

FIRE PROTECTION TASK FORCE
JANUARY 22, 2015

Call to Order:

Gay Dunne called the Thursday, January 22, 2015, meeting of the Fire Protection Task Force together at 6:00 PM.

Members Present:

Gay Dunne, Bellefonte Borough Council Member;
Walt Schneider, Code Enforcement Officer/Logan Fire Company Chief
Tim Schreffler, Fire Department Chief
Tom Mensch, Logan Fire Department
Randy Brachbill, Council Member
Karen Harvey, Council Member

Members Absent:

Tom Wilson, Mayor
Vana Dainty,

Staff Present:

Ralph Stewart, Borough Manager;
Don Holderman, Assistant Borough Manager;

Guests:

I. Approval of Minutes:

Mr. Shreffler made a motion to approve the minutes of October 23, 2014. Mr. Brachbill seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimous to approve the minutes as presented.

II. Reports of Subcommittees:

A. Education - Walt Schneider said they are in the middle of checking out the specifications of a new Fire Safety Trailer to be used across the entire seven municipality regions. That is taking most of the focus. It is an investment into the program of approximately \$100,000.00. In addition they are looking at new curriculum to use with that and to be distributed to the schools. Based on the agreement Centre Region Codes signed with the Borough the Fire Safety Education piece comes with that.

B. Manpower/Marketing/Statistics - Tom Wilson gave Mrs. Dunne a verbal report. He has been talking with Kerry Benninghoff and intends to talk with Senator Corman about the possibility of legislation which would enable municipalities to offer financial incentives for the purpose of recruiting and retaining firemen.

Mr. Schneider said Senate Bill #299 was introduced today that would basically allow municipalities that collect taxes to waive taxes for volunteers up to the amount of which their tax is owed. Mr. Schneider is not enthusiastically about the bill because they come up many times and then disappear. It would give Municipalities the ability to refund or forgive taxes for volunteers based on a criteria that they would set. Mr. Schreffler, in talking with somebody in the western part of the state, it appears like this may generate some momentum on the recruitment side, but it is going to be the way its published and you have to be more specific on volunteering. Mr. Schneider respectfully requested going in front of Borough Council for a letter of support.

C. Historic Preservation - Mrs. Dunne passed out handouts in reference to what she is going to say. At the moment the Historic Preservation Sub-Committee is currently made up of Mrs. Dunne and Mrs. Hannegan, although there are five committee members.

They are no assembling resources for the committee to start to work. The map provided was produced by Liz Lose at the County. It has additional features compared to the fire/sprinkler status map. This is updated as much as possible with the properties that are in the sprinkler pipeline. This map has several district overlays. Specifically the National Register of Historic Places, the HARB District, the Keystone Community Program District and the Waterfront Business District. She feels this map will be good for seeing where sprinkled properties are. It gives you some geographic reference. She feels a map like that would be good in the future after ranking buildings to identify those buildings that are the highest ranking and therefore the most deserving of sprinkler systems or at a later date can be used for demonstrating progress and installation of sprinkler systems. There is a property owner at 127 West Spring Street that is not on the map. Mr. Schneider respectfully requested that the fire companies be removed from the map at this point. Mr. Holderman asked if this could be provided in an electronic format to be updated as more sprinkler systems be installed. Mr. Schneider suggested it would be great to have this in hyperlink so when you clicked on a building it would give you more information.

Mr. Schneider stated they are exploring the option of providing a brass medallion that would be put above the FDC (Fire Department Connection) to acknowledge that the sprinkler system was installed voluntarily rather than mandatory. They would also issue a certificate.

Another resource that Mrs. Dunne received from Jack Watts, who was involved with the first Fire Protection Task force, and he referred her to the study from the National Center for Preservation and Training. They have different fire safety parameters to develop a historic fire risk index. It does acknowledge historic properties of a building. She feels the subcommittee can use that nicely. It helps define some of the features looked for in construction and building height construction, compartmentation, speed of spreading of the fire, emergency response, etc. She hopes to schedule subcommittee meetings sometime in February.

D. Funding - The Fire Companies and the Borough applied for a grant for installing sprinkler systems in the fire houses. It was a successful attempt to get the funding. There are some hiccups in the bids that just came in. Mr. Holderman said there may be some things that can be done to bring the cost down. They may have to put it out for rebid.

Mr. Holderman, working with Barton Associates, said the bids came in approximately \$105,000.00 more than the grant funds available. The engineer has gone back to the three bidders to try to determine what they were looking at differently in the scope of work and specs

than what he had anticipated. In talking with FEMA there was consideration about de-scoping and doing one of the two facilities, but FEMA said that is not a possibility. If only one building is done then the grant award will be cut in half. Mr. Holderman tried to get on a conference call with the engineer without success. It will be discussed at the Fire Executive Committee meeting later tonight. The fire department has discretionary funding that could probably be added, but the Fire Executive committee would need to make that call.

Mr. Schneider spoke with Barton Associates late this afternoon at length. They are going to be contacting the lowest responsible bidder to basically inquire into if it was pared back and they give the most cost effective installation - this installation was above ceiling, concealed, etc. They want to see the difference in dropping it down below the ceiling and running it fully exposed because that should save some money. He suggested telling them the price and inform them that it cannot be done for more money than that. He said the lowest responsible bidder is a good company to work with. It will be a monitored system. Ms. Walker said she would feel comfortable going no more than \$30,000.00 with the discretionary dollars that the fire department has. It is currently sitting at \$80,000.00.

Mr. Holderman said this could be extended another six months if necessary.

Mr. Stewart said the Keystone Community designation has happened since the last meeting. They are learning about the financial incentives that go along with that designation. So far the area designated, which is on the map in yellow, is also considered an Enterprise Zone, so if the property owner does a renovation and puts in something new, such as a sprinkler system, they are eligible for tax credits up to 25% of the cost or up to \$500,000.00. The project is competitive. The state only has so many tax credits for this area and there are always more requests than money. The other possibility is that now that the Borough is designated they apply for a Grant-to-Loan where the state gives up to 1/2 million dollars, free to the Borough, where they loan it out to a business or property owner and they pay it back with a small interest percentage. As it is paid back it is re-loaned to the next person. That is an application process that Ms. Dainty is working on this. Today they talked on the phone to the area representative about the programs. He has only been in his position about a year so he is trying to feel his way through it. He is going to provide a list of other pools and maybe something outside the DCED funding. The other thing discussed is a CDBG funded program. The Borough gets an allocation of approximately \$100,000.00 each year. The County will administer this for the Borough. They have an idea slated coming up, but after that it could be applied for to help property owners install sprinkler systems.

The Borough's Association has an open window for resolutions. Mr. Stewart suggested a resolution could be made saying 50% of tax credits are available for sprinkler systems or 50% of the cost. Locally Mr. Stewart suggested asking the County, when someone gets a permit for an installation that eventually works its way over to the assessment and then that person's taxes goes up, he suggested asking if the permit for a sprinkler system be exempt from the assessment process.

The Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act is a federal piece of legislation that has been around for a number of years. It was last discussed in 2013. It's an amendment to the IRS code. It helps a property owner be able to change the depreciation schedule on a sprinkler system. He said it is easy to write letters to the Senators, Members of Congress and State Legislators about the tax credit for volunteer fire fighters. It all relates to funding.

Mr. Schneider reported they received notice that FEMA grants have been awarded and contracts have been sent out for executing for this year. He reported that the Logan Fire Company applied and received \$14,284.70, which is more than ever received before. It is a weird equation they use. \$10,000.00 of that is going to go to debt reduction on the new fire apparatus. They are upgrading the Borough owned piece of fire apparatus, #114, which is a rescue engine. They are replacing the warning lighting system on it using LED's based on the fact that they can't get replacement bulbs for the actual lighting systems. The strobe systems are obsolete. They are putting the traffic warning symbol on the back. As long as Mr. Schneider is chief they are going to continue to do the debt reduction mode.

Mr. Stewart reported there was a study done on incentives for the use of residential fire sprinkler systems. The study was done by the Fire Protection Research Foundation. They identify sixteen communities across the United States that have some kind of incentive. The ones that apply to the Borough are waiver of tap fees, assistance in helping the person get the system started, some type of subsidy in some of the other fees associated with that, reduction of property taxes for a period of time, and special financing options.

When Mr. Schneider originally did the grant he had gotten a rough number out of more fire protection. Several things that drove up the cost were the trivalent ones in the area were invited to bid on the project. The federal prevailing wage is probably the biggest smack on the entire project budget. Mr. Holderman said the price per square foot was still pretty high.

Mr. Schneider reported the Undine Fire Company received \$14,07.69.

III. Establish Communications Subcommittee - This has not began, but Mrs. Dunne feels it should consist of

A. Borough Staff, Council, Fire Executive Committee -

B. Legislative Initiatives on Fire-Related Issues - Mrs. Dunne said they could go through PSAB and the deadline for submitting resolutions is February 22nd. Mr. Stewart said if the PSAB is supporting it gives a little bit more push. There are two Council work sessions before the deadline and a Fire Protection Task Force Resolution can be drafted then to be submitted to PSAB.

IV. Fire Protection Master Plan Update - Randy Brachbill thanked Mike Facer for the Master Planning Guide that they used. They used the plan to help with planning and as a guide. Randy went through this page by page. The '98 was never officially approved, but there were parts of it that were. This will be a guide to help with those plans. It would be a communication tool in that it would keep the Borough informed about what is going. It would also justify costs and where the money is going. (?) said the '98 plan was really wordy with no ending. He and Randy were thinking the same approach. That is if there is a starting point there has to be an ending point. The goal is if they say they have a task that is task oriented and they determine what it's going to be they can track it until it's closed regardless of who is on the committee. The short-range and mid-range plans are blank because it is up to the fire stations to do their own work. He's not doing their work for them. The mid-range plans are operational plans that aren't currently funded.

(Tape turned here.)

Long-range capital budget plans not currently funded - that would be proposed budgets from 2016 - 2026. If something in the capital budget wasn't able to be reached it could be pushed into one of the next years.

The strategic plan is basically guidance and direction. There are a few mandates thrown in there. There should be a report whether something is done or not done. Mr. Stewart said there is some paper trail. Randy feels not everybody on Council knows what it is for.

The next item is Committee Members of the Fire Exec. That was changed up a little bit. At the Fire Exec. meetings not everybody showed up. The Committee Members are the Bellefonte Fire Chief, the appointed Bellefonte Council member, one chief from each station and each one must provide an alternate as needed.

Everything is up for discussion. The Bellefonte Fire Prevention Plan must be reviewed annually for budget and revision needs and will progress each year in ten-year increments.

They discussed the fire protection improvement plan based on the 1998 Fire Protection Evaluation and that was incorporated into the 2012 Fire Prevention Task Force Plan known as the Bellefonte Area Fire Protection Plan. This includes items from the 1998 plan that were approved and put into action.

The Executive Committee becomes Fire Chief, Chairman; Bellefonte Safety Chair; Department Deputy Chiefs (2); one member from Company one and one member from Company two; Benner, Spring and Marion Walker Townships.

It is still a work in progress.

V. Other Topics

VI. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Thursday, March 26, 2015.

Adjournment:

The Fire Protection Task Force meeting adjourned at 7:00 PM.