**Our City Fire Department**

The Cambridge City Council is in the process of deciding which piece of fire equipment to purchase this year. This has been a long, drawn out process during which the cost of the equipment has risen between $200,000 to $300,000. The Council is trying to decide whether to buy a fire engine or a rescue truck. During this time, the Council has received over $12 million in federal ARPA funds and because of two years of budget surpluses has over $2.5 million in excess in the “rainy day fund”. That’s a total of $14.5 million in additional funds that could be used.

Cambridge has a volunteer fire Department made up of over 40 people, who are willing to give up their time and their own safety to keep us safe. They are willing to leave their jobs or homes when called to answer any alarm that occurs. The Fire Department goes out on **over 1,000 calls per year**. If we had a paid fire department, it would cost the City approximately $5 to $6 million each year. The City does pay for fire equipment and vehicles and that is the problem we are now facing. Here is a list of existing fire trucks and the year they were purchased:

1. The tower ladder engine, 1994 – This unit is outdated and the Council agreed to replace it with ARPA funding of $1.7 million last year. This is a good start; however it will take 18 months to arrive.
2. Fire Engines – four (these are the units that go on most calls)
   1. Engine 1 – 2005 Pierce Engine – In the shop for repairs estimated at $15,000 – 17 years old.
   2. Engine 2 – 2001 Pierce Engine – currently working but scheduled to go into repairs (est. $35,000) when Engine 1 comes out of repairs. This Engine is 21years old.
   3. Engine 3 – 2015 Pierce Engine – currently the main engine, needs air-conditioning and small pump repairs. Only 7 years old.
   4. Engine 4 – 1992 Pierce Engine – currently out of service because of a bad engine which they cannot find parts for and pump repairs – could cost up to $100,000 to repair – 30 years old.
3. Rescue 1 – 1999 Hackney Rescue – Currently the engine shuts off by itself and no mechanic has been able to fix it. This is the only vehicle of this type in Dorchester County, and it is used for major accidents. It is also too small to carry all of the new equipment required. Replacement cost is now $1.7 million. This truck is 23 years old and is the Chief‘s top priority for replacement.
4. Hazmat 1 -2007 – Currently online and responds to all hazmat situations in a 3-county area – only 15 years old.

So the Fire Department must maintain 7 vehicles on an ongoing basis. Looking at the dates of purchase, it is easy to see why replacements are necessary. The question now facing the City Council is whether to override the Chief’s recommendation of replacing the Rescue 1 truck or buying a new Engine 4 at a cost of $900,000. The Council has expressed concern that if they approve the Rescue Truck, the Fire Department will turn around and ask for a new Engine 4, which they will and should since both are needed, and both do not function properly.

This all seems like a silly disagreement to me. The Council’s core responsibly to its citizens is to keep us safe. That means functioning Police, Fire, Water, and Code enforcement units. The last fire engine purchased by the City, before the replacement last year, was in 2015 and before that was in 2007 – that was 15 years ago. We need to support our volunteers with working equipment, and if that means buying both the Rescue Truck and an Engine in one year, so be it. Now is a unique time to make these purchases and to catch up on our fire equipment replacement schedule because of the influx of the ARPA funds and the budget surpluses.

Let’s rework the budget and buy both! The money is there!

If you agree, contact your Commissioner before the Council meeting on Monday , August 8th.

Chuck McFadden,

President of CAN