

To: Ann Arbor City Council

March 18, 2011

I feel it incumbent on me to write to you on my departure as your Fire Chief. Public Safety while costly is the most important service that government must provide. Ann Arbor Fire Department is at a point where public safety is jeopardized. Our City is full of homes and commercial structures that were built over 100 years ago; they have questionable wiring and lack current safety standards built into the codes.

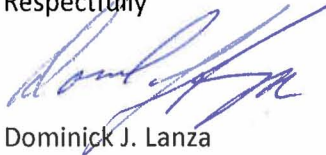
Current staffing levels at Ann Arbor Fire are below nationally recognized standards and make this a one-fire incident department. In that I mean one substantial fire is all that can be handled at a time, there does not exist the reserve equipment or personnel to handle two significant incidents simultaneously. Currently we are closing one Fire Station in lieu of overtime payments when that occurs response times are lengthened damage increases and potential injury or loss of life increase. Ours is an aggressive offensive fire department, which means they enter the building search for victims and extinguish the fire quickly. As staffing continues to drop it will be forced to become a defensive fire department that means they rarely enter buildings and focus on saving surrounding buildings.

Firefighters in Ann Arbor have been criticized for taking huge pensions, those people are gone and those pensions were created by the City by offering two for one compensation time when the City did not have money. When those people cashed out those hours their pensions soared but those who remain are blamed which is unfair and not true. Last year when we laid off firefighters the mantra was "if the old guys retire we won't have to lay off". Yes, that is true but we also continue to shrink the size of the fire department and further decrease the level of protection.

By the continued cuts in fire protection, I can only compare it to playing baseball with a basketball team, being short the people needed to field a full team we will certainly lose. Your firefighters are the only Unionized City employees who have taken permanent pay cuts of 3% not for six months as reported but in perpetuity as well as an additional 1% pension contribution. Are they thanked for their willingness to assist NO they are told to give more before other unionized employees give any? You have some of the best firefighters I have seen but even the best cannot win if they do not have the means.

Yes, I leave for personal reasons but had it not been for that it would be for the lack of support and the systematic destruction of your Fire Department. I urge you to move forward cautiously pursue regional fire protection as a way to save and be more effective, paid on call and volunteer are not the answer. Your jobs are difficult but I implore you be strong make the right decision do not further undermine the effectiveness of your fire department. I am proud to have worked with such dedicated men and women and I can only wish them and the City well.

Respectfully



Dominick J. Lanza