

April 9, 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 is the second workshop and a continuation from last month regarding the discussion and question of whether or not Monroe Township needs to bring on part time paid driver's for day time coverage to improve day time coverage. We learned from last month's workshop. Tonight we are being a little more structured to allow more time for input. We will focus on a five minute time limit to speak. The Leadership Committee, led by Ken Shur, will work through that as people get called on. Items have come up over the month and there were some questions submitted to the township and not all were posted to the website for answers. The Committee focused on the question of driver/no driver. The questions on sustainability, operations of the department and budget all fall to the Board of Supervisors to address once we get the recommendation from the Leadership Committee. This is not something the Board of Supervisors will take on to vote immediately in May, assuming the Leadership Committee makes a recommendation for a driver. They may say no driver. We have no idea where it is going. Once we have that recommendation and assume a driver is requested, then all the operational and business questions will need to be answered and that will be the responsibility of the Board of Supervisors. There is no intention of not answering the questions or any kind of conspiracy. This subject matter leaks over to the overall operation of the fire company. We will go over the information received. The intention was for the Committee to have one or two meetings and there were more than that to work through the items. This is not being rushed through the system. If the recommendation for a driver is made, then the Board has another whole decision to make and processes to go through.

LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

Ken Shur said the Committee will try to do a better job to get the questions answered to the satisfaction of the people. Our scope was to make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors on driver/no driver. That is what we have worked through since January. Our goal is to make a recommendation at the May meeting. That is our target.

PUBLIC INPUT

Heather Dunn asked about the items that were looked at as the Committee went through the analysis and any surprises you didn't expect or found.

Mr. Shur said what startled him was the number of active firefighters. It is very limited. He had no idea there were only a hand full that met the criteria of responding to 25% of the calls. During the daytime, Monday through Friday, from 6 AM – 6 PM, the probability for someone to move a piece of equipment to respond, chances are very limited. During the evening it doesn't appear to be an issue. Over the weekend is not an issue. He was surprised with the sophistication of the fire company. There is a great deal of time spent on equipment maintenance. They are committed to training the staff. They are committed to the mutual aid agreements. He didn't expect that from a local volunteer fire company. There is a network with all the fire companies in Pennsylvania. It scares him that there is no coverage when the firehouse is across the street and the elementary school is beside the township building. If there is a fire during the day, chances of moving that equipment is slim. We would have to rely on Carlisle and New Kingstown to respond. It could be a home or a barn.

Tom Zerbe said he was shocked with the number of volunteers and not getting the truck out during the day. It needs a lot of thought and figuring out to get the truck out during the day.

Cass Gibson was amazed at the amount of time it takes someone to volunteer to become a fireman before being allowed to do anything. It takes 200 hours of their own time going to Harrisburg to go through the training. That is relatively new and a big problem. We are all here because we are concerned. Our next step is to go to the people we elected, not just the three Supervisors, but Harrisburg and Washington, about the mandate. It is affecting us. The more people trained, the better they are prepared, but the adverse effect is we can't get volunteers any more. He thought the high school kids got involved, but the amount of time it takes is amazing. The people spend their personal time away from their families doing the training.

Heather Dunn did not realize there is such limited day time coverage. She is on the school board so it is a huge concern. There are 350 kids in that school. If there is any kind of disaster we need to be able to provide that coverage. That is a concern.

Rhonda Bender said she was a social member of the fire company in the past. She asked if this is a new tax being asked for in addition to the fire tax we are already paying. With regard to no one to respond during the day, which is the reason to have a paid day time driver, what good is a driver if no one else goes.

Mr. Kehoe commented on the tax aspect. The charge to the Leadership Committee was whether or not the current fire company needs a day time driver. After that recommendation is made then it is up to the Supervisors to agree or disagree and figure out how to pay for it. Although the tax is the easiest, there is other financing out there if it gets to that point. A tax

increase will be discussed, but it is not the only avenue to be evaluated for this. It is not an automatic tax increase.

Rhonda Bender asked where the current fire tax is going. Has an audit been done on the money? How do the residents see where that money is going?

Mr. Kehoe said the current tax is \$30 per each \$100,000 of assessed home value. If this path is chosen, we are talking about an additional \$12. We are a long way from that decision.

Mark Farrell said the situation during the day is not so cut and dry to say we have no one. We could have one or none. We have a few people with floating jobs. A driver would get the rig out and maybe one or two people to compliment that. If we have a large incident, we bring other companies in to help. Mr. Shur said there could be someone to respond but no one to drive.

Rhonda Bender said there are only eight active members and most have day time jobs. If you hire drivers for day time, it seems likely you won't have people to respond with the driver. You get the equipment there and have others help by using our equipment. Mr. Farrell said hopefully someone else would go, but it is to get the equipment there. The driver will go even if no one else goes.

Joanna Reinhard said she enjoyed the last meeting. It was loaded with information. She asked what fire equipment the fire company has. Mr. Farrell said they have one fire truck, one tanker, one mini pumper, utility and boats. She asked if the driver can operate all that equipment. Dave Heckert said primarily the driver would drive the engine and would be a backup for the mini pumper or tanker if the engine was down for maintenance. They will be closely trained. The engine carries 750 gallon of water and the tanker carries 2,200 gallon.

Mrs. Reinhard questioned why the fire company doesn't consolidate. With mutual aid, we basically are consolidated, not technically, but it is there. If each fire department has a strength, what is Monroe's strength? Dave Heckert said their special is water rescue. There are only three companies with boats in Cumberland County. We have a large area of mutual aid we provide the boat service to. We also respond to a large area for rapid intervention team. If there is a large fire, we are on the scene to go in after a firefighter that goes down. We do this especially in York County and Cumberland. Mr. Farrell said Monroe is an engine company. There are truck companies. We also have a tanker that carries water. You need more than one tanker in a non-hydranted area. Other companies are big in rescue. Mrs. Reinhard appreciates how the 911 center factors in to who is responding. They know the situation and what each department's strength is.

Bill Castle said the driver just doesn't drive the truck. This is an experienced, certified firefighter. The driver would arrive on the scene, assess the incident, take command and call in mutual aid. This is a professional. He would prime the pump and have the lines ready to enter

and attack. When another officer would arrive, he would take over command. He is not just a driver. This is an unfunded mandate.

Gary Seifert asked if we go ahead with the process and hire drivers (multiple), would they be at the station or within a certain distance of the firehouse. Mr. Heckert said the driver would be on station from 6 AM – 6 PM. That would be their job. They would be asked to do other things like maintaining the apparatus, general station work, would be the point of contact for phone calls, and could schedule fire prevention.

Mr. Shur asked how many drivers would be hired. Mr. Heckert said about ten people to accommodate a flexible schedule. Mr. Farrell said it could be a different person each day of the week. It is like a second job.

Steve Paulus said he spoke to a candidate for county commissioner. There is a possibility of the county looking into putting paid drivers throughout Cumberland County. It may not be Monroe. He asked if that has been researched. Has anyone from Monroe talked to the county about this? Mr. Farrell said that would be a county decision. There are meetings he attends as part of the county fire association. Those types of things are discussed, but there has been no action taken to have the county fund a driver program. Not to say it wouldn't happen down the road. Mr. Heckert said he attends the county fire chief's meetings and there has been no discussion on that. Mr. Paulus suggested they talk to the county commissioners. Mr. Kehoe said you are aware if that ever did happen it would not come free or without a tax base. Was this candidate running or being re-elected. Mr. Paulus refused to specify and said he would let the candidate know how to contact the fire company and Supervisors.

Cass Gibson was concerned if the driver's would go to a county level, because then our voice would be much smaller. We control how much pay, and \$10 an hour for someone with CDL and other qualifications and certifications is important. He understands where Mr. Paulus is coming from but if we go in this direction he would be much more in favor of keeping the control.

Eugene Hertzler said when he came into this he didn't have an opinion one way or the other, even with asking a lot of questions. He just is asking for justification. He is hearing over and over again about the lack of volunteers. His main concern is what to do to increase the volunteers. We have to be more active in getting more members. He would sign up but has any of the people on the committee signed up? Why not send out a mailing for membership. Mr. Farrell offered an application to Mr. Hertzler and he said he would take one. Mr. Hertzler said getting the driver is putting a band aid on the problem. Mr. Farrell said he is open to putting out a mailer, which they have done. Applications are taken to all the events. They have worked with the Scouts. He is open to ideas.

Mr. Hertzler said he has talked to several fire companies about their volunteer rates and they have seen a drop, but nothing major like we have had. He asked if the fire company has

talked to members from 5-10 years ago to see why they are not here anymore. Mr. Shur said the idea could be talked through. Mr. Zerbe said when Mr. Hertzler signs up with the fire company, the membership drive would be a good job for him.

Cass Gibson mentioned Representative Regan will be at the township building on April 28 for a town meeting. We should all show up for that and talk about the requirement being placed on firefighters for training. It would be a start.

Dave DeNicholas said there is plenty of clarification needed. He understands the money is not to be talked about, but there is more than just the \$10 an hour to talk about. Mr. Gibson agreed and said the rest would be an additional 20% added on.

John Kugler was a former Monroe firefighter. It took time to complete the training. He has come back to the fire company and is the oldest member at 48 years of age. There is no reason why he can't do something. What it takes is a group and a team. Age doesn't matter. We need to think about what we are doing here. It is about keeping the township safe. His father is 82 and still fights fires. Think about that.

Murrel Walters thanked all those people who volunteered on the Committee. They are getting grief and not getting paid. He is not a volunteer firefighter, but is amazed at how much time and effort is put into this and they don't get paid. He has been a resident for most of his life. He sleeps better at night knowing the fire company is manned. You think about the \$5, \$10, \$20, but if you start thinking about the dollar, how much is a life worth. If the fire company is not manned during the day, the fires could be much worse when no one is home. He does not know how to get more volunteers. Part Time drivers make a lot of sense to him. We shouldn't be quibbling about the small dollar amount. He bets insurance will go up each year if the fire company folds up. Spending more money for day time coverage will save him money in the end. We have one life or one animal. He is fervently in favor of the paid drivers. If we could get enough volunteers, then the paid position could be ended.

Cass Gibson said if we didn't have a tanker, the insurance would be 10-15% higher. That is an agent's initial guess.

Joanna Reinhard said age is not the only thing. The first woman firefighter she knew was at Fairview Township, and she was in her 50's.

Tom Vogelsong said most of the room is made up of volunteers. Why not put this matter on the ballot and let all the residents vote on it.

Sheldon Brymesser said when he was a kid, volunteers were not the problem. Everyone wanted to be a firefighter or a state cop, for the excitement. Those days are gone. Now everyone is on their computer's and don't want to do the training. If you are running a company and need 12 employees and only have 5, that is a problem. To make the tax dollars work and make the

part time driver's work, we need to train more people. It takes time and money. If there were more trained people he would be more excited about paying a driver. A lot of states have county wide fire companies, but it is said if we went to that the insurance would be more. Mr. Gibson said insurance is based on the distance from the fire company tanker because of the rural character of the township. Mr. Farrell said in a city the tanker requirement would not be there. Mr. Brymesser said the volunteers have had 50-80 years of a good thing. That has gone away. It may take a couple years, but it will probably end up county wide.

Mr. Brymesser suggested closing down the fire company, selling the equipment, renting out the building as a restaurant, renting space from the township building, and removing the fire tax. This would all equal up to 1.2 million, which could be applied to the sewer debt for one year. Other companies could come in and donations could be made from the General Fund and go from there. The northeast area could be covered by Mechanicsburg, the southeast area by Dillsburg, the southwest area by South Middleton, the northwest area by Carlisle, and the center by New Kingstown.

Mr. Kehoe said Mr. Brymesser, in between his humor, makes an excellent point about renting the vacant space in the township office. If there is a recommendation for other companies to cover Monroe, that will need to be formally worked out with the other fire companies. Since Mr. Brymesser knows about running a business, he knows you can't go into something that large on a hand shake. It would be a more formal business agreement and the cost per run will need to be determined and agreed to and so on. It is something we may need to look at.

Rhonda Bender said New Kingstown ran over 700 calls last year and she is not sure she would want them to be responding for her.

Eugene Woodward has been a member of the fire company since 1972. There have been all kinds of obstacles. He still responds as fire police. We need all types of volunteers to help with fire police, people to help with fundraising and administration. This is a business and we need everyone. Everyone has a position they can fill in the fire company.

Heather Dunn said if this moves forward and ten new drivers are hired, she would encourage the inclusion as part of that job description to improve the efforts of social media to get more volunteers. She asked if there are other township's doing this and are we modeling this after another township? Mr. Farrell said yes, others are doing it. Carlisle has had paid drivers for several decades as a borough. South Middleton has had paid drivers for at least ten years. North Middleton has had drivers for about three years.

Mr. Shur said the Committee met with the North Middleton fire chief to understand the mechanics. Silver Spring has approved a big increase in fire tax and part of that plan is to incorporate drivers into their service.

Steve Paulus questioned if only three will be casting their vote on the Committee. It was confirmed, the fire company won't vote. He understands drivers are needed, but they need more than drivers. Sixty hours a week is a big chunk. If you do that, the guys driving the night shift will stop, because they could get paid during the day. He is not taking away from the fire service, but this is a band aid. The need is to recruit, to get young people, college students from Dickinson, and make a dorm room. Get high schools involved and help with scholarships. He encouraged the fire company to look at membership.

Mr. Farrell said Mr. Paulus is right, membership is needed. Mr. Paulus and Mr. Brymesser have good opportunities to help the fire company because they have young people working for them. Mr. Farrell is not going to do this for the next 40 years. He is not the future. The fire company does have a bunk room and they have had live-ins in the past. Monroe Township is not the best draw for college students. It would have to be someone who is already trained because they don't have the time to volunteer and train while going to school. They really need the communities help. The officers have talked to the volunteers about putting on part time drivers and what it would mean. We are happy about it. He doesn't want to be the guy by himself. He doesn't want to drive. Carlisle, South Middleton, North Middleton, and Mt. Holly have drivers to help get the job done.

Eugene Hertzler asked if there are any restrictions on current or past members of the fire company being hired as drivers. Mr. Farrell said the goal is to hire outside people. North Middleton had a different take on that. Our first approach is hire outside people. He doesn't know if they will completely limit because if someone calls off and they need to fill a shift then it would be good to have a dedicated resource. We are not looking at our people. Dave Heckert is the only one qualified with a CDL. We have had outside interest shown. One is from Harrisburg, and that is a resource that is very well trained.

Joanna Reinhard mentioned the changing working environment. We don't have as much manufacturing and industry. A lot of those businesses had trained fire personnel on the premises. At her job, everyone was trained and moved when someone responded so the spot was never vacant.

Glenn Sarvis said for the past four years he has been active with the Franklin County caving adventure club with Messiah and Dickinson. He is really impressed with the students in the club who are not just willing to do things and help people, but they have good attitudes with life in general. Those students would be good volunteers.

BOARD'S COMMENTS

Bill Castle said the Board selected different people for the Leadership Committee. He was also involved, but he stepped back and did not influence the Committee. We have a fire company of fine people in the township, but it is just not big enough. As businessmen, the fire company will have to sacrifice and the township will have to sacrifice. The Committee should

draft a letter to Representative Regan and Senator Vance asking them to work on the 200 hours of training requirement. They need to change those rules. Let the fire company people train their own people. The economy is changing and there are things we need to address. Volunteers must be certified. Kids are in activities and a lot of parents work. People don't have the time. Training is important and needs to be explored with the state fire commissioner. Volunteers at churches and PTO's are also hard to get, and they don't need to be trained. We all have homes and families. The Township is to provide for the health and welfare of the people and fire protection comes under that. How to address that, the Board will come up with some ideas. Just raising the fire tax is the easy way, but we will look at other ways to cut funds and see what we can come up with. We can look at cutting costs down where reasonable and work on the budget, just like at home. We will work with you. The Board has not discussed raising the tax.

Mr. Kehoe thanked everyone for coming out and sharing their thoughts and opinions. The Committee will come back at the next regular meeting and make a recommendation and then the Committee will be disbanded. He thanked the Committee for planning for these public events.

ADJOURN

The workshop was adjourned at 7:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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