

**Minutes of July 11, 2019 WESC Meeting**, held at Warwick Ambulance Station.

**In Attendance:** Scott Barr, Pat Barrett, Sonny Ebersole, Herb Flosdorf, Jeff Garner, Aaron Hoover, Frank Kenavan, Edna Kline, Lynn Mearig, Zach Miller, Duane Ober, Ron Oettel, Mike Smith, Brian Wiker, and Greg Young.

Meeting was called to order by Chairman Brian Wiker at 6:30pm.

**Treasurer's Report:** The 2019 year-to-date budget, as of June 30, 2019 was reviewed. Ron Oettel a motion to accept the budget as presented, seconded by Frank Kenavan, and passed.

**Previous Minutes:** The May 2019 Minutes were approved as presented.

### **Unfinished Business**

**Earned Income Tax / Property Tax Relief** – Brian Wiker stated that the tax credit is close to being adopted in Elizabeth Township.

**Fire Extinguisher Training Prop** – Duane reported that he submitted the grant paperwork to DCED and is just waiting to hear from them.

**Medical Exam** – Duane reported that we continue to have problems with the bills from UPMC, with pricing that wasn't agreed upon, bills sent to members instead of the fire company, and unpaid bills being sent to collections. Duane asked all agencies to stop sending members for physicals until this can be resolved. Dennis Strauss informed Duane that he was checking with staff at Cornerstone Family Health to see if they could offer the same package for us. Duane continues to work with Glenda from UPMC to get this corrected.

### **New Business**

**Yellow Dot Program** – Duane reviewed the Yellow Dot program from PennDOT with everyone and asked for the information to be posted and promoted at the fire stations and ambulance buildings for members and staff to be reminded about the program. This is a result of a resident at Traditions of America questioning our awareness and knowledge of the program.

### **Open Comments**

**Rothsville** – Greg Young reported that they are currently upgrading the security at the fire station by installing an electronic key access system and security cameras. They also just recently took part in the demonstration of a product called FAST Board, which is used to help rescue civilians or downed firefighters more quickly. He stated that Rothsville will most likely be purchasing one, at a cost of around \$2,500.

**Lititz** – Ron Oettel thanked everyone for assisting at the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks event in Lititz Borough. He advised that there were many changes this year and possibly more to come with the additional buildings being built at Wilbur.

**Warwick Ambulance** – Frank Kenavan reported that their call volume year-to-date has been lower compared to previous years.

**Rothsville Ambulance** – Scott Barr reported that one of their part-time employees from Wellspan left and they are currently using Warwick EMS to help staff the open shifts while they work with Wellspan for a new employee.

**NWEMS** – Edna Kline reported that the Brickerville ambulance ran 73 calls in June, with 461 calls in first half of the year.

**Elizabeth Township** – Brian Wiker reported that Dollar General is no longer involved in the building plans at Long Lane and Route 322. Tractor Supply is still moving forward with their building plans.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned prior to the presentation for the evening. The next WESC meeting will be Thursday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, at Rothsville Fire Station, beginning at 6:30pm.

**Guest:** Brian Wiker introduced Mike Ibberson, the Fire Chief of Swatara Township in Dauphin County. Mike described Swatara Township as approximately 15 square miles, with 30,000 residents, but up to 85,000 population during the work day. Routes 83, 230 and 441 also run through the township, as well as Eisenhower Blvd. They average close to 1,500 fire calls per year.

Mike originally was hired as the Director of Fire Services for the township. When he began, there were five fire departments in the township, but now they have four (one was closed). One issue they had was that firefighting tactics were performed differently in the township, depending on whose call it was. They began the process to work under one system by adopting township wide Standard Operating Guidelines, which took about one year to complete. They also had a fire study completed by VFIS, similar to the study that WESA had done in 2012. They also had another fire study done by an ad-hoc group of citizens and business leaders.

As a result of the study, they created a Township Fire Board, which is an advisory board. The Board is made up of 2 citizens, 4 fire chiefs, 1 elected official and Mike. This Board essentially runs the township fire service now. He had a goal of getting the township to fully fund the fire services in the township which has been accomplished. All the bills from the four fire stations go directly to the township to be paid. Their funding comes from a fire tax, which generates approximately \$1.4 million. Combining the funding of the fire companies also saved over \$60,000 by joining the insurance policies from the individual fire stations.

Mike also developed a township organization chart and structure from which to operate from. The fire chiefs from three of the four township fire stations are now considered Township Assistant Chiefs, plus one other Assistant Chief. With input from the assistant fire chiefs, Mike then appoints the remaining officers, chosen through a promotional process. They have a total of 16 fire officers now, compared to 32 officers previously. The officers all have tasks that they are expected to perform to maintain their rank. He stresses to his members the need to follow the chain of command at incidents, while also flowing from the bottom to the top when making purchase requests. By the time he gets a purchase request, he knows that it has passed through his line officers for support.

Each fire company maintains their own 501(c)3 status and two of them still do fund drives, bringing in an additional \$15,000-\$20,000 per year. The fire companies each still have control over their finances, which can be used for misc. purchases, such as clothing, electronics, etc. The township owns one fire station, the rest are still owned by the fire companies.

Once the new system was established, Mike created a new fire company identification number. All the fire rigs have the new number on them, but also contain the community name on them for tradition. Mike felt it was

important to move forward and have a new identity for the township fire service, so that the individual numbers of the four fire companies did not keep the system separated.

The fire companies are accountable to the township through an established ordinance. If the fire company is not following the SOG's, they can be removed from providing service in the township. Mike is not permitted to remove a firefighter as a member of the fire company, but he has the ability to remove their ability to serve as a volunteer in the township and being covered by insurance.

Mike and the township assistant chiefs now have full control over purchasing the apparatus. He found it did not work with having many members serving on the committee. Since the township is funding the apparatus, he has final say in what is purchased. Fire companies may not purchase their own apparatus and use them; they are not covered by insurance and will not be permitted to respond to calls in the township.

Mike's success as the Fire Director first, and now as Fire Chief, is due to the support he receives from the elected officials. They currently still maintain full volunteer staffing, but when the data shows the need for paid staffing, he will support it. The data would have to show a slower response time and fewer volunteers participating.

Swatara Township offers an incentive program to its volunteers, in order to remain volunteer as long as possible. They do not offer a tax credit, since many of their volunteers do not live in the township, since they are live-ins at the fire stations. The incentive program is fully funded by the township, with this year's budget being set at \$100,000. The Assistant Chiefs are eligible for up to \$5,000 per year for performing their duties, paid monthly. Additional line officers can earn up to \$133 per month, while firefighters are paid based on incentives earned through a point system. Firefighters are paid once certain classes are completed, number of calls run, standby shifts worked, and more. The system has been working because the members appreciate the immediate reward for their efforts. The funding is managed through the township finance office. There is no conflict for paying the incentives, since it is nominal fee for service, which is less than 20% of the salary of a career firefighter, and taxes are withheld.

Mike also stressed the value of having a fire company Instagram page for recruitment purposes. Posting photos of training activities and incidents is seen by a lot of people, which helps them bring in new live-ins each year and maintain support in the township.

Mike explained the benefits of including members in small groups for projects, so that they take ownership, and feel a sense of satisfaction once they have completed their task. This in turns leads to a desire to do more for the department.

Mike reports to the Swatara Township Public Safety Director, which he supports. Originally, his role had close, to no, supervision.

One of the benefits to his township wide system is that once they are trained, the firefighters can respond from any of the township fire stations. The drivers, once qualified, can also drive similar rigs in the other stations as well. If only one station is dispatched and a crew of personnel is present in another fire station, they are permitted to add themselves onto the call.

Mike stated that other benefits that they have realized has been better operational efficiency, response times are down and the incentive program is working to retain volunteers. Mike also makes an effort to interview his volunteers to get feedback from each one of them.

Mike completed his presentation with reviewing a new Peer Support Program they have just created to provide employee assistance to their volunteers. The benefit can be used for, but not limited to: stress management, work-related problems, financial, legal, marital, grief, substance abuse, planned intervention and critical incident stress management.

Minutes submitted by Duane Ober, July 23, 2019.