

STATE OF TEXAS

§

February 26, 2014

COUNTY OF GRAYSON

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BE IT REMEMBERED THAT A Called Meeting of the Sherman City Council was begun and held in the City Council Chambers on February 26, 2014.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Cary Wacker; Deputy Mayor Robert Softly.
Council Members Davis, Johnson, Plyler, Sofey, Watt.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

CITY STAFF PRESENT: George Olson, City Manager; Robbie Hefton, Assistant City Manager/CFO; Brandon Shelby, City Attorney; Mark Gibson, Director of Utilities; Scott Shadden, Director of Development Services; Don Keene, Director of Community and Support Services; Clay Barnett, Director of Public Works and Engineering; J.J. Jones, Fire Chief; Otis Henry, Police Chief; Mary Lawrence, Controller; Tammy Davis, Support Services Manager; Shawn Hackworth, IT Manager; Pam Cloer, Assistant to the City Manager; Linda Ashby, City Clerk.

PURPOSE: Call to Order, Quorum Determined, Meeting Declared Open

Receive the City of Sherman’s Fire Station Overview

Adjournment

CALL TO ORDER, QUORUM DETERMINED, MEETING DECLARED OPEN

Mayor Wacker called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m., declared a quorum present, and opened the Called City Council Meeting.

RECEIVE THE CITY OF SHERMAN’S FIRE STATION OVERVIEW

Jeff Jones, Fire Chief, presented an overview of Sherman’s Fire Stations, including call volume, response times, shifts in population and risk, areas of concern, and a roadmap for future decisions. Items that hinder and/or help in decisions about where to locate fire stations include geographic limitations, such as railroad tracks, high water locations, and one-way streets; and operational limitations, such as which apparatus will fit in which stations.

Chief Jones said fire stations are expensive to build, to operate, and to maintain. He added that decisions are made based on the best data available at the time and some of the decisions that were made 40 or 50 years ago may not serve the citizens of Sherman very well today. Only one of the current fire stations was built after the City began providing ambulance service. Other things that must be considered are where hazardous materials are located and how they are transported, and other possible threats to the community. Currently there are five fire stations in Sherman.

In 2006, the City hired a consultant to provide a report on fire department operations, which included an analysis of the fire station locations, staffing, response, and apparatus placement. Using that information, additional data was determined in 2008, including station design, response districts, public access and maintenance costs. It was found that projected growth to the north and the west would eventually lead to locations beyond what was considered an acceptable response time.

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Since 2000, Sherman has experienced a 13% increase in population and a 16% increase in the service area. In 2000, the Fire Department answered just under 3,800 calls. In 2013, they had 6,219 calls for service. Those were individual alarms that resulted in almost 13,000 vehicle responses for the year.

Chief Jones said the year 2000 was before Sherman Town Center, before the Commons, before the development north of U.S. Hwy 82, and before Panda Energy. All those things must be considered before we talk about the current fire stations, the delivery, and the future, he added. The geographic, economic, and response factors make it harder to achieve an acceptable response time to the community.

Response times are designated by several entities and provide a plan of how far a fire station needs to be from a home or a business. The Insurance Service Office (ISO) indicates that a six minute response time is recommended, while the American Heart Association says five minutes.

The Insurance Service Office grades communities on three factors. The first is communication, and deals with the number of telephone lines actually coming into dispatch, how many operators are on duty, and how a call is processed. Sherman's process is pretty good. The ISO also grades the water supply, especially the number of fire hydrants in the City and how far away a house is from the fire hydrant. The third factor is the fire department itself, training records, how new employees are processed, continuing education, the number and type of apparatus a department has and how modern it is, daily staffing and the number of people responding to an event, and station locations.

Chief Jones reminded Council Members that in 2011, Sherman had an ISO study and improved their property protection class from an ISO rating of 3 to a rating of 1. In 2006, the consultant hired said that although Sherman had an ISO rating of 3 at that time, if they came and graded the community then, we would probably slip to a 4 and maybe a 5. Since 2006 there were significant improvements that allowed the City to achieve a better ISO rating.

He added that there are 3,295 Fire Departments in Texas that are graded by the ISO and of those, seven hold a property protection class rating of 1 and 33 hold a rating of 2. Sherman is one of the top rated, based on communications, water supply, and fire station locations.

Chief Jones said since 2000, Sherman has seen an increase of about 57% in the call volume, and since 2009 alone the increase has risen by 20%. Most of the calls are EMS calls.

Council Member Watt asked if a fire truck, ambulance, and command vehicle are sent to the same call, is that considered one call or three calls? Chief Jones said that is considered one call. The 6,200 calls for service involved almost 13,000 pieces of equipment on the road. Additional equipment is sent for ambulance calls because patients are getting bigger, the care they give is more complex, and the responders are doing more procedures on the scene. The chances for survival are higher if they can stabilize the patient before they are enroute to the hospital. He added that with an EMS call, the equipment is out of service for about one hour. Response time for an additional call will be longer if that response is from a different district.

Chief Jones said in 2003 the department had over 2,000 overlapping calls, where two or more things were happening at the same time. That number increased to 2,234 in 2013. Not only are they having more calls, but more calls that are happening at the same time, which limits their ability to provide an acceptable response time. ISO also looks at staffing and Sherman has added three firefighters in 2001 and another three in 2010.

Chief Jones discussed the locations and response time of each fire station, and the complexity of each district. Station 1 is located downtown in the Central Business District and has really good north, south,

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east, west access from the station. The ladder truck is housed at this station, making it a “hub” for the other districts. The Central Business District is really busy during the day, but after 5:00 p.m. the population shifts, except during events. This puts the ladder truck in a position to respond to any part of the City. Central Fire Station also houses the administration, prevention, EMS, and training offices and has been in operation for 50 years. Fire stations generally have a 45 to 50 year life span.

Fire Station 2 is located on the Municipal Airport property and was built in 1984. This station gives good access to Sherman High School and to Austin College. Station 2 is very short and not all equipment will fit in this station. It also has limited space for personnel.

Fire Station 3 is the newest and has been in operation for 14 years. It was originally designed for three bays, however during construction it was changed to a two bay station. It has good access along U.S. Highway 82, at least to U.S. Highway 75, and along F.M. 1417, which has a lot of multi-family dwellings.

Fire Station 4 was built in 1968 and is located on land provided by Johnson & Johnson. Chief Jones said it is a good location and exits onto the service road of U.S. Highway 75. It has a basement where an inventory of equipment and supplies are kept. It is on a very popular corner and the property, along with the adjoining Texas Department of Transportation property, is valuable.

Fire Station 5 is located on Frisco Road, next to the railroad tracks, and was built in 1974. This is a busy station, especially for EMS. It provides good access to Dos Lagos and the North Hoard/Baker Road area. This station also has short access and is hard to enter with the larger equipment. During the last three years, Chief Jones said he has asked for Capital Improvement Program funds for some modest improvements. The station currently has only one restroom.

He added that none of the stations currently meet the ADA standards and are difficult for the public to access. Also today, none of the stations could accommodate female firefighters if Sherman had a diversified work force. Those are challenges that the staff will have as they move forward.

Chief Jones showed a map of the location of all fire stations and the 1.5 mile response time standards that would be determined by a six minute response time. Almost 20% of the calls are currently in the small area that lies north of U.S. Highway 82, between Loy Lake Road and Travis Street. Last year there were 1,106 calls in that district alone. This area includes Sherman Commons, Home Depot, Lowe's, two schools, eight assisted living and health care facilities, 24 restaurants, and retail businesses. At any one time, there could be 10,000 people in that area. Wal-Mart alone counts 8,000 people in their store daily. Chief Jones added that this area is outside the six minute response time.

Another area that is not covered is on the west side of town, however it does not have a high run volume. This area has lots of motor vehicle accidents, but not as many calls that are critical for the six minute response time. However, Chief Jones said this is where the future development will be located and future fire station development should take this into account.

Chief Jones also referenced a location where Fire Station 3 used to be located, saying it is a huge residential area with moderate density and a low call volume. In 2000, Fire Station 3 was moved from Alexander Street to F.M. 1417. He said the staff doesn't want to create more of these “donut holes” if the remaining stations are relocated instead of new stations constructed.

The consultant's report from 2006 and the study from 2008 were used to create a Fire Station Master Plan, to project a 15-year roadmap for where the growth would be and the projection of the fire station needs. As that study was being completed, the prospect of moving Fire Station 4 from its present location at U.S. Highway 75 and F.M. 1417 arose. The staff worked with the Sherman Economic

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Development Corporation to select an alternate site. A site study has been completed, which will save time if and when they move forward with a new fire station. A location has been determined, soil issues have been assessed, and they know what the intersection will look like. Chief Jones said it takes three years from the time they decide to construct a new fire station until the new station is in service. With this preliminary work, they already have a station design and are now only 18 months from moving in.

He added that they also selected a generic concept fire station plan which could be used at other sites and modified as needed. They might change the façade to match the neighborhood, but the major work is completed. They have done preliminary planning for Fire Station 4 in case they decide to move the administration offices, add an Emergency Operations Center, or add another bay. They have also considered the possibility of running two ambulances out of the same station to serve the area more efficiently.

In providing a “roadmap,” Chief Jones said in the first year, it is important to select and secure a site for a north station, taking into account the thoroughfare plan, plans for development, and future needs. He also encouraged the Council to move forward with the modest upgrades to Station 5. There are roof and structural issues that need to be addressed as early as this year.

He felt in year two, the plan should include the start of construction on the north station, which would be 18 months from the beginning of construction until the “move in” which would occur in year three. At some point, Chief Jones felt it was important to identify the site for a new station in the west part of Sherman. This location would be driven by development. The relocation of Fire Station 4 could also move up or down in the plan schedule. Fire Station 4 is fine, but it is older. The location itself is not bad, but might be more valuable for other development.

Chief Jones reiterated that call volumes have increased 20% since 2009, 57% since 2000, and overlapping calls are increasing, which makes it harder to maintain response times. The ISO rating is critical for the homeowners. When Sherman went from an ISO of 3 to 2, it saved the homeowner \$100 to \$160 annually on their homeowner’s insurance. He added that to reach an ISO of 1, Sherman would need another fire station to “fill the gaps.”

He added that Sherman’s primary growth area is in the Town Center area and to the north, but there is also potential growth to the west that will eventually need to be addressed. The south station relocation will also need to be addressed at some point.

Council Member Watt asked if any specific locations had been reviewed yet. George Olson, City Manager, said the staff has not gone through that process. Council Member Watt asked if a “mini-station” could be located between Travis Street and Loy Lake Road, in the Town Center area. Chief Jones said you could put a station with one garage and sleeping for three people, but if the station holds an engine and an ambulance, it would be more flexible. He said you could build a station to accommodate future response, but only staff it with what is needed today. This would allow for growth as needed.

Council Members discussed the limits of the equipment as used in the current fire stations. Chief Jones said they purchased a 95 foot ladder on the ladder truck instead of a 110 foot ladder because the door on the fire station would only accommodate the 95 foot ladder. He did not want to be limited in providing services because he is restricted on the construction of a building. It should be functional for the community.

Mayor Wacker asked if he had a preference for where his special equipment was stored. Should it be spread around the City or concentrated in one place. Chief Jones said it depends on available parking spaces. He added that some of the specialized equipment would be better at some of the outlying

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stations. Most extra equipment is currently stored at Central Fire Station because there is room. It is all uncovered and the staff must pick up the equipment and take it where it is needed. The areas where the equipment is stored should be enclosed and secure.

Council Member Watt asked if this issue was at a critical stage. Mr. Olson said it is close. They need to begin the planning process and move forward. The gap in service and the additional growth will not get any smaller. The staff is moving forward and feels that the issue needs to be addressed.

Mayor Wacker said during the budget process this year, the City Council is not deferring the decision making into the future any more. This is the year when the issues need to be reviewed and some “step one” decisions made so Sherman is positioned for the future. Mr. Olson said the City is not at a point where it will fail if something is not done, but as Sherman develops and grows, the call volume continues to increase, and federal changes to insurance requirements change the way EMS business is handled, it will have an impact on how Sherman delivers service. He added that Sherman needs to move forward.

Mayor Wacker said it would be an 18 month process to build a new Station 4, because the site has already been selected. A site has not been selected for a north fire station so that process would take 24 months to select a site and provide site studies and soil samples, before construction could begin.

Chief Jones said he felt all of the pre-budget issues that are being discussed “tie together.” For example, one of his challenges is high water locations. He must also have access to water and employees to serve. Eventually those issues must be addressed.

Council Member Sofey asked if the Council would have cost estimates for construction costs as well as staff for the stations. Mr. Olson said they would have cost estimates based on what the Council wants to do from a budgeting standpoint. Options will also be presented based on the cost estimates.

Council Member Davis asked how much land would be required for a generic fire station. Chief Jones said probably 2.5 to 3 acres, depending on the radius required to turn into a station, storage space required, and what departments would be located there. Fire Station 4 required 5 acres.

Council Member Watt asked if the administration was moved to the new station, would Central Fire Station be redesigned and used as a fire station only. Chief Jones said there always needs to be a first response in the Central Business District. That station is crowded with equipment, but he felt a fire station downtown would remain, but redesigned to accommodate personnel instead of storage for vehicles.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the City Council, motion was duly made and approved to adjourn the Called Meeting at 12:43 p.m.

MAYOR

ATTEST

CITY CLERK