



GRAND TRAVERSE RURAL FIRE BOARD MEETING

Paradise Township Hall
2300 E. M-113
Kingsley, MI 49649

*April 20, 2016
Work Session 12 pm-6 pm*

Chairman Tim Trudell Vice-Chair Linda Forwerck Treasurer Doug Moyer

Members: Fife Lake -Linda Forwerck, Grant - Doug Moyer, Green Lake- Paul Biondo, Paradise- Tim Trudell, Springfield- Tom Gonyer, Union- Doug Mansfield, Whitewater- Ron Popp

Any interested person or group may address the Grand Traverse Rural Fire Board on any agenda item when recognized by the presiding Chairman or upon request of any Board Member. Also, any interested person or group may address the Grand Traverse Fire Board on any matter of Fire Department concern not on the Agenda during the agenda item designated Public Comment. The comment of any member of the public or any special interest group may be limited in time. Such limitation shall not be less than five minutes unless otherwise explained by the presiding Chairman, subject to appeal by the Grand Traverse Rural Fire Board.

I. Roll Call

Grant (present), Green Lake (present), Paradise (present), Springfield (present), Whitewater (present) and Fife Lake (present). Union was absent and excused.

II. Approval of Agenda

The Chairman asked for a motion to approve the agenda as presented. **Fife Lake moved to approve the agenda as presented, Whitewater seconded. All in favor, motion carried.**

III. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest.

IV. Public Comment

No public comment.

V. New Business

- a. Meeting with Consultant Thomas Wieczorek (12-3 pm) Director, Center for Public Safety Management

Mr. Wieczorek introduced himself and briefed the board on his background in fire and law enforcement, as well as his business of consulting for public safety organizations.

Mr. Wieczorek covered trends in firefighting, including decreasing numbers of volunteer fire fighters; mergers and mutual aid agreements between departments, even inter-state, in part to field bodies in departments that are under staffed; attracting and paying staff; tensions between EMS and fire services; and demographics.

Mr. Wieczorek discussed the use of MABAS, MEMAC and EMAC, all of which are mutual aid compacts and systems to allow fire stations to automatically call back-ups to large incidents, or to staff stations whose firefighters had been sent to large incidents. The board discussed volunteers and staffing in GTRFD, including response times to incidents and volunteer response during daytime hours when many of them are working elsewhere. Some fire departments are beginning to charge for mutual aid runs because other departments are depending too much on help from their neighbors. The board and Mr. Wieczorek discussed funding of the department from the state level, and associated laws and policies. There are increasing numbers of fees and cost recovery for fire and EMS services.

Previously, EMS was a small portion of the fire service. Mr. Wieczorek discussed the changes to about 80% of fire department runs being EMS, rather than fire. This affects the funding, training and staffing of fire departments. The smaller EMS agencies are, the less profitable they are; smaller EMS agencies generally lose money. In general, fire and EMS sharing employees tends to be the most efficient and effective. Mergers are increasing, because they reduce duplication of administration among contiguous jurisdictions.

Fire/EMS services should know when their peak times, seasons, etc. are for calls. This will help to provide staffing at key times, when there is historical data that suggests there is likely to be an incident. In general, the number of fires is decreasing, but the costs of having a fire are increasing. Community risk reduction programs are reducing the risk of fires across the country. The population is aging, which is reducing volunteers and at the same time creating larger numbers of medical incident calls. There has been a migration of young people out of the state of Michigan, despite an increase in population in the jurisdictions covered by GTRFD. It is hard to connect to younger volunteers through traditional means, and fire chiefs are having the most luck recruiting new volunteers through newer social media avenues.

The board took a ten-minute recess at 1:20 pm. Supervisor Moyer (Grant) left the meeting at this time.

Volunteers frequently leave departments that are either too busy or too slow, leading to a juggling act by chiefs to balance resources and staffing. Few departments complete analyses of workloads, performance and value and target recruiting to understaffed areas and times. The aggregate data on total calls is misleading, as it is more important to look at what types of calls are being responded to. Fire departments are an insurance policy, funding is part insurance (prevention) and part response. Prevention is cheaper in the long run, but is usually the first thing cut from budgets. EMS needs to look at whether they are first responders or transport, advanced or basic life support. Current systems are frequently driven by politics, labor unions and past practice, rather than being efficient, patient-centric, and evidence-based systems. In the past, fire services focused on suppressing fire and rescuing people. Fire prevention and early detection/reporting was rarely looked at. Models have changed to focusing on fire prevention and early detection/reporting, which tends to lead to lower numbers of fires, fire-caused deaths/injuries and firefighter deaths/injuries.

Moving from firefighting to preventing fires involves identifying risks, prioritizing risks, developing strategies & tactics to mitigate risks, preparing the community risk reduction plan, implementing the CRR plan, and monitoring, evaluating and monitoring the plan. One of the challenges with community risk reduction plans is reaching out to people who are wary of allowing local governmental units on their properties – this can be mitigated by working with local church or community groups. The board discussed the implementation of CRR plans with Mr. Wiczorek.

Regardless of CRR plans, the response time of the first firefighters with the capacity to extinguish fires is critical. Also critical is the point at which the jurisdiction runs out of equipment. What is the busiest that the department can be without running out of resources? Even false alarms pull resources and lead to volunteer burnout.

Staffing and deployment of fire services should be based on community risk assessment, workload of fire stations/units, call demand, response time, critical tasking on fire and EMS calls and available funding. Maps should be developed of response times to various areas of the jurisdiction, as well as maps of demand. Risk analysis mapping should be completed, showing what areas of the jurisdiction have the highest risk for incidents.

Supervisor Mansfield (Union) joined the meeting at 2:30 pm.

The general series of activities for improving a department (based on NFPA 1710 and 1720) is conducting a risk assessment; based upon the risk, developing critical tasks; looking at how department will get people; laying out different

levels of service (urban, suburban, rural and wildland); and developing a citizen-focused standard of response coverage.

Sleep deprivation is a major issue among firefighters and EMS responders, especially volunteers.

Alternative strategies being seen include police/fire mergers, a la carte options, paid on-call staffing and college student volunteers (generally with free housing in exchange for staffing the station).

At this point, Mr. Wiczorek began a discussion with the board regarding the GTRFD specifically. Board members brought up as strong points the leadership of Chief Weber and the quality of the equipment owned by the department. The department has shown leadership state-wide as a multi-township department. The volunteer and EMS staffing are dedicated, although somewhat burned out due to a lack of volunteers. Good strength in interactions with the public and support from the public regarding finances. Employment and growth are relatively positive in this area, especially compared to other areas of the state. There is willingness in the department to change, but not as much on the board. The firefighters and EMS staff are extremely dedicated to showing what an intergovernmental fire department can do, but the volunteers are unsure of the future of the department and their support from the board. The unstable funding future is probably the number one threat to the future of the department. Most of the money comes from the townships' general funds, which is an unstable source of funding. Testing is necessary to determine actual response times and discussion is needed to make sure the public is aware of these times. Trudell stated that other threats include a kingbuilding mentality among some board members.

Weaknesses include a lack of volunteers willing to undergo training, which makes recruiting difficult. Popp said that he doesn't agree that funding is difficult, and that the department has always been well funded. He sees personnel as the largest issue. Chief Weber disagreed on funding, as the townships' millages are some of the lowest in the area, there is nothing in the way of capital funding planning and general operating costs are increasing year over year. The board discussed the need for funding and operating plans, and also the need for a plan for how to structure or restructure GTRFD. Fire prevention efforts are another major weakness, as there is a lack of these efforts and community risk reduction programs. Recruiting and retaining volunteers has been a major issue.

Opportunities include moving toward more of a strategic focus, and using this focus to streamline and move forward into a better structure than the department has ever had before. With a better economy comes an opportunity for additional funding. The department has an opportunity to move away from majority fire services into more of a general emergency service.

At this point, Mr. Wieczorek finished his presentation and the board took a 20-minute recess at 3:00 pm.

b. Meeting with Consultant Lane Wintermute (3-6 pm) Senior Associate, Emergency Services Consulting International

Mr. Wintermute introduced himself and provided his background in emergency services and emergency services consulting. Emergency Services Consulting International works only in fire and EMS consulting. They focus on improving public safety through facilitating advanced policy decision making. They offer feasibility studies, master planning, agency evaluations, strategic planning, deployment analyses, executive recruitment, and many custom projects.

An agency evaluation focuses on a review of programs and practices and then compares observations to national standards and best practices. The review involves organizational design, management components, training program, prevention and public education programs, service delivery and response performance, capital assets and staffing.

Master planning involves an evaluation of current conditions, an evaluation of future growth and service demand projections, and identifies and develops short and long range options and strategies for future delivery service models. Master planning expands on an agency evaluation with a discussion of future options. The master plan discusses where the department is today, where it needs to be in the future, and how it will get there.

Strategic planning is a facilitated process that establishes a shared sense of direction for the organization. It identifies, prioritizes and establishes action plans for goals, and develops mission, vision and values statements. Strategic planning generally involves more public input which can be very valuable to the long-term planning of the department. Strategic planning involves a series of workshops with a cross-section of stakeholders to identify mission, vision, values and goals.

Strengths at GTRFD include personnel, training and physical ability, equipment, leadership and firefighting skills. Weaknesses include staffing challenges and diminishing numbers of volunteers, limited administrative support, long response times, mutual aid issues, revenue losses and a need for defined response time standards and targets.

Challenges include an ongoing need for personnel, differing approaches to EMS service delivery among jurisdictions, and a population that tends to be aging and transitory (tourists). There has been a significant decrease in revenue from 2015 to 2016, and more townships splitting off will lead to additional decreases. This is offset by lower costs with fewer participating townships. Opportunities include completing an agency evaluation, master plan or strategic plan. Other opportunities include eliminating duplication, including between fire and EMS;

evaluating financial and governance options, including cooperative efforts, Public Act 57 reorganization or reorganization of contracted services. Other opportunities also include working more effectively with other departments and EMS agencies in region; however, this also means the board and department must move past territorial, artificial barriers. The main question must be what is in the best interest of the citizens that are served by GTRFD? Working together has barriers. The big six are: turf, power, politics, control, money and time.

Trudell asked about specifics of project management. Wintermute said that there are generally 4-5 people working on each project, including a project manager, a finance manager, and others. Wintermute has worked with GT Metro in the past. Service delivery analysis includes some facets of ISO compliance. They don't do a full ISO analysis, although they are working on a partnership with ISO that could lead to full ISO analysis. Wintermute's firm has worked with all levels of departments, including departments in Michigan and Minnesota, which has similarly-configured departments. They have done a number of cooperative effort feasibility projects in Minnesota. The firm has not worked specifically with departments transitioning to Public Act 57 funding, but has worked with a number of departments working under similar laws in Colorado and Washington. Departments implement all of their suggestions about 50% of the time, but the "happy customer" level is closer to 90%. Frequently customers implement many suggestions, but not all.

Forwerck asked about specifics of project management. Wintermute's firm works with all key players and levels of stakeholders, including staff, board, firefighters (both career and volunteers). Different stakeholder look at the issues from different viewpoints, and so it is important to give everyone an option to air their opinion.

Mansfield asked about community input, and perception versus reality of fire response times. Wintermute's firm has done community surveys, focus groups, and other methods of determining the willingness of the community to pay for the level of service they wish to receive. A final presentation is open to the community. The board discussed the history of GTRFD, and its change from 10 townships to the current 7 townships and how personnel, staffing levels, equipment and run levels have changed. Mansfield thinks we should focus more on where we need to go from here, rather than current funding. Wintermute's firm frequently completes the report, including some implementation steps, and gives and final presentation and that's the end of the engagement, but in other cases is more involved in the implementation of the plan after the final report is distributed.

Biondo asked about the company's experience. Wintermute has worked with significant numbers of both EMS and fire departments. There has been a significant trend toward fire-based EMS, with cross-trained staff. There seems to be a range of 600-800 annual calls that tends to be the threshold at which purely

volunteer departments can't keep up, especially with volunteer numbers continuing to trend downwards. Departmental staffing decisions need to be made in part based on the community's want, need and desire for services and its willingness to pay for these services.

Mansfield asked about Wintermute's thoughts on service holes, and whether the level of service should be exactly equal over a department's service area. Wintermute replied that unfortunately, in rural areas, service coverage cannot be made equal over a department's service area. Wintermute's company frequently gives opinions on equipment a department does or doesn't need, and they give the opinion they think is right, not what the chief or the board or the firefighters want. Geographic differences in response times are addressed in their analysis, and they are compared to national standards. Urban, suburban, rural and frontier are four categories, and will have significantly different response times and coverage abilities. Response time targets are set based on the categories. The board and Wintermute discussed relative levels of importance in fire prevention targets. Mansfield stressed the importance of working with the public and making them understand the fire service, because the department is funded through taxes and without taxes has no ability to give service.

Wintermute concluded his presentation at 5 pm. The board recessed for dinner at that point, reopening the meeting at 5:58 pm. Commissioner Moyer (Grant) rejoined the meeting at this time.

VI. Second Public Comment

VII. Adjournment

Green Lake moved to adjourn at 5:58 pm. Fife Lake supported. All in favor. Motion carried.