

Fire district completes work on user's manual

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — Polk County Fire District No. 1 has completed work on its first standards of cover.

"The standard of cover is the user's manual," Chief Ben Stange said. "Anyone from the public should be able to pick it up, know who the fire district is, how it's staffed, all that stuff."

In the years 2014 through 2016, the district's response times to medical calls varied depending on which vehicle was used and which station volunteers responded to.

Stange said he has a goal for the first medic to be out the door in 1 minute, 30 seconds, 80 percent of the time.

For the district's main ambulances, those figures were met 58 percent of the time in 2016.

The district is close to meeting its goals of arriving to medical calls in the city limits of Monmouth or Independence within 8 minutes, 90 percent of the time.

Last year, the first two ambulances out arrived within

8 minutes 87 percent of the time.

The document uses tools to evaluate how the fire district is doing and sets a baseline to compare future performance.

"It defines the baseline emergency standards — where we're going to be how fast," Stange said. "We need a way to measure ourselves."

Stange said the statistics used to create the standards of cover are from 2016 and before, so he is excited to see how 2017 holds up against those baseline figures.

The document also helps show how — and where — the department should grow through maps illustrating where the most calls for service are throughout the district's boundaries.

It takes into account population growth estimates from Portland State University, and how that may affect the fire service.

According to the population forecast, the cities of Monmouth and Independence will grow, but not as quickly as nearby Dallas.

"When we're talking future plans, we know we

aren't going to need three more two-story fire stations," Stange said. "We will still be a combination agency at that population. We'll still depend on volunteers. We'll still need career staff."

The standards of cover evaluate the response times for fire and emergency medical services calls, as well as the number of calls that the district receives.

While the number of calls have increased, it is the percentage of overlapping calls that concerns Stange.

"As we're trying to demonstrate right now, it's a bigger issue for us," he said. "We have both ambulances from Dallas heading over right now — both of our medics are out."

Creating the standards of cover document was one of the top goals of Polk No. 1's board of directors in 2017.

Other goals include securing or improving funding, reducing liabilities, incentivize or require improved fitness, clarify and track training, and re-evaluate mission and vision statements.

Gordon named new mayor of Falls City

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Jeremy Gordon quickly fell in love with Falls City when he and his wife moved to town a little more than two years ago.

Now, he's the mayor, appointed by the Falls City City Council on a 3-2 vote on Monday night.

When asked why he applied for the mayor post, Gordon said he felt driven to give back to what he believes is his family's "forever home."

"I really feel compelled to serve the community that has been so good to us," Gordon said. "I've never experienced community like this."

This is the first public office Gordon has held.

"There will be a learning curve," he said. "This is my first attempt at serving in local government."

Gordon was one of three candidates seeking the job. City Councilor Jenn Drill and resident Shane Curry Jr. were the other two, but only Gordon and Drill were

present for the council interview Monday.

Gordon is a project manager and state authorization administrator at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and is on the Polk Community Development Corporation Board.

He works from home in the full-time job with the university and consulted with his boss about whether he could perform in both roles.

"She is incredibly open to adjusting my hours in real time in any way that needs to happen," Gordon said. "I'll be busy, no doubt, but in a way that I think I will find compelling and exciting and as an opportunity to be creative."

When asked what his goal would be if selected to finish former mayor Terry Ungricht's term, he said he wouldn't take office expecting to make wholesale changes.

"Making changes for the sake of change doesn't always benefit everybody," he said. "I don't think I have that kind of umbrella stamp that I would bring or want

to change. I think I would rather want to enhance the capacity and the positive things about the city, and help solve problems that have been lingering for a while."

Among those issues, in his opinion are: Infrastructure, affordable housing a potential levy to support fire services, and the contract with Southwest Polk Rural Fire Protection District.

The council asked Gordon and Drill questions for about 35 minutes before taking a vote.

"I think we got pretty lucky," said Council President Tony Meier before asking for councilors to fill out their ballots. "I think we got two excellent candidates."

Councilors Lori Jean Sickles, Charlie Flynn and Dennis Sickles voted for Gordon. Cliff Lauder and Tony Meier voted for Drill.

Gordon was sworn in immediately after the vote.

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