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HFD Deputy Chief Matthew Tobia selected as new City Fire Chief

HARRISONBURG, Va. – A career fire services leader with a lifetime commitment to community engagement will soon step up to help further the mission of the dedicated men and women of the Harrisonburg Fire Department.

HFD Deputy Chief Matthew Tobia has been selected as the City's new Fire Chief, effective June 28. A nearly 30-year veteran of fire services with a diverse skill set and a wealth of experience in leadership roles, Tobia has been with HFD since early 2019 as Deputy Fire Chief of Support Services. But his love of Harrisonburg goes much deeper, due to his 19 years of experience as a volunteer counselor with the Mid-Atlantic Burn Camp for Children held annually in Keezletown, where he and his wife, Jeanne, volunteer their time every year. Chief Tobia also serves on the Advisory Board for the Camp.

It was that experience that led him to fall in love with Harrisonburg, culminating with the opportunity to join the team as Deputy Chief last year.

“My wife and I had long talked about our dream of moving to Harrisonburg. The Shenandoah Valley is simply gorgeous and the community is incredibly welcoming,” Tobia said. “So, when we learned about the opportunity to join HFD, we jumped at it.”

Prior to his arrival in Harrisonburg, Tobia served as the Assistant Chief of Support Services and Volunteer Administration for Loudoun County (Va.) Fire and Rescue – an organization that includes 19 fire and rescue stations, more than 500 career personnel and more than 800 active volunteers. Prior to that, Tobia served with the Anne Arundel County Fire Department in Maryland from 1992 to 2014. He is certified through the Center for Public Safety Excellence, the National Board of Fire Service Professional Qualifications, and the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, among other designations, and is affiliated with the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Tobia says his immediate goal as Fire Chief will be to ensure the Friendly City continues to receive the outstanding service residents have always experienced from HFD. Having been with the department for 16 months, he has quickly learned how



(Above) New HFD Chief Matthew Tobia.

unique and experienced HFD is and the important role they play in the community. Tobia has no plans to make any immediate changes, instead focusing on planning for the future.

“We have a high-performing department. My primary job is to support the men and women on the front lines every day, making sure that they have the resources they need to do their jobs,” Tobia said. “This department has a long, proud tradition built by personnel who have given a lifetime of service. I’m honored to be standing on the shoulders of giants in accepting this tremendous opportunity.”

In his time with HFD to date, Tobia has focused on improving HFD’s connections through various platforms to enhance community engagement. That has included initiatives that leverage incidents that take place in the community as educational opportunities – such as promoting the need for smoke alarms in neighborhoods where a home fire has taken place, or canvassing about carbon monoxide detectors after a carbon monoxide incident.

Moving forward, Tobia will seek to engage with HFD personnel to develop an employee-driven, 5-year strategic plan to chart long-term planning for the department. It will focus on providing “excellent service to our citizens while ensuring the health, safety and wellness of our personnel,” the new Chief said. He also will work to fill the vacant deputy chief position created by his promotion through a member-engaged process.

For Harrisonburg City Manager Eric D. Campbell, the selection of Tobia takes into consideration not only his vision for the future of HFD, but also his commitment to the future of the entire city. His passion for engagement and volunteerism will further the department’s tradition of being a leader for the betterment of the community.

“Matthew has shown time and again since his arrival in Harrisonburg that he is dedicated and focused on the health and wellness of the personnel at HFD, and on being the engaged leader our community needs from its fire department,” Campbell said. “I am looking forward to seeing what he brings to the position of Fire Chief, knowing that our city is getting a leader who is dedicated to its future.”

HFD Deputy Fire Chief of Operations Stephen Morris, who has served as interim fire chief since Chief Ian Bennett’s retirement in April, will resume duties as deputy fire. His steady leadership during the City’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with his many years of service with HFD, are invaluable to the future of the department and Harrisonburg community.

“I can’t say enough about what Stephen has brought to HFD and the countless hours he has put in these past few months keeping our department and residents safe during truly trying times,” Campbell said. “Harrisonburg is a better place because of his dedication, and HFD is the professional, trusted organization it is in large part due to his service.”

Matt and Jeanne Tobia are residents of Harrisonburg. They have two children – Hanna, a senior at Virginia Tech, and “Doc”, a graduate of Blue Ridge Community College’s welding program who works in the industry locally.

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 54,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.



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