CITY FIRE SHAKEUP

London mayor announces new interim fire chief amid firing of dept. heads

MACEE SWAFFORD
SENTINEL-ECHO

LONDON — In the wake of last week's General Election, London Mayor Tracie Handley has named a new acting fire chief after terminating the employment of previous Chief Donnie Hale and Assistant Chief Brandon Wagers.

Marc Rudder is the city's new Acting Fire Chief.

Mayor Handley announced the appointment Friday morning in a Facebook post, stating that Rudder had agreed to serve in the interim leadership role.

She noted that Rudder brings 35 years of experience in the fire service and a background in leadership, training and firefighter development.

Rudder currently serves as Director of Training for the Kentucky Fire Commission. His experience includes leading volunteer and combination fire service organizations, developing firefighters and officers, overseeing training and certification programs, and strengthening operational readiness.

"I am confident that his experience, knowledge and leadership will be valuable assets to our Fire Department and our community," Handley stated in her announcement.

Rudder provided this comment to The Sentinel-Echo: "I am honored and humbled by the opportunity to serve as Interim Fire Chief of the City of London Fire Department. My focus will remain on providing strong leadership, stability and the professional emergency services



Acting London Fire Chief Marc Rudder was appointed Friday. | SUBMITTED

our citizens deserve as the city works toward selecting its next Fire Chief. I appreciate the confidence placed in me and look forward to serving alongside the department's members."

Rudder's appointment comes after Handley terminated Hale and Assistant Fire Chief Brandon Wagers last Wednesday, the day after the 2026 General Election.

Handley, who had been knocked out of contention in the May Primary, was not on the ballot.

The mayor's termination letters cited concerns involving a December 2025 city council meeting and deficiencies in the department's required annual firefighter training.

Both letters state the terminations are effective immediately and cite concerns stemming from a Dec. 3, 2025, London City Council meeting, as well as deficiencies in the London Fire Department's required annual training.

In Hale's termination letter, Handley stated she had lost confidence in his ability to lead the department. The letter identifies three primary concerns, including his response to the activation of a fire alarm during the December 2025 council meeting, his handling of the incident involving Wagers and the department's training records.

According to the letter, Wagers activated the building's fire alarm during the public meeting, prompting attendees to evacuate. Hale was present and, according to Handley, failed to take action to control the crowd or restore order. The mayor also alleged that Hale did not conduct an investigation into the incident or take disciplinary against Wagers.

The termination letter further states that Hale completed 25 total hours of firefighting training in 2025, falling short of the 75-annual minimum required for state incentive pay eligibility. The letter from Handley said ensuring the department meets state training requirements is ultimately the fire chief's responsibility.

Wagers' termination letter cites misconduct, alleged violations of law, dishonesty and failure to perform essential job duties.

The letter states Wagers activated the fire alarm without consulting the fire chief, presiding officer or law enforcement during the December 2025 meeting. Wagers reportedly said the room was overcrowded and that he believed an emergency evacuation was necessary.

Handley questioned that decision, stating the alarm was activated despite there being no fire or other emergency that warranted evacuation. The letter also cites potential violations of state statutes concerning falsely reporting an incident and disrupting a lawful meeting. It notes the city's administrative action does not depend on a criminal charge or conviction.



Former London Fire Chief Donnie Hale speaks at council meeting last fall. | FILE

Another concern outlined in Wagers' letter involves the department's annual training requirements. As the department's training coordinator, Wagers was responsible for scheduling, delivering, tracking and documenting

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