

MINUTES

PUBLIC SAFETY AD HOC COMMITTEE

LOWER ALLEN TOWNSHIP

REGULAR MEETING

JUNE 4, 2019

The following Committee Members were in ATTENDANCE:

Dave Holl	Director of Department of Public Safety
Leon Crone	Police Captain
Frank Wirth	Fire Captain
Dave Murdoch	Fire Chief – Lower Allen Fire Company
Frank Williamson	Fire Chief – Lisburn Comm Fire Company
H. Edward Black	Board of Commissioners
Dean Villone	Board of Commissioners
Carolyn Holtzman	Board of Commissioners
Don Smith	Capital City Mall
John Ortenzio	Capital Commercial Properties, Inc.
Terry Lenker	Township Resident – Sheepford Area
Dick Hammon	Township Resident – Rossmoyne Area
Chris Pushart	Township Resident – Allendale Area

The following members of the audience were in attendance: Chris Trace, Lower Allen Fire Department, Rodney Mumma, Lower Allen Fire Department, Bryce Landis, Lower Allen Public Safety.

WELCOME

Director Holl called the June 4, 2019 meeting of the 2019 Public Safety Ad Hoc Committee to order at 6:30 pm at Lower Allen Fire Station #2, 800 Rupp Avenue, Mechanicsburg. Prior to the start of the meeting, the audience was given a tour of Fire Station #2 by Lower Allen Fire Chief Dave Murdoch. This fire station includes a kitchen and residence quarters for live-ins or overnights. The fire bays house a pumper and emergency response truck. Mr. Holl asked if there were any questions from previous meetings. There were none.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Williamson moved to approve the minutes from the May 20, 2019 Public Safety Ad Hoc Committee meeting. Mr. Hammon seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

PRESENTATION: FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Tonight’s presentation was led by Fire Captain Frank Wirth who spoke about the gaps that exist between the fire service capabilities that are needed as opposed to the existing capabilities we have, and possible ways of closing these gaps. As previously discussed, Mr. Wirth would consider Lower Allen Township Fire services to be at an Offensive Service Level 1 or 2 currently. This level of service utilizes 10 to 15 staff and one pumper or a pumper and an aerial or support truck. Expectations are to extinguish interior and

exterior fires, extricate a vehicle entrapment, and recognize hazardous materials. The following are gaps that exist in meeting these expectations:

1. **Staffing:** A lot of demands are competing for staff time including other jobs, sports, family obligations, and hobbies; sometimes time is worth more than money to busy staff members. A fire fighter is considered an active member if they respond to calls 10% of the time. The number who respond to calls 50% of the time is very minimal – about one or two people. A study produced by the Senate Resolution 6 Committee showed that in 1975, Pennsylvania had around 300,000 volunteer fire fighters. This number is now at 38,000. Mr. Lenker mentioned that once a person is not involved for a while, it is difficult to get them back. The greatest staffing issues are in the evenings. PSO coverage overnight will begin in August. This will provide 24/7 staffing.
2. **Qualified firefighters:** There are many hazards in this line of work and training is essential. Basic training needed is 186 hours. More specialized areas require additional training. The training process is long and high turnover is an issue.
3. **Cost:** A sizable monetary investment of \$4808 is required to outfit new fire personnel. They need to stay with the department to offset cost. Turn out gear has an average of 10 years of usefulness. Mr. Villone asked if the Township is doing enough to adequately protect fire fighters and he was told that Lower Allen is up to date but Lisburn is not with the 10 year replacement. Cancer prevention from toxins in buildings has also increased equipment costs.

STAFFING

Lower Allen Fire Service averages 650 calls for service per year. Lisburn Fire Company averages 150 calls. PSO's do not respond to as many Lisburn call outs due to distance but they are there weekly checking on equipment. PSO's currently staff Lower Allen Township from 6am to 6pm and daytime call coverage remains fairly steady. Mr. Wirth stated that all areas of emergency services are experiencing a decrease in recruitment. New ideas for ways to recruit members are needed. Some incentives like gift cards, clothing with logos for organizational pride, banquets, are being used to compensate volunteers. Live-in programs and junior fire fighter programs are also in existence.

Lower Allen's Model Fire/Rescue Services as a three legged stool where volunteers, PSO's and Live-ins each form a leg and hold the entire system up. Currently there are no live-ins and this impacts nighttime coverage. Lisburn's Model depends on volunteers with assistance from Lower Allen PSO's.

Competent personnel are needed to run volunteer fire departments as they are non-profit organizations (501C3). There needs to be accountability of funds for protection against embezzling and for tax purposes.

FINANCES

Fundraising events are labor intensive. The return on the investment must be considered. Chicken BBQ is a popular event with a decent profit. Some money comes in through grants from the state and federal government as well as the fire tax. The fire departments also depend on municipal funding for some of their purchases.

Chief Murdoch spoke about changes in apparatus replacements. In the past, all apparatus was replaced after ten years of service except the tower truck. Currently apparatus is budgeted to be replaced after 20 –

25 years of service due to monetary and budget concerns. At this stage there is low resale value and technology is often outdated. There is also increased maintenance required. The Commissioners have to balance between spending and levels of service. Fire Service personnel would like to get back to a 10 to 15 year replacement schedule. Chief Murdoch stated that ransitioning from 5 frontline apparatus to 4 multi-function apparatus will save Lower Allen Township money in the future. Planning for future expenses needs to be done sooner rather than later. Leasing options are also being explored.

FIRE STATIONS

Mr. Wirth stated that Lower Allen Township has a challenging shape for fighting fires. It is not possible to have one centralized location. This is more efficient for a career department. Decentralized fire stations provide stations where the population is. In the past, stations were built on cheap or donated land. Now it makes more sense to put stations where they would have quick access to strategic areas of the Township. The ISO recommends a 1.5 mile radius for fire stations. Arcona is outside of this radius. Aerial apparatus has a 2.5 mile radius.

TRAINING FACILITIES

Mr. Wirth spoke about another challenge being faced by fire and rescue services which is finding adequate places to complete training. Some locations are a distance away and the fire truck is out of service while it is at training. Traffic is also an issue as well as a safety issue for the fire fighters. New MS4 requirements require that water used for training does not go into the storm drains.

AUTOMATIC AND MUTUAL AID

Mr. Wirth defined Automatic Aid as assistance from another fire department dispatched automatically. Mutual aid is requested as needed. These types of aid have been used for a long time to help out in complex situations. Some are governed by a written agreement but most are not. Resources are now being stretched for these types of aid and it sometimes has to come from father away or could be unavailable. This affects the Township's ability to fight fires. Due to lack of staffing, aid is sometimes requested as only one piece of equipment per Fire Company.

COMMUNITY RISK EDUCATION: The 5 E's

Mr. Wirth spoke about community risk education being done through Education, Engineering, Enforcement, Economic Incentives, and Emergency Response. This is provided through PSO's, live-ins, and volunteers. The International Fire Code and International Property Maintenance Code are the guidelines for fire prevention inspections and code enforcement. Residential sprinklers are required in multifamily homes but not in single family homes. It is always necessary to look toward the future such as the area of Arcona that is still being developed as well as currently vacant land.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Mr. Wirth led a discussion of some possible solutions to closing the gaps in service capabilities. Intergovernmental cooperation is one option that was considered in the past. The SAFER Grant program and Strike Engine failed due to disagreements on cost sharing and coordination of supervision. Studies through COG have shown that other departments are not ready to partner together to provide a higher level of service. A new model is needed for the future and the hope is that this can be created in part from Ad Hoc Committee recommendations. An alliance needs to be formed between Lower Allen Fire and Lisburn Fire to keep policies, training, and qualifications the same.

Mr. Wirth stated that their departments have reached a solution by combining volunteers with career staff. Lower Allen PSO's are transitioning from being law enforcement oriented to fire/EMS focused so they can take care of some of the responsibilities and assist the volunteers. There is an accreditation process for fire departments that is also available from the Center for Public Safety Excellence.

A 2012 study of volunteer fire fighter recruitment showed that the top reasons departments lose volunteers has to do with moving away, job commitments, family commitments, and lack of interest. Training is not an issue in losing volunteers.

Mr. Wirth spoke about the importance of keeping a distinction between volunteers and employees with the example of the Emmaus Volunteer Fire Department. The Borough provided incentives to volunteer fire fighters and became involved in their organization. This led to a court case ruling that the part-time volunteer fire fighters were actually employees of the Borough.

COMMITTEE QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Mr. Holl spoke about the Captain and Chiefs doing a great job with their presentations over the past weeks and explaining the current and future challenges that fire service is facing. He emphasized the importance of looking for a 5 to 10 year plan.

Mr. Holl thanked those who are long term volunteers of the fire departments. He stated that fire departments in general are facing the challenge of not having anyone coming along to take over. Lack of response for fires is a realistic fear. The problem is system wide. Legislature is not helping the problem and it gets pushed onto taxpayers. He stated that ultimately the questions which must be answered are what level of service is expected and what are taxpayers willing to pay for this service.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (Discussions will be limited to 10 minutes per person.)

Former Fire Chief Rodney Mumma spoke about the lack of younger members coming up through the ranks in the fire department. He also spoke about the difficulty of balancing commitments with time at the fire station. He stated that the biggest challenge for volunteer chiefs is keeping personalities in line. New equipment and trucks help to attract and retain volunteers.

ADJOURNMENT

Director Holl adjourned the Ad Hoc meeting at 8:30 pm. The next meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee is scheduled for Tuesday June 18th at Cedar Cliff High School in the Library.