

# Fire and Police Consolidation Puts Public Safety at Risk!

Harper Woods fire fighters have proudly served the citizens in this community for more than 50 years. Your fire fighters are trained to protect lives and property and respond to any emergency 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The City of Harper Woods wants to change the way fire service is delivered by cross training fire fighters and police to serve in dual capacities under one public safety department.

Since the early 1990s, previous proposals to merge police and fire personnel have all been rejected by voters and the City Council over the years.

## A Public Safety Merger Is Not the Answer for Harper Woods!

There is no advantage — in either economy or efficiency — in combining police and fire department functions. Harper Woods needs both good police service and good fire services and the consolidation of the two results in poorer police and fire services for many reasons, including:

### Inadequate Training

Fire fighters in Harper Woods already are trained to perform both fire and EMS duties, as well as hazardous materials response, confined space rescue and rapid intervention. Call volume has skyrocketed in the last five years while staffing levels have remained the same or been reduced. Training police to be fire fighters is expensive and unrealistic.

### Insufficient On-the-Job Experience

Harper Woods will lose its most experienced fire fighters to high turnover in a combined department.

### Reductions in Fire Department Staffing

The possible cut in the number of fire fighters reduces staffing to unsafe levels and increases response times, putting public and fire fighter safety in Harper Woods at greater risk.

### Increased Response Times

Fire fighters responding to a fire will have to wait for additional cross-trained police before starting fire suppression. A fire doubles in size every 30 seconds, and an increase in response times is too long. The reduction of one ambulance leaves only one to handle emergencies, costing precious minutes in response times.

### Ineffective Fire Fighting Capabilities

The idea of supplementing fire fighters on the fire ground is ineffective and inefficient if police are already responding to a law enforcement call. A combined public safety operation lacks the flexibility needed to respond to changing demands for fire and police services.

# Harper Woods News

## City Council passes resolution to implement Public Safety

On May 5, 2008, the Harper Woods City Council passed the following resolution: "NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of Harper Woods hereby directs that the City shall establish a Department or Division of Public Safety and shall immediately begin the cross training of Police Officers to be fire fighters and emergency medical technicians and fire fighters who so desire, to be cross trained as police officers."

## Court Action filed against the city of Harper Woods

A city charter defines the rules of operation for a city and also defines the process for making any changes to the charter. According to the Harper Woods City Charter, "There shall be maintained both a police department and a fire department, which departments shall not be combined". A lawsuit has been filed against the city of Harper Woods by resident Jeff Wummel and the Harper Woods Firefighters Local 1188 alleging that the city council's decision to proceed with cross training police officers as firefighters is a violation of the city charter and to prevent the move to a public safety department without an approved change to the city charter by the residents of Harper Woods.

## City Council refuses to release a plan

At recent council meetings, many residents have asked questions on how the city council would implement public safety in Harper Woods. While the council members have stated that they have been discussing the move to a public safety department for many years, they still refuse to release any details on their plan.

- The city manager stated that he met with a reporter for over 3 hours to discuss the move to public safety in Harper Woods, but he refuses to share the same time with residents to explain the plan.
- The city manager stated that he went to the Park Place Senior Apartments to dispel rumors about ambulance service under their public safety plan. However, many of the seniors still attended the city council meeting because they had not received sufficient answers to their questions. After the council meeting, they were still dissatisfied due to the lack of information from the city manager and city council.
- When I arrived at church on Sunday at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Father Herman mentioned that a member of the police department had visited him to discuss public safety in Harper Woods.

At the latest city council meeting, the mayor and city council members stated that they are unable to discuss the issue of the public safety department due to the recent lawsuit mentioned above. It appears that the city is selective in determining who they will talk to about their public safety plans, and selective about what information is provided.

## City Council offers 25% pay increase to police department

There are significant costs to implementing public safety. One of those costs is the increase in pay for cross-trained officers. The city manager confirmed a 25% pay increase for the police department (5% per year over 5 years). While normal raises may fall in the 2.5% to 3% range, the additional increase may be attributed to a premium for agreeing to cross-train. The raises will be given to all police officers, not just the ones who are cross-trained. The pay increase may be delayed or modified due to the pending lawsuit.

## Let the residents vote on Public Safety

In approximately 1992, the residents of Harper Woods rejected by majority vote a proposal placed on the ballot to combine the police and fire departments. If the city council put the issue to a vote in 1992 as required by the city charter, then the existing city council should follow the same process. If the city council is convinced that moving to a public safety department is a positive move for the city, then they should detail their plan and allow the voters to make the final decision.

## Get Involved and Stay Informed

I encourage everyone to contact the city council members to voice your concerns. The attendance at city council meetings has been increasing, and every voice makes a difference. The next city council meeting is scheduled for October 6<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm at City Hall. If you would like to stay informed on the issues affecting Harper Woods residents, then please provide your contact information. Ideally, an email address would work best. We will try to use regular mail for anyone who does not have an email id or access to a computer.

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