

Report: Westshore Regional Fire District Study Meeting, February 24, 2014
by LWV observers Susan Murnane and Marty Mace (Bay Village Chapter)
and Jean Seasholtz (Westlake-North Olmstead Chapter)

This report, which contains observations and selected highlights of a meeting of the Westshore Fire District Study Meeting, is not an official statement of the LWV. Official minutes will be prepared by Mayor Clough's office.

Present: **Bay Village** - Mayor Sutherland, Fire Chief Lyons, union representative Steve Kaye, Law Director Ebert; **Fairview Park** - Mayor Patton, Fire Chief Williams; **Rocky River** - Mayor Bobst, Fire Chief Flynn, union representative Kevin Bednarski; **Westlake** - Mayor Clough, Acting Fire Chief Hughes and Assistant Fire Chief Mortis, union representatives Clayton Kovats and Patrick Graelis; Northern Ohio Fire Fighters President Astorino; Westshore Central Dispatch Center Supervisor Pishnery; WCOG Financial Officer Presley

The meeting was called to order at 11:10 and adjourned at 11:30 in the Mayor's Conference Room at Westlake City Hall. The last meeting minutes (June 21, 2012) were approved. Mayor Clough was elected Chairman, with Chief Lyons as Alternate Chairman.

Past Chairman Mayor Sutherland updated the committee. Ohio's Local Government Innovation Fund notified her in July 2013 that the \$100,000 grant application for the Westshore Regional Fire District Phase Two Feasibility Study had been approved. While the grant is supposed to be used by July 8, 2015, Mayor Sutherland has been assured they can seek an extension.

Mr. Ebert stated that three of the four city councils must pass ordinances accepting the grant. The Westshore Council of Governments must also pass a resolution supporting the study. He will prepare the ordinances. The process should take 3-8 weeks, depending on the number of readings. Mayor Clough expects Westlake City Council to pass the ordinance on first reading. Mayor Patton suggested the fire chiefs attend their Council meetings to answer questions.

Once the grant is accepted, the group will advertise for a project leader with experience in fire fighting to lead the study. Meanwhile, Mayor Clough will compile job description and qualification suggestions. Once the leader is hired, the actual feasibility study will take 12-18 months.

Chief Lyons said that at the last meeting there was discussion about the differences between a fire authority and a fire district. According to a June 20, 2012 memorandum prepared by Mr. Ebert, ORC 503.371 authorizes the creation of a joint fire district and grants it the power to levy a tax, requiring no changes to current funding.

Mayor Clough asked whether any city charters would need to be changed in order to create a joint fire district. Mr. Ebert said that he would have to examine all of the city charters, but the Bay Village Charter would not need to be changed. Chief Lyons said that it was his understanding that Bay Village's charter provision requiring a fire department would be met by the joint fire district.

The Westshore Regional Fire District is a joint venture among the Cities of Bay Village, Westlake, Rocky River and Fairview Park. All meetings are open to the public. No date has been set for the next meeting.