By now, Westerville residents may have heard or read about an impending levy for fire protection and emergency medical services for Westerville and Blendon Township. As Fire Chief, I feel it is important to reach out and explain the need for this levy, expected to be on your ballot Tuesday, March 15, 2016. I am very proud of the high quality service the Fire Division provides to the community, and we’re working hard to assure that level of service continues.

The Westerville Division of Fire meets National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards for response times, with an average response time just under 4 minutes. WFD has been evolving for many years, and the decision points we face ahead suggest ongoing change. We began to offer a higher level of fire protection when we introduced compressed air foam systems (CAFS) in 2005. For emergency medical services, we were the first department in the state of Ohio to use C-PAP devices to treat patients with respiratory illnesses. We have also deployed a new device on our Medic vehicles which automates the chest compression on patients in cardiac arrest. WFD implemented a basic life support (BLS) squad in 2007 to reduce our use of fire trucks responding to medical emergencies while at the same time providing a better service to residents keeping our advanced life support (ALS) vehicles in service more frequently.

With our refurbishing of large apparatus to delay purchasing new equipment, we have been able to stretch tax-payer resources. All of this was accomplished with our mission in mind, to develop innovative concepts providing cost-effective services that are responsive to the needs of the community.

Now we’re facing new-generation needs and service demands that we must meet in a fiscally responsible manner. Demand for fire, rescue and EMS services has steadily grown every year for several decades and technology is ever changing. WFD has utilized every available resource to meet changing demands, which has enabled us to keep our promise of carefully managing fiscal resources from the 2010 2.6 mill levy to last a full six years. This was accomplished despite those tax revenues running over $600,000 less per year than projected by the County.

The facts of our future are these:

**Increased Demand For Emergency Medical Services.** Demand for EMS continues to steadily rise with a 12% growth in call activity between 2008 and 2014. The Fire Service as a profession is changing, with more need and focus on responsibilities to perform as firefighters, fire inspectors and emergency medical technicians. WFD’s ability to respond quickly and start a life-saving assessment, action and/or transfer is something we want to protect in this community.

**Changing Face of Fire Protection.** With the construction of new homes and commercial buildings, many prevention strategies are in place, such as fire/smoke alarms and sprinkler systems in some commercial buildings. However, WFD will still be at-the-ready to provide fire protection services when they are needed.

**Increased Demand For Fire Inspections.** As a result of our population and commercial growth, the increased demand for fire inspection services is important. We want our buildings, structures, restaurants, shopping centers and other community facilities safe for occupancy. In 2014, nearly 2,500 commercial inspections were conducted, which is a number we expect to sharply rise as new business enters the community.

**Disaster Preparedness.** We live in a time when this is a necessity. Our preparation and training for a variety of disasters, natural or otherwise, is the responsibility of WFD as your public safety agency. In fact, the 2014 citizen survey showed most residents are concerned about this topic and want to know the department is well-prepared.
For more information, including voter registration, please visit www.westerville.org/vote.