

**2024 Decennial Committee Report**  
**St. Joseph-Stanton Fire Protection District**



**Original Committee in 2023**

District Trustees: Norman Paul, Richard Denhart, & Howard Marsh

District Chief: Josh Reese (**Committee Chair by designation**)

District Assistant Chief: Rusty Shafer

District Residents: Brian Buss & Danny Ehmen

**Revised Committee in 2024**

District Trustees: Danny Ehmen, Brian Buss, & Howard Marsh

District Chief: Josh Reese (**Committee Chair by designation**)

District Assistant Chiefs: Casey Buss & Rusty Shafer

District Residents: Dan Davis & Richard Denhart

## **I. BACKGROUND**

The St. Joseph-Stanton Fire Protection District, referred to as SJS or SJSFPD for the remainder of the report, was established in 1947. In May of 1947, a petition was filed with the Champaign County Court, for the purpose of proposing the creation of the Fire Protection District. It was approved & SJS started equipping & recruiting, which allowed us to start providing services in 1948.

SJSFPD covers 72 square miles with a total population of approximately 7,000 people. The village of St. Joseph is located within our response area consisting of approximately 2 square miles, and a population of 4,000 people. The remainder of our response area is located within the townships of St. Joseph, Stanton, and very small parts of Ogden, Somer, and Urbana townships.

We provide fire suppression, rescue services, & fire prevention education, as well as emergency medical services, with members ranging from first responders, EMT-B's, EMT-I's, & Paramedics. Our call volume, in recent years, has climbed to an average of approximately 425 calls annually. It is also our responsibility, through an agreement with the Village of Saint Joseph, to provide Storm spotting & EMA services.

Special areas of interest that are located within our district include Interstate 74, and the Union Pacific Railroad. Interstate 74 is very heavily traveled through our district with an estimated 34,400 vehicles utilizing it daily. Vehicles of all sizes carrying just about every type of freight imaginable travel the interstate, and make up many of the motor vehicle accidents that SJSFPD responds to. The Union Pacific Railroad main line between Chicago, and St. Louis also traverses our district just East of the village of Saint Joseph. This railroad carries a variety of freight, including hazardous materials in bulk, so there is elevated potential for a rail involved incident.

## **II. GOVERNING BODY**

The Fire District is governed by a 3 members trustee board, which are appointed by the Champaign County Board. The Board of Trustees is the corporate authority of the Fire Protection District, as identified in the Illinois Statutes. Within the Board of Trustees are elected positions of President, Vice President, & Secretary/Treasurer. The Board of Trustees are also responsible for appointing or contracting, a book keeper, lawyer, & accounting firm.

The Board of Trustees is legally responsible for establishing general policies to guide the District, approve programs and services, pass tax levies, and appropriate financial resources. The Board of Trustees is responsible for appointing a Fire Chief, who serves as the Chief Administrator for the Fire District. The Fire Chief is also responsible for overseeing the current operations, future planning, budgeting, recruitment, retention, & any disciplinary matters.

The District has no full time employees, all members are a "paid per call/training" status. We average 30-40 current members, at any given time. The Fire Chief is responsible for appointing the Assistant Chief(s), who assist & help oversee all of the above. All member additions, promotions, demotions, suspensions, resignations, or terminations are done at the discretion of the Chief Officers, who in turn seek final approval from the Board of Trustees.

### III. DECENNIAL COMMITTEE INFORMATION

- A. Our original committee was formed on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023, those members were:
- Our Trustees: Norm Paul, Richard Denhart, Howard Marsh
  - Our Chief Officers - Chief Josh Reese & Assistant Chiefs Casey Buss & Rusty Shafer
  - District Residents - Brian Buss & Danny Ehmen
- A. In March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024, we revised our committee, as one Trustee had retired, one had passed away, & 2 new Trustees had been appointed by the County.
- Our Trustees: Danny Ehmen, Brian Buss, & Howard Marsh
  - Our Chief Officers - Chief Josh Reese & Assistant Chiefs Casey Buss & Rusty Shafer
  - District Residents - Richard Denhart & Dan Davis

#### A. MEETING DATES (50 ILCS 70/20)

##### **First Meeting - May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

This meeting formed the committee & laid the groundwork, determined the duties, & set the expectations.

##### **Second Meeting - March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

The committee was revised during this meeting & we recapped the duties & expectations.

##### **Third Meeting - June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

We reviewed our Decennial information flow sheet, our operating policies, successes, & areas we could improve upon.

##### **Fourth Meeting - September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

### IV. INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS

SJS is an active member of the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System, also known as Illinois MABAS. We are a member of Division 28, which gives us access to specialized equipment, specialized services, & additional resources, for any incident that we may require any of the above. We also have mutual aid agreements in place with our surrounding fire districts. Some of those agreements are automatic, while some are upon request, both of which can bring additional manpower as needed & also opens up the response of specialized services or equipment, for specific incident types.

We are a member of the Champaign County Fire Chief's Association & are very active in that organization. This membership also gives us access to additional resources, equipment, services, & training opportunity for our members. It also gives us an additional platform for information sharing & strategic planning.

We have an agreement in place with Carle Ambulance, for providing EMS transport, at the Paramedic (ALS) level, for the EMS based calls for service within our district. Carle also provides our EMS training program & oversees our EMS operations, as we operate under their protocols & direction, within EMS Region 6 of Illinois.

## V. REVIEW

We have reviewed the following, non-exhaustive list of laws, policies, training materials, and other documents applicable to the district, to ensure compliance and to determine if any of the following should be updated or revised.

- Fire Protection District Act (70 ILCS 705)
- Open Meetings Act (5 ILCS 120/1)
- Freedom of Information Act - FOIA (5 ILCS 140)
- Public Officer Prohibited Activities Act (50 ILCS 105/4.1)
- Human Rights Act (775 ILCS 5/2-109)
- Decennial Committees of Local Government Efficiency Act (50 ILCS 701)
- State Ethics Laws, including, but not limited to the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act (5 ILCS 430/1-1)
- Local Government Efficiency & Size in Illinois: Counting Revenues, Not Governments, by Wendell Cox (2016)
- Compliance with the State of Illinois
- Compliance with Office of State Fire Marshall (OSFM)
- Compliance with Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH)
- Compliance with FEMA / NIFRS Incident Reporting standards
- Compliance with OSHA/IDOL standards
- The ordinances, resolutions, budgets, & minutes for SJSFPD
- Review of our District By-Laws & policies
- Review of our budgets, levies, & other financial based statements
- Our OMA Officer is: Josh Reese
  - We are OMA compliant, with our meeting schedule publicly posted, annually & all of our meeting minutes kept on file
  - We do have a policy for public attendance & public comments during meetings
- Our FOIA Officer is: Rusty Shafer
  - Our FOIA requests are kept electronically
  - We are compliant with all FOIA requests
- All of our Trustees have completed their introductory OMA Training
- All of our Trustees have filed their Statement of Economic Interests with the county
- All of our members partake in annual Sexual Harassment Prevention training
- All of our members partake in annual HIPAA training

## VI. ACHIEVEMENTS

- In 2024, we contracted a new District Attorney. This attorney is more in tune with modern laws & policies, as it relates to fire protection districts. He is also more aware of budget regulations & how to shape them to better suit our needs. His services will continue to serve the district & it's resources well for years to come.
- In 2023, we also contracted with an accounting firm, to handle all of our payroll needs & tax filing needs, as well. With more regulations & processes being added all of the time, this will help to ensure we stay compliant & ahead of coming changes.
- We have several neighboring departments that we will share training opportunities & even equipment, which in the end, saves all of the districts money.

- Our agreement with Carle Ambulance, for housing an ambulance in our station, has led to faster response times for medical calls within our district. That current agreement is a way to have an ambulance in house, without the large expense of paying for an exclusive ambulance being assigned to our district. We count this as a huge win for our tax payers, to not have the larger expense, before our volume of medical calls really supports it.
- During the construction of our updated station, which was completed in 2019, we built into the design, a emergency diesel generator, as well as a small storm shelter. During the high winds storm in June of 2023, power was knocked out to most of our district. Trees were down, power poles were snapped, & power lines were knocked down. Some areas of our district were without power for a couple of hours, while other areas were out for longer than a week. We lost power at the station, for the better part of 6 days. During that period, we were able to remain functional & continue providing the services that are our duties. Not all areas of our building were on the circuit for emergency power, so we had to do without some non-essential functions, such as cooling/heating of the HVAC system. With that Achilles being highlighted, we contracted with an electrician to make sure some of those needs would be met, if we were to encounter a similar situation. This means we can open the doors to the community, as a heating or cooling center, if severe incidents were to occur again.
- Our current apparatus fleet is:
  - ~First out engine - Engine 1151 - is a 2016 Pierce Pumper - 8 years old
    - \*1151 also serves as our first out rescue based incident responder & is equipped as such
  - ~Reserve - Engine 1152 - is a 2003 Pierce Pumper on an International chassis - 21 years old
  - ~Water Tanker - Tender 1166 - is a 1994 International - 30 years old
    - \*A new tanker has already been ordered, from Alexis Fire, to replace 1166. The new tanker will also feature a pumper setup, which makes the apparatus multi dimensional.
  - ~Water Tanker - Tender 1167 - is a 2014 Kenworth - 10 years old
  - ~First out for EMS calls - Rescue 1175 is a 2020 - Fouts Bros. on a Ford F530 chassis - 4 years old
    - \*1175 is a multi faceted & equipped apparatus. It can also function as a rescue unit, with a smaller amount of rescue equipment, & a brush truck, with a forestry pumper setup on it.

As vehicle costs have continued to rise, we have tweaked our replacement schedules a tad, while trying to maximize the life of each vehicle, & striving to meet NFPA 1901 standards. We have all of our apparatuses serviced by reputable, manufacturer trained or approved vendors, & maintenance records are kept on file. We also have all of our pumps tested annually, in accordance with NFPA & industry standards.

- Despite the rising costs of equipment & bunker gear, we a practice in place, for keeping our members in NFPA compliant gear. NFPA standards call for all structural firefighting coats, pants, boots, helmets, & misc. PPE to be in service for 10 years, from the date of manufacture.

Around 8-10 years ago, we started ordering small amounts of gear annually, to fall back into compliance. This also helped by setting the stage, for having smaller amounts of gear “expiring” & coming due for replacement in a more gradual manner in the future. This replacement schedule has helped make it easier to plan & budget for a replacement schedule.

Earlier this year, we inventoried & reviewed all of our bunker gear, to verify our compliance levels, & ensure we are on track. When we identified a few shortcomings, with some boots & helmets, which were ordered in August of 2024, to update them.

- In 2024, the district elected to contract the 3<sup>rd</sup> party services of a company called Lexipol. The specialize in the creation, updating, & educating members on the districts policies, as well as the operating procedures, to form an electronic policy & procedure manual. This manual is available, to our members either online or through an app, so they have them handy at all times.

All current members, as well as any future probationary will have to electronically acknowledge each policy or procedure. Any time state laws, federal laws, or industry standards are update, the team at Lexipol automatically update those policies, We can also update them as needed as well & when any updates are performed, those policies are sent back out to our members for re-acknowledging.

This migration was done to help ensure we are always compliant & stay up to date, with the most litigious avenues that could help prevent the district from being wrapped up in a lawsuit. Yes, we have insurance for such possibilities, but any measure we can use, is a good thing.

- We have had a long standing program, where elderly residents, or residents that are more prone to the risk of falling & needing assistance, can get access to a Knox Box, for emergency responders to get into the home, without damaging locked doors or windows. We purchased more of those boxes earlier this year, to have more of them available. Upon request, when there is a need, we verify the need, & then we place the box. The residents are informed that these are loaned to them, free of charge, we just ask that they be returned if they no longer need them, or move out of the home. This helps some of our out risk residents feel comfortable in their homes, while also knowing emergency help could get in swiftly, if the need arises.
- We share a fire safety education based smoke “house” trailer, with Homer Fire & Sidney Fire, which gives all 3 of our departments, access to the education tool, without all of us having to purchase similar items.
- We have been fairly active in grant writing opportunities over the past 10 years. We are typically awarded a handful of grants, in varying amounts, every year. We feel that this help bridge the gap on some items that we may need, but are harder to budget for, with higher priority needs coming first. One of our recent grant approvals, was for the purchase of an automatic CPR device, which delivers high quality, consistent chest compressions, while keeping our members safer & freeing up their hands for other life saving duties.

## **VII. REVENUE & BUDGETS**

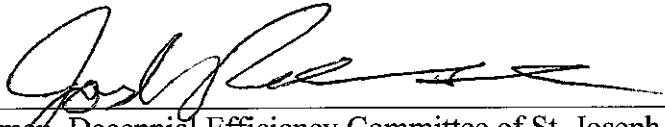
- **Equalized Assessed Values for our District**
  - 2023 - 187,218,388
  - 2022 - 175,957,998
  - 2021 - 166,237,089
- **Fiscal Year Budgets**
  - 2022-2023 - 567,000
  - 2021-2022 - 603,900
  - 2020-2021 - 446,153

## VIII. INEFFICIENCIES WE IDENTIFIED THAT WE COULD IMPROVE ON

- While we have been active in the grant writing scene. Our committee has identified that we should focus even more attention in this arena, as there are more opportunities available. And currently, there are more districts applying, for somewhat shrinking funding opportunities. So, if we want to continue being awarded a decent amount of grant requests, we are going to have to write more of them.
- We also identified that we should continue focusing on & planning for our next ISO Rating inspection process. Our ratings are far better than a lot of departments across the state of Illinois, but that doesn't mean we are comfortable sitting back. Those ratings are factored into the insurance algorithm that the rates for our district's commercial properties, as well as residential properties are factored upon. We will continue to work towards improving our scoring when the chances come up.
- We want to continue focusing on recruiting new members, while also doubling down on retention of the members we do have. We have the blessing, while many surrounding departments are constantly in the boat of struggling to find new members, we are lucky that we have historically been very well staffed. At times, when our numbers get lower, our recruiting efforts have been very successful. Sometimes to the point of having to turn off those efforts, so we can focus on the initial training of those new members. But we also realize that, at any point, those successes could dry up & training, as well as equipping new members can be more costly. So we want to further focus on & invest in the retention of our current members, which helps build the foundation for remaining well staffed & balanced for the future.
- In order to ensure competitive prices & options, we have diversified the companies & sales reps we have connections to. So we are routinely seeking more than 2 quotes for purchases. This means we are not locked in with any sales rep or company & generally gets us more options & better prices. Our strategy isn't always to go with the lowest price, instead we lean toward the lowest, qualified quote.
- We are going to continue working with some of our surrounding fire districts, to identify training opportunities & training equipment opportunities, where we could work together, share the expenses, & then share between multiple districts.
- We have a very strong, community based following on Facebook. With many members who are active with our information, fire safety, & community messages. We also have many, who will reach out with questions, through Facebook. We also realize, we could strive to have even more information sharing & transparency, with an active & actively updated website. Our previous website fell pray to a software fluke, that wiped out all of our info, so our current website, is simply a placeholder. We simply have not put the time into it, because there have been other things that took up the bulk of our attention. However, in 2025, the committee would advise that we work on getting that back up to par, which could be another platform for connecting with the residents of our district. We could envision having our meeting schedule posted, as well as meeting agendas, minutes, & other pertinent district info, where residents could find it, in 1 central location.

**IX. DECENNIAL MEETINGS RECAP**

- Our Decennial Committee meetings were posted for public view & invitation to attend. We had no guests, so therefore, had no guest comments, which also meant that we did not have any follow up guest surveys to include in our review.

Submitted by:   
Chairman, Decennial Efficiency Committee of St. Joseph-Stanton Fire Protection District

Date: 9/11/24