



# FIRE CHIEF BURLINGTON, WISCONSIN



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## THE POSITION IN BRIEF

The Fire Chief in Burlington is a key member of the City's management team. The Chief is responsible for leading a combined department of 15 full-time and six part-time employees, and 30 volunteers, and managing budgets of more than \$2.5 million.

## THE COMMUNITY

Incorporated in 1886, Burlington is a growing, full-service community in Racine County approximately 30 miles southwest of Milwaukee and 70 miles northwest of Chicago. Burlington is located at the junction of the White River and Fox River in southeastern Wisconsin.

The first land claim in the area by European settlers was made around December of 1835, when Moses Smith and William Whiting carved their names and date on trees near the present Standard-Press building on Pine Street. Returning with Lemuel Smith and Benjamin Perce weeks later, the four built a shanty on the east side of the Fox River in what is now Wehmhoff-Jucker Park.

In 1836 Daniel Rork made a claim to land on which much of the early settlement was built. In 1837 Moses Smith was appointed postmaster of the settlement, then called Foxville. The name was changed to Burlington on July 15, 1839. After completion of the dam, sawmill and grain mill, the first bridge to span the Fox River was built.

More on the history of Burlington can be found [here](#).

Today, at nearly eight square miles, the community has grown from two to four, to more than 11,000 people. Burlington has excellent schools, an aquatic center, 28 parks, a thriving downtown area and several successful industrial parks. The City is also experiencing residential growth along its southern corridor.







## **A SNAPSHOT OF BURLINGTON'S DEMOGRAPHICS AND AMENITIES:**

Average age of 37.9 years old.

White (non-Hispanic) 88%, African American/Black 1%, Hispanic 10%, Asian 1%.

Median household income: \$80,529.

Median value of a Burlington home: \$321,426.

Burlington educates more than 4,000 students in ten high-achieving facilities. Burlington schools are nationally recognized for excellence in education, and a full spectrum of schools are available for students at each level. Burlington is home to quality public schools as well as parochial schools and the area's technical college.

Higher education is available at a host of campuses within a short distance of Burlington. Approximately 18 colleges and technical institutes are within a two-hour drive of the community.

An abundant supply of inexpensive water and sewage treatment capacity.

Easy access to Interstates 43 and 94, and short drives to Milwaukee, Madison and Chicago.

Burlington residents are served by an abundance of passive and active parks (28) and recreation facilities

Full library services are provided by the Burlington Public Library.

Comprehensive full health care and easily accessible in-patient hospitals are found throughout Racine County and nearby Milwaukee and Kenosha counties.



## CITY GOVERNMENT IN BURLINGTON

The city is governed under a Mayor/Common Council/City Administrator form of government. The Mayor is elected at large for a two-year term. There are eight Common Council members, two representatives from each of the four Aldermanic Districts, also elected for two-year terms. The Mayor and Common Council appoint a full-time City Administrator who is the chief administrative officer of the City. Carina Walters has been Burlington's City Administrator for close to 10 years.

The City's mission statement: The mission of the City of Burlington is to build and enhance our community by safely, respectfully, proudly and effectively executing our daily work activities. As an organization we are committed to continuous improvement.

The City is currently finalizing its strategic plan which is the foundation for staff's short- and long-term workflow.

The City provides all of the other traditional services such as police, public works and utilities, airport, inspectional services, administrative services (Administrator, HR, finance, clerk, assessor, attorney) and a full-service municipal library.





## **BURLINGTON'S POLICE AND FIRE COMMISSION**

Under Wisconsin law, cities with a population of 4,000 or more must create police and fire commissions. Commissions serve as independent, non-partisan bodies charged with assuring that the hiring, discipline and termination of public safety personnel is handled in a manner free from political or other influences.

In Burlington, the five-member police and fire commission is appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Common Council. One of their roles is to appoint the Chief. With regards to other department personnel, the Commission approves applications, testing processes, interviews top candidates and places candidates on an eligibility list for both the Police and Fire Departments as well as conduct any other business as deemed necessary by the commission.

## **FIRE AND EMS IN BURLINGTON**

The Burlington Fire Department was organized in 1877 with 45 volunteers, a hand-operated pump, and a hand-drawn cart with 500 feet of hose. With that strong tradition, and almost 150 years later, the department has 15 full-time employees, six part-time employees, and 30 volunteers and modern vehicles, equipment and technology.

Today the Burlington Fire Department is responsible for providing fire, rescue, emergency medical, and life safety services to residents, businesses, and visitors in an area of eight square miles within Racine and Walworth Counties. The Fire Department is an all-hazards response agency. Additional services include code enforcement, planning and research, and community risk reduction education to increase the health and safety of the community and improve Burlington's quality of life.

The department currently operates with a 1998 Ford Pickup Utility Truck, a 2014 Ford Explorer Command Car, a 1996 Pierce 100' Aerial (will be replaced this year by a King Cobra Tower Ladder), a 2005 Pierce Quint, a 2009 Pierce Engine, a 2001 Pierce Engine, a 2004 Ford Medtech Ambulance, a 2016 Ram Ambulance, and a 2020 Ford F550 Ambulance. The department has an ISO – 2 rating.



## THE FIRE CHIEF

The Fire Chief is an integral part of Burlington's management team, requiring well-developed leadership abilities and management skills that are based upon consensus building and problem solving. The next Chief must have a strong desire to work in a collegial, team-oriented environment. The Chief must be a highly motivated, self-starting, and confident individual with excellent interpersonal skills.

The next Chief must have a demonstrated track record in leadership and staff development, and effective customer service. Candidates should possess strong and creative problem-solving skills, as well as be adept at public presentations in a team-management approach.

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## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEXT CHIEF

### **Community and Inter-jurisdictional relations.**

The Mayor and Common Council, and the City Administrator, enjoy strong working relationships with community and business groups. Burlington has a strong retail presence in a historic downtown area and in the outlying areas, and many business owners are active in the community. In addition, the City works cooperatively with its neighbors and other governmental jurisdictions.

With that as a foundation, the next Chief is expected to cultivate and build relationships with these stakeholders. As important, the City welcomes a Chief who forms cooperative and close connections with Burlington's neighboring jurisdictions, including Racine County (which may examine the value of a fire district), and the Town of Burlington which up until the last 15 months the City provided EMS services to the Town, an arrangement that may be revisited. Neighboring fire and EMS agencies maintain an active MABAS system, and Burlington's partnership is seen as a critical component, an important relationship for the new Chief to maintain.

**Community Growth and its effect on the Fire Department.** Growth in Burlington's population is modestly increasing, and new housing development is expected to come online within the next several years. The City's enviable quality of life, good schools and low crime rate suggest continued growth is expected.

Accordingly, the next Chief will need to be agile, proactively creative, and have a strategic vision for

how to address the challenges growth presents to the department's resources and efforts. As service demands increase, the next Chief will be required to carefully assess the organization's workforce needs and a long-term staffing plan. In addition, the department maintains one geographically central fire station that is more than 60 years old, so it will be very likely that during the tenure of the next Chief that this facility's future will need to be assessed.

To be sure, growth requires leadership and administrative maturity to anticipate and respond to changing conditions, demographics and community lifestyles that necessitates organizational dexterity. At top of mind, too, is how growth will not only press on the fire service's resources, but its manpower.

In 2025, the recruitment and retention of personnel in a department that relies on a mix of full-time, part-time and volunteer workers is an on-going challenge. The department currently enjoys a comfortable blend of newer volunteers working alongside long-tenured employees. It is not uncommon for several generations of the same family to have volunteered for the fire department. Yet many look at these legacies pragmatically, knowing that future job demands, daytime availability, changes in the community and how fire service is viewed as a career or volunteering choice may affect the future of how the department attracts and retains talent. The next Chief is strongly advised to appreciate these traditions, while paving the way for the department's future.



**City Management Team.** The City's management team is an energetic group that keenly understands and meets the Common Council's and the community's expectations. Within a framework of a collegial work environment strong interdepartmental working relationships, and a small-team setting where daily contact among the management team is the norm, the new Chief can expect this professional assembly of management leaders to be a welcoming source of encouragement, support and tools he/she may need to be an inclusive and responsive leader in the department, as well as the overall organization.

**Staff development, leadership and labor-management relations.** The next Chief inherits a department that receives a great deal of support and resources from the City's elected officials, Police and Fire Commission, fellow management team members and the community. Working from this solid foundation, the new Chief will be charged with advancing the organization to even greater levels of success. Following a highly respected retiring Chief of more than eight years of service to Burlington but more than 30 years in the fire service, the new Chief will find a receptiveness to different ideas.

The new Chief is expected to step into this position and provide the leadership to identify, filter and address organizational concerns that may be impacting the Department. The Fire Chief will be charged with advancing the organization to new levels of success. Along these lines, the next Chief will continue to formalize programs to train and develop all personnel in the Department and identify critical elements for developing and preparing future leaders of the Department.

One of the challenges experienced by many public safety agencies today is also present in Burlington; namely, recruitment and retention of personnel, as previously discussed. The additional challenge is ensuring the on-going engagement of the department's volunteers who respond to fire calls. Knowing that more than 85% of Burlington's calls are EMS-related, it will be incumbent on the next Chief to be respectful and creative in working with this dynamic.

Finally, with working in a collective bargaining environment, the new Chief will need to appreciate and honor the fundamental provisions of the collective bargaining agreements. Seeking out and valuing input from all segments of the organization to develop the Department, and the talents of its staff, will be vitally important.



## MUST HAVES

The City is seeking proven, progressive, and passionate-for-public-service candidates committed to excellence in the delivery of Fire and EMS services. Candidates should have an equivalent combination of education, training and experience which provide the required knowledge, skills, and abilities as outlined below.



### Education and Experience

- A bachelor's degree in fire administration, emergency management or public administration.
- At least five years' experience of a progressively responsible nature as a paid or volunteer firefighter, including all certifications up to a Wisconsin Firefighter II (or equivalent) and five years plus of supervisory duties which must have been equivalent to a Fire Lieutenant or higher.
- A current EMS license at or above Advanced-EMT(A-EMT) (Wisconsin or NREMT) Wisconsin State Fire Inspector I certification, or ability to attain same.
- Ideally, certification from the National Academy Executive Fire Officer program.
- Experience as a collaborative fire/EMS leader with demonstrated staff management, interpersonal and customer service skills.
- The ability to develop strong relationships with surrounding Fire/EMS agencies for the most comprehensive and balanced approach to high-level services for the residents of the city.



### Management Style and Personal Traits

- Experience with a combination department that values the importance of integrating full-time staff with part-time staff and volunteers is ideal.
- Well-developed verbal and written communication skills.
- A clear and dynamic vision for providing excellent, proactive emergency services.
- Experience as an innovative, collaborative fire/EMS leader with demonstrated managerial, interpersonal and customer service skills. Successful candidates will be able to demonstrate a balance of commitment to the organization and a genuine confidence and approachable personality to residents, business and governmental leaders.
- The highest level of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, and dependability at all times.
- Be prepared to be an integral, engaged, and transparent leader of the Fire Department, with a strong background in modern fire, EMS, community risk reduction, emergency management and all hazards' practices.
- Understand the need to use data for problem solving, assessing community risk and vulnerabilities with fluent computer skills.
- Have a positive track record of collaborative collective bargaining relations.
- The ability to mentor, coach and foster leadership roles within the staff; have the ability to succession an, bearing in mind a vision of the community's needs. The ability to guide and balance change is critical.
- The ability to develop strong relationships with surrounding Fire/EMS agencies supporting regional response planning and programs.





## **COMPENSATION, BENEFITS AND THE ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE**

The offered starting salary is \$107,000 - \$115,000 (midpoint) +/- DOQ, and an excellent benefit package including a pension program through the Wisconsin Retirement System is offered.

The Mayor and Common Council, and the City's Police and Fire Commission possess a strong respect for City staff's work. Among themselves, elected officials are collegial and respectful of differing perspectives and points of view. The City of Burlington is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

## **HOW TO APPLY**

Candidates should apply no later than March 31, 2025 as the review of resumes and offers to interview will be on-going. Send a resume, cover letter and contact information for five work-related references to [www.GovHRjobs.com](http://www.GovHRjobs.com) to the attention of Lee Szymborski, Senior Consultant, MGT, Northfield, IL. Tel: 847-380-3240. The City is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

