



Request for City Council Action

DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT	REQUESTOR:	MEETING DATE:
Fire	Interim Fire Chief Scott	January 26, 2026
PRESENTER(S)	REVIEWED BY:	ITEM #:
Fire	City Administrator/Finance Director Flaherty Assistant City Administrator/Human Resources Hille	5.1 – Fire Department Staffing

STRATEGIC VISION

MEETS:	THE CITY OF OTSEGO:
	Is a strong organization that is committed to leading the community through innovative communication.
	Has proactively expanded infrastructure to responsibly provide core services.
X	Is committed to delivery of quality emergency service responsive to community needs and expectations in a cost-effective manner.
	Is a social community with diverse housing, service options, and employment opportunities.
	Is a distinctive, connected community known for its beauty and natural surroundings.

AGENDA ITEM DETAILS

RECOMMENDATION:	
City staff recommend the City Council approve of a job description and authorize recruitment.	
ARE YOU SEEKING APPROVAL OF A CONTRACT?	IS A PUBLIC HEARING REQUIRED?
No	No
BACKGROUND/JUSTIFICATION:	
<p>City staff are requesting the City Council approve a job description for the Fire Chief position and authorize recruitment to fill this position. This position, previously approved by the City Council as the Emergency Services Director, has been vacant since August 2025. With this vacancy, the City Council authorized Interim Fire Chief Scott in September 2025 to continue to support the planning and development of the Otsego Fire Department.</p> <p>City staff have revised the job description with assistance and guidance from Chief Scott to reflect the duties, responsibilities, job functions, knowledge, skills, abilities, and qualifications of this position to best serve the Otsego Department in providing services to the community. The title of the position is also recommended to change to Fire Chief, which is believed to better reflect the role and resonate with potential applicants in the marketplace.</p> <p>The draft job description has undergone a position scoring through the City’s third-party evaluator. The position was scored at Grade 16, which was consistent with the previous job description, and aligned with the 2026 budget.</p> <p>The proposed recruitment schedule posts the position upon City Council approval with application deadlines, application reviews, candidate interviews throughout February and March, City Council interviews and pre-employment screening throughout March and anticipated start date as early as April.</p>	
SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS ATTACHED:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Description • Presentation Slides • Letter from Citygate Associates 	

POSSIBLE MOTION

PLEASE WORD MOTION AS YOU WOULD LIKE IT TO APPEAR IN THE MINUTES:

Motion to approve the Fire Chief Job Description and to authorize recruitment.

BUDGET INFORMATION

FUNDING:	BUDGETED:
General Fund – Fire Department (42200)	Yes



Position Description

Position:	Fire Chief
Department:	Fire
Position Status:	Full-time
FLSA Status:	Exempt
Pay Grade:	16
Approved:	DRAFT

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

General Statement of Duties: This Fire Chief position will be responsible for coordinating the official start of the Otsego Fire Department. This position provides strategic leadership and direction for all fire service functions and ensures efforts are responsive to citizen and community needs while maintaining strong employee culture and city-wide relationships. Responsible for long-term planning and policy development, and working collaboratively with other city departments, regional agencies, and community stakeholders. Lead by example, demonstrating integrity, transparency, and accountability in all actions and decisions.

Immediate Supervisor: City Administrator

Supervision Exercised: Provides supervision to the Fire Department staff.

MAJOR JOB FUNCTIONS

1. Implementation of new Fire Department
 - a. Final oversight of new fire station construction and coordinating the start up operations of the facility.
 - b. Coordinate delivery of (2) new fire apparatus in spring of 2026
 - c. Research and purchase remaining equipment for apparatus, new firefighters and fire station.
 - d. Review and approve staffing plan for the new fire department.
 - e. Implement a training plan for new firefighters.
 - f. Continue fostering a professional working relationship with all first responder organizations including contract fire departments, mutual aid fire departments, EMS/Ambulance providers, and the Wright County Sheriff's Office.

2. Fire and EMS Operations

- a. Respond to emergency and non-emergency calls
- b. Direct all fire department operations, ensuring comprehensive public safety management.
- c. Delegate tasks effectively and foster clear communication for optimal efficiency.
- d. Oversee employee performance, including evaluations, hiring, and disciplinary actions, while managing performance complaints and internal investigations.
- e. Enforce personnel policies, manage union contracts, and handle labor issues and grievances to ensure fair and effective labor relations.
- f. Implement succession planning to ensure smooth leadership transitions and role continuity.
- g. Facilitate regular leadership and staff meetings to maintain alignment and address concerns.
- h. Maintain a visible presence and remain approachable to staff, encouraging open communication and providing informal support to strengthen relationships and team cohesion.
- i. Collaborate with Human Resources to enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and advance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

3. Administration

- a. Serve as a member of the city's leadership team, contributing to city-wide collaborative decision-making, policy development, and culture development.
- b. Provide information to the city administrator on operations, and collaborate on projects, goals, and strategic plans.
- c. Lead departmental strategic planning with a visionary approach, aligning with city core values and community needs.
- d. Promote customer service excellence and ensure effective information dissemination.
- e.
- f. Foster cooperative working relationships with other city departments, contract fire departments, EMS providers and county, state and federal agencies. Maintain strong community visibility and build partnerships with businesses and organizations.
- g. Perform other duties as assigned.

4. Supervision

- a. Complete performance evaluations and recommend wage adjustments according to the City's Personnel Policy.
- b. Administer employee discipline according to the City's Personnel Policy.
- c. Ensure staff is adequately trained and department is cross-trained. Assign work and ensure that it is done professionally, efficiently, accurately and timely.
- d. Provide oversight of the Data Practices Act.

5. Fire Prevention, Suppression, Medical Emergencies and Emergency Preparedness Activities

- a. Plan, organize, and allocate resources for emergency response, prevention, and risk reduction. Oversee fire department daily operations.
- b. Lead city preparedness efforts under city administrators' direction.
- c. Ensure all fire service and medical emergency matters are handled in a manner consistent with city ordinances and state, federal and county laws.

- d. Design and implement fire and medical emergency procedures, ensuring compliance with legislation and evaluating activities.
 - e. Direct community relations, safety awareness programs, and fire prevention initiatives.
 - f. Represent the city and department in safety matters, attending relevant meetings, events, and emergencies.
 - g. Keep the council, city administrator, public safety committee, and residents updated on fire services and safety issues. Represent the department in legal proceedings when necessary.
 - h. Maintain the established staffing plan
6. Budget/Finance
- a. Coordinate the planning and drafting of department's budget.
 - b. Works with the city administrator on budget process.
 - c. Maintain control of expenditures within budget limitations.
 - d. Recommend and implement changes based on service delivery outcomes.
 - e. Review and approve service contracts with vendors and consultants to ensure compliance with budget and policy.
 - f. Analyze staffing and equipment levels to determine budget and community program needs.
 - g. Manage and administer grants or other sources of funding in compliance with approved guidelines.
7. General
- a. Participate actively in the City's management team
 - b. Presents in front of various groups for reports, updates, and community engagement
 - c. Attends staff, community, committee, and councils meeting as necessary
 - d. Treat fellow employees with respect and integrity
 - e. Promote a positive and motivating environment
 - f. Provide exceptional customer service
 - g. Confer with supervisor, peers, and employees to discuss and resolve issues
 - h. Make decisions that are always in the best interest of the City
 - i. Perform other duties and projects as assigned
 - j. Follow all safety policies and procedures
 - k. Follow all City policies and procedures

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES

- Demonstrable knowledge of and experience in emergency operations
- Ability to make rapid decisions under high stress circumstances
- Extensive knowledge of and experience in City operations, ordinances, and practices related to
- Experience making presentations to government bodies, professional associations, and community organizations
- Ability to communicate clearly, professionally, effectively, and precisely both verbally and in writing
- Ability to resolve and diffuse conflicts
- Ability to understand, manage, and communicate complex ideas, projects, and situations

- Applied experience and knowledge ability to work independently and as part of a team and to coordinate work with other Departments and to lead multi-departmental or multi-jurisdictional projects.
- Considerable skills in Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and Powerpoint.
- Ability to plan, prioritize, and organize the department's work.
- Strong sense of honesty, integrity, and credibility
- Ability to maintain a high level of integrity and ethical performance at all times
- Ability to work successfully under stress, pressure, and changing conditions

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

1. Valid Minnesota firefighter license or be able to obtain with 30 days.
2. Ten (10) years as a firefighter with a minimum of five (5) years progressive experience within a fire department of equal or greater size.
3. Associates degree in a related field
4. Valid Minnesota drivers license.

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS

1. Bachelor's degree in a related field.
2. State Certified EMT
3. Experience with a fire inspection program
4. Experience:
 - a. With union grievances, arbitration, mediation and contract negotiations.
 - b. Working with boards, councils and commissions.
 - c. In a leadership role that includes management and administrative functions, including developing and managing a budget
 - d. Collaborating with city leadership and regional agencies.
 - e. Managing a fire department with similar organizational structure.
 - f. As an Emergency Manager or state/national certification as an emergency manager.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS AND WORK ENVIRONMENT:

The physical demands described are representative of those that must be met by an employee to perform the essential functions of the job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

Most work is done within the fire station office facility, but the work environment varies considerably depending on the circumstances. Noise level in the work environment is variable. . This includes occasional light physical strength work to medium physical work. Travel within the City to incidents, inspections and meetings is everyday. This position requires attending City Council meetings in the evening as requested, and on-call requirements in emergency situations.

Activities that **occur constantly** (5–8 hours/shift): talking, hearing, reading

Activities that **occur frequently** (2–5 hours/shift): standing, walking, sitting, repetitive motions, eye/hand/foot coordination, feeling, climbing

Activities that **occur occasionally** (up to 2 hours/shift): stooping, kneeling, crouching, crawling, reaching, handling, grasping

Activities that **occur rarely** (do not exist as regular part of job): lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, balancing

City of Otsego is an Equal Opportunity Employer. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodations are offered to qualified individuals with disabilities. Prospective and current employees are encouraged to discuss potential accommodations with the employer.

Employee signature below constitutes employee's understanding of the requirements, essential functions, and duties of the position.

Employee Name

Employee Signature

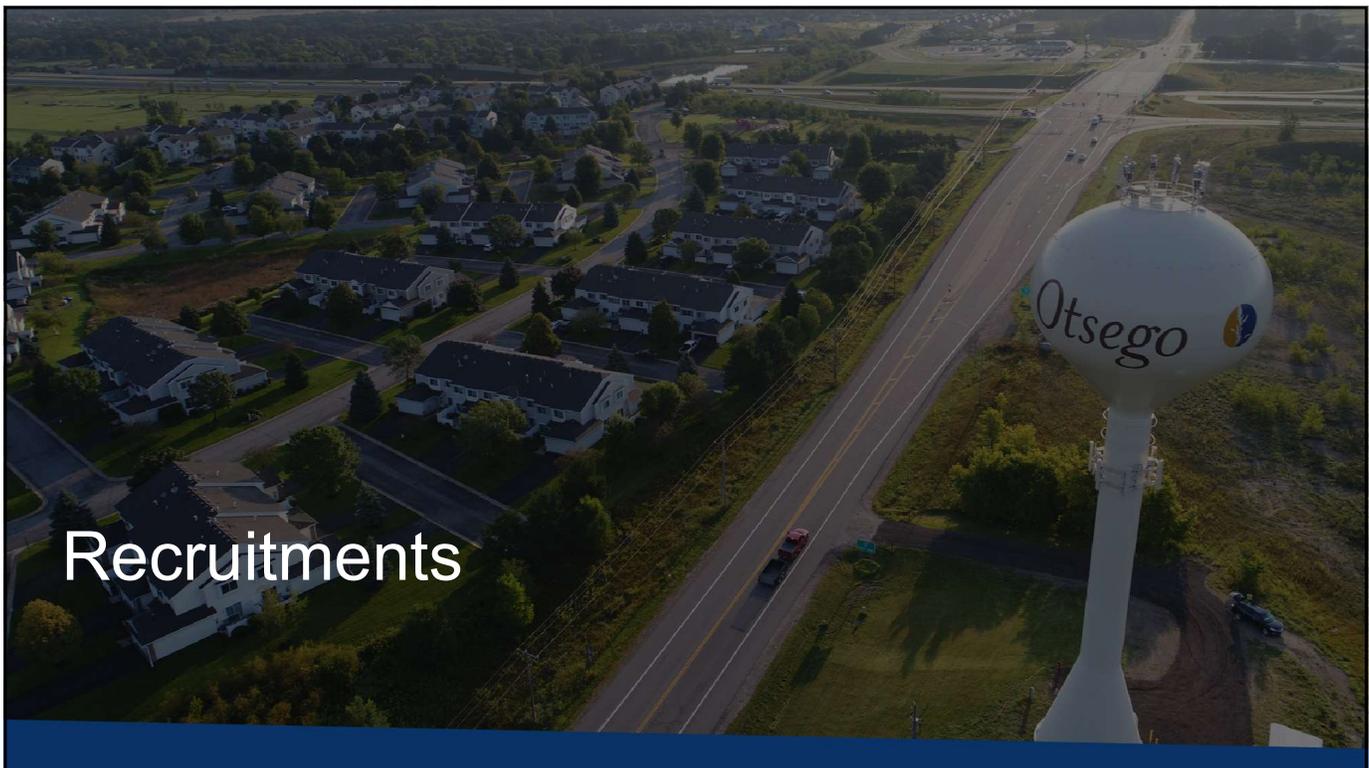
Date



Fire Department Staffing

CITY COUNCIL MEETING
JANUARY 26, 2026

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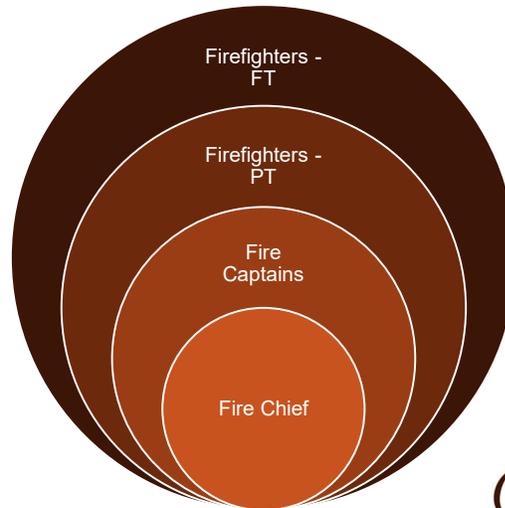


Recruitments

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Why Start Hiring

- **INTERIM CHIEF**
 - Hired in September 2025 for Short-Term
- **RECRUITMENT PROCESS**
 - Domino Effect
 - Multiple Positions & Long Process
- **POSITIONS TO FILL & START DATE**
 - Fire Chief – April
 - Captains – May
 - PT Firefighters – June
 - FT Firefighters – October/November



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Fire Chief Responsibilities

- **DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP**
 - Build Community, City Council, and City Staff Relationships
 - Operational Decisions & Policy Development
- **DEPARTMENT RECRUITMENTS**
 - Selection of Full-Time Captains
 - Engaging & Attracting PT Firefighters
 - Training & Team Building
- **RECRUITMENT SCHEDULE**
 - Posted – January 28
 - Application Deadline & Review - February
 - Interviews & Pre-Employment – February to March
 - Start - April



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Fire Captains - Responsibilities

- **DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP**
 - Build Community, City Council, and City Staff Relationships
 - Delegation of Assignments from Fire Chief
 - *Equipment Procurement*
 - *Station Readiness*
 - *Apparatus Delivery, Training, and Readiness*
 - *Standard Operating Procedures & Guidelines*
- **DEPARTMENT RECRUITMENTS**
 - Engaging & Attracting PT Firefighters
 - Assist with Fire & EMS Training Programs for PT Firefighters
 - Team Building
 - Assist with Attracting & Selection of FT Firefighters
- **HIRING GOAL**
 - Start in May



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PT Firefighters

- **RECRUITMENT**
 - Length of Process and Number of Positions
- **TRAINING REQUIREMENTS**
 - Anticipate a mix of Experienced and Non
 - State Fire Certification
 - *Start in June*
 - *Testing in October*
 - EMS / First Responder
 - *Start in November*
 - Department & Community Specific Training
 - Team Building
- **HIRING GOAL**
 - Start Training in June



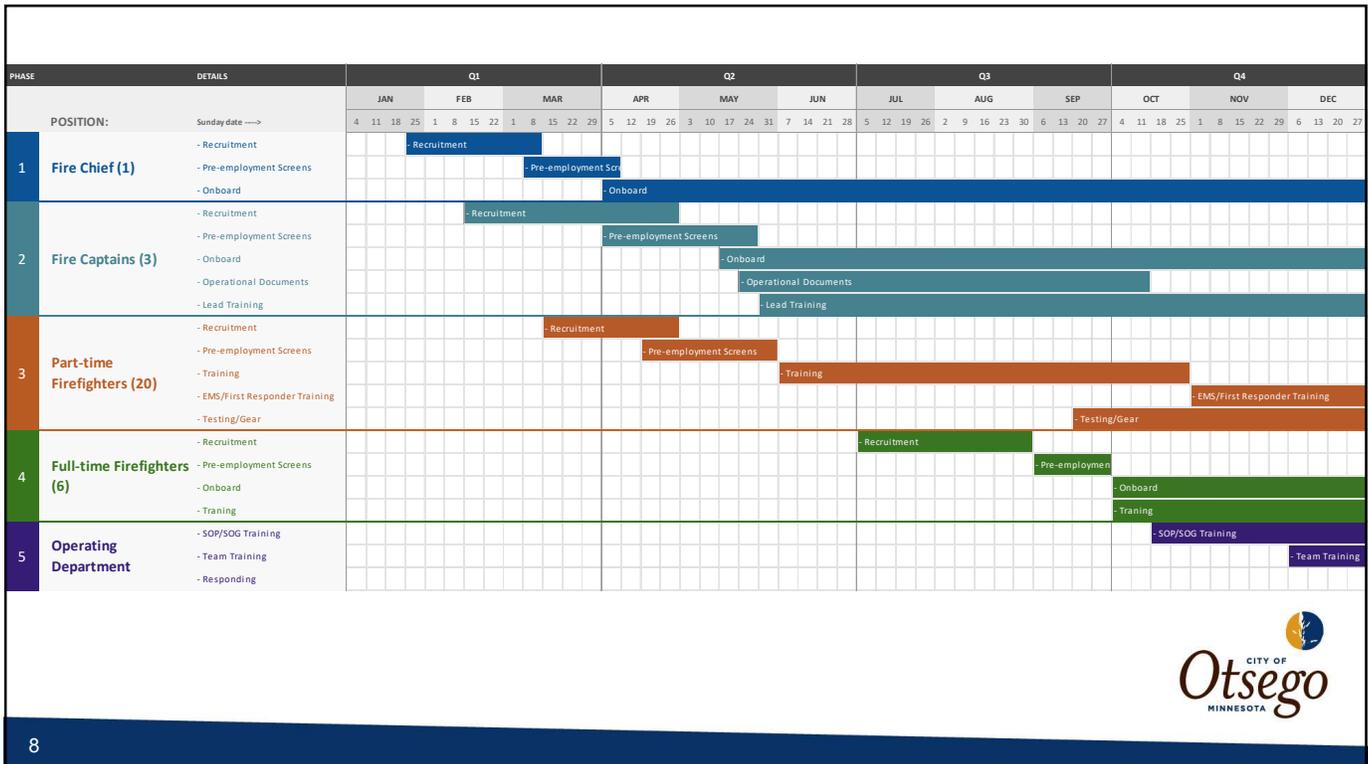
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FT Firefighters

- **RECRUITMENT**
 - Length of Process and Number of Positions
 - Competitive Market in Twin Cities Region
- **ONBOARDING**
 - Turnout Gear Sizing & Procurement
 - Equipment Training
 - Department & Community Specific Training
 - Team Building
- **HIRING GOAL**
 - Start in October/November



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Time Sensitive Factors

- **INTERIM FIRE CHIEF**
 - Intended to be short-term. Permanent Chief should play a role in many final decisions.
- **TRAINING**
 - PT Firefighters and Fire/EMS Certification Timelines
- **LOOSE EQUIPMENT**
 - Example – Turnout Gear Leadtime of up to 90 days
- **DEPARTMENT ORIENTATION**
 - Team Building
 - Training Together
 - *With City Equipment, At the City Fire Station, With the Fire Leadership Team*
 - Learning the Community



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Ongoing Items

- **MINIMUM STAFFING**
- **CONTRACTS FOR 2027**
- **SHARED SERVICE CONVERSATIONS**
- **DEPARTMENT ROADMAP**
 - Fire Marshal
 - *Relationship with Building Official and Building Inspectors*
 - Administrative Support
 - Grant Applications



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Utilize Staff

- **FIRE CHIEF GUIDE ALL FIRE RECRUITMENTS – CAPTAINS, PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME FIREFIGHTERS**
- **FIRE CAPTAINS AID IN TRAINING FOR FIREFIGHTERS**
- **FIRE TRUCK TRAINING UPON DELIVERY**
- **FIRE CAPTAINS**
 - Procure equipment
 - *Hoses, SCBA,*
 - Ready Station and Apparatus
 - Establish SOPs/SOGs
- **3 FULL-TIME FIREFIGHTERS ON TRUCK – 4TH FIREFIGHTER AS PART-TIME DUTY CREW**



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Next Steps

- **TONIGHT:**
 - Approve Job Description & Authorize Recruitment
- **UPCOMING:**
 - February
 - *Fire Captains Job Description & Authorize Recruitment*
 - **Goal to Start in May**
 - *PT Firefighters Job Description & Authorize Recruitment*
 - **Goal to Start Training in June**
 - Summer
 - *FT Firefighters Job Description & Authorize Recruitment*
 - **Goal to Start in October/November**

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**CITY OF OTSEGO, MN
FIRE SERVICES IMPLEMENTATION ASSISTANCE**

MEMO TO COUNCIL

January 23, 2026

Citygate Associates, LLC (Citygate) was retained to assist the City Administrator and Interim Fire Chief for the City of Otsego, MN (City) to peer review staffing City fire services within national best practices and State of Minnesota regulations for the City's new fire station. Some of this work was to:

- ◆ Provide expert advice
- ◆ Review costs and budgeting
- ◆ Review personnel additions
- ◆ Plan implementation as directed
- ◆ Review City staff work regarding best practices and regulatory requirements

Citygate worked alongside Interim Fire Chief Scott as he reassessed the City's Fire Department staffing plan and all possible options. Both Citygate and Chief Scott are aware of the current volunteer and paid-on-call firefighter staffing challenges in Minnesota and the administrative costs of operating a small, independent fire department. There is no question that paid-on-call or part-time firefighters are cost effective. There is also no question that regulatory requirements mandate that even a one-station fire department needs headquarters staff to ensure proper training, equipment oversight, and round-the-clock incident command leadership.

Citygate assessed all staffing and shared service options with Chief Scott. We understand he worked on solutions with all possible fire agencies, including the City's current contract fire departments, the multi-county 9-1-1 dispatch centers, and the ambulance providers. He then studied how the City could directly staff the fire station and perhaps only share command. For every research path, Citygate peer reviewed the thinking and results. We met with the Chief and the City Administrator about the policy and regional partnership near-term constraints.

Citygate was not hired to complete a fire department assessment. However, it is apparent that to deliver improved fire services from a station inside the City, Otsego needs to invest a guaranteed level of fire crew staffing to provide services within a contemporary and regulatory-compliant department as the City grows.

While the type and level of fire service response is a local policy choice based on funding, fire service operations must follow safety standards. One such federal and state safety law is for safe staffing during interior operations at a building fire. This law, known as the “2-in/2-out” rule, means that when interior fire operations require breathing apparatus, the firefighters must operate in teams of 2—1 pair inside, and 1 pair outside equipped to immediately rescue the 2 inside.

Fire departments strive to get 4 personnel delivered to a building fire as fast as possible. Some agencies can only afford to quickly deliver 2 or 3. This is typically enough for most EMS events. If fire departments responding to building fires staff at 3, they must send a second unit *quickly*. For departments using volunteers or paid-on-call from locations other than a fire station, this is a time challenge. Some smaller departments use both types of staffing: an on-duty crew of 3 or 4, 24/7/365, with multiple-unit staffing coming from the on-call firefighters.

This could be done in Otsego by adding a limited number of career firefighters to each shift to total 4 or filling the 4th seat with a part-time duty crew firefighter when available. However, having 3 firefighters scheduled 24/7 still provides a more predictable, reliable, and sustainable model than relying 100% on a volunteer/paid-on-call staffing model. Otsego’s new Fire Department needs a timely, reliable, and prompt minimum force upon which it can build for future needs.

Once a fire department is established, the City will be eligible to apply for State and Federal grants, including firefighter staffing grants. In the meantime, a 3-person crew can handle much of the EMS and lower-risk incident types in Otsego. In the event of a structure fire, the 3-person crew provides a transitional fire attack until more staffing arrives. The 3-person staffing model is very common in smaller combination and career fire departments in Minnesota.

Shared services, either by contract or fire districts, takes time and should be well planned before implementation. While shared services are a growing trend in Minnesota, failure to have a comprehensive plan in place before implementing can lead to costly failures.

At present, the research discussions in Otsego have not yet yielded a defined partnership to staff both fire crew personnel and headquarters functions this year. Citygate concurs with the finding that immediate sharing is impractical because the nearby agencies have operational, fiscal, geographic distance, and other constraints. The City’s previous Director’s plan to wait until late 2026 to hire firefighters and fire Captains would not allow significant time to properly train newly hired staff to respond as a team from the Otsego fire station.

RECOMMENDATION

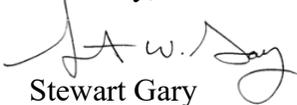
Citygate recommends the City move now to hire a small leadership team (Fire Chief and Captains) as soon as possible so that the team can continue to develop and implement the remainder of hiring to provide the needed blend of full-time and part-time firefighters. Given the lead times to acquire fire equipment and hire personnel, the City must now work efficiently if it wants to have an operational fire department by January 2027. Additionally, we recommend the City consider establishing a roadmap (Master Plan) for likely future steps in their fire department, including the hiring of a Fire Marshal for fire code and plan checking duties, which is critical for a fast-growing community like Otsego.

The need to have contractual fire service with cities outside Otsego will wane as Otsego establishes a fire department to respond to fire/EMS calls. This also establishes a reciprocal exchange expected in mutual aid. At that point, the City provides and receives normal, no-cost mutual aid.

Citygate also agrees that the new Otsego Fire Chief needs to continue to discuss future shared services opportunities with neighboring fire departments within Wright County. Recent incidents in Otsego have confirmed the need to invest in minimum, guaranteed fire department services within Otsego. The research conducted to date indicates the most efficient method of shared services is to remain within Wright County's 9-1-1 dispatch center.

Overall, it is critical for the new Fire Chief to have the collaborative skills and experience to foster positive relationships with all neighboring fire departments to share programs as is feasible, and to set the tone for and select your new Fire Department's leadership team and line personnel.

Sincerely,



Stewart Gary

Public Safety Principal
Citygate Associates.