

APPROVED

**CITY OF WAUSAU HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF OPEN SESSION**

DATE/TIME: December 9, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.

LOCATION: City Hall (407 Grant Street) – Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Becky McElhaney (C), Terry Kilian (VC), Gary Gisselman, Michael Martens,
Vicki Tierney

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Also Present:

The meeting of the Human Resources Committee was called to order by McElhaney. McElhaney noted that the agenda said it was a special meeting and that this was incorrect.

Approval of November 11, 2024 Minutes.

Motion by Kilian to approve the November 11, 2024 Human Resources Committee meeting minutes. Second by Gisselman. All ayes. Motion passed 5-0.

Human Resources Report for November 2024.

No questions were brought forward.

Discussion and Possible Action to Approve the Proposal to Expand Wausau Fire Department Hiring Criteria to Include EMT-Basic Candidates and Implement an In-House Paramedic Apprenticeship Program.

Chief Kopp thanked the committee for the opportunity to present this item and introduced Deputy Chief Pluess to present the item. Pluess said that the department currently has ten vacancies, and by changing the minimum requirements for hire they believe they can increase the application pool. The Fire Department would partner with NTC to put candidates through a hybrid paramedic program that begins mid-January. Pluess said unlike the last training with NTC the department provided where candidates were in class 40 hours a week, this new hybrid program would allow candidates to be available to work while they are going to school for a year. Pluess said that this would not result in an increase in overtime for the department and that the candidates would get paid for school while on shift but not on their off days, as it would be a condition of their employment.

Pluess discussed an Early Engagement Benefit which is a sign-on bonus of \$10,000 and \$5,000 towards tuition. Pluess said this would come off of what a one-year Firefighter normally would make. Pluess said this would act as a recruitment and retention tool.

Tierney asked what happens if they do not pass the EMT course. Pluess said that candidates they have put through school have successfully passed the paramedic exams on their first attempt. Tierney then asked why we would provide such a high hiring bonus to someone who

isn't as qualified as a one-year firefighter. Pluess said that after tuition costs, the salary is lower than that of a one-year firefighter.

Kilian said that she appreciates the work put into the proposal, however, with City debt being such an issue, she was concerned that the proposal did not include how much it would cost to implement. Kilian was also concerned about how repayment from those who leave employment would be guaranteed to be collected. Pluess said that no additional positions are proposed and that the cost is neutral since the proposal to hire apprentice level staff is the same as the current starting rate for a firefighter. Kilian again asked how they could guarantee that the City would be reimbursed if someone left; Pluess said that the City has collected from others who have left with less than two years of service.

Martens said that he thought it was a good program to implement.

Tierney expressed concerns about hiring candidates without the necessary requirements and also about collecting repayment.

Gisselman asked if there are any common reasons for people leaving the department, as the HR report indicates that the Fire Department has lost ten employees this year. Gisselman also asked for clarification on how training for the candidates would be handled. Pluess said that the candidates would attend the required courses at NTC and then do the virtual courses while on shift, and hands-on training at the department. Gisselman said that repayment is not new and asked if all employees are not held to the same standard of repayment for certifications, continuing education, and such. Henderson said that it is sporadic as to what items are called out for repayment if an employee leaves within a certain period of time. Gisselman said that this should be addressed in the handbook.

Chief Barnes spoke about their hiring process, sending new hires to the academy, and the repayment of items if an employee leaves within three years of hire. Barnes said that training and continuing education are on-going in his department and would not expect employees to sign an agreement for such items, but rather only if they are obtaining a college degree and then decide to leave.

Henderson said that he had two issues with the proposal. The first issue is the 3-year requirement of employees to stay before there is no repayment. Henderson said that 3 years is a long time for someone to commit to. The second issue is having employees stay in the position if they hate their job or feel it's not a good fit just to not have to repay.

Tierney said repayment should be prorated back to the City.

Kopp said that the department has had employees who left and had to pay back for schooling and equipment and that it was a prorated pay back. Kopp said that this will give some people an opportunity to do something that they have always wanted to do who otherwise would not have been able to. Kopp shared that a candidate who applied during the last time the

department put candidates through paramedic school had a full-time job and a family and would not otherwise have been able to pursue a career as a firefighter/paramedic.

McElhaney said that she is a proponent of apprenticeship programs and asked for Kopp to provide more information about the schedule for the students and the hiring bonus and tuition credit.

Kilian asked if the amount of pay for the apprenticeship employees is the same as someone hired with more education and training. Kopp said yes and no, that paramedics receive an incentive for their license and receive more pay for years of service, but the rate is the same for someone who is hired with just an EMT-basic license. Kilian said that she feels the cost is extreme for the City. Kopp shared that he and Pluess were both in apprenticeship programs that helped them to determine they wanted a career in the fire service.

McElhaney clarified that the department will not be hiring candidates who do not have any certifications, but rather, they are lowering the minimum requirements and helping the candidates to get to the certification level desired by the department. Kopp said that Wausau has a high standard of service, sending two paramedics on all ambulance calls they receive.

Tierney asked when the employees would receive the bonuses. Kopp said he believed it would be provided immediately after hire. Tierney asked what the reasons were that the department lost employees. Kopp said that he's asked for input from exit interviews conducted with HR and that no one has said anything negative about the department. Two people left because their spouses were accepted into residency programs elsewhere, another moved to be closer to parents, and one said that they didn't realize they would have to work so hard and decided to quit.

Motion by --- to approve the proposal to expand Wausau Fire Department hiring criteria to include EMT-Basic candidates and implement an In-House Paramedic Apprenticeship Program. Second by ---. Motion passed 4-1. (*Kilian was the dissenting vote.*)

Closed Session pursuant to 19.85 (1)(f) Considering financial, medical, social or personal histories of specific persons which, if discussed in public, would likely to have a substantial adverse effect upon the reputation of any person referred to in such histories or data for the purpose of considering leave of absence requests exceeding 30 days for one employee.

Motion by Martens to go into closed session pursuant to 19.85 (1)(f) Considering financial, medical, social or personal histories of specific persons which, if discussed in public, would likely to have a substantial adverse effect upon the reputation of any person referred to in such histories or data for the purpose of considering leave of absence requests exceeding 30 days for one employee. Second by Gisselman. McElhaney took rollcall of members present. The committee entered closed session.

Reconvene into Open Session.

McElhaney indicated that the committee was back in open session.

Discussion and Possible Action on Closed Session Item #4 Approving Leave of Absence Request.

Motion by Martens to approve the leave of absence request. Second by Tierney. All ayes.
Motion passed 5-0.

Adjournment.

Motion to adjourn by Kilian. Second by Tierney. The meeting adjourned.

Rebecca McElhaney
Human Resources Committee, Chair

Video available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZeUBWZSIWE> and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UPFLQ3_khM