

FIRE PROTECTION TASK FORCE
January 26, 2017

Call to Order:

Randy Brachbill called the Thursday, January 26, 2017, meeting of the Fire Protection Task Force together at 6:00 PM.

Members Present:

Randy Brachbill, Chair, Bellefonte Borough Council Member
Gay Dunne, Bellefonte Borough Council President
Walt Schneider, Bellefonte Fire Chief
Mike Facer, Public
Brian Walker, Public

Members Absent:

Tim Schreffler, Public
Tom Mensch, Logan Fire Department

Staff Present:

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

Guests:

None.

Approval of Minutes:

Walt Schneider made a motion to approve the September 22, 2016 meeting minutes. Don Holderman seconded the motion. The Committee filled in some blanks where there were questions marks. A voice vote was unanimous. Mrs. Dunne abstained from voting.

Committee Reports:

Old Business:

Recruitment – Mr. Brachbill said this is the Committee to discuss these items, but this is not the committee to do these items and he wants to hold true to that. One of the things Nittany Valley Planning has brought out is strategies for fire protection. At the next to the last NVJPC meeting a committee was formed. Walt said the only thing that has been done is data has been gathered from the associated departments. Lou Brungard is heading up getting folks together. They didn't meet before the last meeting and he has indicated that he will get a meeting organized. Walt recommended that Bellefonte does not let its piece go because they will look at a regional approach, but Walt knows in the past other regional approaches have fallen short. Bellefonte needs to maintain what they are doing and they can feed them that information and keep them in the loop, but if Bellefonte doesn't look after Bellefonte it may fall short. He said

Safer Grant is closing almost as he speaks and they are not ready to put one in, but that gives a good idea that there is one year to get a Safer Grant put together if the idea is to do one for Bellefonte. It may end up with Bellefonte saying let's do a Safer Grant and then be the sponsors for the regional Safer Grant, which is the federal grant with a two-year window where you can get federal money to do recruit and retention. There are many things you can do under it. Walt said there have been a bunch of these done around Central Pennsylvania that this group can tap into and see what they have done and if they are being successful. There have been a lot of commercials on TV regarding the initiative. It is Huntingdon and Blair Counties together. Indiana County did one. When you joined there you had to decide if you wanted life insurance, a college scholarship, health insurance and something else. It was a given amount a year they would give you if you were an active volunteer. Mr. Stewart would like to see how they developed the resources for that. Walt said somebody needs to take charge of this. Walt is happy to help write the grant, but he recommends hiring a grant writer. Mike said if the grant provides two years worth of money, then who picks up the cost after that. His other question is "where is here". There are numerous people that live outside the Bellefonte territory. With the one Walt talked to it was irrelevant where you lived but where you ran. Alpha spends a lot of money for recruiting. They have an existing program that they just keep feeding. If Walt can give Mr. Stewart contact names he will make some calls.

Mr. Stewart said there is new legislation regarding the tax relief, but you may have to live in the Borough to take advantage of that. The region needs to approve it and not just Bellefonte Borough. The criteria of who is eligible for that needs to be discussed. Mr. Holderman said he felt this would be a priority to look into first. The information the Borough would need is what do you consider an active member...how many calls? The second thing is how many active members actually live in the Borough. Walt said there are very few active members that live in the Borough. What needs to be determined is what is considered active because it isn't just firefighting. It's training, meetings and all the stuff that runs that organization. Walt said Council is in charge of defining that. Walt said the problem is it will only impact who pays taxes to the Borough. Mr. Stewart and Mr. Holderman feel if Bellefonte Borough takes the lead there will be a lot of pressure on the other municipalities to participate. Walt said there are also people that are active that don't live in the coverage area. It was suggested you need to determine what helps prompt the grant. Is it a high active member or a lower active member? If it's a lower active member they'll give you money for things like advertising to get more recruitment. Walt said fortunately you don't have to disclose your active members for the federal side. They want to know what the target is for how many more members to get. Randy said the other stations have to agree on what the active criteria is. Walt will provide the list of how many are in the Borough and also an equation for what to consider active. He is leaning toward counting hours. He is also in the process of getting a list of National Certifications for everyone in the Borough. Mr. Brachbill said it would be helpful for Borough Council to get monthly or quarterly updates from the fire department. Mr. Holderman said it is a yearly report. Mr. Brachbill asked if there could be a report of how many calls are done each month. Walt said, as fire chief, he needs people. Martha was starting to help him with background checks. She left the Borough and was not replaced. Walt does not have any staff assistants. Mike said this information is all available in software that is used. For over ten years he managed the program. He got the reports from both departments, made sure they were completed and exported them to the Commonwealth and the national level on what is done. It consumes a great deal of time. He got to the point where if

it isn't important to others why should it be important to him. The stuff wasn't getting done. He couldn't do it all. He understands where Walt is coming from with administrative support. The officers bear a large portion of that, but somebody has to take the ownership of that and see that it gets done at his level so they can feed Council's level. On an average month there are 25-30 calls. It could be five minutes putting it in or it could be 25 minutes putting it in. You also have to chase down the officer to get the report. The total time would approximately be 25-30 hours a month.

Brian said having volunteers is more than the guys in the fire suits. At what point can they put together what a volunteer is and at what point is the line drawn saying this is what is handed down to the next person. There is a roster that everybody registers on saying where they were for a specific call. Walt said in the last year and a half he has talked to at least twelve people who live and reside or work in the coverage area about volunteering to at the company level be a treasurer or secretary. He has talked to people saying he needs departmental support. Mr. Stewart said the Borough does not know what positions are needed. He would like to list it on the website. Mike said he and Randy spent a couple hours at the Annual Volunteer Fair at the Match Factory and it wasn't well attended. They put together an open brochure listing the positions they are looking to fill. Randy suggested Council should talk more about it in front of C-NET. Walt said one of the things to think about is how to make it more efficient and how to make the job easier. The fire departments are incentivized to participate in the commissioners grant money. This year if the information isn't reported then you are excluded from that money. That would be \$10,000-\$12,000 a year for each department. The information needs to be reported and they are behind. Walt said he is guilty of getting behind because one of the things he took on as department chief is what Mike was doing and that is making sure the reports are accurate. It was making sure when it said this was the occupancy that it was what it was. He was taking ½ or more of his time reading all the narratives on the reports and double checking what the people put in. The part that Mike and Walt spend the most time on was reading to be sure the data was accurate in the system before it was submitted. The incident commanders are responsible for initially filling out the forms and putting in the narrative that the data person puts in. It is a combination of things that prevents this from getting done. Station 2 has a secretary to the chief and she types in whatever is on the report. No matter how you do a report there is interpretive data so it needs to be somebody qualified doing the report.

Somebody may not be able to submit the reports, but they could follow up on all the background checks or helping write policy. Walt would love to have a departmental quartermaster. It should be inventoried and maintained. Currently there is one person at each station doing that.

Each department has administration at their station. Mr. Walker suggested starting with a wish list of five people. Mike feels administrative support would be the first person needed. Walt and Mike will email back and forth and begin a list. Mike said the software that is required by the Office of the Fire Commissioner to use for the reporting piece of things does interface with the County CAD system. There is a feed from the dispatch that would feed emergency reporting, but there is a fee for that. It might help, but who pays for it.

Marketing -

Fire Hydrant Flushing – Mr. Stewart talked to Matt and he is looking into some kind of equipment. When you flush hydrants he checked with DEP about the chlorine discharge and something else to help with the process. DEP requires something to be put in the water to help with the chlorine discharge. It is going to be on a future agenda. Walt said they have been told in the future with the new Susquehanna Basin requirements that flushing hydrants is illegal.

Walt asked if the hydrants are ever going to be rated – flow tested. The NVJPC was looking for hydrant flow rates. Mr. Stewart assumed the fire company rated the hydrants. Walt said in the last fifteen years hydrants have been spot checked. They have not, since Walt has been in the department, done a systematic flow testing of the system. Mr. Stewart said it is a manpower thing.

Randy feels the list of buildings for the CDBG funding needs to be looked at. Mr. Holderman said the 2016 grant information has been submitted. Matt Milliron from the County said they just got the contract for fifteen two weeks ago. It came with a conditional letter based on the project. It is the same discussion from a few years ago. Mr. Holderman is putting the letter in the Council packet. The County has already drafted the response and they are sending it to DCED. They are saying it's an eligible project and they really like the project, but they are questioning the fundability of it. Mr. Holderman will continue justifying it. The 2016 application just went in so probably if the Crider Exchange is going to be the first one it would probably take 2 ½ years worth of funding. Mrs. Dunne had minutes from a year ago and at some time she will share the rating system with Mr. Brachbill. Walt would be interested in seeing ten buildings go through the scoring.

Dry Hydrant Locations – Condition –

Adjournment:

Mr. Schneider made a motion to adjourn the Fire Protection Task Force meeting at 7:00 PM. Mr. Holderman seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimous.