

BEN AVON BOROUGH
Council Work Session
January 5, 2021
Minutes

The Borough of Ben Avon Council met in a work session on Tuesday, January 5, 2021 virtually and at 7101 Church Avenue for the purpose of transacting General Business. President Jennifer Bett presided and opened the meeting at 7:01 PM with the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Council Members Present: Jennifer Bett, Henry Casale, Megan Dolan, Ken Opiery, Kara Roggenkamp, David Stoeckle, Rick Wagner

Others Present: Mayor Melanie Hughes-Holcomb, Borough Secretary Terrie Patsch, Ben Avon Fire Company Chief Tom Maletick, Assistant Chief John Otstot, Jim Rupert

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – *There was no public participation*

COMMITTEE UPDATES

Administration Committee – *No report given*

Public Affairs – *No report given*

Public Safety/Code Enforcement – *No report given*

Public Works – *Report given by Ken Opiery*

Mr. Opiery shared a report from Mr. Regrut, Public Works Foreman, that the snow plow on one of the Borough trucks will need to be either repaired or replaced. As the repairs estimate would be in the \$2000 - \$3000 range, a new plow and assembly would be around \$6400. Since the truck has a number of years in service remaining, it was agreed to replace the plow altogether. The timeline for replacement would have the truck back in service by next week.

QVCOG – *Report given by Rick Wagner*

Mr. Wagner reported that an information packet was sent out from the COG with data on the upcoming contract bids for waste removal and recycling. This information is currently being reviewed, and a report will be submitted to COG with comments and suggestions.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Ben Avon Volunteer Fire Company - Chief Tom Maletick, Assistant Chief John Otstot,
Jim Rupert

Review of Council Questions/BAVFC Responses – *See Attachment A*

Council Discussion of Fire Department Request - *See Attachment B*

Comcast License Agreement

Mrs. Bett reported that notification was recently received in the Borough Office from Comcast regarding the upcoming franchise lease expiration. As the negotiation will begin in the next few months, Mrs. Bett asked council members if anyone was interested in undertaking this task. Mr. Casale will be working with the Comcast representative to secure this contract.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Mr. Casale; Second: Mr. Wagner; Motion Carried to adjourn the meeting at 9:18 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terrie Patsch
Borough Secretary

ATTACHMENT "A"

Questions submitted by council based on the request by Ben Avon VFC for a new fire truck are in bold black with written response from BAFC below; discussion points from this meeting in red.

What collateral will the BAVFD be using to obtain a \$300,000 loan?

BAFC: No collateral needed for a state loan. 2%

Tom Maletick stated no collateral is needed. 2% loans are available which is the same as what was done to purchase current rescue and quint.

How does the department intend to reimburse their portion of the loan?

From the \$10,000/yr. we get from Kilbuck Twp. & the state grant we get every yr. for between \$11,000-\$12,000

Tom Maletick states - we get a state grant every year that varies between \$11,500 - \$11,800. In addition, the FD receives \$10,000 per year from Kilbuck contract and then about 11-12K from state grant we apply for each year.

Update on modifications needed to the existing fire station?

Modifications needed are to raise 2 eye beams and install a larger garage door. No permits or engineering plans were needed the last time we did the same project. We will get a structural engineer to oversee the contractor's work, just like last time. The fire company will pay for these modifications, just like last time.

Ben Avon Council will need to pre-approve any modifications and have plans presented by an engineer or other contracting agency as well as any permitting requirements.

Tom Maletick - The modifications would have to be made on the building for any newer truck as the structure was not raised to the maximum height the last time it was adjusted. A structural engineer was enlisted by the FD with proposed changes and prior to any action would need to be reviewed by the borough engineer. Adjustments to the building height would be based on the size of the vehicle purchased. The last renovations cost around \$5000 paid for by the FD.

Ben Avon Council would like to review the full 2020 and projected 2021 budget for BAVFD.

I sent Jennifer all of our financial information earlier in the year. Our projected budget is what our budget is now. The money we receive from the borough, approximately \$14,000 we get from our letter drive & our annual state grant. Note: we only get a 27% return from our letter drive. That means more than 70% of the residents in this borough DO NOT donate.

Mr. Opiery asked for internal financial statements – money in/money out, assets, liability that tie out to a bank statement. He is looking for their overall financial picture. Mr. Maletick asked that the request be emailed to him and he will forward it to the appropriate person to respond. Several council members asked if the money is being used by the FD to make truck payments, what in the budget would not be receiving the funds. Mr. Maletick also stated that they only apply for grant money if they need something for the company. If there is no need, they don't apply that year. There are funds from the borough contract with Kilbuck being held for truck purchases only.

What is the total number of volunteer firefighters in Ben Avon? Of those, how many are active?

We have 20 firefighters, 15 are active. As far as drivers go, we have 8 that can drive the truck now with drivers training to start for most everyone else as soon as the truck arrives. The truck will not go into service until we have enough qualifier drivers.

Mr. Stoeckle asked if the number is still accurate and Chief Maletick replied that it was.

Of those active fire firefighters, how many are able to drive this new truck?

The size of the truck we are looking at is the same size as the aerial truck we have now only it's slightly higher.

Chief Maletick reported every new driver must attend extensive training. Everyone is currently EVOG (Emergency Vehicle Operator Certification) certified as well. He also suggested the borough insurance may discount insurance with that designation.

Mayor Hughes-Holcomb asked about ongoing recruitment and current membership and their outlook for the next 10 years. Chief Maletick stated that recruitment is an ongoing challenge, but their numbers remain as previously stated.

Please confirm that Bellevue is the only neighboring borough with a similar truck size/capabilities.

Bellevue is the closest department with a similar truck. Their truck will not fit on some of our streets. That's why we got the aerial we have now only it doesn't reach many of our set back houses such as Dickson Ave., Irwin Ave. & the houses up on the hill on Church Ave. near the Avalon bridge.

Mr. Stoeckle asked Chief Maletick about the ability to maneuver the streets of the borough. Chief Maletick stated the truck they tested set up all through the borough and performed beyond his expectations. Avalon has a truck with a basket that cannot be used in Ben Avon due to overhead wires and utilities. He stated that NFPA requires that you have two aerial apparatus in place in front of a structure fire before you bring in a water supply. One would be Bellevue and the other would be BA. The current BA truck will be expiring at the end of 2022. It was noted that the lack of a second truck would have an ill effect on the service to other boroughs as well.

Knowing current trucks are near expiration dates, what fund-raising efforts have taken place to go towards the purchase of this truck?

There are no fund raising ideas that can raise the type of funds needed to purchase a new fire truck. My question to you is what fund saving ideas has council come up with to make this purchase?

Chief Maletick stated that enough money cannot be raised through the FD to purchase a truck, that is why the 2% loan program is available. Council members asked about the sharing of resources with other local boroughs, and Chief Maletick said there is no discussion or sharing of equipment.

What is the impact to the BAVFD if this truck is not purchased at this time?

The impact on the fire company if this truck isn't purchased is we will close our doors at the end (FEB) of 2022. Our rescue/engine cannot be used as a first due firefighting piece of equipment due to being 20 yrs. old.

What are the recruitment and retention efforts being conducted by the BAVFD?

What has been the annual/monthly usage of the current ladder truck?

The current aerial responds on all structure calls in Ben Avon, Emsworth, Kilbuck Twp. & parts of Quail's district.

Chief Maletick reported that every structure fire call that comes into Ben Avon, Emsworth, Kilbuck is responded to by the aerial. Mayor Hughes-Holcomb asked in reviewing the 2020 call summary to confirm her findings that there were no structure fire calls in Ben Avon in 2020. Also, that the total structure fires in the surrounding communities were 7.

What is the projected annual/monthly usage of the new ladder truck?

The projected usage of the new truck is hard to estimate but it will remain the same and may go up because of its capabilities in other borough's such as Avalon & Bellevue.

What will be the added value that Ben Avon will get out of this truck investment?

The value Ben Avon gets out of this truck is the ladder will reach just about every rooftop & 3rd floor window in Ben Avon. This makes roof venting & rescue much easier than 3-4 firefighters carrying a 35' ladder up to the house and having to throw it. If fire is blowing out the roof, this vehicle makes it much safer & easier to get water on the fire without putting firefighters in harm's way.

The demo truck sat on Dickson Ave. and reached the rooftops on either side of the street without having to move the truck. We don't have those capabilities now.

Mr. Stockle commented that the longer ladder would reach houses on Church and Dickson a lot more easily. Chief Maletick agreed that it would improve safety for the fire fighters and residents as well. An aerial ladder can be set up in five minutes vs. 15-20 minutes carrying a ground ladder.

What are the alternatives to purchasing this specific vehicle? Have other options been identified?

There are no alternatives to purchasing this truck. Our aerial is our first our firefighting piece of equipment. It will be 30 yrs. old in 2022. It needs replaced. A new engine is close to \$700,000. This truck we are looking at is only \$142,000 more and gives us a whole lot of options that a standard engine does not give us. For the features this new aerial has, this truck is a steal at its price.

Mrs. Bett stated that all options are still on the table and being considered. Chief Maletick estimated that the purchase of the new truck would only result in around \$55 per household per year. He did not think that any resident would consider that excessive to have a state-of-the-art piece of equipment. Some discussion was held concerning regionalization of fire equipment in the North Boroughs. Mr. Wagner stated that if the BA truck goes out of service, Emsworth and surrounding boroughs would have to wait for another truck to get to the call, which Chief Maletick confirmed. Ms. Roggenkamp asked if there was a rough figure for the council to consider options of new vs. used vehicles. Chief Maletick has seen several options, however, research time and travel expenses prohibit him from moving forward until he hears a number that council is comfortable with for a used truck. Any truck they would choose that fit the parameters would still need the building renovations.

What are the expected annual maintenance costs for this vehicle? How will these costs be covered?

Annual maintenance costs will obviously go down due to mfg. warranties. When they expire the costs come out of our borough budget just like they do now.

What is the expected useful life of the vehicle?

The life of this new vehicle is 30 yrs. compared to 20 yrs. that a new engine gives you. You get 10 more yrs. for \$142,000.

What is the impact to current services if a new truck is not purchased?

The impact to current service if this vehicle isn't purchased is we close our doors at the end of 2022.

What strategies is the BAFVD using to ensure the ongoing viability of the department including recruitment and fundraising?

Recruitment & fundraising are always on every VFD's mind. We planned to go door to door this year to try recruiting people but the pandemic put a stop to that. We hope to do that in 2021, pandemic permitting.

We have tried putting posters up in the borough, added a recruitment letter in our annual letter drive & went up to the high school and talked to the students. All this added up to no new members. We are hoping going door to door next year helps us in this endeavor.

Membership problems are not just Ben Avon's problem. All VFD's not only in our immediate area but Allegheny County, the state of PA & nationally are having problems getting new members. Kids would rather play on their electronic devices than join a vfd. Ask your own kids or grand kids if they are interested in joining the fire company and see what their answer is. It would be great if 1 or 2 would say yes.

Fundraising is difficult with only 20 members. With all the required training, weekly training, monthly business meetings & work details to keep our equipment clean & up and running it's tough to get people to sell tickets. Let's face it, selling 1,000 tickets for only \$500-\$1,000 profit just isn't worth the time or effort. With what things cost in the fire service, and spending hours & hours selling strip tickets and reaping \$1,000 or less is futile at best.

Chief Maletick reminded council that they all have his email address and phone number, and can call or message him any time with questions.

ATTACHMENT "B"

Fire Hall Lease

Mr. Pipery reported that the copy of the draft of the Fire Company lease of the fire hall space did not incorporate the changes he and others suggested. He will contact Ms. Sweeney for the most up-to-date copy for council review.

Mr. Casale stated the \$800 per month payment that will be waived with compliance of submitting timely reports and general financial records. In addition, the lease would state that no renovations can be made to the facility without council's approval.

Mr. Wagner referred to the previous two studies completed some time ago, which recommended resource sharing between the municipalities. It was suggested and discussed that perhaps the QV COG would be a good place to start some centralized organization.

Mrs. Roggenkamp suggested an identified alternative to the new truck, what the projected cost could be and the impact that expense would have on the residents. Mr. Wagner asked if Mr. Pipery could run some tentative numbers to see the impact on the budget.

Mr. Pipery stated he is concerned that there is no internal accounting system and so no provision for financial documentation to show the borough. Mr. Casale asked if the FD is a 501c3, and suggested they would have to file a form 990.

Mayor Hughes-Holcomb suggested that more information is needed to clarify the NFPA recommendations, and Mr. Wagner pointed out that the aforementioned studies recommend one ladder truck for all boroughs at that time. The study also shows 16-22 people per call, and that has not been reflected on any of the reports.

Several next steps for council members were discussed and assigned.