

FIRE PROTECTION TASK FORCE
March 24, 2016

Call to Order:

Randy Brachbill called the Thursday, March 24, 2016, meeting of the Fire Protection Task Force together at 5:45 PM.

Members Present:

Gay Dunne, Bellefonte Borough Council Member;
Randy Brachbill, Bellefonte Borough Council Member
Tim Schreffler
Chief Schneider
Brian

Members Absent:

Tom Mensch

Staff Present:

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

Guests:

Approval of Minutes:

Chief Schneider made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 28, 2016 Fire Protection Task Force meeting. Gay Dunne seconded the motion. A voice vote was unanimous to approve the minutes as presented.

Sprinklers:

A note was sent to Ms. Dainty to see if there are any updates on the Grant Application or the Keystone Sprinkler update.

Mr. Stewart reported Pennsylvania Downtown Center is the contractor for the state. There was an employee from Pennsylvania Downtown Center in Bellefonte last week doing an assessment of the program. They asked how the Borough felt about the program and were told the number one reason the Borough got into the program was for sprinkler systems. Mr. Stewart also informed the person that there was concern that the funding has not yet been seen. The representative will take it back and see what he can do.

Mr. Stewart stated another route that can be taken is the CDBG funding. There is an application in.

Chief Schneider asked if there has been any evaluation looked at because it will impact everybody to getting funding for the valve. As numbers begin being pushed downtown the ability to put pressure in the Allegheny main and be able to develop pressure in that beyond what can now be done is going to offset cost in every building. He thinks priorities should be looked

at in fixing the infrastructure piece because it will be paid for over and over and over again every time it is touched. Mr. Stewart agrees. The funding at the state level is pretty tight right now. Chief Schneider questioned if CDBG funds could be used since it directly affects CDBG area. Mr. Stewart said the problem is it has to affect the census block groups. If you go beyond that area then you aren't eligible. Nittany did a flow study and it was found that there is no backflow prevention between the reservoir and the Allegheny main. Water goes from the Allegheny Street reservoir, pumps up to the tower, comes down through the system and flows up Allegheny Street and back into the reservoir.

The question was asked if somewhere in records there is a justification for if something is not addressed with the backflow issue they will require fire pumps in certain locations downtown, which would supersede the value of replacing or upgrading that valve. Mr. Stewart does not know if that is how it is worded. Several fixes to increasing the water pressure downtown have been identified. The quickest and simplest is to install the check valve. The question was raised if there is quantifiable numbers that could be used to justify CDBG money that would be spent on increasing the pressure at a specific property – idea fire pump versus covering that with the remedy that would take care of the pressure of all the properties downtown. Chief Schneider said you would need to pick a property and do the exchange and look at what demand they would want versus what they would need and then at that point of time be able to get that piece of the puzzle. Allegheny Street is a 12. Mr. Holderman said there were a lot of property owners in the downtown install sprinkler systems and they haven't needed any. Chief Schneider said not all properties will need it. Chief Schneider feels the Crider Exchange will definitely need it. Code will not allow you to put in a non-compliant system. If there is a way to quantify the valve, which is \$100,000.00 and two fire pumps will exceed that. Possibly that would help convince the CDBG folks to allow part of the money to be used to replace the valve. Mr. Holderman stated the problem with CDBG, as Mr. Stewart pointed out, is that the system is a looped system. If it were checked off by the low to moderate income block groups and you could isolate it then there are no problems using the funding, but since you are justifying putting that check valve in and they will say that's having an impact on the overall system, which is where the problem always arises. It was suggested if the numbers were available it wouldn't take much effort to put that in the application and let them say no. Mr. Holderman said that can be suggested. The worst thing that could happen is they will come back and say they are giving provisional approval or they will say this isn't an allowable expense with CDBG. Chief Schneider said the problem is that before the tower was put on the system the reservoir fed downtown. The system was made to flow downhill by gravity. What has happened is when the tower got put on the system they didn't put any backflow prevention in it. They just didn't catch that this thing would make its own re-circulating circle. Mrs. Dunne suggested if you targeted more than one multi-residential building housing the low-income and moderate or whatever the exact specifications are, maybe that would be more convincing.

Mr. Brachbill would like to move forward on the agenda. This topic is discussed at every meeting with no progress. If there is time at the end of the meeting it could be discussed more.

Recruitment:

Tim Schreffler reported information was obtained about the contacts on how to get in to assemblies at the schools, but it is a matter of them scheduling. That is the biggest challenge at this time. It will be hit and miss. A question is are there multiple activities going on as far as

recruitment. He is being told that fire departments are going through a recruitment activity as well. He wanted to know if the groups are working against each other. Mr. Brachbill said if the stations are doing something he just would like it reported at this meeting. Mr. Holderman said he knows just by attending the Logan Annual Luncheon they were sitting next to a table where there were three junior fire fighters. He talked with them and asked how they like the program. Chief Schneider talked to the chiefs about setting up recruitment activities. If that is an extension of this he would like to know that so there aren't multiple calls to the school.

There is a video being made for recruitment that Tim would like to use. He spoke to Alpha about what they have been doing and they are going to start that again. He talked to CPI and they actually are trying to determine how a Centre County recruitment video can be done. Once all the details are arranged free advertisement can be used for it.

Mr. Holderman said Tim is going through efforts and it is know that the fire departments have started the junior firefighter program. There should probably be a record somewhere of where the numbers are today so that in two or three years you can go back and look and determine how effective the recruitment program has been or maybe on a yearly basis you can to back and look and see what is working and if anything needs to be tweaked.

Marketing:

Ms. Harvey resigned, but she did look at the website and make some recommendations. It was suggested to have the Chief attend Council meetings and get information out on CNET. Mr. Stewart suggested having different fire safety weeks; have open houses where people check smoke alarms and change batteries or whatever is thought of to keep things on the forefront.

Tim said there was a weekend in Bellefonte called Operation Life Saver where he brought in 175,000 smoke detectors that were handed out to nine different counties.

Old Business:

Volunteer Fair: Mr. Brachbill was at the Volunteer Fair. There was some foot traffic, but not a lot. He felt there were about 25. For the fire fighter side of it they looked at the pictures but it wasn't worth their time. He isn't sure how much it was advertised. Mr. Holderman said it was marketed heavily.

ARD Program: At the last meeting there was some talk about the ARD program, but there hasn't been any activity.

Guidance Counselor Promoting Volunteering at Fire Stations: That is a work in process.

Visibility of Community Activities Information Booth: This is an idea that was being discussed at the Volunteer Fair. When there is an event that possibly both departments could be visible. The last few years the fire department hasn't been at the Children's Fair because it was scheduled on a weekend when there weren't volunteers to take a truck over. Chief Schneider also said they stuck you down the one end of the road and you didn't get a lot of foot traffic so it felt like there wasn't a reason to be there. The fire department used to sell food, but they had to pay a fee for the booth and the committee originally wanted the food supplied to the committee members so in the end they basically were paying or breaking even for a day's work.

Chief Schneider said the Fire Safety Trailer could possibly be a draw for the children. He said part of the problem is that the Children's Fair has become a fundraising event for some organizations. They donate a lot of it back to places, but it is like you are going to make money on our backs to donate back. The Rotary is making a lot of money from the Children's Fair. The last couple years the Borough has been a beneficiary of playground equipment. The Rotary is fulfilling their mission.

Mr. Stewart suggested having a banner at the parade that says volunteers wanted/needed – call. It could be put on the front of the trucks...and the backs. Mrs. Dunne suggested hanging a banner across the street also during Fire Safety Week.

Tim said when they have committees where he works the impact of getting volunteers and participation is there, but it's not there. When management gets involved there are all kinds of volunteers that come out of the woodwork and positive responses are received. Using that as a gauge it would be great if the Borough be the force behind communication and marketing to assist the fire departments is critical. The question was raised if Bellefonte Borough has an information table at all the public gatherings, which they don't. Mr. Holderman feels it would be called a complaint table. Tim feels it would be a shot in the arm if the public realizes the Borough is behind the fire department. An information booth at public events would also give Council members an opportunity to be out there talking to people.

Mrs. Dunne reported there is a joint Borough County meeting at the end of April and it will be a Public Town Hall with topics that are of mutual interest between the Borough and the County. She suggested this could possibly be a setting where this topic could be brought up.

New Business:

Fireman Fund Grant Equal Distribution: Mr. Brachbill reported this money comes in. Every municipality in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is issued in the fall. The money comes from the collection of taxes on fire insurance. The Fireman's Relief money comes from fire insurance payments, any outside corporation. If you are a foreign insurance provided – i.e. State Farm is a foreign fire insurance provider; Erie is a domestic. The foreign insurance providers pay a percentage to the state that is then pulled aside. This dates back into the late 1800's. The purpose today is to pay for insurance and safety equipment for fire departments. That equipment payment goes through the municipality and is divided up two ways. The entire pot that is covered by volunteer fire service in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is dumped into one lump that is split in two. The first half is split based on relative property value and the second is based on population. It is given to the municipalities and they have sixty days to disperse it to a relief organization. There is no requirement as to which relief organization they give it to. The intent is that they give it to the relief organization that is covering their municipality. The fire department gets 100% of Bellefonte Borough's allotment. A portion of the allotment from Benner Township and Spring Township is also received. The money goes directly to pay for life insurance for all the volunteers. There is a lot of span coverage on there for Worker's Comp and other things. It also pays for safety equipment. The annual budget is approximately \$66,000.00. Approximately \$45,000.00 is for safety equipment and recurring expenses directly to the fire company as far as offsetting the costs.

COG:

Mr. Brachbill had a suggestion of a COG using Bellefonte, Pleasant Gap, and Walker. He didn't include Milesburg. He suggested meeting every other month. He wasn't sure if you want to call it a regionalization of the departments, but suggested forming a group because they all are in the same boat as far as membership and challenges. At the Nittany Valley Planning Committee meeting one of the goals through that committee, a ten-year goal, there was an item about fire departments. There was discussion about bringing this group together. Mr. Stewart said basically it is saying one firefighter can serve more than one department.

Sub-Committees:

Mr. Brachbill would like to re-evaluate the sub committees.

Historic Preservation Committee:

Mrs. Dunne reported she and Sue Hannegan are ready to share their criteria with Ms. Dainty to see how it meshes with what the information they have been requesting on the application of a property owner who wants to apply for assistance. That will be done before the next meeting.

Newsletter:

Mr. Holderman reported the Borough newsletter will be going out in April. He suggested Chief Schneider put something in there.

Fire Inspections:

Mr. Brachbill would like a report on how buildings in Bellefonte are doing with the fire code inspections. Chief Schneider said it can be done, but he has a large workload and doesn't have the manpower right now to do it. He doesn't feel it is fair to hit on the first year. He would like to complete year two of the program.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Fire Protection Task Force will be May 26, 2016 at 6:00 p.m.

Adjournment:

Chief Schneider made a motion to adjourn the Fire Protection Task Force meeting at 7:00 PM.