

Carthage Fire Department
401 W. Chestnut
Carthage, MO 64836

8/14/2024

To: Carthage City Council

Mayor Dan Rife, Derek Peterson, Chris Taylor, Lori Leece, Dustin Edge, Terri Heckmaster, Tom Barlow, Alan Snow, Jana Schramm, Tiffany Cossey

Greetings Mayor Rife and members of council. The purpose of this letter is to address the appointment of the new fire chief for the Carthage Fire Department.

I would first like to state for the record that this letter was composed by working members of the department. Jason Martin, Brian Calhoun and Eli Maples were not involved due to personal conflict as applicants for the position.

The Carthage Fire Department has remained relatively uninvolved in the unrest and upheaval in the city council over the past calendar year, mainly due to the fact that the majority of our members do not reside in the city and our department was not being directly affected by any actions being taken. The political noise was just that as far as we were concerned, noise. Everything changed a few months ago when our chief resigned, in part due to the council and the actions that were being taken. Our department was moving in a good direction, very progressive and pro active in bettering our equipment and personnel for our citizens that we serve. All of that progress is now threatened to come to a screeching halt if the wrong person is put at the head of the department.

It has become clear that the majority of the city, specifically the council, is blissfully ignorant of what happens at the fire department. This is not meant as an insult in any way, but is quite simply the truth of the matter; so many people that we serve have no idea what it is we do. While it is true that we respond when something is on fire, there is so much more to what we actually respond to. We respond to motor vehicle crashes, medical calls, water rescues and a variety of other calls. Generally speaking, if someone calls for assistance and it isn't immediately clear what they need, the fire department is dispatched to handle the call. Our members are cross

trained in a variety of specialization areas due to the wide array of calls that our department responds to. The respect that our department has in our area among first responders is something that we take great pride in and have worked hard for.

The chief position is paramount to our department continuing our progressive changes and carrying on our tradition of being some of the most professional firefighters in the area. When Chief Huntley resigned, there was a general sense of unease about what the future held. Several members of the department were present the last time a chief was hired from outside the department ranks and felt the repercussions for years. We were relieved to hear that we had 3 out of 8 applicants from inside the department, as it decreased our chances of having a repeat of that catastrophe. When we heard that 2 of the internal applicants were called back for 2nd interviews we were further encouraged that the right man would get the job. The overwhelming majority of the department is in agreement that Jason Martin is the right man. Jason has over 25 years of experience at this department and has been in an administrative role more recently. Jason has earned the respect of the department through years of hard work and dedication, even those who don't necessarily support him as their top choice for chief. The margin of difference in experience and expectation of the department to be successful in the chief position between Jason and any other internal applicant, as far as we are concerned, is extremely wide.

Imagine our displeasure when last night at the council meeting, as we expected to be there to celebrate our new chief, we felt the council collectively spit in our face as a department. A 2 hour closed session, which was a very poorly veiled attempt to derail the efforts of the hiring committee in their unanimous decision to appoint Jason Martin as fire chief. Not only do we not have a chief to run our department today, we have little to no faith in the process. Two council members were on the hiring committee, as pointed out by Tom Nixon during his speaking portion at the beginning of the meeting. The hiring committee even sought insight from current employees at the department that have worked with Jason Martin for years, after which they reached the conclusion that Jason Martin was the top candidate. After the council meeting adjourned, we noticed that many of the council members weren't even able to look our department members in the eye. Morale for our department took a hit based on the meeting outcome last night because it is now very clear to us that personal vendettas are being allowed to factor in to decisions that will affect the running of a department of this city. This is not acceptable and quite frankly unethical. Our faith as a

department in the city council's ability to properly lead this city is not only in question, for most of us we simply don't have any faith or confidence in their abilities after this.

We leave you with a simple request that our department is entitled to: explain yourselves. Explain to us your reasoning for not appointing a chief that was selected unanimously by your own hiring committee. Explain to us why a man that is widely respected in our department and area was openly disgraced by the council last night. Explain to us what factored in to cause an almost 2 hour long discussion where a collective decision couldn't be made and then caused many of you to leave in obvious shame. Explain to us how you as a city council feel you know best about who could perform this job better than the 95% of employees who have faith in Jason Martin as the fire chief, especially when only 1 of you, Chris Taylor, has actually been to the department and seen how we operate. We are owed that and look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Carthage Fire Department