of topics including multiple confusing questions and several controversial items. So, it's clear we have not been "skirting" any issues. We are all for answering the controversial and explaining the confusing questions, plus we have been putting your questions out here word-for-word. So, I stress we will not skirt any questions the public may have. Hopefully, you will see it by directly answering the question you placed on Facebook.

Ambulance billing is complicated and regulated by the government. There are only several things we are allowed to charge for: mileage and oxygen administered. Mileage charged is not only for the fuel, but it also reflects the cost of the vehicle's maintenance and the wear and tear on that vehicle. The mileage cost, however, is not related to the cost of fuel.

The \$1808 charge is derived from a complicated standardized formula being used across the country to determine cost for operating those ambulances. This formula is called the Ground Medical Emergency Transport (GMET). Because every Ambulance Provider/Fire Department has different cost through mostly benefits and pay scales, that charge varies by provider/department. So, for example, the cost for the ambulance in Lake Villa is different than the cost of an ambulance in Antioch, and both are different than the cost of an ambulance in Newport Township.

To try and help you understand how it is charged, we have attached a few websites that may explain this in further detail.

<https://www.ems1.com/ems-products/billing-administration/articles/understanding-the-ground-emergency-medical-transportation-program-KDMkcBtCfEgNPhqH/>

<https://chicagoareafire.com/blog/tag/ground-emergency-medical-transportation-gemt-program/>

<https://www.illinoisfirechiefs.org/resources/gemt/>

The cost to guarantee Contract Paramedics is approximately 2.1 million dollars per year in Antioch. We can collect approximately one million dollars per year for ambulance fees because of our demographic as determined by the GMET formula. In that regard, I can assure you there are no hefty profits for any department in Illinois – including at the Antioch Fire Department/First Fire Protection District of Antioch - when it comes to running a Municipal or Fire District ambulance service.