

# Getting Pumped for Pumpers: Public Gets Heated at Godfrey Fire Protection District Trustees Meeting

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GODFREY – The Godfrey Fire Protection District (GFPD) Board of Trustees voted unanimously to approve the purchase of a \$449,000 custom-built pumper engine at the beginning of its meeting 8 a.m. Wednesday morning, but the meeting continued with heated public comments.

The pumper, proposed by GFPD Chief Erik Kambarian, will be assembled by Safety KME and Mac's Fire with a base price of \$419,995. The additional costs come from the custom builds done by both Safety KME and Mac's Fire to meet the needs of the GFPD. The majority of those upgrades, such as \$4,100 for hot dip galvanized frame rail upgrade and \$1,583 for cab and body corrosion protection upgrade, were done to ensure the body and chassis of the pumper would sustain the needs of the GFPD for the next two decades. It will be funded through a \$421,000 loan through Liberty Bank, which will be paid in \$50,000 increments by the Village of Godfrey annually, as well as \$14,000 provided by donations from Beverly Farm, Walmart and the GFPD Rescue Fund and \$14,000 from community donations matched by the GFPD Foreign Fire Insurance Board.

This pumper was described as “adequate” by Kambarian for the department's needs. Trustee Terry Ford made the motion to approve it and it was seconded by Trustee Steve Rynders before being approved unanimously. After a construction meeting is held in Pennsylvania regarding the pumper's build and the approval of the contract by the GFPD's lawyer, the truck is expected to arrive in service in around 350 days.

It should be noted, however, this was not the first pumper chosen by Kambarian and the Godfrey Fire Protection District. Kambarian said the first pumper had a more versatile ladder, shorter wheelbase, better lighting and carrying capacity and a larger engine. That pumper was originally priced at \$494,000 before Trustee Maurice “Moe” Hand was able to lower that number to \$455,000.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, a woman representing Beverly Farm – the largest caller to the GFPD – said Ford was in her office describing the firefighters in the GFPD as “children.” When asked for clarification, Ford did admit to making the comparison.

“I didn't call them children directly,” he said. “I compared them and the new pumper to taking children to the store. When the kid wants a toy they cannot afford and you tell them they can't have it, they throw a tantrum. I compared them to that.”



This back-and-forth between Ford and members of the public caused several jeers from the audience. When a man demanded to know why the truck described as more suitable for the GFPD by Kamabrian was not going to be purchased, Rynders said it was because they could not afford it, adding they were as much as \$135,000 “in the hole.” To this, a man in the crowd called out “bull!” That man claimed the Village of Godfrey pledged as much as a half million dollars to assist the GFPD in attaining a new pumper, saying an additional \$5,000 would have been affordable.

Another member of the crowd asked the GFPD's lawyer if the trustees could be removed with a referendum or re-chosen by the people. He was told that was not possible, adding the trustees are chosen by the general public for six-year-terms.

Insurance was another concern from the crowd. Godfrey currently has an ISO rating of 3-3X, which is a marked improvement from its pre-2016 rating of four. If the GFPD were able to attain a \$750,000 ladder truck, it could increase even further to two. Kambarian said at its current state, however, he would not be surprised if the ISO rating dropped back to a four. Those ratings are used by the majority of insurance companies to determine costs for residents living in different municipalities. If the rating was dropped again, it would cost many Godfrey residents extra money in their premiums.

The time chosen for the meeting – 8 a.m. on a Wednesday morning – was also jeered by the crowd for being inaccessible to people. The trustees said several such meetings of trustees and other groups associated with the GFPD, including pension funding, occur early in the morning on weekdays. Despite the early hours and inconvenient day, scores of people from the general public of Godfrey were in attendance.

Special recognition was given by both the trustees and the GFPD for the presence of Allison Ringering, the widow of the fallen Captain Jake Ringering, and Luke Warner, who was injured in the wall collapse, which killed Capt. Ringering.