

Dear Gustavus City Council,

It has been brought to my attention that the city is reviewing the fiscal year's budget and making changes due to a loss of federal funding, as this news can be upsetting. It is also a chance for us to review how we are spending money and making sure every penny is spent wisely. At the end of the day the decisions we make this year will have a lasting impact on generations to come. As a volunteer on the GVFD I was involved in a department budget meeting and it was exposed how unwisely we are spending money. As this is my opinion, I would like to lay out some facts so it is on the record for all to hear.

A fire department's main goal is to save lives and property for our lovely community. And our department is failing. Not because of the volunteers, who invest countless hours and put their own lives on the line every time the tone goes off, but because of this city's decision to prioritize funds to the wrong line items. So let's take a deeper dive.

Line item one:

Payroll expenses:

The payroll expenses for this rural, VOLUNTEER fire department have almost quadrupled over the past five fiscal years. As a matter of fact we spend almost 80% of our budget, or should I say taxpayer money (who pay to be protected) on employee's. And what do we accomplish by paying 80% of our budget on payroll?

1. Having a fire department that can't even go into a burning building due to lack of training.
2. Being unable to recruit new volunteers due to lack of organization.
3. Not having adequate equipment to respond to certain emergencies.
4. Looking like a comedy show to the community, and not trusted by community members, not because of the volunteers. But due to the infrastructure and lack of training.

Let's break this down a little more:

We average 40 calls a year. We pay roughly \$123,878.13 on payroll a year of a roughly 180,000 dollar budget.

So let's take 123,878.13 and divide it by 40 calls a year.  $\$123,878.13/40 = \$3,096.95$

That's \$3096.95 a call we pay for a VOLUNTEER fire department, while our volunteers receive a check for \$15.00 per call. This isn't an issue of volunteers wanting more money. This is an issue of your volunteers screaming for help, asking for more training, more structure and less waste. If we move down the line items of the budget we will see that there are multiple issues with this budget. The lack of setting the correct priorities, and allocating the funds towards, Radios, Batteries, Training, emergencies life saving equipment (i.e jaws of life, and extraction

equipment, vehicle maintenance, outdated systems regarding our protocols, oh and did I mention TRAINING.

It's really upsetting and discouraging that the city would rather pay for employment in a VOLUNTEER fire department, for us to be able to play dress up instead of being properly trained to respond to any emergency. Including a house fire with children stuck inside of the house. The outcome of that emergency will be your volunteers looking like fools instead of heroes, since we can't even go inside to attempt to save them due to a budget that has been misallocated.

Line item 2:

Acquiring two new vehicles is not an option, and here is why.

Every fiscal year from this point forward our department will be making more cuts to the necessary line items to cover more maintenance, shipment cost and added fluid cost. I will break it down a step further.

Let's say the aftertreatment system (DEF) of our new water tender throws a code, this new vehicle, covered by manufacturer warranty will have to be shipped to the closest dealer to be fixed. The closest dealer will be either Seattle or Anchorage. The cost of the shipment will be on us, as the warranty will only cover the broken items on the vehicle. Unless of course the city decides to get it fixed here, which will void the warranty all together.

Insurance costs will go up. As well as the cost of the DEF fluid which is currently only available at Toshco for the price of 35 dollars a gallon. We will burn roughly 2 gallons a call while we idle if not more.

In closing the city needs to quit acting like we are running a department with massive call volume and allocate the funds to invest more into the safety and well being of our citizens and VOLUNTEERS. If you would like more of a breakdown of our current budget and where funds should be properly invested please reach out. Because at the end of the day this may just be politics and annual budget annoyance to you, but this is a matter of life and death to your citizens and volunteers. The waste and misallocations must be called out publicly and must be changed. Our lives and the lives of this community are in your hands when it comes to the budget.

Sincerely a very concerned and disappointed Volunteer.