


Crawford  County

County Commissioners
Chairman
Eric Henry
Vice-Chairman
Francis F. Weiderspahn, Jr
Secretary/Treasurer
John Christopher Soff

Fire Commission Members
Allen Clark, Conneautville
Eric Coston, East Mead
John Fuller, Vernon Central
Robert Horvat, Vernon Township

Fire Commission
c/o Crawford County DPS
632 Pine Street
Meadville, Pennsylvania 16335

Fire Commission Members
Phil Koon, Saegertown
Joe Lamey, Titusville
Bob McCartney, Fallowfield
MaryAnn Menanno, Meadville
Jim Pratt, West Mead #2
Ryan Sekerski, Cochranton
Kris Simmons, Crawford DPS/911
Joe Smock, Meadville
Justin Sullivan, Townville
John Treacy, Conneaut Lake
Bob Wimer, Greenwood

**Crawford County Fire Commission
Stakeholder Subcommittee Meeting**

MEETING MINUTES

September 7, 2022, 9:00am, Crawford County DPS

Attending:

Allen Clark, Conneautville Fire Dept.
John Treacy, Conneaut Lake Fire Dept.
Phil Koon, Saegertown Fire Dept. (virtual)
Kim Flynn, Starn Marketing
Chuck Lawrence, Saegertown Borough
Jay Verno, Retired
Chuck Evanoff, Penelec

Aaron Fox, PennDOT
Greg Beveridge, DPS Director
Don Bovard, DPS Operations and Training
Joe Bernier, NW Rural Electric Coop
Dave Schepplemann, NW Rural Electric Coop
Greg Bush, Bush Investment Group

- I. Allen Clark welcomed everyone to the meeting and everyone introduced themselves.
- II. Allen Clark gave an overview of what the Fire Commission is and some of the objectives of the Commission were
- III. Best resources to respond to trees and wires down calls

The question was posed, is sending the fire department on trees with or without wires down the best use of resources?

Both electric companies and PennDOT reported they are short staffed and have a hard time hiring employees just like the fire departments are. Their employees are aging just like the fire departments. They do cover large areas from a county to several counties. They do have personnel on-call for emergencies and their average response time is 1.5 hours based on their data.

The local fire department is the quickest resource to respond to trees/wires down compared to utilities or road departments. Everyone was in agreement that many reports from the public of trees down are minor and can just be lifted off the road. Good on-scene size up is critical for both utilities and PennDOT to know the scope of the situation and to send the correct resources. Flares get motorists attention in general compared to traffic cones.

PennDOT does have regional foremen that can respond quickly but may not have the correct equipment needed for the emergency. 80% of their equipment is located at the Meadville facility with limited equipment at the regional stockpile locations.

Both the utilities and PennDOT would like an accurate size up of the scene when their resources are being requested. PennDOT even asked for the fire officer on scene's phone number so they can communicate directly with them to determine the scope of the incident and to determine the correct equipment and personnel to respond.

Both utilities and PennDOT prioritize damages and incidents reported in their jurisdictions and send resources to the most urgent situation.

PennDOT said fire departments and municipalities can remove trees and debris from state roads to render them safe and drivable. Communication is the key. Contacting them and giving them accurate information and what is needed helps them get the right resource to that area the fastest.

It was asked if a survey of other counties could be done to see what their policies and procedures are in regards to trees/wires down.

NW Rural Electric Coop does have a hot line demo trailer that can be requested to help educate public safety and the public about the dangers of electricity and downed electric lines.

IV. Community and municipal perception of the fire service in Crawford County

Most residents do not value the fire service until they have an emergency and need the fire department. When those in attendance were younger everyone looked up to the firefighters and everyone wanted to be a firefighter when they grew up. Firefighters were generational having three or four generations volunteering together at the same time. Volunteerism in general is down no matter if it's the fire service or any civic organization.

An example of obtaining public input was the broad ban survey that the county sent out to everyone. This was an educational survey and not a sales pitch.

Some fire departments are responding to the same number of call or more but there are more non-emergency calls responding to rather than emergency calls where there is fire or are life threatening.

State and Federal Legislators have been engaged but need to act on state and federal solutions. Talking to them over and over until they do act was suggested as a way of making changes for the positive.

V. Funding for fire service

It was noted that since COVID-19 Pandemic, many fire departments have gone to on-line social media fundraising to generate revenue.

Municipalities can impose a fire tax but many elected officials and residents see as a negative. Fee for services or surcharge are better terms or means to generate funding. Municipalities can by legislature enact a .5 mill tax for EMS but no municipality in Crawford County is doing that. Some municipalities have recently enacted a storm water fee. It was suggested that the state generate the funding for the fire service similar to liquid fuels funding. The

county could enact of tax or a user fee can be added to cell phones as possible revenue generators.

The local bed tax was discussed as a possible revenue source. 2% goes to the tourism bureau and 1% to the county. In the last couple years Crawford County has lost hotel beds which has decreased the amount of revenue. Residents want to see a return on their investment or financial contribution.

A lot of non-profits including fire departments ask businesses to donate money or items to raffles and fundraisers. Businesses can only afford to donate so much funding and still make a profit after expenses.

Many fast food and retail businesses ask the shopper if they would like to round up for a cause. Maybe sometime that cause can be their local fire department.

VI. Community and municipal education efforts

A suggestion was made to have firefighter programs in the elementary schools to get the children interested in public safety and then when they turn fourteen, they can join a fire department. Education of teachers to the true need in public safety would also have to take place. Similar programs have been done with Educator in the Work Place Program, job shadowing, and summer interns.

Many residents and elected officials do not know what the cost of emergency equipment and vehicles are today and the shelf life some of the equipment have. This should be included in an educational campaign as well. Town Hall Meetings was suggested as a means of reaching residents and helping them understand the needs of the fire department.

A strategic plan needs to be developed to show where the fire service has been, where it is now, where it needs to be, and what steps can be taken now to reach those goals. We need to get residents emotionally engaged in order for change to occur. It was suggested to have people speak on the good and the bad experiences when requested emergency services. The public is perceiving that the fire service is doing good and they do not know otherwise.

Social media is another avenue to reach younger members of our communities. An example of the poster Recycle Right Educate Yourself could be used for residents to educate themselves on what the status of their fire department is and what needs they have.

VII. Increasing membership in fire departments

It was asked if fire departments with social clubs have asked their social members to help with fire department business, fundraising, or emergency response needs. Some fire departments do and many ask their social members and the public that they need help.

Fire department social clubs is generally a means of income rather than an avenue to obtain members for emergency response. Some municipalities have agreed to send their employees to help fire departments during the day respond to some types of emergencies in their municipality which is a great help.

VIII. Allen Clark thanked everyone for their time and for attending and giving their input. Minutes will be sent to those attending and they may be contacted in the future for additional input.