

# City of Kirtland

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## City of Faith and Beauty

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As the City engaged in its 2020 budget and appropriations process in the first several months of the year, I became increasingly concerned with the sustainability of the City's financial future, as it became apparent that we will be spending our budget reserves down close to zero heading into 2021. Every member of City Council shared their view of the urgent need to find costs savings and efficiencies in order to put the City on firmer financial footing. The recently announced restructuring of the City's Service Department is a modest first step in this direction but, by itself, is inadequate to address a problem of this magnitude. The situation is made even worse by the evolving COVID-19 crisis and the resulting economic instability that will have an adverse effect on the City's tax revenues in 2020 and beyond. In fact, RITA has just informed us that they are projecting our 2020 income tax collections to go down by \$340,000, or nearly 9%, in light of the current situation.

In 2018, the City's Fiscal Review Task Force identified both the City's Service Department and its Police & Fire Dispatch operations as having significant potential for costs savings and efficiency. Although discussions at that time between City Council and the administration were not fruitful in achieving any Dispatch costs savings, I felt compelled to review the issue again given our current financial state. As a result, the City sought competitive bids from both Lake County Central Dispatch and the City of Willoughby to assume our Dispatch operations. Kirtland is not alone in undertaking this review as more and more communities are pursuing arrangements of this nature due to the financial challenges they face.

Following the bidding, I met at length with Chief Hutton and Chief Nosse to consider the potential cost savings and all of the other relevant issues, the utmost being the safety of our residents. As a result of these discussions, I will be asking Kirtland City Council, with the full support of the Chiefs, to authorize the City of Kirtland to enter into a five-year agreement with the City of Willoughby to operate Kirtland's Dispatch services. The partnership will save Kirtland over \$800,000 during the next five years. As part of the process, two part-time police officers will become full time, resulting in an expanded police presence in our City. The resulting increase in personnel costs are included in the calculation of the above stated costs savings.

Following are a number of FAQs which not only address the questions that many of you may have, but also reflect the thought process that I went through in making this recommendation to Council. By no means do these actions solve all our fiscal problems; rather they are merely another step along the way in addressing our long-term financial stability. Most importantly, based on the experienced professional input from our Chiefs, I am confident that our new arrangement with Willoughby will continue to provide Kirtland residents and businesses with the safety and security that they expect and deserve.

**Q: How do we know Willoughby will provide Kirtland with high quality dispatch service, with no inappropriate delays in response time?**

*A: Chiefs Hutton and Nosse are very familiar with the Willoughby Dispatch operations, including the manager of the Dispatch department, and have the utmost confidence in Willoughby's ability to provide the necessary Dispatch services that will ensure the safety of Kirtland residents with no unacceptable delay in response time. Willoughby will dispatch Kirtland Police and Fire personnel and our teams will respond with the same diligence and urgency that we have all come to expect in Kirtland.*

**Q: How does Willoughby assess the quality of its Dispatch services?**

*A: Willoughby regularly surveys its community to grade the level of service provided by its Dispatch operations. The most recent survey resulted in a 4.5/5 service rating from the residents. Willoughby guarantees that it will provide the same level of high-quality support to Kirtland residents. Kirtland residents will be asked to participate in this survey in the future.*

**Q: Can Willoughby adequately handle the increased call volume resulting from the assumption of Kirtland's Dispatch services?**

*A: Based on Kirtland's known call volume statistics, Willoughby firmly believes that the increase will add negligible stress to its current Dispatch system. If necessary, however, Willoughby has committed to adding sufficient part or full-time Dispatch personnel.*

**Q: Will Willoughby dispatchers treat Kirtland residents as they do their own?**

*A: The Willoughby Chiefs have assured Kirtland that their dispatchers will quickly learn about our residents, businesses, landmarks, events and roads in order to provide Kirtland the same level of service that Willoughby dispatchers offer their own residents and businesses. In addition, Willoughby dispatchers will periodically spend time with Kirtland Police personnel to identify residents, issues and locations that may require more regular and special assistance.*

**Q: Who will Kirtland residents call in non-emergency situations?**

*A: Kirtland residents will still call 256-3333 for non-emergencies. During weekdays, an employee within the Kirtland Police Station will answer the calls. On nights and weekends, the calls will be answered by Willoughby. To further enable Willoughby team members to address the need of Kirtland residents for traffic and other pertinent information, Kirtland will regularly provide Willoughby with an updated list of Kirtland events, detours and closures.*

**Q: Do other local communities use third parties to dispatch Fire & Police services?**

*A: Yes. Eleven Police Departments and nine Fire Departments in Lake County, including Willoughby Hills, Kirtland Hills and Waite Hill, utilize an outside party to provide Dispatch services. In addition, dozens of Cuyahoga County communities, including Chagrin Falls and Solon, rely on partners to perform their Dispatch services. In our conversations with other communities, they are nearly unanimous in their satisfaction with their arrangements from the standpoint of both quality of service and cost efficiency. The Chiefs and I will continue our dialogue with other communities in order to understand the lessons they learned in transitioning to another Dispatch service provider and, in particular, to avoid problems or stumbling blocks they encountered along the way.*

**Q: Will Willoughby have access to the cameras at the Kirtland Schools in the event of an emergency?**

*A: The Willoughby and Kirtland Police Departments will each have access to the link that would allow our collective law enforcement team access to the cameras in the event of an emergency. The details of the plan will be documented in a Memorandum of Understanding with the Kirtland Schools.*

**Q: When will the transition occur and what steps will be taken to ensure a smooth transfer?**

*A: Both Kirtland and Willoughby will work closely with an experienced and successful Dispatch services consultant to achieve their goals during the transition of Dispatch services to Willoughby. The target transition date is June 1 but both Cities agree that the transfer shall not occur until they each agree that the required standards of service quality and timeliness will be attained.*

**Q: What will be the economic impact in Kirtland for this change?**

*A: The City's current annual cost of providing Dispatch services is in excess of \$500,000, a significant portion of which will be eliminated as part of the shift to Willoughby. Kirtland will pay Willoughby an average of \$120,000 per year for Dispatch services. Kirtland will also incur some one-time transition expenses as part of the changeover. The overall cost savings for Kirtland will be in excess of \$800,000 over the five-year term of agreement.*

**Q: What will happen to the PSAP communications system purchased by Kirtland for its Dispatch operations in 2018?**

*A: The PSAP system will be moved to and housed in Willoughby. The value of Kirtland's contribution of this equipment to Willoughby was factored into the negotiated fee that Kirtland will pay to Willoughby under the agreement.*