

**REPORT
OF
STEVENS POINT POLICE AND FIRE COMMISSION
REGARDING
ANONYMOUS CONCERNS OVER
FIRE DEPARTMENT MANAGEMENT**

The Stevens Point Police and Fire Commission (“Commission”) has conducted a number of meetings to review a series of anonymous letters dropped outside the homes of several city leaders that raise concerns regarding the management of the Fire Department. The Commission has met with the leadership of the Fire Department and has engaged in lengthy discussions regarding the concerns that have been expressed. The Commission also hired an outside HR Consultant (Ed Reed) to interview members of the Fire Department in order to gain a better understanding of the concerns that were expressed in the anonymous communications. Some of the communications included letters from departed employees expressing concern regarding the management of the Fire Department.

The Commission has spent a number of hours digesting the information provided to it and seeking to determine whether or not the information raises valid concerns that must be addressed by the Commission. There can be no conclusive determination of the validity or critical nature of the criticisms because of the variety of differences in the responses to the information from various sources. The Commission cannot ascertain if there is a relationship between the anonymous letters communicated to one Commissioner and a disciplinary hearing that was ongoing at the time before the other Commissioners. It appears there may be perception by some members of the Department that the management of the Department shows favoritism toward certain employees and manages the Department with a “top down” attitude. The Commission believes that this is a perception of some members of the Department but is unsure whether it is a valid perception because information from the Reed Report showed that a majority of the Fire Department members were satisfied with the overall management and supervision of the Department.

It must be noted that the Department has a significant success in providing fire protection and emergency medical services to residents of Stevens Point and other communities and has also been identified as a top-level Fire Department when dealing with other organizations like MidState Technical College.

The Commission has reached a point in its deliberations that strongly suggest that the Fire Department must move forward rather than dwell on past histories (and especially events from many years ago). As a result, the Commission has directed that:

- The leadership of the Fire Department and the leadership of the Fire Union work cooperatively to identify a Consultant that would work with the entire Department to develop a collaborative problem-solving process to address the apparent tensions between the leadership team and the staff member team of the Department;
- That these two groups should provide a recommendation to the Commission for a Consultant that would work with the parties by July 31, 2021. The recommendation would include a timeline for completion of the collaborative problem-solving process with an

agenda for the process to be followed with the expectation that the process would be completed by December 31, 2021;

- That all members of the Department, including management and line staff and administrative staff would participate in this collaborative problem-solving process and that a Report with recommendations from the participants would be provided to the Commission for review and possible implementation of necessary action steps to address the perceptions and opinions of all members of the Department.

In order to be transparent regarding this review, the Commission is attaching the Reed Report and the written comments received from the Fire Department leadership relating to the suggested concerns from members of the Department. The Commission has concluded that there are significant disagreements regarding the concerns that have been expressed and there is no proof that has been provided to show the strength of the information provided by the various individuals. For this reason, the Commission has decided to move beyond an analysis of the information and direct that the various groups within the Fire Department come together to conduct a self-evaluation and provide recommendations to the Commission.

**Administrative Review for
Stevens Point, Wisconsin
Police and Fire Commission**

Submitted By:

Edward Reed

Confidential Information

General comments:

Methodology:

At the request of Attorney Dean Dietrich I conducted a series of interviews to determine if a significant problem existed in the Stevens Point Fire Department (SPFD) between 'line employees' and management. For this project 'Line employees' are any fire department member below the rank of Assistant Chief. Management is defined as Assistant Chiefs and the Chief. Three positions (Fire Marshall, Training Officer and Administrative Assistant) were interviewed by me but their comments were not included in the review and they were not mentioned by any fire fighter.

Prior to starting the interviews I had a teleconference with the Chief and two Assistant Chiefs to explain my purpose, how I conduct interviews and that I would interview each of them near the end of the process. Each of them participated in the discussion and asked any questions they had. They also raised some very normal concerns about the process. One question which I had not received before was if employees would be given 'Garrity' rights. I explained that employees were required to attend the meeting with me but participation was voluntary and if they didn't want to talk to me that was their business.

I made an effort to interview all SPFD staff for several reasons: (1) to insure that I got balanced input and not just input from employees who felt strongly one way or the other, (2) because Chief Finn had expressed a concern that I would only talk to those employees who had 'filed a complaint' and therefore would get skewed input, (3) to make a point to the existing fire fighters that I wanted all the input I could get and was interested in listening to all of them, and (4) sometimes a minor bit of information from one interviewee confirms or refutes the input of another employee. The interviews were semi-structured in that I had a set list of topics I asked about but allowed employees to discuss any concern they wanted to bring forward. In discussion I listened for specific information or examples to back up complaints the employees brought forward. I was most interested in incidents or conversations they had directly participated in or had witnessed firsthand. Information provided that 'they had heard from someone else' was given less weight.

When evaluating the input from the employees I listened for a 'consistency of comments' or comments brought forward by more than one employee. If a comment was brought forward by only one person and not corroborated by others it was considered but it was given lesser weight.

As you may hear, occasionally I would digress and tell 'war stories' or talk about other topics of mutual interest (such as SCUBA diving). While these digressions extended the time of the interview I feel they helped keep the conversation more of a mutual discussion versus an interview.

I did not attempt to contact all employees that have left the SPFD but I did try to contact all who had left within the past three years or anyone who was mentioned as having an issue within the past 3 years. I

was able to contact all but 2 of those employees. I did not contact two employees on long term leave of absence. One was on a military leave and contacting him would have been difficult. The other long term leave is a disciplinary issue and I did not want to appear to be involved in that situation. I was able to get feedback via email from one employee on medical leave of absence.

Environmental Issues:

There are several key issues that are effecting the current situation although it is difficult to quantify the impact.

1. There was a change in chiefs about seven years ago. While individual styles of management may vary between chiefs and senior firefighters have had an opportunity to learn to adapt to changing styles, a number of the junior members have only worked under Chief Finn. Therefore, Chief Finn is either the best Chief they have had or the worst.
2. The Department is structured on a 'para-military' management model and in an emergency response or combat situation that is necessary. In the past an autocratic management style was generally accepted by employees but it is not typically received as well with newer employees. For a reference consider how effective General George Patton's style was during the Battle of the Bulge. However that management style would not have worked for General Eisenhower in coordinating the activities for D-Day. Today's leaders have to know how to modify their natural style to fit the situation and employees under them.
3. The necessity for extraordinary precautions and changes in procedures due to Covid-19 is compounding the daily stress in the department.
4. The amount of overtime over the past year or so has worn employees down and tolerance and tempers are running thin.
5. There is an employee on a long term disciplinary 'administrative' leave pending possible termination of employment. Management feels they cannot comment on the situation and rightly so. However the employee and his friends have repeatedly shared 'his side of the story'. One version of his side of the story is that a 'police investigation' cleared him of any wrong doing and management is 'out to get him'. The 'table talk' in the station on this topic appears to be divisive. A compounding factor is that some employees have been subpoenaed related to the case and they feel 'caught in the middle'.

General Conclusions:

Generally the current SPFD firefighters (employees) appear to be reasonably satisfied with their relationship and management by the current Assistant Chiefs and the current Chief. When asked to rate the relationship between the current management and line employees on a scale of 0 (very negative) to 10 (very positive) a majority of the employees rated the overall relationship with the Assistant Chiefs and Chief as positive (see chart of responses). However, in discussion, several employees stated they felt the rapport had deteriorated over the past year. Only one employee stated that it had improved.

While the majority of interviews were positive or neutral several were extremely negative and almost all mentioned one of more negative issues relating to, or traits of, the Chief or Assistant Chiefs .

Based on the input I received I do not feel that the situation is as dire as several of the letters have indicated. However, typically I would expect to have more of a bell shaped graph. It is unusual to have one quarter of the responses in the '3 and below' ranking. (See attached graph) Several employees felt that the ranking had deteriorated over the past several years or felt their ranking was better than the group would rank it. Only one employee felt things were better than in the past.

I should point out that a fair number of firefighters stated that the Chief and/or Assistant Chiefs really looked out for them when they were injured or had personal problems. Examples were calling to check on how they were doing or giving them 'emergency time off' to deal with a family crisis.

Specific Issues: I understand that I may not have heard the full story in the examples below. However this is what I heard and is the generally accepted version among the firefighters. Each specific issue was brought up by at least two employees other than the key person involved.

Perception of Favoritism by Chief and Assistant Chiefs: When asked if 'management' was fair and consistent in administering policies I received a mixed response of yes's and no's. However almost every person went on to discuss how some employees were treated better or worse than others. Examples are:

- Several employees stated that the 'extra projects' were not distributed equally. The Assistant Chiefs tended to assign the extra duties to those employees who the Assistant Chiefs knew would get things done. This is a double edged sword with the recognition that the Assistant Chief trusts them but on the other hand 'the reward for doing a good job is more work'. It is also felt that employees who do more to make the Assistant Chiefs look good get more of a break if discipline is being considered.
- There is a perception that the Chief tends to 'have it in for union office holders'. There is a feeling here that if a union concern is brought forward the Chief takes it as a personal affront or challenge to his authority.
- There is a feeling among some of the employees that management is out to get the employee on disciplinary leave. However most of the employees who discussed this issue made it clear that they did not have all the facts.
- Some employees were presented service and recognition awards in a very public and positive manner and in other cases the presentation was, at best, an afterthought.

Inconsistent discipline: Several employees recounted incidents such as a minor damage while backing a truck in where one employee would receive a disciplinary action and another employee having a similar accident would not receive discipline. Examples are:

- Two employees were backing a fire truck in (on separate days) and 'broke a mirror'. One employee received a disciplinary warning in his file and the other employee received no disciplinary action.

- An email was sent to all shifts instructing how to enter a hospital emergency entrance during road construction. Apparently on the day the email was issued an ambulance backed into the entrance (contrary to the email's instructions). On the second day a different driver also backed into the entrance and the garage door came down on the vehicle although it caused no damage. The Assistant Chief in charge was aware of both drivers violating the email instructions but only took disciplinary action against the second driver.
- Employees are allowed to have a volunteer stay over a short time and cover for them if they are going to be late for work. This results in no manpower shortage and helps the employee avoid disciplinary action. In most cases this is no problem however in a recent case an employee called in and a volunteer was willing to stay over but he was told by management that it would not be allowed. The employee calling in late received disciplinary action. The employees that mentioned this case are unclear why the 'swap' was not allowed and came to the conclusion that management was 'out to get the employee'.

Displays of temper: A number of employees' recounted incidents where they were subject to or overheard temper outbursts by Assistant Chief Gemza. They recounted incidents where he would 'yell and swear' at them, sometimes for extended periods of time. Several employees' recounted incidents in which visitors or contractors also witnessed this behavior. These incidents appear to be when he was involved in following up on a problem or issue. He is also quoted as telling employees that 'he can do what he wants because he has the bugles' indicating that because of his rank his decisions can't be questioned.

Several employees stated that they didn't know when 'he was going to go off' and felt like they were 'walking on egg shells' around him. These comments came from about one half the employees of various seniority and rank. After the close of my interviews Assistant Chief Gemza came out to my car to 'straighten out the record' regarding a question I had asked. It rapidly became clear that he had jumped to a wrong conclusion and had his facts wrong but before I could correct his misunderstanding he became visibly agitated and seemed not to hear my explanation. I had to verbally get his attention for him to listen. Since I do not report to him this was no threat to me but if I was a firefighter I would have been worried.

A perception that management rewrites or disregards policies to benefit themselves:

Nepotism: There is a City policy restricting employment of relatives and until recently the Fire Department had a policy prohibiting employment of relatives. In the past this policy has been applied within the Fire Department. In two past cases children of active firefighters had to wait until the parent retired to be hired. The most recent case was over ten years ago. A number of employees interviewed explained that recently the Chief rewrote the 'nepotism' policy to allow employment of relatives as long as a relative did not directly report to a family member. At the same time the job descriptions of the Assistant Chiefs were rewritten so one Assistant Chief (Moody) directly supervises firefighters and the other (Gemza) supervises Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Very shortly after this change Assistant

Chief Gemza's son was hired. Virtually every person I talked to drew the conclusion that the policy was rewritten and the job descriptions of the Assistant Chiefs were rewritten to benefit Assistant Gemza and/or his son.

The reason the son could be hired apparently is that Assistant Chief Gemza's son is a firefighter and does not directly report to his father through the chain of command. However all firefighters are both firefighters and EMT's and the rest of the employees have a hard time with that logic. The majority of the firefighters feel both Assistant Chiefs were complicit in this action but Chief Finn and Assistant Chief Gemza lost a lot of creditability on this issue.

There are several inconsistencies here that bother me. The line employees tell me they have seen a revised (or new) department nepotism policy and that two past employees sons had to wait until their father left to be hired. (Both cases were at least 10 years ago.) After their father retired both sons were then hired. The Chief tells me there never was a policy and is not one now. He stated he had discussed it with the PFC and they said it was ok to proceed to hire Assistant Gemza's son. I did verify in discussion with an employee of the city outside the Fire Department that the subject was briefly discussed at a PFC meeting but I cannot find any formal discussion in the minutes of the past PFC meetings. The Chief also states he talked to Stevens Point H.R. and although the H.R. manager did not like it she said there was no rule against it. She did state that there was a city policy restricting hiring of relatives. I did not attempt to verify either version as it is not critical at this point. The point is it came off as favoritism for an Assistant Chief and playing fast and loose with the rules. In discussion with the Chief he seemed to feel it was his decision and did not seem to understand why that was not good enough for the rest of the staff.

This issue will be hard to move forward from. You can't back up and it will probably be a long time before another firefighters' child applies.

Alcohol on premises: There apparently also is a policy prohibiting alcohol in the department. Several employees told of seeing a bottle of Jamison Liquor on Chief Finn's shelf. The Chief explained he won it from a firefighter on a football bet and that he had it on display but it had not been opened. Regardless of the reason it was on display, open or not, it was a violation of the policy and became a symbol that 'management can disregard the policy and do what they want'. I did see pictures but did not personally observe the bottle and the Chief said it had been suggested that he remove it which he states he did after waiting about a week. In our conversation the chief asked me if I wanted to see the bottle and when I asked if it was still in the building he stated he had 'brought it back in case I wanted to see it.' I declined the opportunity to see it. For the record, I had not discussed the bottle with the chief prior to this meeting and had in no way indicated I may want to see it. If he wanted to show it to me he should have asked me prior to bringing it back in.

In both the cases above the Chief should have understood the impact they would have on the rapport with the staff and handled the situations differently.

As a caution, if the Chief bets with any fire department employee for anything more than an occasional cup of coffee or places bets on department time he is leaving himself open for criticism and potentially serious problems down the road.

The two issues (The Jamison and betting) indicate to me that Chief Finn needs to more clearly understand his role as a leader and role model for the department. He needs to set the example.

Firearms on premises: Several employees also recounted that in the past other employees had brought firearms into the department to work on them and management was aware. When I probed on this issue I found that a number of years ago (at least 10) some employees brought parts of firearms into the building to work on them in their spare time. Employees who remembered this stressed that they only brought parts in and at no time were there enough parts to assemble a working firearm.

As it was explained to me this sounded very plausible. Given the assurance that it had happened a number of years ago and not recently and that no member for the current management team were involved, I did not pursue the subject further.

Employee Turnover: A number of employees raised a concern on the amount of turnover in the department over the past several years.

I was able to contact 6 former employees who had left in the past 3 years. In five of the six cases they had rated the relationship between management and line staff as poor. Each had various reasons for the rating but they followed the same basic concerns raised by current employees. In each case the poor relationship contributed to their decision to leave the department but was not the only factor.

In my discussions with current staff several indicated that they were applying to other fire agencies or other lines of work. Again, the rapport with management may be a factor but did not seem to be the driving factor.

Employees tend to leave an employer for more money, better opportunities, family or personal reasons, or dissatisfaction with the current employer. Typically, assuming that all other factors are the same, similar employers in a similar area should have about the same rate of turn over. I touched base with two other area Fire Departments for comparison.

- The Stevens Point fire department has 37 line staff. Over the past three years they have had 12 terminations. Of those one was a retirement and the remaining eleven were resignations.
- The Wisconsin Rapids Fire Department has 33 firefighters on staff and has had 4 employees leave in the past 3 years.
- The Wausau Fire Department has 55 firefighters and has had 14 total terminations in the past 3 years. Of those 14, 10 were retirements, 3 were resignations and one was an involuntary termination.

While this is rough data I believe that, discounting retirements, the difference in the turnover rate between SPFD and Wisconsin Rapids and Wausau indicates that some negative factors exist in Stevens Point that do not exist at the other two locations.

During the drafting of this document I was asked if the Stevens Point fire department had become a 'training ground' for other local fire departments. Some of the employees who left took similar work in the area and some left the area. Apparently two left for higher positions in the area. So on the surface that does not seem to be the case however it would take further research to give a more definitive answer.

It should be noted that several current firefighters including some who have been with the Department for a number of years felt that for the most part the employees who had left recently 'were no loss to the department'. That may be true but two things need to be remembered: (1) the Department had invested a good deal of money to train these employees and when they left that money was lost, and (2) assuming the hiring process did a good job of screening candidates every new employee starts out with the potential to be a great employee. Therefore if they were a poor employee when they left something happened along the way to sour them. I am concerned that the Chief is minimizing the attrition as 'undesirables' and therefore ignoring the possibility of internal problems.

Management also has discredited the complaining employees as being disgruntled or not meeting the standards of the Department. To consider this I reviewed some of the annual reviews for employees who had serious complaints. The reviews were as recent as 2020 and for the most part the reviews were satisfactory or above and in at least one case the employee was considered for promotion to Lieutenant rank.

Exit interviews with employees leaving a department can be an informative tool in identifying areas of dissatisfaction. To be useful the departing employee must feel that the employer really wants their input and the information will not be used in a retaliatory manner. As a standard part of reviewing the Human Resources management of a department I ask for several years of past exit interview notes or forms. When I asked an Assistant Chief for the past three years exit interview forms I learned there 'were no notes kept'. When I asked the Chief about exit interviews he stated he had an exit interview with each employee before they left but did not keep notes. Several former employees told me they did not have an exit interview. The lack of records indicates they are correct. These exit interviews would have been a beneficial tool to help identify any problems within the Department earlier. I recommend that a formal Exit Interview program be established in conjunction with the City H.R. Department.

Perception that management is more interested in protecting themselves politically than the welfare of the staff: Several employees made the comment that the Assistant Chiefs and Chief were more interested in making sure they did not look bad than properly resolving issues or correcting problems.

- **Theft from employee locker.** An employee apparently had an item stolen from his private locker. I have been told that there had been several other minor thefts from lockers. He sent an email to all Fire department members regarding the issue. He was called in to talk to the Chief. The Chief informed him that he (the Chief) considered his email an accusation that management was somehow responsible for the theft and the email needed to be retracted. Which the employee did in a second email. He felt that the Chief stated or inferred that if he did not retract his original email he would suffer disciplinary action and may lose his job. The employees who mentioned this

incident stated the employee was very upset over it and felt that management was more concerned about themselves than solving the theft problem.

- **Alleged sexual harassment/assault:** This incident was brought up in an anonymous letter and by several employees. After listening to several variations of what happened I have concluded that Assistant Chief Gemza lightly struck another male firefighter in the groin. This action apparently was made in a 'roughhousing' manner and did not cause pain to the employee. The employee was offended by the action and later reported it to his Captain who reported it up the chain of command. The incident was investigated and Assistant Chief Gemza apologized. However, the employee felt 'threatened' during the investigation for reporting the incident. The employee does not know if any formal notation or disciplinary action was placed in Assistant Chief Gemza's file.

Based on the information I received I do not feel this action meets the definition of sexual assault or harassment. However, the action by anyone and especially an Assistant Chief is grossly unprofessional and improper. Also to close a complaint of this nature a meeting should be held with the complaining employee explaining the final decision and actions taken by the department. That did not happen and therefore the employee was left feeling the issue was swept under the rug.

Possibility of Formal Disciplinary Action: I did not find anything that would lead me to believe formal charges should be brought against the Chief or Assistant Chiefs under any State or Federal laws or guidelines. I did not find any evidence of clear violation of City of Stevens Point or Fire Department policies or guidelines, other than possession of a bottle of alcohol, which would lead me to believe that any charges should be brought against the Chief or Assistant Chiefs. The bottle of alcohol incident appears to be resolved prior to my interviews.

Closing Conclusions:

While the ability of the department to meet Stevens Point's needs appears to be satisfactory, something is wrong in the department. I am not able to point to one item, trait or issue that would be an instant fix or stands out as the primary reason for the negative trend in the department. Based on my interviews, the turnover data and some review of related documents there is an indication that the management of the department is not moving the department in the direction necessary to continue as a cohesive fire unit.

Management has done some positive things. These usually are on an individual basis such as calling to check on a sick employee. But then they seem to turn around and mismanage a conversation or interaction with employees. Employees will forgive an occasional misstep by management but if the missteps are even close to the number of management's positive deeds then employees will feel mistreated. Employee memories tend to remember the bad days much longer and more clearly than the good days. That is understandable because they should expect every day to be a good day.

I feel steps need to be taken to change the trend from a negative atmosphere to an upward, more positive, trend. To accomplish this both of the Assistant Chiefs and Chief are going to have to adjust or modify their individual management styles and actions in several ways.

Looking forward, several employees stated, and I received other feedback, that the employees were hopeful that the PFC was (is now) seriously interested in how the Department was being managed. That places the 'monkey on the PFC's back' to monitor the progress in the Department. I recommend that you give careful consideration to some formal method of reviewing or monitoring progress in the future. Clearly you do not want to get in the way of the Chief running the Department and it is not healthy to become the avenue for employee complaints. However I feel it will be necessary to periodically 'take the temperature of the water' to insure that progress is being made.

Recommendations moving forward:

1. The situation in the SPFD is not where it should be right now. It is not as bad as it could be but steps should be taken to improve the rapport between the Chief, Assistant Chiefs and line personnel.
2. Management should modify their autocratic (military) management style when not in an emergency situation and improve their ability to (a) listen to employee thoughts, questions, concerns and suggestions, (b) consider those comments and only then (c) carefully respond. Stating 'I have the bugles so I can do what I want' is not a productive response.
3. Maintain a calm and professional demeanor at all times.
4. Management should make a serious effort to be fair and consistent in administering policies and especially discipline. Policies should be clearly communicated and reviewable by all employees at least 30 days in advance of a change if practical. I heard many employees expressing fear of disciplinary action which is unusual. But if discipline is necessary it should be done in a fair and consistent manner after a complete investigation. And is best done with a cool head.
5. Develop, implement and be consistent with an exit interview program with employees comments forwarded to both the Stevens Point Human Resource Department and the Stevens Point Police and Fire Commission.
6. Consider developing a 'management training' course for current and possibly future Lieutenants and Captains.
7. Continue the positive things they are doing.

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ROBERT J. FINN
FIRE CHIEF

May 19, 2021

To: City of Stevens Point Police and Fire Commission
933 Michigan Avenue
Stevens Point, WI 54481

From: Stevens Point Fire Department Management Staff

Subject: Reply to the Ed Reed Report

After spending many hours with the Police and Fire Commission testifying on the Ed Reed Report we as a management staff feel the need to expand on several half-truths, or false accusation throughout the report. None of this was investigated to find truths, but instead what people wanted to say was considered fact. This entire investigation was based around mostly anonymous letters sent to both the Common Council and Police and Fire Commission.

- It states in the Ed Reed report that operations of the Stevens Point Fire Department are being ran in an effective manner. If this is true, then the department's management team must be running an effective department despite what the letters will lead you to believe.
- We have realized that the policies within the Stevens Point Fire department have not been the best over the years. For many, and we mean many years, members of the department have operated by what someone has said to be true. When a problem arises, instead of taking responsibility for their actions they state, "Show me in a policy where it says that". Lexipol is a new policy program manager addressing this issue. Lexipol was cut from Capital Funding process when it was submitted; however, it was critical to the current chief officers within the department. With that in mind, money was taken out of the operational budget to purchase the program. Implementation of the Lexipol program provided SPFD with the ability to have electronic acknowledgement and hold people accountable. Since the implementation of this program, over 75 policies have been instituted since August of 2020. This accountability has resulted in a small amount of members being upset. Accountability, transparency, and integrity to do the right thing are some of the same characteristics that are included in the report as items that members of the SPFD are claiming that the Chief's do not possess. Leaders understand that we lead from the front and by example, and it starts with us the Chiefs. It also stops with us by following through which is just as important and sometimes even more important, like remembering to just say thank you, giving a pat on the back when deserved, or recognizing someone for

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working hard like most do! Continue to lead from the front and change will happen! It already has with this program and will continue to as we move forward.

- Our union leaders are for the most part the same leaders within the department. We acknowledge their hard work, but again this is part of the 80/20 rule. We have the same people moving the department or union forward and the same members pulling both back, but again like stated in Mr. Reeds report if two disgruntle employees say the same thing it must be true!?
- Discipline has been different in the past, but we are trying to correct this again with Lexipol making it more standardized across the board. Other problems with discipline is that Chief Officers do not, and should not, be going out after discipline is issued and discussing it with members on the line. Only one side of the story is being told which is fine, just do not give credit to these statements for chief officers doing their job. Another issue that our Captains and Lieutenants struggle with is holding other Union Members accountable. We have spoken with them and can recognize the difficult position their placed in as leaders when holding fellow Union Members accountable to department Policy and Procedures.
- Was this Reed Report an Investigation or Not? We have heard, seen, and been told that this was not an investigation and again heard, seen, and been told it is? Which is it...? The Ed Reed Report consistently is filled with inconsistent items not accomplishing what the actual report is supposed to accomplish. Both his graphs on "SPFD ranking of how management is dealing with employees (Active and Terminated Employees)", and on "SPFD ranking of how management is dealing with employees (Active Employees only)" these contradict almost all his nonfactual findings.
- Per Policy 200.8 the Fire Marshal, Training Officer, and Administrative Assistant are all part of the management staff here at the Stevens Point Fire Department. We do not know what more to provide about this matter and why Mr. Reed felt they are not part of the management staff.
- Garrity Rights are being given to members when interviewed about disciplinary issues. This is something that has not been done in the past, but due to recent legal counsel direction, this will be done in the future to protect everyone involved.
- If two people say something, it MUST be true! We have a real problem with this as Mr. Reed did not truly investigate anything members stated, just if two people stated something it MUST be true!? If we allow this thought process to happen, the Stevens Point Fire Department will just become more chaotic. There are such things as checks and balances!
- The fire department runs as a para-military organization and at times under an autocratic leadership style when life and public property are at stake. Just because this is one of many leadership styles occasionally used within the department or because someone does not like what happened, does not mean it is wrong.
- 2020 & 2021 through COVID-19 had everyone dealing with stressors department wide, but again, it is easy to use hindsight to call attention to only the negatives. Managing is hard,

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leading is harder, but through it all, the Chief Officers led the way through a pandemic which affected all of us in some way here at SPFD.

- The statement “tolerances and tempers are running thin”? Again, this is a line staff having this issue, and telling you that they are having problems. We as chief officers assist them through these issues, large or small, when we are made aware of them. One important aspect to aid in correcting these issues is the line staff’s willingness to work together and accept the help that is being offered to them.
- Again, if its table talk it must be true? We do not want to keep addressing the same issues but the report from Mr. Reed in cases continues to go in a circle.
- Under the direction of legal counsel, we were not allowed to talk about the Casey Bielen issues moving forward pending a termination hearing. Members wanted us to talk more openly about it so they could get additional information to inform Casey Bielen during this period. They were also upset we did not keep them informed about the disciplinary proceedings. Again, Chief Officers need to address disciplinary issues and are not at liberty to talk about what is going on. These people just want to be nosy and stir the pot! Because we do not allow these things to happen, they get upset and write letters.
- Employees felt caught in the middle, the chiefs within this department did not put anyone in the middle of this issue. We did not create this issue! They were either on duty at the time of the accident which Casey Bielen caused or put themselves in the middle by supporting Bielen’s actions the past 14 months and helping him get dirt on management, which he asked for from other members of the department. Remember if you cannot discredit your actions, try to discredit who is handling the discipline the evidence discredits the witnesses.
- Family vs Policy: Family is what the fire service and this department is made up of. We watch out for each other and protect one another. Policies are in place to help people through issues when direction is not there to be given.
- Extra Projects go out for people to sign-up for, or get on, the same people continue to volunteer! This is the issue of “I don’t want to do anything again, but after it’s all done, I’ll bitch about it and tell everyone how I would have done it better”. To that we say get involved, but that would be too difficult for some.
- All awards in the department are not the same. Some have different criteria based on the award, which includes why you are receiving it and how you receive it! Most when asked about the awards program do not feel it is needed, but again, the chiefs feel strongly that it is important.
- People do not volunteer to stay over on a shift, they make trades with individuals which are tracked in Aladtec. This is black and white, there is no such thing as volunteering to do your job at the Stevens Point Fire Department on a what they call a “stay over”.
- Job Descriptions for the two A/C’s have not changed since 2008 when the department restructure occurred. The Chiefs job description has not changed since 2014 when they

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hired the new chief. He also never asked for job descriptions for verification of these false statements.

- Who are the two people who had to retire so their family members could be a part of this department? Which again is not true, but Mr. Reed had made mention of this in his report, and I would like to know who the two people were. The only one that I am aware of is Dennis Kitowski?
- The entire Nepotism issue is entirely false and proves that the Ed Reed Report is a work of fiction. A few things to consider; one there was no Fire Department Policy prohibiting employment of relatives at the time of FF/PM Gemza was hired. The second, Policy #1039 was written in late 2020 as part of the Fire Departments Lexipol Policy Program. This policy was submitted by Lieutenant Zander, the program manager, for review to the Primary Working Group (PWG). The third item was that the PFC was aware of the hiring process and ultimately approved the appointment of FF/Medic Gemza III. Lastly, Mr. Reed states that it appears “The point is it comes off as favoritism for an Assistant Chief and play fast and loose with the rules.” Mr. Reed never addressed this issue with any of the Assistant Chiefs pertaining to nepotism or playing fast and loose with the rules. How could this not be discussed with Assistant Chiefs, yet the report includes almost an entire page worth of discussion on this matter?
- The display of temper is not a clear depiction of events nor are the other letters about the department a clear or fair depiction of any events. Note that other than the “letters” Chief Finn nor AC Moody had ever received a complaint or been notified of any issues with AC Gemza about alleged yelling/swearing. Mr. Reed interviewed the Assistant Chiefs and the Chief last, after interviewing the rest of the management team, and line personnel. Then in order AC Gemza, AC Moody and Chief Finn were interviewed. Mr. Reed had said after each interview that if you had anything to add let him know at any time. AC Gemza did meet with Mr. Reed after his interview to clear one item up. “That he himself was not part of the hiring process for FF/PM Gemza III.” Mr. Reed questioned why this was brought up by AC Gemza. It was explained to him that he had interviewed the department, and in his interviews asked about discipline and the hiring process. Mr. Reed had expressed that he was not aware that FF/PM Gemza III was the son of AC Gemza and stated he was confused to why AC Gemza brought this up. It was explained that this seemed improbable that he was unaware of the fact based on he had read the letters and interviewed the entire department.
- Every person who has ever been terminated has always like their boss? We would love to hear everyone who has ever been fired not from any job, but just from fire service jobs and hear how much they all loved their Chiefs, PFC’s, and Councils that let them all go! We would have to believe that would not be the case in most situations.

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- Look at the real numbers for the comparable departments in this area, and outside you will find that Fire/EMS job opportunities are endless right now in the state and across the US as there is a nation job shortage of both firefighters and paramedics.
- What does the Training Ground statement even mean? If the training ground were up and running this person would not have left? Which to me means we are moving in the right direction and moving the department forward with what we are creating.
- Only one member has left for a higher position within the department at least that is what we are aware of? Which was Lt. Briggs for a D/C of Training position with WFD. This was after we would not promise him the new Training Officer position if it were created.
- Again, we as chief officers do not do the annual evaluations on the FF/PM's these are done by company officers, per contract language outlined in the Local 484 and City agreement as an appendix. So why is this an issue? Because members of the local evaluate annually their peers and chief officers agree that some could do better with IAP's this is an issue? Why?
- Also, the statement about people being "considered for promotion" we must follow the contract when it comes to promotions, which we have done, and will continue to do until both parties can agree on new language.
- Several minor thefts from lockers? Is this true? If so, why have we not heard of these issues before, or why have company officers not been told or done anything about these issues. We are appalled that we have thief's within the department and members with no integrity!
- Quinn Warner did admit, in Chief Finns office, that A/C Moody was the thief of the Fart Spray, and Ramen Noddle's, Casey Bielen never admitted to accusing A/C Moody of taking the horn. What has been done about these false accusations?
- Again, Mr. Reed does not even understand who is, or is not a part of the management staff here at SPFD. The captains are not a part of the management staff, Ethan Przybylski's issue was handled with the Captain, and Lieutenant on C-Crew along with union officials at the time. Why do we keep bring this issue up over and over if it has been handled with the Chief?
- The Chief and PFC will be handling Exit interviews, again why does the line staff have to worry themselves about things that are being addressed by the Fire Chief and PFC?
- We are addressing leaders, and future leaders, of the department. This process is being through job descriptions, training and education. The promotional process must be bargained which causes problems since simply moving the department forward with what is right, the union members should be getting something in return.
- The Ed Reed Report "Methodology" if he had followed his own stated methodology, would have eliminated almost his entire report. "Inconsistent discipline," not a single issue brought up could be confirmed with anyone who has firsthand knowledge of any of these instances. Simply fact, none of these issues sighted are true. It would also seem strange that department personnel would have firsthand knowledge of other people's personnel files, or even have the ability to collaborate what is in each file. Each employee has the right to

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has the right to copy their own file with a request and could have shared it with Mr. Reed which did not happen.

- Mr. Reeds report states that it is clear the current firefighters including some who were with the department for several years felt that for the most part the employees who left recently “were no loss to the department”, but then he goes on to contradict his methodology by making a contradictory statement about employees cost of training and blames the Chiefs for the issue. In some cases, his report uses majority as a fact, and in other cases he chooses not to follow his own stated methodology and decides to make a point to disprove it.
- The Ed Reed Report consistently is filled with inconsistencies pertaining to what the actual report is supposed accomplish. Both of his graphs showing “SPFD ranking of how management is dealing with employees (Active and Terminated Employees)” along with “SPFD ranking of how management is dealing with employees (Active Employees only)” contradicts almost all his nonfactual findings.
- His so-called bell curve diagram, which was addressed in detail during the discussions had with the PFC and the rule of 80/20 and the many different leadership styles that are used within the department and giving examples of each.

Professionally,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert J. Finn".

Robert J. Finn
Chief
Stevens Point Fire Department

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph A. Gemza".

Joseph A. Gemza
Assistant Chief of EMS Operations
Stevens Point Fire Department

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jb Moody".

Jb Moody
Assistant Chief of Fire Operations
Stevens Point Fire Department