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Safety, Efficiency, and Trust Public Safety in Cedar Falls

Ensuring safety and security of residents is a key function of the City's mayor. The conversation about public safety and the future of emergency response is an important one, and one that we should all participate in. It is also important to remember that the Mayor must focus on a multitude of issues, maintaining a focus on both present concerns while planning for the future. As your mayor, I will ensure a safe and secure Cedar Falls, bringing residents together with a focus on building a community we can all be proud to call home.

The City of Cedar Falls maintains two fully staffed fire stations, with full-time fire response personnel on call 24/7. These firefighters receive the same training and certifications from the State of Iowa as all other professional firefighters in our state. They work and train as a unit, ensuring that Cedar Falls maintains the highest level of safety and security.

While we can all agree that certain aspects of this program could and should have proceeded differently, the City has reached a stage where eliminating the public safety program in Cedar Falls would be expensive, divisive, and inefficient. We must find a way to come together and look for practical solutions rather than further dividing our community. The following goals and objectives are a means to help us move Cedar Falls forward.

Maintain the highest level of training

Emergency responders require an important set of unique skills, bolstered by regular training and a team-based effort. Public safety staff in Cedar Falls will maintain the highest level of training to ensure that they have the skills needed to keep residents and their property safe.

Responders serving in Cedar Falls must pass both written and skills-based testing, conducted by the State of Iowa's law enforcement academy and fire school. This testing adheres to the same standards and requirements as other trained professional firefighters across the state. Following completion at both state schools, emergency responders will serve under the direction of a certified training officer in their assigned department (either fire or police services for a minimum of six months). In addition, responders will conduct monthly training within their assigned teams. This adherence to rigorous training standards will ensure that our personnel are prepared and equipped for the emergency needs of today, as well as those we will face in the future.

Recruit and retain a talented and diverse department

As with any organization, long-term success depends on the ability to recruit and then retain the best talent possible. The Cedar Falls public safety program provides our community with a tool to recruit individuals who are committed to service, and have an interest in emergency response. Today, Cedar Falls is home to the most diverse group of first responders our community has ever had. We are protected by dedicated and professional staff, including members of the US military, Iron Man competitors, and even staff from larger departments in neighboring states. These men and women bring a unique set of skills and experience to keeping Cedar Falls safe. Over the next few years, it will be vital that we continue to recruit a similarly talented series of emergency responders as our community grows. To ensure these recruitment efforts, the City's administration must provide consistency and support to these dedicated personnel.

To maximize our response capabilities, emergency personnel will continue to be cross-trained in a variety of skills. Emergency responders will maintain primary duty assignments, with either the police or fire division as their primary function. Police response will consist of three eight-hour shifts with eight to ten personnel per shift, while fire response will consist of three twenty-four hour shifts with eight personnel per shift. These shift assignments will ensure effective training and team building, while providing emergency responders with flexibility and opportunity for career growth.

Build trust and confidence

The core of emergency services is trust and confidence in the first responders and their efforts. My responsibility as mayor will be to ensure that residents not only **ARE** safe, but also **FEEL** safe. Residents want to know that when they call 911 and need help, someone will respond with the skills and tools necessary to help them.

Over the past several years, residents received a great deal of information about the public safety program. This information came from a multitude of sources, ranging from local news media to personal social media. Some of this information is true and much of it is not. For our community to come together and work for a bright future, residents need access to information and an opportunity to get their questions answered. As Mayor, I will hold a series of town halls focused on public safety in different neighborhoods throughout Cedar Falls. Residents will be invited to ask questions and meet the dedicated men and women who work every day to keep us safe. Rather than filter a message through elected officials or senior leadership, residents will be able to ask these public servants their questions directly. Our emergency responders will have the opportunity to talk about their work, and demonstrate their abilities through live skills practice.

As your mayor, I will work hard to provide every resident with an opportunity to ask questions, access information, and participate in the discussion.

Ensure efficiency and effectiveness

Over the past forty years, fire calls decreased by 60%. We now average between four and six significant fires per year in Cedar Falls. This substantial reduction can be attributed to many factors, more stringent building codes, enhanced fire prevention measures, and regular inspections. As our community sees a reduction in “traditional” calls for fire service, we see an increase in other types of emergency needs. Whether that is responding to severe weather events, helping with a mental health crisis, or even a fire from an electric vehicle, our emergency responders and resources must be consistently updated and effectively deployed.

The Cedar Falls public safety program ensures that our community has a larger staffing contingent, while simultaneously reducing operational costs. As Mayor, I will work with the public safety command personnel to ensure that our emergency services are prepared to respond to the needs of our community, while also maintaining a balanced budget.

Regular evaluation

Organizational policies, whether in the public or private sector, should never be fixed or static. Every policy, no matter the topic, should be thoroughly vetted before implementation, and regularly evaluated after implementation. These evaluations should objectively review a policy’s impacts and determine if the policy is functioning as desired. If an issue is discovered, it should be clearly identified and then changes made to correct the issue.

The City’s public safety program should adhere to this same principle. The program should be evaluated on a regular basis by experienced command staff, with reports delivered annually to the Mayor and Council. The report should include updates on response times, staff training, departmental budgets, and other key aspects of emergency response. In addition, the City can also benefit from the evaluation conducted by the Insurance Services Office on a five year basis. This evaluation has previously confirmed the effectiveness of the public safety program, and should be used as an additional opportunity to monitor the efficacy of the program.

Cedar Falls is a thriving community, benefiting from generations of leaders who focused on planning for the future. Building an efficient and effective public safety department will enable Cedar Falls to grow, while ensuring the safety of our residents, businesses, and visitors.