



July 31, 2026

Dear Eldridge residents,

While I'm sure most of you are aware, the City of Eldridge and the Eldridge Volunteer Fire Department have been engaging in discussions for several years concerning the department's challenges in serving a growing community with a shrinking volunteer base. Those discussions became more amplified in May of 2025, when fire department leaders approached the city council with very real concerns about burnout, and asked the city to take it over, and hire a full-time chief.

The one thing I learned in my two years on the council, and now my first seven months as mayor, is that the wheels of government move slowly, and there never seems to be a quick and easy solution to most matters. Due diligence needs to be done, legal implications need to be investigated, and solutions need to be sought. Someone once told me that serving in city government is like honey. When it works, it's sweet, but it can often be sticky and messy.

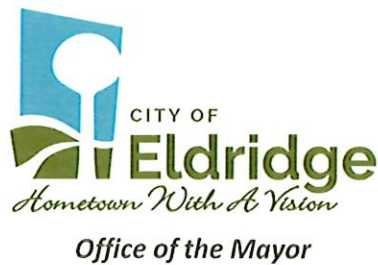
There is no question that things have gotten sticky and messy over the past 15 months. While the two entities initially tried to work toward a transition that would be most beneficial to our residents, the fire department ultimately decided in June that they wanted to remain independent and provided the city with two options. In an email they asked the city to double the fire department's annual funding from \$364,000 to \$766,000, which would allow them to hire their own fire chief, continue to manage their pay-per-call personnel, as well as cover capital expenses. Or, option two would be for the City to absorb the fire department and it would become a city entity. They wanted a decision by July 15, and a transition completed by Oct. 1.

Initially, we were told their demands were non-negotiable, but they did come to the table at a special committee of the whole meeting on July 13, where there was what I believe to be honest and open discussion, including talk about some sort of hybrid model where the city would manage the capital assets, with the fire department hiring its own chief and managing personnel.

The fire department stated that the nearly 15-month delay had caused serious issues of mistrust with city officials, and that it would be nearly impossible to regain that trust. Several times during that discussion the council was told to "just make a decision," but also, that due to that lack of trust, nearly one-half of the department's 20 members would walk away if the department became a city entity.

Citing the need for public oversight of taxpayer money, and going back to the department's original ask in May 2025, the city council voted 5-0 on July 20 to absorb the fire department into a city entity, where it would be treated like any other city department, whether that be police, public works or administration.

Let me be clear. The city council's action on July 20 in no way demeans the service and contributions the volunteer firefighters provide our community. We are fortunate to have them



protecting us night and day, and their service is exemplary. Under the city's oversight, the fire department would still be able to serve their community as volunteers and would still be paid \$20 per call. The main difference is that they would be serving under a fire chief hired by the City, and the city would oversee the budget.

It is imperative that the City and fire department work together to better serve our residents, and there is no doubt it will be difficult to move forward without them. I believe that the City and fire department will be stronger together, than apart, and that's what's best for the residents we all serve.

I also believe that the city council and our staff have tried to find common ground with the fire department, and we will continue to do so as we continue this transition process. However, as a result of the impasse we find ourselves in, I want to communicate what the city is doing moving forward.

1. Last week I sent individual letters to each member of the fire department, asking them to meet with me and Councilman Ryan Iossi, either as a group or individually, to find a path moving forward.
2. In the very near future I will be putting together a transition team as we move closer to the fire department's Oct. 1 deadline.
3. There will be an ordinance on the Aug. 3 city council agenda allowing the city to create a city fire department, and that will take three readings to become official.
4. City staff has reached out to all of our Mutual Aid partners making them aware of our tenuous situation and solidifying their support in case of emergencies.
5. City staff and myself met with Davenport fire and city officials making them aware of what has transpired, and we will keep those lines of communication open.
6. City Administrator Nevada Lemke and myself have met with the DeWitt city administrator and fire chief to seek information on how that department is run.
7. We have met with Scott County officials and MEDIC.
8. In the very near future we will begin advertising for a new full-time fire chief.

As we work through this process, I will continue to provide updates on the city website, and I ask for your patience and trust as we work through this. As I stated in my recent letter to the fire department, no matter how far apart we may seem to be, or how much hurt has been caused on both sides, we owe it to our residents and community to find a solution that serves everybody's best interests, including the fire department, the city, and most importantly, the citizens we serve. You, the residents, deserve our best efforts to create a path forward.

Sincerely,

Scott Campbell
Mayor