

**FIRE PROTECTION TASK FORCE**  
**May 26, 2016**

**Call to Order:**

Randy Brachbill called the Thursday, May 26, 2016, meeting of the Fire Protection Task Force together at 5:45 PM.

**Members Present:**

Randy Brachbill, Chair, Bellefonte Borough Council Member  
Gay Dunne, Bellefonte Borough Council President;  
Walter Schneider, Bellefonte Fire Chief  
Tom Mensch, Logan Fire Department  
Ralph Stewart, Bellefonte Borough Manager

**Members Absent:**

Tim Schreffler, Logan Fire Company  
Brian Walker, Public  
Don Holderman, Assistant Borough Manager

**Staff Present:**

Ralph Stewart, Bellefonte Borough Manager

**Guests:**

**Approval of Minutes:**

The March 24, 2016 minutes were tabled at this point in the meeting due to a lack of a quorum . The next meeting will be July 28, 2016.

**Sprinklers:**

Sprinklers Grant – The fire department grants are totally closed now. The building permits are closed. Mr. Stewart stated they are looking at funding for whatever funding opportunities are under the Keystone program. The big thing that is somewhat viable is the CDBG Community Development Block Grant Funding. There is an application in to the state for assisting property owners with installing sprinklers. Mr. Holderman said so far they have not gotten word that it is not an eligible type of use for funding. No news is good news. Hopefully by the next meeting there will be some possible feedback.

**Recruitment:**

**Marketing:**

There isn't anybody doing the marketing. There has been some discussions about how to address marketing, but there isn't any specific person heading it. Recruitment and marketing may go together.

Walt said as much as you are going to tap these additional folks everyone is busy. For the committee you need to try to figure out how to get folks that aren't directly involved with the fire department. The committee is doing with what the Undines and Logans are already doing, and that is there are people who are administrative officers in the company who are also now operational officers in the company so they are just stretched. If they get burnt out you run out of time to do training and anything else and they are sucking out their creative juices. He doesn't know if the Chamber or Vana's Committees, but you have to find a way to tap some folks that aren't fighting fires and training to fight fires to be able to help. You are constantly tapping more and more the same people and are not spreading the foundation out. And that causes burn-out and you have the collapse of the institution that you are trying to preserve.

Randy said at the last meeting there was talk of Council members getting involved in community events. Maybe have two there at a time. The departments could have different levels of membership. You could have the firefighter level of membership and maybe an administrative member. As a Council they would have to look at doing something for Walt.

Walt said with both stations it's just tough...the Undines to a bigger extent than the Logans have a bigger pot to draw on only in the fact that they have a bar so they have a huge membership of 800 plus. When you look they belong to the social club, the bar. Of course they want to try to help run the social side of the organization because they have a bar they want to continue to sit at. I'm not saying they are bad people. I'm just saying there's a motivation there.

Tom said over the years the Logan's had the ambulance service and the fire service, no alcohol. That was the draw to the Logans. It was like father like son, but by the same token they hung out down there, they shot pool down there. They were there until 11:00 at night until Mom or Dad called and said you'd better get your butt home. That was the attraction to keep them available there. And there was a club called the Diamond Club. The Diamond Club was to get involved and see if you could get a piece of fire apparatus across the Diamond before the fire siren went off. That meant six guys and a driver. They could go on ambulance service calls or they could go on fire calls. At the end of the day you had a ready pool of people. That is what station 2 has now with their bar. They have an attraction to bring people to the station and be available. Now they tell me if they've had more than one beer they are not allowed to go. Walt said right now it is zero beers. Tom said at the end of the day you have to look and see what attracts people. They were lucky at station 1 because the ambulance service is the second part of that. The dad always wanted to bring the son in there because it was a good way to learn a lot about life. Tom said he thinks they have to rethink what they are doing. When you go into a surgery you've got a surgeon or maybe two depending on what it is, and the rest of the people that surround them are not surgeons, but they are certainly qualified to a certain level, but not at the 20,000 hour requirement to be a surgeon. He likens that to the fire service today because right now they are talking about 240 hours just to get them involved...roughly 200 hours. That's not realistic today. There's too much competition. There has to be a draw and he thinks the draw would be if the amount of hours could be reduced to have the guys hold the hose to fight a fire. As long as you have the officer on the scene, who is the surgeon and knows all the do's and don'ts to guide those people. Walt said the only problem that will be run into is Nationally there will be a problem. It's called the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Walt doesn't

think right now they are going to tackle that one and be able to get the NFPA to change the national standards so that at a legal liability standpoint...the Good Samaritan Act still applies, but they will come in and say okay, look...in using the worst case scenario...they will come in and say chief, what training did that person have? Okay, why did you let an interior firefighter go inside without taking the full basic firefighting program and curriculum as recommended by the fire company. Their answer from a legal standpoint is it is better to watch a house burn down than to kill a firefighter. Tom understands but at the end of the day he recommends selecting the qualified officers...Walt said the problem right now is if he gets a call any one of the firefighters that is deemed to be an interior qualified black helmet firefighter might arrive on that apparatus. Right now if there are three on each piece of apparatus at 9:00 a.m. he is feeling good about himself. We are headed into crisis mode with respect to staff. He agrees wholeheartedly that it takes a significant commitment to get somebody qualified to be able to ride a piece of apparatus. As a state fire instruction he finds it hard to find where he can remove that piece of the puzzle – to put somebody in an air pack and send them into a burning building because they may not have that highly trained officer. The other problem you may end up having is once you get them through that training they stop. The problem is when you look at the depth of training and certification there is a handful of very well trained folks. When you get below that most of the folks are slightly trained above that baseline. As you are getting into captains you basically...there is a captain at station 1 that is firefighter 1, he has his hazmat, he has that baseline training and he has started vehicle rescue training and he recently took some additional training. Tom said in recognizing that when you look at those levels you have to find the people who are willing to take out of their life. Walt said the initial training is spread over the course of a year. It's doable. Part of it is the advantage that it is bringing them in to the camaraderie. It's bringing them into the fire services. That's a big deal. What you have to find is a) more bodies to do other stuff. If you get kids hooked at age five and keep them hooked then you will have firefighters for life. The other demographic is trying to get them in the door. Walt has not had the luck to get them in the door. Tom talks to a number of young guys on the school bus about being a firefighter. He said it's like playing the piano. Mill Creek in Huntington County has solved the problem. They have fifty active volunteer firefighters in the middle of nowhere. He is the only chief in the entire that Walt feels can be an old time chief. That means he can turn around and bark orders and say "you do it because I'm the chief and I told you to do it that way" and they will snap and run because if they don't the door will snap shut behind them. Some people just command respect. Tom said a major factory that had shift work was lost and you lost the people that were available around the clock because of the shift work. The ambulance service was going all the time. The activity was there and a lot of times the wives would be involved. Tom said at the end of the day if the legislature wants to put them out of business then the only option is a paid department but it will be a level of service below the volunteer level of service. A plan needs to be developed to address those issues. Walt asked do you make a job requirement that says you are expected to learn to drive fire apparatus and be a member of the fire company.

Walt doesn't think the community understands the need for firefighters and he doesn't know how they are told without sounding very militant. He's definitely not the Vana White Social Model. He will tell you how it is and will give you all the information, but he couldn't sell you a used car. He knows his shortcomings and that's one of them. Here's the magic...how many police officers are on duty at any given time? Ralph said two to three. Walt said if you

had to put three people on during the day...once you head down a paved road it's a slippery slope. You just start sliding. Lock Haven for years has run with three guys on the apparatus during the day that are paid. The rest are volunteers. Walt said if you think about it take the police budget and put it together with the fire fighter budget. How do you tell the citizens of Bellefonte and the surrounding communities that if you don't take care of the problem the old fashioned way then the new way to take care of the problem will be by adding mills to your taxes. It's a horrible paradigm because Bellefonte Fire Department runs one call a day on average. Ralph said there are a lot of reasons – the culture has changed, the workforce, the jobs. The police department is more than they can handle. It's all they can do to keep it there. They brainstormed for years. Do they consolidate with Spring Township? What is the answer? Ralph said he can see the day with expenses a county-wide police department. He can also see a county-wide fire department some day.

Walt said the fires that were fought thirty years ago are not the fires that are fought today. What you have in your house has changed radically. The furnishings have changed. The energy content of what is in our homes today versus thirty years ago is truly 3-4 times the btu content. One pound of legacy furniture versus new furniture truly is about 3-4 times. On top of that we have become a society of packrats. We have three to four times the amount of stuff in the house, which means there is 10 times the amount of fuel leverage. Now there is an open concept in houses.

Mrs. Dunne asked if it would be a topic to bring up at a Town Hall Meeting? Walt and Ralph agree that it would be.

## **Funding:**

## **Historic Preservation Committee**

## **Old Business:**

**Sub-Committee Review:** No complete review made due to time constraints/no changes made or recommended.

## **New Business:**

### **Fire Department Regionalization: Pros – Cons**

Bellefonte, Pleasant Gap, Walker Township, Milesburg, Howard?

Tom felt other departments would be interested in doing this as long as they shared the benefits. The benefit has to be there for everybody in a specific area. That is the only way to compete with the larger metropolitan areas. Randy brought it up two meetings ago at the NVJPC. Spring, Benner, Walker and Marion Townships are all part of that. One firefighter there from Walker agreed that would be a good thing to do. The thing is the departments don't want to lose their identity, and that can be done without losing your identity. At one time they tried to get the new radio system started and State College said they were absolutely not interested. That left Bellefonte with all the other departments and that hurt. In the end Bellefonte took it upon themselves to establish the first system. There were other companies around involved. Everyone needs to have a vested interest. Walt said when it gets tough is when you have to figure out how you are going to divvy up the money. The classic is the liquid fuels money. How do you divvy that? Do you go by mileage?

Walt said there was a call a month ago and one of the neighbors got there first and took the call. Walt got a phone call regarding the potential of additional territory for the Bellefonte Fire Company.

**Fire Hydrant Flushing: No discussion to time constraints**

**Questions from Nittany Valley Joint Planning Session:**

Call Boxes Information Inclusion and Dry Hydrants –

Dry Hydrant Locations – Condition - The one good one that is out of service right now is behind Café on the Park. There are three more to be installed but every time they try to figure out where they go there are logistics problems.

**Next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the Fire Protection Task Force will be July 28, 2016 at 6:00 p.m.

**Adjournment:**

Chief Schneider made a motion to adjourn the Fire Protection Task Force meeting at 7:02 PM. Mrs. Dunne seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimous.