

Dear Harrison County Resident,

As Mayor of Bethany and members of the City Council, we have been tasked with a complex issue relating to the Bethany Fire Department, which is paid for by residents and businesses of Bethany by their property taxes. You may recall earlier last year a property tax question was placed before the voters who both live inside Bethany city limits as well as those county residents living around the city but not already inside one of the five existing fire districts within Harrison County. This question was placed before voters to establish an encompassing fire district, which would ultimately assumed the City of Bethany's current Fire Department. We are not a supporter of increasing taxes, especially in times like now when expenses seem only to increase for everyone. As a result of this strongly held ideology, we decided to offer an alternative to this tax increase by proposing the formation of a 'cooperative' style membership structure for anyone living outside the city limits of Bethany who do not live in a fire district. As a result of the question failing at the ballot by the voters, we are writing to you today to offer a further explanation and the opportunity to buy a membership.

We as a city have seen an escalation of expenses relating to the fire department for services rendered by our hard working volunteers outside the city limits over the last several years, especially along I-35. As a result of an abnormally dry year in 2014, we were forced to begin collecting fees for services rendered, as the City of Bethany simply could not afford to continue offering fire services without additional revenue to pay for operations, training, and leadership at the department. This tiered system of billing was ultimately not working so we decided to scrap the proposed fees in favor of waiting for the formation of this cooperative fire district beginning in 2016. While we were able to realize some savings last year and have a strategic plan to replace and make considerable investments in the department, we simply cannot afford to do so without additional revenue from outlying areas that the department services. At the same time, having had numerous conversations with many property owners outside the City of Bethany, we are fully aware how important the Fire Department is to you folks should an emergency arise. We are committed to ensuring you continue to receive services under absolutely every circumstance should the need arise. Please allow us to make it absolutely clear: regardless of whether or not you pay for a membership, should a fire break out on your property - the Bethany Fire Department will respond.

We are proposing an annual membership fee of \$50 per property owner of 10 acres or less and \$100 per property owner of over 10 acres, to act as insurance for you in the event an emergency fire situation occurs requiring the use of the City of Bethany's Fire Department and its volunteer firemen. Should you decide to purchase a membership, you would not receive a bill should a fire call be made to the city. However, we also want to let you know that should a membership *not* be purchased by you, we will have to collect a \$1000 call out fee for any call made that dispatches the Bethany's Fire Department to your property. We as elected Councilmen and Mayor wrote and passed a budget for last fiscal year that spends \$60,000 on the fire department and we operate on a balanced budget. This means we spend only what we take in as revenue, not relying on reserves for the first time in decades. Because of this strong fiscally conservative budgetary principal as well as restrictions, which require dollars received for other services remain in those

departments, i.e. sewer fees etc., we need your help. In reality a department the size of Bethany, considering the many upgrades to equipment that is required for the safety of our volunteers, a realistic budget number is around \$100,000 annually. We truly want to invest further in the department and believe this is entirely possible should you decide to help by purchasing an annual membership. This will be a win-win scenario for both the city and county residents who need fire protection services to continue and improve.

This proposal is one that works well for a rural Macon County fire district and its implementation caused their revenues to increase by double digits for two years in a row, allowing them to have ample funds to operate and invest in equipment. Municipal services like a fire department is costly but necessary and the City of Bethany has a long history of supporting a volunteer fire department. We believe this to be a serious step forward in services and a good alternative to raising taxes on you, the property owner. We do, however, need your participation for it to work.

We ask for your serious consideration and that you remit by check payable to 'City of Bethany' a total of \$50 or \$100 for one year's service beginning April 1, 2016. All monies paid will go only to the Fire Department and prevent any movement of funds to any other department. The money will be reported in the annual budget process, which is open to the public. Should a check not be received by April 1st, we will keep records of all property owners in conjunction with County Courthouse records to keep an updated database at City Hall. This will allow us to ensure your status as a dues paying member of the Fire Department is on record at all times. This letter will serve as notice that our policy as a city owned Fire Department will change April 1 for services rendered to property owners outside the city limits. This will bring the cooperative billing system in line with the city's annual budget calendar and the period between now and April 1 will be a 'grace' period for you as a property owner should a fire occur.

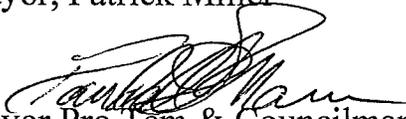
- Each property owner will be charged \$50 if you own 10 acres or less for a one year membership. If you own over 10 acres, the membership fee is \$100.
- Memberships are from April 1st to March 31st and will not be prorated.
- No one will be billed for *making* a phone call to reports a fire – only the property on fire will determine to whom a bill will be sent.
- It is **strongly encouraged** to notify county and city authorities at 660-425-3199 if you are going to start a grass fire, prior to starting the fire, to eliminate an unwanted response charge. An unwanted response to a fire is one that was not reported to dispatch as a controlled burn before the time of dispatch.
- Should the Bethany Fire department be dispatched outside the city limits and a membership has not been purchased by the owner of the property, the following fees will be assessed:
 - \$1,000.00 will be billed to the property owner where the fire has occurred.
 - \$500.00 will be billed to the owner of a vehicle or machinery fire.
 - \$300.00 will be billed for an unwanted response.
- Please remit payment as soon as possible to the City of Bethany, as the grace period will end April 1, 2016, and billing for services rendered to non members will immediately begin on April 1.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. Please feel free to call City Hall with any questions at 660-425-3511 or email us at admin@bethanymo.com.

Respectfully,



Mayor, Patrick Miller

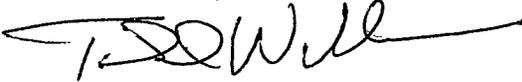


Mayor Pro Tem & Councilman, Randy Mann

Councilman, Steve Miles



Councilman, Todd Williams



Councilman, Lance Johns

