



## MT. HEALTHY FIRE DEPT.

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Residents of the City of Mt. Healthy,

I know you have all recently received a letter from Mayor James Wolf explaining the upcoming levy proposal to fund the Mt. Healthy Department of Fire and EMS, which will be on the ballot in August of 2020. While I encourage everyone to read and examine the mayor's letter in order to appreciate the finer points of the levy and the rationale behind its creation, as Fire Chief, I also wanted to communicate directly with you, the residents, and explain the need for the upcoming levy from the Fire Department's point of view.



**Chief Steve Lawson**

**A Brief History:** The Mt. Healthy Department of Fire and EMS was established in 1898 as a volunteer fire department which provided only firefighting services. In 1972, the Mt. Healthy Life Squad was established to provide emergency medical care to the City. In 1995, the Fire Department and Life Squad merged to become one, cross-trained, service and operated as a fully volunteer department until 1997. That year, we asked the voters to pass a 1.5 mill levy that would staff part-time personnel on station Monday through Friday, with volunteers still responding to emergency calls from home to staff the ambulances and fire engines at night and on weekends, and the voters graciously supported us. By 2004, however, we had experienced such a decline in the number of volunteers that we were unable to staff the ambulances and fire trucks adequately anymore, and we had to rely on our neighboring departments to respond to fire and medical calls much of the time. Therefore, in 2004, we asked the voters to pass a 5-mill levy, which allowed the staffing of three part-time personnel on station 24/7. Again, the community supported. On January 1, 2005, we began to staff three part-time personnel around the clock. We have been operating from this 5-mill levy for 15 years, and in 2010, we started to find that the part-time system was becoming unsustainable. This has largely been due to the lack of a consistent part-time personnel pool in the Cincinnati/Hamilton County region; it is the goal of most part-time firefighters to secure a full-time position, and eventually, most of our part-time firefighters are hired elsewhere and move on, causing a "revolving door" effect. We have also found that staffing with three personnel has made it extremely difficult to keep up with the constantly increasing call volume. We recently increased our staffing to four per day, to combat this rise in our call volume. The fourth position, however, is funded by a grant, which will expire next year. We currently provide "advanced EMT" level medical service, rather than the full paramedic services provided by nearly all other surrounding fire departments in Hamilton County; at the same time, we are one of the busiest fire stations in Hamilton County.

**Where We Are Today:** In 2004 (when the current 5 mill operating levy was passed), The Mt. Healthy Department of Fire and EMS responded to 1,249 incidents. In 2019, we responded to 2,010 incidents, that is a 60% increase in call volume in 15 years! In other words, our calls have increased by 60%, but our funding and staffing remains where it was 15 years ago – we are straining to meet the community’s rising needs. We are now asking the voters to pass a 12.9 mill levy to bring the Mt. Healthy Department of Fire and EMS up to the current regional standard of care. The passage of this levy will allow us to hire seven full-time personnel that will be certified to the firefighter/paramedic level. This will provide two full-time personnel on shift every day along with three part-time personnel, for a total of five personnel 24/7. Five people will allow us to deploy two ambulances to two different incidents simultaneously, or to deploy a fully-staffed fire engine and an ambulance simultaneously – this will drastically reduce our need to rely on our surrounding communities for help (with three personnel, we were only able to respond to one medical or fire incident at a time, requiring any additional calls to be picked up by our neighbors).

## **What will a 12.9 mill levy do?**

- **Allow us to hire full-time personnel, staffing two full-time firefighter/paramedics every day, 24/7**
  - o Why is this important? the current part-time system is not working like it used to because fewer people are being trained to become a firefighter and EMT’s. It is also difficult to retain quality personnel without the possibility of full-time employment.
- **Provide paramedic level EMS service**
  - o Why is this important? Our fire department is one of the only in Hamilton County that does not provide paramedic services. We currently provide “Advanced EMT” service (which allows us to do many things beyond a basic EMT, but not to the level of a paramedic. In addition, there are times when we do not have any advanced EMTs working, and we only have basic EMT’s. If you or a family member experience an emergency that requires advanced medical care (IV fluids, medications, EKG, advanced cardiac life support, etc.), we must call in neighboring paramedics to assist us; this could increase the time for you or your family member to receive appropriate care
- **Increase the personnel per day from 4 during the day and 3 at night, to 5 personnel around the clock**
  - o Why is this important? Five personnel will allow us to have the ability to have two ambulances respond to two medical calls at the same time or respond to a medical call and a fire call at the same time. Currently, at night, with three personnel, we will only be able to deploy one ambulance or one fire engine at a time. Any additional calls must be picked up by neighboring departments. This will also allow us to have more than one emergency vehicle on a single emergency call (for example, both a fire engine and an ambulance on an auto accident scene).

- **Grow and evolve with the times, to meet the growing and expanding needs of the City of Mt. Healthy**
  - o Why is this important? The Mt. Healthy Department of Fire and EMS was founded in 1898, and ever since then, we have grown and adapted to the changing needs of a changing city. We are operating in 2020 with a budget and a vision from 15 years ago. We want to continue to be able to proudly provide the highest-level service to our community for another 100+ years!

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, consider our request, and the many reasons we are asking for your help. We have always been there for the City of Mt. Healthy, and are hoping the community will do the same for us.

Please remember to get out and vote on August 4, 2020 and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Steve Lawson, Fire Chief  
Mt. Healthy Fire Department



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