

March 12, 2015
6:00 PM

The Monroe Township Board of Supervisors workshop to discuss the potential of a part time paid driver for the fire company was called to order by Chairman Kehoe.

ATTENDANCE

Phil Kehoe, Chairman
A.W. Castle, Vice Chairman
Samuel Simmons, Supervisor
Marjorie Metzger, Admin. Asst.

Ken Shur , Leadership Committee
Cass Gibson, Leadership Committee
Tom Zerbe, Leadership Committee
Mark Farrell, Leadership Committee
Dave Heckert, Leadership Committee

PROCEDURE

Mr. Kehoe explained this workshop was set up to discuss the need of a part time day time driver for the fire company to augment the fire service in the township. This subject came up last summer as part of the budget workshop, and we have been working on trying to qualify and understand and have asked for help through the formation of a committee to look at it more in depth. He asked for professional dialogue so we can all understand and apply creativity and see where we go from here. After a presentation from the Committee, then the public can introduce themselves and share whether or not they have been involved now or in the past with the fire company or another fire company. That would be helpful.

LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

Ken Shur served 18 years as a school board member for Cumberland Valley School District. He introduced the committee members as follows: Cass Gibson - resident, Tom Zerbe – resident, Dave Heckert – fire chief, and Mark Farrell – President and Assistant Fire Chief.

The Committee members were asked by the Board of Supervisors to serve. They have met four times. The first meeting was on January 27. The assignment given was to make a recommendation to the Supervisors on whether or not there is a need to hire a part time driver for the day time hours, Monday – Friday for the fire company. They also were to study the data. The Committee will not be making a recommendation tonight.

Another public workshop will be held on April 9, 2015. At the end of that meeting, the Committee will make a recommendation. The goal for tonight is for the fire company representatives to go over an outline of what has been reviewed by the Committee since January. Then it will be opened up to questions and dialogue. We will answer questions as openly as we can. If we don't have the answers, we will bring them back at the next meeting.

Mark Farrell said he has been involved in the fire company for 13 years and Dave has been involved since 1982. There has been a steady decline in membership over the years. The idea of a paid driver was brought to the Supervisors more than ten years ago as a concern down the road. In the beginning of 2013 it was a concern because there was a major drop in members. An active volunteer fire company member is someone who responds to more than 20% of the calls. In 2012 they had 12 active members. In 2013, it was reduced to 8 active members. In 2014, they have 8 active members. There are another six very occasional members and a couple fire police to direct traffic. These run less than 15% of the calls. That has been the trend. For the last five years the fire company has been doing budgets with the township and have planned out the year and the challenges.

Mr. Farrell said there has not been a lot of young people join. He is 46 years old and Dave is 45. They have one junior who just joined, which is the first in a couple years. All the volunteers have families except one. We have school aged children. There are no retired folks. Members have jobs that have changed. Mark is on the road a lot. There used to be people working at night so they were available during the day. The average number of members responding went from six in 2013 to three in 2014 during the day. The average during the evenings is 6-8 because everyone is home. This means that during the day there are times when we have as low as 1 or no one available.

Mr. Farrell said there are five qualified engine drivers. The requirements to be a driver is high. There is a lot of responsibility. You must be a seasoned fire fighter with 5+ years. You must be able to take the role of officer and be able to run the pump. The fire company has training internally. They use the guidelines through NFPA. The driver is a significant position. Some people in the fire company don't ever want to drive and some don't have the skill sets to drive. Monroe Fire Company is not unique. Across the country, state, and region there is a decline over the past 30 years of volunteers. You must have 200 hours of training to qualify to be productive. You must be able to wear an air pack and use a hose line. There is specific training required by the state and NFPA to qualify as an interior firefighter. It is a hard requirement. There are always requirements to train, which were increased 6-8 years ago. There is hazardous material training, first aid, AED, and rescue. Years ago there were more mothers who stayed home. Now there are double salary families. It is a real challenge to get volunteers. Both young people and adults are pulled in more directions with sports and kids activities. This all seems to contribute to the lack of interest and time in volunteering.

The question is how to be productive and supplement our volunteers with the lowest cost and meet the need and get out the door. You can just have a guy to get out the door, but there is not enough people to help. That is the reason we have come to this point of putting on part time staff. Someone who works for the township would add huge expenses for one person without adding a lot of coverage. We are most vulnerable from 6 AM to 6 PM, Monday – Friday.

The average call volume over the past three years has been 350 calls per year. 65% of the calls are within the township and 35% are mutual aid. We use our neighbors to help all the

time. If the township building was on fire, there would be 4 engines, a truck, a rescue, and 3 tankers respond. The township is divided into box areas, which determines who is coming for what type of call. We could not survive without mutual aid. We need them and they need us. 60% of the calls are between 6 AM – 6 PM.

If the township approves to start the process, the part time drivers would have no benefits, would be required to have a CDL, and 5 years experience driving a fire engine. The drivers would be managed by the fire company and would have other duties around the station, such as testing of equipment, machinery, and having it all ready for calls. The driver would work from 6 AM – 6 PM. The financial impact to have drivers 5 days a week from 6 AM – 6 PM would be \$40,000 a year. It would consist of all part time people who would work 12 hour shifts at \$10.00 an hour. That is in the middle or lower side for the rate. There would be no impact on the volunteer status. It would not affect Obama care or the grants the fire company gets. It could open up other grants that would help pay for paid people.

PUBLIC INPUT

Eugene Hertzler was involved in the Carlisle fire company way back. He asked where the \$40,000 is coming from. Mr. Farrell said that is up to the Supervisors. Mr. Hertzler said the fire tax was new just a couple years ago. It is more than what the township gets. There is a bigger problem than just a driver. There are only 8 active members. If you add the millage to pay for the driver, but there are not enough people to go with the driver, then you are going to want to hire more to go with the driver. It would be increasing his tax dollars for a losing cause. You may have to look at combining with other fire companies. Police have done that because the price was getting out of hand. He does appreciate the time and hours of training and the time away from family. What will stop the decline trend? What are other fire companies doing to keep members? He can't believe Monroe only has 6-8 active members.

Mr. Farrell said the millage is more for the fire company because the township gets funds from other areas. Mr. Kehoe stated the Township does not operate solely on its real estate tax. The township budget for 2015 is 5.8 million, minus the 2.1 million for sewer which leaves \$3.7 million as an annual operating budget. The fire service tax is \$176,000 and the township real estate tax is slightly less than that. The township has other funding sources for its annual budget in addition to its real estate tax. Mr. Hertzler said the fire company has other funding sources too. Mr. Farrell said they do fundraising, and get firemen's relief, which is insurance money.

Mr. Hertzler asked how much the fire company budget has increased since the fire tax went into effect. Mr. Farrell said the budget has stayed the same and the Township even reduced the millage rate to keep it the same after the County's reappraisal a couple of years ago. The Supervisors approve the same amount from year to year. Mr. Farrell mentioned the library tax and that it is almost half as much as the fire tax. Mr. Farrell said where do we go from here. Everyone around us has the same problem of getting volunteers. North Middleton put a program for drivers in place over 3 years ago. South Middleton has had drivers for over ten years.

Carlisle has had paid drivers for over 20 years. Silver Spring just increased their budget. Each fire company is getting \$750,000. Their budget plans include looking at adding drivers to supplement their lean times. Monroe is not the same as Silver Spring Township. Mr. Hertzler said Silver Spring has many more calls. Mr. Hertzler mentioned many of the calls that Monroe responds to are outside the township. Monroe only had 4-5 house fires in 2014 and the year before only one. Mr. Farrell said they must be ready for a house fire at any time. You can't predict.

Mr. Hertzler said it must be looked at in different ways. You can't keep taxing the people. He does appreciate what the fire company does. Different companies specialize in different things. Mr. Farrell said Monroe does specialize and does not have a rescue or truck. They have the boat. Merging with another fire company has been looked at, but we have not found where this will benefit Monroe Township. Silver Spring, Mechanicsburg, Upper Allen, York County, South Middleton, and Middlesex companies are all struggling for membership. Many are looking at paid drivers as a means to help. They have mutual aid back and forth. It would extend the response time to have outside fire companies come in to respond. He doesn't see where merging will benefit the township.

Mr. Shur said regionalization was beyond the scope of what the Committee was to look at. Mr. Hertzler said once there is a tax in effect, it will never go away.

Joanna Reinhard asked if the fire tax is in place because the resident's couldn't give enough money to the volunteer fire company to keep it going. She mentioned the concern of home owners insurance and how hard it is to get for some people. The only thing that saved her was the Yellow Breeches creek. She asked if there have been any complaints about the home owners insurance going up or that insurance is difficult to get because of the fire service. Mr. Farrell is not aware of anyone having problems with getting insurance coverage. The rates are affected because most don't have fire hydrants. If we merge and have no fire house, the rates will go up a good bit because of increased response time. The insurance is based on how close you are to the fire house, how much equipment they have, and how much water they carry. Mrs. Reinhard mentioned the people in the early 20's going off to college. She asked if tournaments are ever used, which attract communities.

Dave DeNicholas has been a resident over 30 years and has never been involved in the fire company. He has spent his life in money and banking. He reviewed the statistics he had received through a Right to Know request to the Township, that showed there were only 9 structure fires in the township in 2013. The majority of the calls were medical assist. He questioned if there are any EMT's or paramedics in the fire company. Mr. Farrell said there are 3 EMT's and 1 paramedic. The fire company provides BLS support and medical assist calls when the ambulance is not available. They also run all cardiac arrest calls.

Mr. DeNicholas said the fire company is operating on a cash budget of about \$200,000 with expenses and debt. The township has around 2,000 units and little growth. Projections

from the county says there will only be 1,000 more people over the next 25 years. We have mostly single family dwellings. He sees this as more of an EMT service than fires. Let's consider what we are and then what needs to be done to solve it. It is a very difficult situation. No one is doing well. The fire company has two great pieces of equipment that some don't have. Consider all avenues and maybe go out and look at merging. Hats off to you guys, with the things you do such as Santa and Easter. They are good for the community. We have to find a way to make it all work. It is a lot of money. Definitely consider all the angles. \$10 an hour for part time drivers who need a lot of training. Where are you going to get that person? Dave Heckert said there is no shortage. There are part time drivers in Carlisle, South Middleton, North Middleton, some from the 911 Center, and even chiefs from other departments. Mr. Farrell went over his call volume numbers, which comes from the state reporting system. He gave specific numbers for types of calls for 2013 and 2014.

2013

354 Calls

175 Calls Monday through Friday, 6 AM – 6 PM

51 Structure Calls (12 in township)

37 Vehicle accident/Vehicle fire (32 in township)

11 Outside Fire (all in township)

71 Medical Assists (all in township)

1 Water Rescue (outside township)

4 Other (all in township)

2014

298 Total Calls

123 Calls Monday through Friday, 6 AM – 6 PM

46 Structure calls (14 in township)

23 Vehicle accidents/Vehicle fires (22 in township)

6 Outside Fire (3 in township)

38 Medical Assists (all in township)

2 Water rescue (1 in township)

8 Other (6 in township)

Mr. Farrell addressed the change in medical assist calls they made between 2013 and 2014 as it pertains to West Shore EMS. The fire company responds to 2nd due EMS calls (when the first and local ambulance is unavailable). There was a CAD issue that did not allow them to differentiate between West Shore EMS who has 2-3 ambulances in Mechanicsburg area and other providers. Once this CAD issue was addressed, the fire company made a change to not respond to West Shore calls unless all ambulances were unavailable.

Christine Pulgar is not involved in the fire company but has several relatives in

surrounding fire companies. She is not arguing the need for drivers. She asked how many vehicles are provided for the volunteers that are not fire engines. Who maintains these vehicles, who purchases them, what about the registration and gas? Dave Heckert said the fire company has an engine, tanker, utility, mini pumper, an explorer for fire police, and three chief's vehicles. Mrs. Pulgar asked what happened to the vehicles they had previously. She asked what the purpose of these vehicles, and how they benefit the fire company? She asked if the fire company would be willing to give up those vehicles to pay for the part time drivers. Dave Heckert said the vehicles are paid for with firemen's relief. The chief's are responsible to pay for their own gas for these cars. Mrs. Pulgar said we could better the equipment we have and equipment for the community to use without those vehicles. How about updating the fire hall so more people will rent it out? Mr. Farrell said they have rentals now and in the last 12 months the hall has been completely painted inside and all ceiling tiles replaced. He said Silver Spring has two vehicles for chiefs. We could debate every expense.

Keith Metzger has lived in the township for 34 years and was involved in the fire company for many years. There are a lot of things to consider before going with paid drivers. The firemen's relief money comes from home owners insurance. The home owners insurance is affected by the ISO rating. Mr. Metzger said the ISO rating has decreased and the fire company does not care. What are we doing to raise the ISO rating for the residents? Mr. Kehoe suggested that he reads the Board of Supervisors minutes from last year that already contains a detailed report on this subject. He had a list of questions to cover, but did not have enough time. Ken Shur asked him to provide a list of questions and there would be responses for the next meeting.

Steve Paulus said the Planning Commission allows 5 minutes to each person for comments. We gave the first guy a ½ hour. He is a fourth generation farmer. He would like to see young people get involved. He mentioned the FFA scholarships that are provided. If we don't address the real issue of not being able to get members, then why go this route of drivers. Get really creative and get people who are studying public safety. A lot of farmers don't have the infrastructure. This Committee can't keep raising taxes.

Gary Seifert asked what the increase would mean to the fire tax for a \$40,000 need. Mr. Farrell said the \$40,000 increase is \$6 per 100,000 of assessed value on a home. This equates to just over \$12 a year for the average home in Monroe, which is an assessment of \$209,000.

Jane Lerch mentioned Shippensburg uses students from the college.

Greg Hertzler mentioned the HACC firefighting program. Some of those students are members at New Kingstown. Some fire companies do live-in programs with these students. Why not try something like that. We already have a bunk room.

BOARD'S COMMENTS

Mr. Kehoe said the next time we have the preliminary information out of the way which

will allow more time for questions and comments. Is there any value to posting the summary that Mark Farrell provided at the beginning on our website? There was a lot of information. There was some conflicting information between what Dave DeNicholas stated and what the fire company's State reports show. We could put the information on the township website. There is emotion and money attached to this subject so we need to make sure this issue is clear for everyone. He thanked the Committee for doing this. It was above and beyond. He invited everyone to the next meeting to continue the dialogue.

ADJOURN

The workshop was adjourned at 7:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie E. Metzger
Admin. Asst./ Secretary-Treasurer