

CITY OF ABERDEEN ♦ COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW: ABERDEEN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Stakeholder: Josh Montague, Fire Chief
Russ Piper, President
City of Aberdeen Volunteer Fire Department

Date: April 14, 2022 | 3:00pm-4:00pm | Teams Virtual Meeting

WM Team: Lauren Good, Project Manager

STAKEHOLDER INFORMATION

The Aberdeen Volunteer Fire Department is responsible for fire suppression and prevention, rescue services, and emergency medical services. Fire and rescue services in Aberdeen are provided by both volunteer firemen and paid emergency medical technicians. The City of Aberdeen is served by three fire stations. The main fire station, located on Rogers Street, is centrally located in its service area and has ready access to major streets in all directions. In addition to the main fire station, the City also has two substations, one located on MD 22 (which has been recently been rebuilt and expanded), and the other located on East Bel Air Avenue. There is also one substation located in Perryman that is owned and operated by the Aberdeen Volunteer Fire Department, but not within the corporate limits of Aberdeen.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

CAN YOU PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT'S STRUCTURE AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE ORGANIZATION TO THE CITY ITSELF? IS THE SERVICE AREA STRICTLY WITHIN ABERDEEN CITY LIMITS (TYPICALLY, UNLESS CALLED TO PROVIDE AID)? HOW MUCH INTERACTION IS THERE WITH APG? HOW MUCH OF THE DEPARTMENT IS CAREER VS VOLUNTEER? DO YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY ATTRACTING NEW MEMBERS (AND IF YES, WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE THAT TO?)?

- Independent association with a Board of Directors (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, three Trustees, Assistant Chief, Chief) as the governing body. Board meetings once a month and holds regular meetings once a month.
- Have own budget set up on annual basis.
- Funded through fund drives, Harford County, City of Aberdeen. All buildings are privately owned by the Aberdeen Volunteer Fire Department.
- Service area goes beyond the City boundary, encompasses entire City, but mutual agreements with the County along with other cities/towns.
- Have mutual aid agreement with APG; more often APG coming off base to assist the AVFD, but occasionally AVFD will assist APG
- Volunteer company. All fire personnel are 100% volunteer. EMS is paid service. Hire people to staff medic units.
- Difficult to attract new members. People coming into the County don't realize that it is an all-volunteer system.

WHAT STRENGTHS CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE DEPARTMENT?

- Being in business since 1889—core group of individuals. Have pride in the organization.
- Had problems 20 years ago with providing an ambulance service so went to paid system

but still struggling due to lack of career medics.

- People want to come out, go on calls, enjoy being at firehouse, have passion for fire service—keep it going daily

- Just put together \$9M renovation of station through all volunteers. Had \$1.5M from County, <\$100k from City. Working on paying off \$6M loan.

WHAT ARE SOME AREAS WHERE YOU BELIEVE THE DEPARTMENT COULD MAKE IMPROVEMENTS?

- Everywhere!

WHAT PROGRAMS OR SERVICES ARE YOU CURRENTLY PROVIDING? WHAT ARE THE MOST FREQUENT CALLS FOR SERVICE YOU RECEIVE?

- Put in smoke detectors for the community.
- Mainly EMS and fire protection.
- Most frequent calls are EMS—90% of what they do.

DOES AVFD HAVE A NEED FOR NEW OR EXPANDED FACILITIES? WHERE AND WHAT KIND? WHAT ABOUT MAJOR EQUIPMENT?

- Replacing medic units at least 3x within next 20 years; fire trucks at least 1-2 replacement needed within that timeframe.
- Short-term rescue truck and 2 engines need to be replaced.

ARE CURRENT RESPONSE TIMES/STAFFING APPROPRIATE FOR THE SIZE/TYPE OF COMMUNITY?

- Day-to-day changes in response times. With people around, can occur in a reasonable time. Others, 6-7 minutes to get equipment on the road because volunteers are not in firehouse. Good bit of members within City limits but others take some time to get to firehouse. Most days looking at about 5 minutes to get equip on road.

IN THE CITY'S 2011 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, A NUMBER OF FUTURE PLANNING AREAS ARE IDENTIFIED FOR POTENTIAL FUTURE ANNEXATION. WHAT CONCERNS (IF ANY) DO YOU HAVE ABOUT BEING ABLE TO PROVIDE SERVICE TO THESE AREAS?

- Biggest concern is the amount of calls from those developments. More concerned about EMS calls. As far as fire incidents, don't think there would be that much of a struggle or big change. New development would increase calls a bit but as they get plans for new developments, they'll have to look at response times, types of incidents they might handle, will it be an issue to get those calls covered. Will always be concerned with this because 100% volunteer.
- Once the department gets upwards of 2,000-3,000 calls per year, what will this do to the volunteers currently have.
- Need to go to paid force is definitely coming. It is an eventuality. Would say it's a safe bet within 10-20 years will have some kind of paid system.
- Volunteer system as a whole is taking a hit so just one of those things where there will be a need to have people in the station 24/7. Whether just paying 2 trained personnel, driver/officer and volunteers to be firefighters or other situation remains to be seen.

ARE THERE AREAS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY THAT ARE CHALLENGING TO PROVIDE SERVICE? WHERE AND WHY?

- With new development, how much space is going to be on the roadways? Some

developments the department has recently been sent to have asked if equipment has fit and wanting to make sure it will fit.

- As far as height, it can be a challenge but don't foresee high-rise buildings within the

community.

- Cars parking on the street combined with width of street a concern due to size of equipment.

ARE THERE ANY AREAS OF THE COMMUNITY THAT DO NOT HAVE ADEQUATE WATER PRESSURE FOR FIREFIGHTING NEEDS (OR AREAS WHERE YOU WOULD HAVE TO RELY ON WATER TRUCKS, ETC. DUE TO THE LACK OF HYDRANTS)?

- Within City limits, most areas have hydrants and most of those are really good hydrants.
- Older mains mean pressure is not as good, but this is being addressed already.
- Within the City, hydrants are roughly 500-600 feet apart, which is pretty standard. There

are some areas where it's a longer distance (dead-end street) but not really that many where that's a problem. If it is a problem, the officers plan for this and have a plan prior to an incident occurring.

ARE YOUR FIREFIGHTERS/EMTS ABLE TO FIND ADEQUATE HOUSING WITHIN THE CITY OR IS HOUSING AFFORDABILITY A PROBLEM?

- Never really been brought to their attention.

DO YOU ENCOUNTER ISSUES WITH VACANT PROPERTIES?

- Run into very little issues with vacant properties or those occupied by people that aren't supposed to be there.
- Even with EMS calls, rarely getting calls related to this.

DO YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS WITH EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS OR AREAS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY THAT HAVE POOR COMMUNICATION SIGNALS?

- Pretty good within the City.
- Warehouses tend to have issues.

WHAT HAVEN'T WE ASKED YOU THAT WE SHOULD HAVE?

- If solar panels on roof and there's a fire, don't have access to roof to vent. For most part case by case review.
- Would like to find funding for EMS and start of paid fire force. Definitely would like to see support from City to do this. Not asking for money to ask for money. Doing this to keep up and provide good quality service to Aberdeen. Also for vehicle replacement.

Meeting Notes:

Lauren Good, Project Manager

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