



HoseLine

SPRING 2023

SPECIAL REFERENDUM ISSUE

Please join us on
March 16, 2023 at
7:00 p.m. at the
Prospect Heights
Fire Department on
Camp McDonald and
Elmhurst Roads



Dear Resident and Taxpayer,

For the past five years, we have been using this newsletter to tell you about the fire protection district's operations, effort, needs and plans. We have detailed how and when we made major purchases, what we've done to improve service delivery, and how we've kept costs down. Unlike a retail business, we must be prepared at any time for a surge in demand caused by a fire or other emergency.

The workload at the PHFPD continues to rise. 2023 was the busiest year in the history of the PHFPD with 2,722 calls answered. Over the past 25 years, the number of emergencies has grown by over 450 percent! This necessitated a switch from volunteers on-call to firefighters in the firehouses 24/7. For the past three years, changes in the regional labor market have required us to switch to mostly full-time employees rather than part-time employees.

During this time, income has not kept pace and two major cost-cutting initiatives took place. First, the vehicle replacement plan has not been funded since 2009. We have been using reserve funds to make vehicle purchases, but that will soon run dry. Fire trucks and ambulances are very costly and see severe use with quick starts and stops. Reliability is a must. Firefighters and paramedics are of little use if they cannot get to the emergency.

Second, we have balanced our budget by continuing to make reductions in areas to ensure that our most important resource needs remains steady, our personnel. This tightening of every aspect has not allowed us to put away funds to address our upcoming vehicle needs and fire station improvements.

Below is the question that will be on the April 4 election ballot. It asks voters whether the fire district should issue \$10,000,000 in bonds to pay for new fire equipment and firehouse modifications to accommodate a full-time workforce.

Shall the Prospect Heights Fire Protection District, Cook County, Illinois, improve fire stations, purchase emergency response vehicles and acquire fire and rescue apparatus and equipment and issue its bonds to the amount of \$10,000,000 for the purpose of paying the costs thereof?

YES

NO

For the owner of a \$300,000 home, the cost would be about \$135 a year. Asking any more of the taxpayer was ruled out by our Board of Trustees. The last bond referendum was in 1991 and with YOUR approval, funded the last fire station addition and vehicle purchases. In the 79-year history of the PHFPD, this is only the sixth time voters have been asked to raise taxes, with all five previous requests passed by voters. The PHFPD does not receive funding from the City of Prospect Heights. By state law, property tax is the only substantial means of income available to a fire protection district. The goal here is simple: *maintain the service level taxpayers have come to expect.*

We remain committed to all of you in our mission of ***"Delivering exceptional services for everyone with Courtesy, Respect, and Empathy."***

The rest of this newsletter is additional information about the "Why" and the "What." I ask that you read it and contact me if you have any questions or want to discuss anything about the proposed referendum and how it relates to the PHFPD.

My phone number is 224-318-1720. • My email is firechief@phfire.com.
My office is open from 9 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. – feel free to stop in!

Sincerely,

Drew Smith, Fire Chief

PLEASE VOTE - WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Why it's needed?

2 main projects planned for the funds raised by this bond issuance.

■ Update firehouses: #1 Our personnel deserve modern, safe working conditions.

- Current fire station is 79 years old, had 2 additions 1973 and 1992.
- Station needs to be reconfigured to accommodate a diverse, full-time workforce.



- Kitchen was designed when district was all volunteer, small. It is currently unable to seat more than six personnel.
- We need to make essential repairs such as replacing all

garage doors, roofs, and cracking concrete, ADA upgrades.

- Reconfigure our vehicle garage to reduce our members' exposure to cancer causing exhaust and fumes. Currently, fire fighter coats and pants are stored hanging next to our vehicles. New design standards will move them to a ventilated area, not exposed to vehicle exhaust.
- Reconfigure sleeping areas into individualized areas. This will reduce transmission of sickness/diseases while sleeping.
- Reconfigure shower areas into individual private areas.
- Update all technology systems, add security cameras and access controls.



■ Update Fire Apparatus, Ambulances and Equipment



- Fund replacement of our 30 year old ladder truck. It is 3 times older than any neighboring departments and at the end of life. Our maintenance costs are exceeding \$30,000 annually. Parts are becoming harder to find and repair down time is becoming longer.
- Reduce our fleet by combining one engine with

our tanker. This will reduce maintenance and ensure the water is readily available on the west side of town. Relying on the ambulance crew to drive the tanker is not acceptable, due to the increase of time that the crews are spending on ambulance calls.

- Replace ambulances. We currently maintain a fleet of three. One 2009, one 2006 and 2007 that had chassis replaced in 2018.
- By replacing our older ambulance, we will have load-assist stretchers on all three ambulances. (This system prevents back injuries and is compliant with 100% of ambulances that the surrounding suburbs presently have.)
- Replace six heart monitors. These state-of-the-art devices are \$40,000 each, yet are an essential tool on every paramedic ambulance call.
- Replace the current inventory of personal protective firefighting equipment for every employee. We are required to replace these "turnout" coats and pants every 10 years without exception per NFPA Standards. The cost of one set is close to \$3,000, and we will need 40 sets.



What caused this?

- The cost of new fire vehicles and ambulances have increased faster than our budget allows us to allocate funding for them.
- By state law, property tax is the only substantial means of income available to a fire protection district.
- There was a \$200,000,000 (40%) decrease in assessed property value between 2008 and 2017. *When property values fell, so did the fire district's tax income.*
- Projected cost of fire station remodeling is currently \$7 million. Our operational budget will not fund a project without a bond issuance.

Besides daily operations, funding for major purchases such as pumpers, aerial ladder, and ambulances has been lacking.

- A capital equipment replacement plan has been in place since 2000.
- In 2009, funding that plan stalled due to the recession. Since then we haven't had the money to set aside.
- Covid further impaired our capital savings plan.

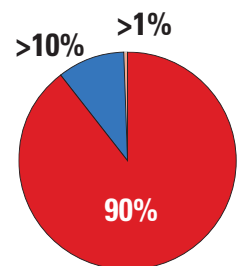
For the past several years we have used all of our reserve funds to make needed vehicle repairs and purchases. Current planned immediate expenses for vehicles and firehouse updates exceed remaining funds ten-fold.

Where does the PHFPD get its revenue from?

- 90% from property taxes
- 10% from ambulance transportation fees
- Less than 1% from other miscellaneous sources (totals less than \$60,000 annually)

State law prohibits the PHFPD from creating or imposing other fees.

10% of average tax bill goes to the PHFPD



Revenue Sources

PLEASE VOTE - WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

When was the last tax referendum?

- 1973 bond issue* to buy a fire truck and build an addition to the original one-room firehouse
- 1985 add paramedic ambulance service
- 1991 bond issue* to buy a fire truck and build an addition for living space
- 2004 tax increase to hire additional firefighters
- 2018 tax increase of 4 percent versus average of less than 2 percent
- When the bond was paid off the associated tax increase was deleted. The 1991 bond was paid off in 1997.

The property tax cap law of 1994 has resulted in savings to homeowners' of more than \$20 million.

How has the PHFPD saved \$\$\$?

- Rather than purchase two new ambulances, we reused the "box" and replaced the chassis. This saved taxpayers about half the cost of new ambulances, or roughly \$300,000. These ambulances are now 16 years old.
- When our 23-year-old 3000-gallon water tanker truck was condemned due to safety issues, we purchased a stock truck. It was the manufacturer's demonstrator unit, rather than ordering a custom truck like we had done previously. This saved taxpayers more than \$100,000. Now, due to an increased number of calls and reduced personnel we must combine the water tanker truck with a pumper to ensure we will have the water with us when it is needed.
- The east-side fire station mortgage was paid off in 2018. The fire district is currently debt free.
- Each fire station is around one-third the size of the fire stations at similar fire departments. This greatly reduces operating expenses but also impairs our ability to provide our employees with proper working conditions.

COMPARISONS	PH	AVERAGE NEW
HQ	10,000 sq. ft.	25,000 sq. ft.
Substation	6,000 sq. ft.	15,000 sq. ft.

- We continue to use part-time firefighters who possess the same training, certifications, and licenses as full-time firefighters. The part-time workforce are saving taxpayers more than \$1,250,000 annually in benefits.
 - The current union contract for full-time firefighters keeps personnel costs fixed through December 31, 2024.
- Since 2013, over \$700,000 in personnel cuts were made to balance the budget.
- Each year these same cuts continue.
 - Use of part time firefighters saving more than \$20,000,000 in benefits and pension over the last 17 years
 - Eliminated 15 people:
 - 12 part-time firefighter paramedics
 - 1 full-time deputy chief, saving salary and benefits
 - 1 full-time administrative assistant, saving salary and benefits
 - 1 part-time records clerk
- Administrative staff cut from 5 to 2 — the fire chief and deputy chief.*

Just how busy is the fire district?

Year	# of calls	Year	# of calls	Year	# of calls
1992	503	2003	1817	2014	2056
1993	512	2004	1491	2015	1946
1994	605	2005	1621	2016	2063
1995	1063	2006	1619	2017	2140
1996	1528	2007	1700	2018	2390
1997	1596	2008	1989	2019	2396
1998	1829	2009	1688	2020	2193
1999	1778	2010	1659	2021	2415
2000	1694	2011	1768	2022	2722
2001	1710	2012	1830		
2002	1810	2013	1854		

2,722 calls in 2023 is more than seven calls each day or one call every three hours.

PHFPD - Doing more with less...

This is a familiar phrase in our society. For government agencies like the fire district, it's part of the way we do business. Every year the PHFPD has done more with less. While each year the taxes you pay have probably increased due to inflation, the prices affecting fuel, commodities, insurance and other services required to run the fire district have risen at a greater pace. Even without these cost increases, the number of emergency incidents handled by your firefighter/paramedics have been increasing each year. The number of incidents handled in 2022 was 13 percent higher than last year and up 49 percent over the last ten years. Each incident places wear on the fire trucks, ambulances, tools, and protective clothing—as well as the increased use of gas and diesel fuel. Needs within the firehouse have also changed. The workforce is increasingly diverse. Greater attention must be paid to the health and cancer prevention of our staff, along with much of the infrastructure which is decades-old.

How can I estimate my tax increase cost?

Find your last tax bill and locate the PHFPD as show below. Multiply the tax show by .15 to see what your cost would be.

TOTAL PAYMENT DUE		2021 Second Installment Property Tax Bill - Cook County Electronic Bill					
\$0.00	Property Index Number (PIN)	Volume	Code	Tax Year	(Payable In)	Township	Classification
By 02/01/2023	232	38032	2021	2021	(2022)	WHEELING	2-34
IF PAYING LATE, PLEASE PAY	02/02/23 - 03/01/23	03/02/23 - 04/01/23	04/02/23 - 05/01/23	LATE INTEREST IS 1.5% PER MONTH, BY STATE LAW			
\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00				
TAXING DISTRICT BREAKDOWN							
Taxing Districts	2021 Tax	2021 Rate	2021 %	Pension	2020 Tax		
MISCELLANEOUS TAXES							
Northwest Mosq Abatement Dist Wheeling	9.04	0.011	0.10%		8.89		
Prospect Heights Fire Protection Dist	931.58	1.134	10.38%	34.50	336.13		
Prospect Heights Park District	710.60	0.865	7.92%	174.10	592.79		
				33.68	467.73		
				64.07	690.93		

For the average homeowner of a \$300,000 home, the additional tax cost would be about \$135 a year.

PLEASE VOTE - WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!



Prospect Heights Fire District

10 East Camp McDonald Road
Prospect Heights, IL 60070

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SUMMARY OF REFERENDUM GOALS

The citizens of Prospect Heights have always been extremely supportive to our organization. We are often asked if we need help or if there is anything that they can do to support us. The time has come where we do need help. With the growth of the city and increases in call volume, this is what we need to help us and keep our community safe.

Fire Equipment

- ✓ Apparatus Purchases:
 - Pumper Tanker
 - Quint
 - 2 Ambulances
- ✓ Replace Two-Way Radios
- ✓ Increase Ballistic PPE Cache
- ✓ Replace Structural Firefighting PPE
- ✓ Update All Monitor/Defibrillators and AEDs

Firehouses

Assess:

- ✓ Space Needs
- ✓ Building Systems
- ✓ Compliance

Improve:

- ✓ Bunk Rooms and Locker Rooms
- ✓ Kitchens and Dining Areas
- ✓ Fitness Facilities

Reapportion and Remodel Office Area

- ✓ Reduce Size
- ✓ Combine Training Room and Conference Room

Update:

- ✓ IT Infrastructure
- ✓ Station Alerting Hardware

Update Overhead Mechanicals:

- ✓ Heat
- ✓ Drops
- ✓ Exhaust Capture

Update/Renovate/Replace:

- ✓ Flooring
- ✓ Water Heaters
- ✓ Parking Surfaces
- ✓ HVAC



A Little History on Our Main Fire Station

The current fire station headquarters, located in the heart of Prospect Heights, was originally built in 1948. It was constructed using a single page blueprint, and *volunteer manpower*. Funding for the construction was raised by the annual firemen's carnival. Prior to construction of this original fire station, the two vehicles owned by the Fire District were housed at the local Sinclair gas station.

In 1971, a bond referendum allowed for an expansion of the truck storage garage and remodeling of the original fire station area to include meeting and office spaces. At that time, the expansion was for the function of a basic volunteer fire department.

The current station was remodeled again after the 1991 bond referendum. This remodel expanded the rear of the station to allowing sleeping areas for firefighters, expanded bathroom facilities, and a small fitness room and training area in the new partial basement.

Today, the manpower is a constant 7 personnel operating 24 hours a day, with areas for administration in the front of the station.

We are very proud of the facility we consider home, yet parts of the building are now more than 75 years old. The main-functioning areas, such as the truck garage and main service areas, are more than 50 years old. There remains a constant struggle to maintain our facilities and keep them as up to date. *Please vote on April 7th!*

PLEASE VOTE - WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!