

Committee of the Whole  
Monday, May 16, 2022 6:00 PM  
Council Chambers  
1369 25 Avenue  
Columbus, NE 68601

1. **Statement of compliance with Open Meetings Act and roll call.**

# Open Meetings Act

## **Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1407. Act, how cited.**

Sections 84-1407 to 84-1414 shall be known and may be cited as the Open Meetings Act.

## **Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1408. Declaration of intent; meetings open to public.**

It is hereby declared to be the policy of this state that the formation of public policy is public business and may not be conducted in secret.

Every meeting of a public body shall be open to the public in order that citizens may exercise their democratic privilege of attending and speaking at meetings of public bodies, except as otherwise provided by the Constitution of Nebraska, federal statutes, and the Open Meetings Act.

## **Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1409. Terms, defined.**

For purposes of the Open Meetings Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1)(a) Public body means (i) governing bodies of all political subdivisions of the State of Nebraska, (ii) governing bodies of all agencies, created by the Constitution of Nebraska, statute, or otherwise pursuant to law, of the executive department of the State of Nebraska, (iii) all independent boards, commissions, bureaus, committees, councils, subunits, or any other bodies created by the Constitution of Nebraska, statute, or otherwise pursuant to law, (iv) all study or advisory committees of the executive department of the State of Nebraska whether having continuing existence or appointed as special committees with limited existence, (v) advisory committees of the bodies referred to in subdivisions (i), (ii), and (iii) of this subdivision, and (vi) instrumentalities exercising essentially public functions; and

(b) Public body does not include (i) subcommittees of such bodies unless a quorum of the public body attends a subcommittee meeting or unless such subcommittees are holding hearings, making policy, or taking formal action on behalf of their parent body, except that all meetings of any subcommittee established under section 81-15,175 are subject to the Open Meetings Act, and (ii) entities conducting judicial proceedings unless a court or other judicial body is exercising rulemaking authority, deliberating, or deciding upon the issuance of administrative orders;

(2) Meeting means all regular, special, or called meetings, formal or informal, of any public body for the purposes of briefing, discussion of public business, formation of tentative policy, or the taking of any action of the public body; and

(3) Virtual conferencing means conducting or participating in a meeting electronically or telephonically with interaction among the participants subject to subsection (2) of section 84-1412.

## **Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1410. Closed session; when; purpose; reasons listed; procedure; right to challenge; prohibited acts; chance meetings, conventions, or workshops.**

(1) Any public body may hold a closed session by the affirmative vote of a majority of its voting members if a closed session is clearly necessary for the protection of the public interest or for the prevention of needless injury to the reputation of an individual and if such

individual has not requested a public meeting. The subject matter and the reason necessitating the closed session shall be identified in the motion to close. Closed sessions may be held for, but shall not be limited to, such reasons as:

(a) Strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining, real estate purchases, pending litigation, or litigation which is imminent as evidenced by communication of a claim or threat of litigation to or by the public body;

(b) Discussion regarding deployment of security personnel or devices;

(c) Investigative proceedings regarding allegations of criminal misconduct;

(d) Evaluation of the job performance of a person when necessary to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting;

(e) For the Community Trust created under section 81-1801.02, discussion regarding the amounts to be paid to individuals who have suffered from a tragedy of violence or natural disaster; or

(f) For public hospitals, governing board peer review activities, professional review activities, review and discussion of medical staff investigations or disciplinary actions, and any strategy session concerning transactional negotiations with any referral source that is required by federal law to be conducted at arms length.

Nothing in this section shall permit a closed meeting for discussion of the appointment or election of a new member to any public body.

(2) The vote to hold a closed session shall be taken in open session. The entire motion, the vote of each member on the question of holding a closed session, and the time when the closed session commenced and concluded shall be recorded in the minutes. If the motion to close passes, then the presiding officer immediately prior to the closed session shall restate on the record the limitation of the subject matter of the closed session. The public body holding such a closed session shall restrict its consideration of matters during the closed portions to only those purposes set forth in the motion to close as the reason for the closed session. The meeting shall be reconvened in open session before any formal action may be taken. For purposes of this section, formal action shall mean a collective decision or a collective commitment or promise to make a decision on any question, motion, proposal, resolution, order, or ordinance or formation of a position or policy but shall not include negotiating guidance given by members of the public body to legal counsel or other negotiators in closed sessions authorized under subdivision (1)(a) of this section.

(3) Any member of any public body shall have the right to challenge the continuation of a closed session if the member determines that the session has exceeded the reason stated in the original motion to hold a closed session or if the member contends that the closed session is neither clearly necessary for (a) the protection of the public interest or (b) the prevention of needless injury to the reputation of an individual. Such challenge shall be overruled only by a majority vote of the

members of the public body. Such challenge and its disposition shall be recorded in the minutes.

(4) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require that any meeting be closed to the public. No person or public body shall fail to invite a portion of its members to a meeting, and no public body shall designate itself a subcommittee of the whole body for the purpose of circumventing the Open Meetings Act. No closed session, informal meeting, chance meeting, social gathering, email, fax, or other electronic communication shall be used for the purpose of circumventing the requirements of the act.

(5) The act does not apply to chance meetings or to attendance at or travel to conventions or workshops of members of a public body at which there is no meeting of the body then intentionally convened, if there is no vote or other action taken regarding any matter over which the public body has supervision, control, jurisdiction, or advisory power.

**Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1411. Meetings of public body; notice; method; contents; when available; right to modify; duties concerning notice; virtual meetings authorized; emergency meeting without notice; appearance before public body.**

(1)(a) Each public body shall give reasonable advance publicized notice of the time and place of each meeting as provided in this subsection. Such notice shall be transmitted to all members of the public body and to the public.

(b)(i) Except as provided in subdivision (1)(b)(ii) of this section, in the case of a public body described in subdivision (1)(a)(i) of section 84-1409 or such body's advisory committee, such notice shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation within the public body's jurisdiction and, if available, on such newspaper's web site.

(ii) In the case of the governing body of a city of the second class or village or such body's advisory committee, such notice shall be published by:

(A) Publication in a newspaper of general circulation within the public body's jurisdiction and, if available, on such newspaper's web site; or

(B) Posting written notice in three conspicuous public places in such city or village. Such notice shall be posted in the same three places for each meeting.

(iii) In the case of a public body not described in subdivision (1)(b)(i) or (ii) of this section, such notice shall be given by a method designated by the public body.

(c) In addition to a method of notice required by subdivision (1)(b)(i) or (ii) of this section, such notice may also be provided by any other appropriate method designated by such public body or such advisory committee.

(d) Each public body shall record the methods and dates of such notice in its minutes.

(e) Such notice shall contain an agenda of subjects known at the time of the publicized notice or a statement that the agenda, which shall be kept continually current, shall be readily available for public inspection at the principal office of the public body during normal business hours. Agenda items shall be sufficiently descriptive to give the public reasonable notice of the matters to be considered at the

meeting. Except for items of an emergency nature, the agenda shall not be altered later than (i) twenty-four hours before the scheduled commencement of the meeting or (ii) forty-eight hours before the scheduled commencement of a meeting of a city council or village board scheduled outside the corporate limits of the municipality. The public body shall have the right to modify the agenda to include items of an emergency nature only at such public meeting.

(2)(a) The following entities may hold a meeting by means of virtual conferencing if the requirements of subdivision (2)(b) of this section are met:

(i) A state agency, state board, state commission, state council, or state committee, or an advisory committee of any such state entity;

(ii) An organization, including the governing body, created under the Interlocal Cooperation Act, the Joint Public Agency Act, or the Municipal Cooperative Financing Act;

(iii) The governing body of a public power district having a chartered territory of more than one county in this state;

(iv) The governing body of a public power and irrigation district having a chartered territory of more than one county in this state;

(v) An educational service unit;

(vi) The Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council;

(vii) An organization, including the governing body, of a risk management pool or its advisory committees organized in accordance with the Intergovernmental Risk Management Act;

(viii) A community college board of governors;

(ix) The Nebraska Brand Committee;

(x) A local public health department;

(xi) A metropolitan utilities district;

(xii) A regional metropolitan transit authority;

(xiii) A natural resources district; and

(xiv) The Judicial Resources Commission.

(b) The requirements for holding a meeting by means of virtual conferencing are as follows:

(i) Reasonable advance publicized notice is given as provided in subsection (1) of this section, including providing access to a dial-in number or link to the virtual conference;

(ii) In addition to the public's right to participate by virtual conferencing, reasonable arrangements are made to accommodate the public's right to attend at a physical site and participate as provided in section 84-1412, including reasonable seating, in at least one designated site in a building open to the public and identified in the notice, with: At least one member of the entity holding such meeting, or his or her designee, present at each site; a recording of the hearing by audio or visual recording devices; and a reasonable opportunity for input, such as public comment or questions, is provided to at least the same extent as

would be provided if virtual conferencing was not used;

(iii) At least one copy of all documents being considered at the meeting is available at any physical site open to the public where individuals may attend the virtual conference. The public body shall also provide links to an electronic copy of the agenda, all documents being considered at the meeting, and the current version of the Open Meetings Act; and

(iv) Except as otherwise provided in this subdivision or subsection (4) of section 79-2204, no more than one-half of the meetings of the state entities, advisory committees, boards, councils, organizations, or governing bodies are held by virtual conferencing in a calendar year. In the case of an organization created under the Interlocal Cooperation Act that sells electricity or natural gas at wholesale on a multistate basis or an organization created under the Municipal Cooperative Financing Act, the organization may hold more than one-half of its meetings by virtual conferencing if such organization holds at least one meeting each calendar year that is not by virtual conferencing. The governing body of a risk management pool that meets at least quarterly and the advisory committees of the governing body may each hold more than one-half of its meetings by virtual conferencing if the governing body's quarterly meetings are not held by virtual conferencing.

(3) Virtual conferencing, emails, faxes, or other electronic communication shall not be used to circumvent any of the public government purposes established in the Open Meetings Act.

(4) The secretary or other designee of each public body shall maintain a list of the news media requesting notification of meetings and shall make reasonable efforts to provide advance notification to them of the time and place of each meeting and the subjects to be discussed at that meeting.

(5) When it is necessary to hold an emergency meeting without reasonable advance public notice, the nature of the emergency shall be stated in the minutes and any formal action taken in such meeting shall pertain only to the emergency. Such emergency meetings may be held by virtual conferencing. The provisions of subsection (4) of this section shall be complied with in conducting emergency meetings. Complete minutes of such emergency meetings specifying the nature of the emergency and any formal action taken at the meeting shall be made available to the public by no later than the end of the next regular business day.

(6) A public body may allow a member of the public or any other witness to appear before the public body by means of virtual conferencing.

(7)(a) Notwithstanding subsections (2) and (5) of this section, if an emergency is declared by the Governor pursuant to the Emergency Management Act as defined in section 81-829.39, a public body the territorial jurisdiction of which is included in the emergency declaration, in whole or in part, may hold a meeting by virtual conferencing during such emergency if the public body gives reasonable advance publicized notice as described in subsection (1) of this section. The notice shall include information regarding access for the public and news media. In addition to any formal action taken pertaining to the emergency, the public body may hold such meeting for the purpose of briefing, discussion of public business, formation of tentative policy, or the taking of any action by the public body.

(b) The public body shall provide access by providing a dial-in  
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number or a link to the virtual conference. The public body shall also provide links to an electronic copy of the agenda, all documents being considered at the meeting, and the current version of the Open Meetings Act. Reasonable arrangements shall be made to accommodate the public's right to hear and speak at the meeting and record the meeting. Subsection (4) of this section shall be complied with in conducting such meetings.

(c) The nature of the emergency shall be stated in the minutes. Complete minutes of such meeting specifying the nature of the emergency and any formal action taken at the meeting shall be made available for inspection as provided in subsections (5) and (6) of section 84-1413.

**Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1412. Meetings of public body; rights of public; public body; powers and duties.**

(1) Subject to the Open Meetings Act, the public has the right to attend and the right to speak at meetings of public bodies, and all or any part of a meeting of a public body, except for closed sessions called pursuant to section 84-1410, may be videotaped, televised, photographed, broadcast, or recorded by any person in attendance by means of a tape recorder, a camera, video equipment, or any other means of pictorial or sonic reproduction or in writing.

(2) It shall not be a violation of subsection (1) of this section for any public body to make and enforce reasonable rules and regulations regarding the conduct of persons attending, speaking at, videotaping, televising, photographing, broadcasting, or recording its meetings, including meetings held by virtual conferencing. A body may not be required to allow citizens to speak at each meeting, but it may not forbid public participation at all meetings.

(3) No public body shall require members of the public to identify themselves as a condition for admission to the meeting nor shall such body require that the name of any member of the public be placed on the agenda prior to such meeting in order to speak about items on the agenda. The body shall require any member of the public desiring to address the body to identify himself or herself, including an address and the name of any organization represented by such person unless the address requirement is waived to protect the security of the individual.

(4) No public body shall, for the purpose of circumventing the Open Meetings Act, hold a meeting in a place known by the body to be too small to accommodate the anticipated audience.

(5) No public body shall be deemed in violation of this section if it holds its meeting in its traditional meeting place which is located in this state.

(6) No public body shall be deemed in violation of this section if it holds a meeting outside of this state if, but only if:

(a) A member entity of the public body is located outside of this state and the meeting is in that member's jurisdiction;

(b) All out-of-state locations identified in the notice are located within public buildings used by members of the entity or at a place which will accommodate the anticipated audience;

(c) Reasonable arrangements are made to accommodate the public's right to attend, hear, and speak at the meeting, including making virtual conferencing available at an in-state location to members, the public, or the press, if requested twenty-four hours in advance;

(d) No more than twenty-five percent of the public body's meetings in a calendar year are held out-of-state;

(e) Out-of-state meetings are not used to circumvent any of the public government purposes established in the Open Meetings Act; and

(f) The public body publishes notice of the out-of-state meeting at least twenty-one days before the date of the meeting in a legal newspaper of statewide circulation.

(7) Each public body shall, upon request, make a reasonable effort to accommodate the public's right to hear the discussion and testimony presented at a meeting.

(8) Public bodies shall make available at the meeting or the in-state location for virtual conferencing as required by subdivision (6)(c) of this section, for examination and copying by members of the public, at least one copy of all reproducible written material to be discussed at an open meeting, either in paper or electronic form. Public bodies shall make available at least one current copy of the Open Meetings Act posted in the meeting room at a location accessible to members of the public. At the beginning of the meeting, the public shall be informed about the location of the posted information.

**Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1413. Meetings; minutes; roll call vote; secret ballot; when.**

(1) Each public body shall keep minutes of all meetings showing the time, place, members present and absent, and the substance of all matters discussed.

(2) Any action taken on any question or motion duly moved and seconded shall be by roll call vote of the public body in open session, and the record shall state how each member voted or if the member was absent or not voting. The requirements of a roll call or viva voce vote shall be satisfied by a public body which utilizes an electronic voting device which allows the yeas and nays of each member of such public body to be readily seen by the public.

(3) The vote to elect leadership within a public body may be taken by secret ballot, but the total number of votes for each candidate shall be recorded in the minutes.

(4) The minutes of all meetings and evidence and documentation received or disclosed in open session shall be public records and open to public inspection during normal business hours.

(5) Minutes shall be written, except as provided in subsection (6) of this section, and available for inspection within ten working days or prior to the next convened meeting, whichever occurs earlier, except that cities of the second class and villages may have an additional ten working days if the employee responsible for writing the minutes is absent due to a serious illness or emergency.

(6) Minutes of the meetings of the board of a school district or educational service unit may be kept as an electronic record.

(7) Beginning July 31, 2022, the governing body of a natural resources district, the city council of a city of the metropolitan class, the city council of a city of the primary class, the city council of a city of the first class, the county board of a county with a population greater than twenty-five thousand inhabitants, and the school board of a school district shall make available on such entity's public web site the agenda and minutes of any meeting of the governing body. The agenda shall be placed on the web site at least twenty-four hours before the meeting of

the governing body. Minutes shall be placed on the web site at such time as the minutes are available for inspection as provided in subsection (5) of this section. This information shall be available on the public web site for at least six months.

**Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1414. Unlawful action by public body; declared void or voidable by district court; when; duty to enforce open meeting laws; citizen's suit; procedure; violations; penalties.**

(1) Any motion, resolution, rule, regulation, ordinance, or formal action of a public body made or taken in violation of the Open Meetings Act shall be declared void by the district court if the suit is commenced within one hundred twenty days of the meeting of the public body at which the alleged violation occurred. Any motion, resolution, rule, regulation, ordinance, or formal action of a public body made or taken in substantial violation of the Open Meetings Act shall be voidable by the district court if the suit is commenced more than one hundred twenty days after but within one year of the meeting of the public body in which the alleged violation occurred. A suit to void any final action shall be commenced within one year of the action.

(2) The Attorney General and the county attorney of the county in which the public body ordinarily meets shall enforce the Open Meetings Act.

(3) Any citizen of this state may commence a suit in the district court of the county in which the public body ordinarily meets or in which the plaintiff resides for the purpose of requiring compliance with or preventing violations of the Open Meetings Act, for the purpose of declaring an action of a public body void, or for the purpose of determining the applicability of the act to discussions or decisions of the public body. It shall not be a defense that the citizen attended the meeting and failed to object at such time. The court may order payment of reasonable attorney's fees and court costs to a successful plaintiff in a suit brought under this section.

(4) Any member of a public body who knowingly violates or conspires to violate or who attends or remains at a meeting knowing that the public body is in violation of any provision of the Open Meetings Act shall be guilty of a Class IV misdemeanor for a first offense and a Class III misdemeanor for a second or subsequent offense.

**Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1415. Open Meetings Act; requirements; waiver; validity of action.**

No motion, resolution, rule, regulation, ordinance, or formal action made, adopted, passed, or taken at a meeting as defined in section 84-1409 of a public body as defined in such section shall be invalidated because such motion, resolution, rule, regulation, ordinance, or formal action was made, adopted, passed, or taken at a meeting or meetings on or after March 17, 2020, and on or before April 30, 2021, pursuant to a Governor's Executive Order which waived certain requirements of the Open Meetings Act.

## **2. Creation of Columbus Reserve Firefighters**

## **Columbus Fire Department Memorandum For Record**

**DATE:** 4 May 2022

**TO:** Tara Vasicek, City Administrator

**FROM:** Ryan Gray, Fire Chief

**RE:** Creation of Columbus Reserve Firefighters

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Restructure the Columbus Fire Department by creating the Columbus Reserve Firefighters which will replace the existing four volunteer companies.

**DISCUSSION:**

Currently the Columbus Fire Department operates with 18 career personnel, approximately 37 volunteer firefighters within the 4 established companies, and a career Fire Chief and Assistant Chief. For many years, there has reportedly been a lack of respect and cohesion amongst the career and volunteer firefighters. From my evaluation of the department and discussions from within, I feel that these issues stem from a lack of accountability, standards and participation across the board. Having been a volunteer for 17 years, I understand the value that volunteers bring to a combination system however; without standards, accountability and participation, it becomes impossible to ensure efficient service delivery to the citizens.

A pressing issue currently is the misuse of city funds by the volunteer companies. In December, Acting Fire Chief Kyle Lingenfelter received an invoice from finance for coding and approval. Kyle recognized what he felt to be a suspicious amount of appetizers ordered for the amount of personnel who attended the meal. After his evaluation, Kyle went to the local business to discuss the receipt containing the appetizers and was told that all of the alcohol that was consumed that night had been rang up as appetizers at the request of an unknown volunteer. It has been reported to me, that once the volunteers were made aware that their altering of alcoholic beverages had been discovered, the volunteers retracted their reimbursement request and paid the December bill out of their own funds. After this was discovered, past meal reimbursements, which the City did pay at the request of the Volunteers, were reviewed. Similar activity was noted on meal reimbursements prior to the December incident. In January, an email was sent by the Mayor and City Administrator to all volunteers and city council altering them to the findings and setting some new policies in place (see below):

*Volunteer Firefighters,*

*We have included all the volunteer's email addresses we have in this email in order to share direct information from the Mayor and I, and eliminate any misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the information contained in this email.*

*It has come to our attention that some Volunteer companies have been going to local establishments (Maximus and CK) and purchasing alcohol, billed as appetizers or pop. There is first hand confirmation from employees at these establishments that the volunteers present asked for the alcohol to be put on the tab as appetizers or pop.*

*We are extremely disappointed in the flagrant deceit of those who participated in this, and their gross misconduct by submitting these receipts for reimbursement.*

*Nebraska State Statute has clearly established laws limiting the City use of municipal funds to nonalcoholic beverages. The City policy clearly states it cannot and will not pay for alcoholic beverages.*

***These expenses will not be reimbursed by the City.***

*There has been much discussion about the funds the City provides to volunteers in order to provide food during volunteer business over the years.*

*The Mayor and I would like to make clear a few guidelines with respect to those funds, beginning immediately.*

- 1. The City is happy to provide a meal, immediately before, during or after a meeting of the volunteers in the Fire Station only.*
- 2. Meals purchased are for the volunteers present at the meeting only. No extra food is to leave the Fire Station. No food purchased by the city for any employees, committee, elected officials, etc. is taken home for personal consumption outside of the meeting time.*

*Jim Bulkley, Mayor*

*Tara Vasicek, City Administrator*

It was determined by City Administrator, Tara Vasicek and Kyle that in order to properly conduct the investigation regarding this expected misuse of City funds, the meeting minutes of the volunteer companies would need to be obtained. According to Kyle and Tara, multiple requests were made to the companies to provide the meeting minutes without success.

Upon my arrival, I was informed about the situation and was directed to request the meeting minutes for the volunteer companies via an in-person request to the companies at their company meeting, as the volunteers required. I met with Department President Derek Gassmann prior to the company meetings and discussed this issue and notified him of my intent and explained that I felt the request to be reasonable and explained further that the volunteer companies exist and operate at the pleasure of the city and at the direction of the Fire Chief according to city code. Derek agreed with me and expressed his feelings about how he believed this issue was handled in the beginning. I requested the meeting minutes of all companies in person and explained that this issue was not going away and that we needed to collectively move forward.

Both companies did provide me with the meeting minutes and they were submitted to Tara for her review. It should be noted that the minutes of the Pioneer Hook & Ladder Company and W.Y. Bissell Hose Company contained redacted names of all individuals who were not elected officers of the companies. These redacted names, included those volunteer members who were in charge of meal planning and coordination. These two companies submitted the December receipts that included alcohol disguised as appetizers and pop.

Additionally, I have included a timeline from Lt. Kyle Lingenfelter outlining the events leading up to this as well as incident response numbers from all volunteers in the past 2 years.

Also, upon my arrival I received a list of expectations from the Mayor and City Administrator outlining a few expectations of me. The main one being improving the relationship between career and volunteer members, citing an overall poor relationship between both groups, a need for clear rules and expectations to be set, possibly updating the structure of the volunteers, streamlining meetings and events, accountability for volunteer participation, plan for recruitment and retention, and an EMS only option for volunteers. Implementing a Fire Reserve Program will address all of these expectations moving forward.

There is little guidance within the Volunteer's adopted Constitution and By-Laws, which were approved and adopted in 1964 by city council, which provides any direction as to who is entitled to the meeting minutes.

This issue has uncovered a lack of accountability and fiscal responsibility within the department. Therefore in an effort to not only streamline the operations of the fire department, but to provide for accountability, fiscal responsibility, safety, standards, operational effectiveness and excellent service delivery to the citizens of the city, I am recommending the creation of a Reserve Firefighter Program.

The Reserve Firefighter Program will clean-up the administrative operations of the department by having a clearly defined method of operation and a cohesive constitution and by-laws. The constitution and by-laws clearly identify responsibility within the program as well clearly provide the Fire Chief with the overall authority to oversee and manage the program.

In addition to the above reasons, I feel that it is becoming increasingly difficult to ask people to voluntarily give up their time. Today's economy has shown us the importance of a dollar. I personally feel that those who choose to provide this service should be compensated for their sacrifice. It is my hope that by having a program established that provides for the compensation of our personnel will increase incident responses and lessen the financial burden that volunteering can have on a family.

A major part of the Reserve program would be the minimum incident participation and response requirement. This program would require all personnel to respond to a minimum of 20% of all Task Force Alarms. These alarms are those that include structure fires, brush and field fires, and auto accidents with reported entrapment. These high acuity calls require the largest number of personnel to respond in order to safely, efficiently and effectively mitigate the incident.

For task force alarms, which are the responses that the minimum requirements would be based on, for the past 3 years show a hopeful picture. Using 2021's task force response data, 6 personnel met or exceed 20%, while 6 more personnel were within 2% of meeting it. It should also be noted, that we feel the amount of task force calls may not be accurate due to the way a call is dispatched, but if this program goes into effect we would take steps to ensure that calls are being coded and dispatched as the proper type of incident, as well as track them internally to ensure all members have a fair chance at meeting the requirements.

The Reserve Firefighter Program will have requirements for participation and training standards which are outlined in the draft constitution and by-laws provided. By having these set requirements and standards, it is my hope that career and volunteer personnel can be assured that standards are being upheld and begin to build the trust that is needed to perform in high pressure environments in which we are expected to work.

Initially, all current volunteers would be provided the membership requirements of the Reserve program and offered an opportunity to participate, given they agree to all terms pertaining to training standards, membership requirements and time frames to adhere to the set standards. For those personnel who are interested in participating in the program and are not certified, there is a 20% cap for that category currently. I would recommend that the President of the Reserves (once determined) and myself would conduct an interview process to make those selections.

This recommendation is in no way to discount the countless sacrifices of our volunteer members over the decades of service to the City of Columbus. This is an effort to better organize our department to ensure that our service delivery meets the expectations of the city and our citizens. Also, I am recommending that we develop something to honor, thank and recognize those volunteers who have served 10 years or more and wish not to participate in the Fire Reserve Program.

It is also my recommendation that we entertain the idea of allowing the creation of the Columbus Volunteer Fire Department Historical Society. This group would allow for the funds from the volunteer companies to be transferred to the Society as well as allow for the rich history and tradition of the Volunteer Fire Department to be maintained. This society would not be funded by the city, and would be an independent organization that could obtain a 501(c)3.

As far as implementation date, I am recommending that if approved tonight we implement the program by Monday August 15, 2022. This will allow for the programs foundation to be built collectively by the Office of the Fire Chief as well as those members who wish to participate in the program. Constitution and By-laws would be reviewed and a proposal sent to Council for approval by July 18, 2022.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

In FY 22, the volunteer fire department was budgeted \$103,280.00 for its operation. It is my professional opinion that this amount will be enough to cover the cost of the Reserve Program. Final estimates will be provided at a later date if approved.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

**SIGNATURES:**

*R. Gray*

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### 3. Adjournment.