



# **WAUWATOSA**

## **PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS**

Dear Mayor and Members of the Wauwatosa Common Council,

From the outset of the merger discussions, we approached this process with cautious optimism. Unfortunately, that optimism has steadily eroded. Although we have received verbal assurances from the City Administrator and other officials, the City has repeatedly declined to sign even a basic Letter of Intent that would formalize those commitments. We are not asking for anything beyond what employees currently have—only that these understandings be documented to provide a stable and trustworthy foundation for the future.

The Mayor has compared this merger to the beginning of a relationship. Yet relationships depend on mutual trust, and what we are experiencing instead feels far closer to the early stages of a divorce.

Much of the tension we are now facing stems from our unresolved bargaining situation. As many of you know, we have spent more than two years in negotiations with minimal meaningful progress—aside from rising legal costs for both sides. Our central concern is internal parity with the police, a principle that has guided Wauwatosa's labor relations for more than 50 years. We lost our last arbitration on the basis of internal parity and conceded significant benefits as a result. This is not a new or a manufactured obstacle; it is a documented historical standard shaping every police and fire negotiation in this city.

Our position is straightforward: employees should not lose ground during a merger—particularly when history, precedent, and basic fairness all support maintaining the benefits they have earned. The City's refusal to formalize even basic transitional protections, coupled with its unwillingness to meaningfully address parity concerns, has eroded trust and cast doubt on the stability of the merger process.

Local 1923 members have spent decades bargaining diligently to secure the benefits that support their families. We will not allow a merger—presented as an opportunity for collaboration—to become the mechanism that diminishes those protections. While our relationship with the City has not always been without strain, this merger offers a chance for a fresh start. Unfortunately, the current approach is setting the stage for an adversarial relationship before the new department even exists.

To restore trust and ensure a viable merger, we respectfully ask the Council to support formal written commitments to the following baseline protections:

- Continuation of existing retirement healthcare benefits for all current employees.
- Full transfer of accrued sick leave without reduction.
- Active, good-faith exploration of an improved work schedule that supports recruitment and retention.
- Healthcare plans that remain competitive with or better than current offerings.

**Without written commitments to these baseline protections, there is no stable path forward.**

Wauwatosa Firefighters who have dedicated so much of their lives to this city will ultimately carry the heaviest burden in making this merger a success. All we ask is that you show your support for the firefighters who have made this department exceptional for so many years. If Local 1923 does not feel that support we will have no choice but to withdraw our support for the merger plans moving forward.

Local 1923 remains fully committed to a fair, cooperative, and successful merger. But cooperation requires trust, and trust requires follow-through. We urge the Council to intervene and help return this process to a constructive path before irreversible harm is done.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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