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Trustees: Brad A. Baxter • Michael D. Meeks • Joseph A. Patton
Fiscal Officer: Rebecca J. Phillips

The Board of Trustees of Bath Township held a special meeting on Thursday June 1, 2023, at the Bath Fire Department, 1787 N. Dixie Highway, Lima, Ohio 45801.

Members Present: Brad Baxter
Mike Meeks

Chairman Brad Baxter called the meeting to order at 3:45 p.m.

The purpose of the meeting was to meet with IAFF Local 4539 and the Fire Chief to discuss BTFD Strategic Plan Items #1 and #2.

1. In conjunction with the fire department leadership team, union, non-bargaining employees, and our elected officials, establish future staffing levels based on data, industry standards, regional averages, and the needs of our community which will allow us to handle multiple EMS, respond to emergencies which require multiple pieces of apparatus, and provide enough firefighters at the scene of a working structure fire to affect victim rescue and extinguishment simultaneously.
2. Create a committee of appropriate parties to analyze the future personnel funding needs of the department, as well as the future capital expenses and formulate a specific funding plan. This most likely will include a levy increase resulting in the need to establish a strategy to garner community support.

Chief Kitchen stated this is an exciting meeting where we get the right people in the room to decide what way the Fire Department needs to go. The Chief referred back to a meeting 20 years ago and how the funding they agreed upon then does not bring in as much money today. He reviewed the costs to run a fire department in 2023 compared to 2004. Two things have happened to bring us to the meeting today. The Fire Department created a Strategic Plan, and the top two goals that they needed to examine were 1) staffing 24/7 and what that would cost and 2) where that money would come from. Regarding where the money would come from created a challenge due to not bringing as much carry over from 2022 to 2023. He reviewed reasons for the lack of carryover which included a lot of overtime. They currently have three full time fire fighters and one part time to make up a full shift. The Chief presented the above goals to discuss.



Mr. Baxter asked that we go around the room and introduce ourselves. He would like us to communicate effectively in this open dialog meeting. This meeting would be an opportunity for discussion, but that no decisions will be made at this meeting. Mr. Baxter let the Fire Department know he enjoys working with them. He would like for this meeting to be the first of many meetings he feels need to happen on a regular basis.

Platoon Chief Crystal Plumpe reviewed how the Fire Departments health insurance has changed over the years beginning in 2019 when they received 5% raised for three years, they had an HRA and paid no monthly premiums. In 2020 the Trustees needed to make changes due to the cost of health care. They went to an HSA with employees making payments towards monthly premiums and paying more out of pocket for our required deductible. Crystal stated this was quite a big cut for them. The Fire Department addressed this with the Trustees to come up with a plan over the next couple of years. She discussed the max amount for deductibles, and there were conversations on how to develop a plan. Due to covid there were a lot of changes, and the full-time staff were not allowed to take any time off. She discussed how other departments in the area received hazard pay and Bath Township did not. She discussed how the department has struggled with turnover and how it is taking longer to fill vacancies. Shift manning was changed to accommodate the changes, and Crystal reviewed calls of service, stats, and staffing.

Platoon Chief Jared Jenkins then reviewed where they are currently and what they would like to see in the future. They currently have four employees on a shift, three are full time and one is part time. One of the full-time positions is a Platoon Chief, and all of these are 24-hour. The Fire Department would like to get to seven full time employees, six full time fire fighters and a Platoon Chief. They would also like to see a position created for Assistant Fire Chief that would be 40 hours a week--the same number of hours as Chief Kitchen. Jared stated the patient is always their number one priority. He discussed various situations at the Fire Department with four employees. Jared feels their current model is not common with four employees on a shift and he referred to surrounding fire departments and their minimum staffing. If one person takes a day off, they give the option to fill the shift and it is not mandatory overtime. Jared stated what they use is not standard practice.

Chrystal reviewed the years Joe Kitchen has been Chief and stated once he leaves, they will not find one person who will be able to do what he has done. The average years of a Chief's time looking through the state stats is 3.3 years. Planning down the road they feel another 40-hour position is needed for an Assistant Chief. Jared stated his hope that a promotion for this position would be from the line. Jared also feels it will be hard to fill Chief Kitchen's shoes.



Chief Kitchen hopes what Mr. Baxter and Mr. Meeks are hearing from this discussion is adding additional staff will cost more but there are also a lot of benefits. It makes a fire department better and stronger to operate at a level the residents deserve. Chief Kitchen referred to Mr. Patton stating we have to have a staffing level where you guys can still operate and not spend \$30,000 overtime in the first quarter of the year.

Mr. Baxter asked if we could improve on the number of employees, but we can't get to the level they are requesting. Mr. Baxter has been an advocate of growing the fire department but discussed other options, levy options, and how they need to watch all the departments within Bath Township.

Andrew Esposito, Manager, Client Development for Clemans-Nelson pointed out how the district around the corner had a levy that did not recently pass. Chief Kitchen stated he never thought he would have to do an increase from the 3 mill that was passed in 2004. He projected he would never have to ask for a levy again. Tangible personal property tax cuts have affected the department and fire department employees' wages. Chief Kitchen stated residents have told him that they like voting on a levy every five years compared to it being permanent. Residents like the opportunity to look at it every five years, but he doesn't like it as an employee compared to a resident. Chief Kitchen stated that if they do a replacement instead of a renewal, it will not bring in enough money to bring on one more fire fighter. Chief Kitchen explained they have nine full time employees, and they have overtime due to employees being off for vacation, personal time, bereavement and sick time. Overtime is all based on vacancies. The more senior your employees, the more time off they receive.

Mr. Baxter referenced back to Bath being the lowest manned department. Jared stated of surrounding union fire departments in the area, Delphos is staffed lower than Bath. The Chief stated Delphos still has a robust amount of volunteers. The Delphos Chief told Chief Kitchen that it is somewhat common to get 10-12 volunteers to come in on calls. Mr. Baxter asked about American Township's staffing, and they told him they have more staff and more calls than Bath Township. Kevin Markward stated they have to beg and plead for part-time staff to work and how they do not know the part-time staff as well as the full-time.

The Chief spoke about eliminating part-time staffing, as it costs around \$150,000, if it would help obtain more full-time employees. Some of the part-time staff do work full-time at other fire departments. Because most of them want to obtain full-time employment, this is the reason for some of the turnover. Jared stated they struggle with turnover and stated there is very limited depth to our bench when it comes to experience.



Chief Kitchen does not like their turnover stats. He stated at least 90% who have left have been on very good terms. They get tears in their eyes and write them a very nice letter. We don't have people leaving because of problems within the organization. He feels there are so many opportunities out there for fire fighters.

Mr. Baxter stated we are a smaller rural department, but other than receiving more pay, what do these departments have that we do not have. He feels that there has to be another element. Chief Kitchen stated when one of his employees left to go and work at American Township he went into a lower step, and he took a large pay cut. Kevin Markward feels they leave due to low staffing. Keven Markward and Ross Emans both described the amount of work that has to be completed when they return back to the station after being called out for a fire or EMS.

Crystal stated if you ask the other fire departments around the area what is Bath Township Fire Department known for, they will tell you for training. They have to do more training because of the lack of experience their employees have. Chief Kitchen stated when one of his employees retired, he had been a fire fighter with over 20 years' experience, and he told Chief Kitchen he was so tired of teaching how to drive, where we keep stuff, and how to hold a hose. What he would have rather done with his experience is trained advanced training. Bath is so stuck at step one because we are constantly retraining. Mr. Baxter asked again what would make the retraining stop and how to get long-term employees. Mr. Baxter feels we have some fantastic people in this department, and he would like to figure out why people want to leave and go to other departments. The answer provided was lack of manpower. Jared stated people do not leave American Township, and they are comparable to Bath. Jared also feels it is manning. Jared stated he does not want the Trustees to think if you give us more people, we will not have turnover as he feels there will always be turnover.

Mr. Baxter thanked everyone for their time this evening and asked if there was anything else to discuss. Chief stated we talked about Item #1 and we need to talk about #2 at a later date. Chief Kitchen stated Jared has asked him several times what does the funding look like for the rest of this year and next year if we continue to struggle with the fire fund. They have worked on EMS billing and cost control, but he does not have control over wages and benefits. Is there a possibility that the Board of Trustees of Bath Township will help us supplement if we do have a short fall like we have had before with other funding sources? Jared stated he would like to tell the guys the township is committed if there is a short fall in the budget, we are not going to make you reduce your staffing, and we will help you. That is what he would love to hear and tell his staff. This option would not be a long-term fix but would be an option until they can get a levy in place.



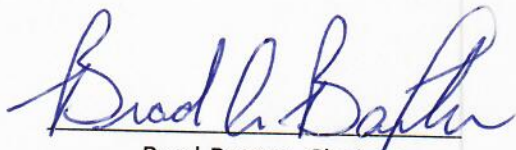
Mr. Baxter stated they want to do whatever they can, and we are working together. We have used other funds for wages for the fire fighters. The Trustees are not making any decisions tonight, but they are aware that is an option. The Chief has lowered manning for the next six weeks due to leave. Mr. Baxter believes right now we are not in dire straits, and we have options to explore. He is hopeful this will alleviate some of it. Mr. Baxter stated we have a responsibility to the taxpayers to closely examine how much we request on a levy. Grants were also discussed that have been applied for and received.

Chief Kitchen asked that the next time we meet we can work on Item #2 since we tackled manning hard, and we can talk about funding at the next meeting to discuss various levies and funding. Chief Kitchen has always felt that the Bath Fire Fighters are not the ones who pick and choose the manning and levies. He feels it is the residents, and we need to run a very robust campaign. If the levy fails, he won't be angry. He will feel a sense of relief because the businesses and residents made the decision.

HEARING OF THE PUBLIC

There was (9) nine from the public in attendance. Ross Emans, Ken Meyer, Jared Jenkins, Crystal Plumpe, Brian Cox, Kevin Markward, Joe Kitchen. Andrew Esposito and Mattie Helmig from Clemons and Nelson.

Being of no further business, Mr. Baxter moved, and Mr. Meeks seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:46 p.m. Motion passed by a unanimous roll call vote.


Brad Baxter, Chairman


Rebecca Phillips, Fiscal Officer


Mike Meeks, Trustee