

**Planning Advisory Board  
Meeting Summary  
March 11, 2020**

**Attendance:**

Geoffrey Close (Chair)  
James Thornton  
Diane Sengstacke  
Aaron Penman

**P&Z Staff:**

Brad Killian  
Jennifer Freeman

**Other:**

Eddie Hopkins – Emergency Services

- 1) The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.
- 2) **Minutes/Summary**

The PAB members approved the summary of the January 2020 PAB meeting.

- 3) **Emergency Services**

Eddie Hopkins from Emergency Services presented an overview of Volunteer Fire and EMS Service. There are 11 Volunteer Fire Companies. There are 2 allied support agencies – DES and the Foundation. There are 1800 volunteers currently and 1250 are active. There are 5-12 people per call, except on the “working call”. EMS is essentially all paid staff. Volunteering has changed. Before there was a family legacy. Volunteers joined at a young age and stayed for life. The demographic spanned all ages. There were mostly one income families and fewer family responsibilities. The training was manageable, and the volume of calls was manageable. Now the family legacy is not there. Volunteers join as a teen or young adult. There is a gap in the demographic. They are 16 -25 years old then average 60ish. Families work multiple jobs and have multiple family responsibilities. The training is very intense. There is an increasing volume of calls.

There are many challenges with recruitment and retention. There is declining membership. The perception has changed. There is a lack of interest. They are competing with family time. They are not getting paid when they can go elsewhere and get paid. Training is long and intense. It is not what they thought it was. And they don’t recognize the long-term benefits.

There are challenges with training. In house training varies but must be consistent. It includes nights and weekends and that is in addition to MFRI and NFA classes. MFRI classes range from 27 – 165 hours with multiple weeknights and weekends. An EMT takes 180 hours and a paramedic takes 18 months. The call volume has changed. In 2019, there were 8800 fire related calls and 27,000 EMS calls. There are many types of calls besides fire. Some examples include alarms, investigations, CO and nature gas leaks, service boxes, lift assists, EMS manpower, EMS calls ALS vs BLS, public complacency, growth and development and society is less resilient.

There are internal challenges. There is a lack of passion. There is no consistency. There is an aging infrastructure. There are increasing costs and less funding. There are more family and employer obligations. The equipment needs to be replaced when it reaches end of life. The County/Federal standards have changed. Volunteers have pride, tradition and change. They need to admit there is a problem and a need for change. The vehicle maintenance is expensive. There are health issues, physical injury and worker comp. So, there is an avocation versus vocation issue.

There are some ways to meet the challenges. Some of these things Harford County is doing include: Incentive Programs, LOSAP, Paramedic Program, High School Cadet Program, Explorer Program, Public Relations/Marketing, Adult Learning, Changing Response Profiles, Consistent Standards, and Cooperatively Work with County.

Mr. Thornton asked about the Riverside and Belcamp and how Fire Companies must come up with their own resources. Mr. Hopkins said when they got the property the idea was to put a fire station there. They started putting money aside. Riverside/Belcamp has gotten densely populated. Their calls for service have increased. They could do the station, but they needed help with funding. The County and Abingdon on in partnership now to build the Riverside station. They are looking to the future. If they Volunteer Fire Company needs to become a paid company, the station is already built. They are looking at other areas that have gaps. Mr. Thornton said the PAB have been asking that the station be funded for awhile and are pleased it has finally happened. Mr. Hopkins said it will help with response time. Mr. Close asked if places like Clorox had their own fire personnel onsite. Mr. Hopkins said not really. Mr. Close asked if they must have special equipment for those types of calls. Mr. Hopkins said each station has the same type of equipment. There is a Hazmat Team that would also go to those types of calls. Mr. Close asked if there was a program to send volunteers to college. Mr. Hopkins said yes. There are several programs, but the volunteers need to know about them. Mr. Penman asked if there were any outreach programs. Mr. Hopkins said there are a few outreach programs. But they don't do much. Level does have a good outreach program. But most companies don't have much time. Mr. Penman said most of the programs he sees are for children. Mr. Close said the almost need a paid person to do outreach. Mr. Hopkins said now there is not as much passion to do the outreach.

4) **Other Business**

Mr. Killian talked about April 1<sup>st</sup>, which is Census Day. It is online already for people to fill out the form. Mr. Thornton asked about the new apartment complex on Tollgate Road. Mr. Killian said the developer said they didn't get a lot of push back from the community.

This meeting was adjourned at 7:06 PM.