



Youngstown Professional Firefighters
IAFF Local 312

June 28, 2020

Council Members,

After viewing the most recent meeting of the Safety Committee on June 25, 2020, we would like to take this opportunity to provide you with some more information on the subjects that were discussed regarding the current state of the Fire Department. We would also like to give you a more apples to apples snapshot of the comparisons made between the Youngstown Fire Department and the Canton Fire Department.

YFD has not replaced the last 9 firefighters who have left or retired over the last 2+ years, which has resulted in chronic understaffing. Departments can be run this lean, but the result is an increase in overtime. Some municipalities will run departments this way despite the increase in overtime because the savings generated by not replacing the employees could be greater than the increase in overtime paid. The problem in our City is that we have cut both total staffing available and the overtime budget simultaneously in an attempt to save at both ends and this will always lead to a reduction in services.

There has been a great deal of finger pointing back and forth about what or who is causing the brownouts of our fire apparatus. The Fire Chief will tell you that it is due to call offs, but it is not because of sick leave abuse or any kind of protest or revolt, as I've heard it called. Fire stations are closing because our staffing has been set up to fail and here is an example.

This is a current example of one shift. Although the details may differ slightly on the other two shifts, this is basically how a truck gets browned out...

37 Firefighters are assigned to "A" Turn ("A" Shift)

- 7 have to be off each day for RH (which prevents OT) or vacation**
- 1 Captain suffered a heart attack a fire and has not yet returned to duty**
- 1 Captain suffered a shoulder injury at a fire and is waiting for surgery**
- 1 Lieutenant had surgery to repair a hernia**

That only leaves 27 firefighters available. It takes 28 firefighters to run all 9 trucks and a Battalion Chief. That means that if NO ONE else reports off for sick leave there will still be a truck closed every single day on "A" turn until 1 of those 3 returns to duty.

All it would take to close a second truck is a COVID exposure, somebody waking up to a sore back, and a firefighter’s kid being sick. Your firefighter’s get sick, we get hurt, we have young families. Members of YFD are not abusing sick leave to purposely close fire stations and no one wants these stations open more than we do. The problem is that almost any call off results in overtime. Then, we were thrown into a pandemic and the Chief ordered one third of the department quarantined at Station 1. That’s how you go through an overtime budget in 6 months. We have simply reached the point where it is necessary to choose between hiring firefighters, higher overtime costs, or a reduced level of service. What you should be aware of is that as we close trucks the reduction in service is much more significant than the Fire Chief would lead you to believe.

The solution to the example provided is for the City to replace our 9 retired firefighters and get back into compliance with our SAFER grant. We can assume that 3 of the new hires would be assigned to “A” turn (“A” Shift) and the addition of those 3 firefighters would leave available staffing at 30 and allow for all the trucks to be open without incurring any overtime.

The Chief has also used the practice of browning out stations in Canton as a means to justify us doing the same in Youngstown and he was accurate in saying that Canton runs less apparatus than we do here. What he neglected to mention is that they can do that because they have more firefighters on each piece of apparatus than we do. We have maximized our geographic coverage by putting less people on more trucks to position them strategically across the city for better response times, the only catch to that is that when we close a truck it really hurts us. Here’s a quick chart with some more relevant information that distinguishes the two cities...

	Youngstown	Canton
Firefighters	118	154
Population	65,469	70,447
Geographic Size	34.6 sq miles	25.5 sq miles
2019 Structure Fires	217	146
2018 Structure Fires	279	176

As you can see, YFD is already consistently putting out more fires and covering a larger geographic area than Canton FD and we are doing it with 36 less firefighters than they have.

We think it's safe to assume that at the end of the day we all want what is best for the people of this City. This Union is going to make a concerted effort moving forward to keep you appropriately informed so that you can make decisions based on more of the facts than you have been given in the past. Even if we can't agree on everything we'd like you to see that we are not who the narrative keeps telling you we are. We thank you for your time.

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