

**Tulpehocken Township Board of Supervisors  
Workshop Meeting for Fire and Emergency Service Tax  
Wednesday, May 15, 2024**

In attendance at this workshop meeting from Tulpehocken Township were Supervisors Gary Deck, Lester Feick and Harold Zimmerman; Secretary Kathy Judy and Township Solicitor Atty. Michelle Mayfield. Also present were John Kintzer and representatives from Bethel Ambulance Service, Western Berks EMS, Keystone Fire Company of Rehrersburg and Mt. Aetna Fire and Rescue: Mike Bashore, Tony Tucci, Fred Kreiser, Randall Haag, Kirk Merkey, Robert Conner, Alan Bashore and Sylvan Witmer.

The workshop began with the pledge to the flag.

**Introduction:**

Gary Deck announced that the goal of these meetings is to gather information. While some are okay for now, other fire and emergency medical services across the country are experiencing financial crisis. Because it is the Townships responsibility to have fire and emergency services for their residents, it is important to be proactive and ensure that the proper funding is in place.

**Ambulance Service Information:**

- If a tax for emergency medical services is put in place, it would eliminate the need for taxpayers to enroll for individual membership. As a taxpayer their membership would be automatic.
- A representative was present to discuss that the Bethel Community Ambulance Service is not in crisis. There is a five year and ten-year plan in place and they are not going anywhere. It was confirmed that volunteerism has declined. They are currently operating with 80% paid staff and 20% are paid-volunteers. Labor, equipment and training costs are up. Income from insurance payments and memberships are not covering expenses. The difference is being paid from reserves. They are not asking for the Township to impose a tax, nor are they opposed.
- Currently the Township is donating \$3,000 to the Bethel Ambulance.
- Bethel Ambulance had 1,564 calls in 2023.

**Fire Company Information:**

- Currently the Township provides the volunteer Fire Companies with Truck Fuel and Automobile and Workers' Compensation Insurance Policies. It is also making a \$24,000 annual donation to each Fire Company. If a tax for fire services is put in place, it would eliminate the annual donation currently being made.
- The Fire Companies' Financial information was discussed. In 2023 revenues, including fundraising, covered the expenses, but did not allow for money to be put in reserve toward vehicle and equipment upgrades and purchases.
- How to fairly distribute funds between the two Fire Companies was discussed. The volume of calls, run card area and equipment each Fire Company has were looked at.
  - o Call Volume: Using totals from the Fire Companies' monthly reports in 2023, and feedback from Representative present at the meeting, it was estimated that Rehrersburg was responsible for roughly 70% and Mt. Aetna for 30%
  - o Apparatus: Rehrersburg operates a Rescue, QRS, Tanker, Mini Pumper and Engine (5). Mt Aetna operates a Tanker, Engine and Air Truck (3). Putting Rehrersburg at 62.5% and Mt. Aetna 37.5%
  - o Expenses: TBD, waiting on Mt. Aetna Fire Company Financials
  - o It was agreed that the number of properties and their assessment value on each Fire Company's portion of the run card map should be calculated and maybe considered.

### **Other Information:**

- A member of the audience raised concerns about a tax increase for those residents on fixed incomes. It was shared that it has been brought up at some meetings and the audience has been open and understanding.
- The County is also doing a study on emergency services funding and a report is expected to be released around September of 2024.
- It's been determined that if the County did a \$50/person tax county wide it would generate \$6 million but it would have a negative impact in that: - volunteers will dwindle – paid departments won't be affordable – services would shift to being multi-municipal – membership through residences will miss the businesses that contribute large amounts if the tax is levied by property assessment value.
- The per capita tax cannot fund it, it would be too high
- How will Tax Exempt entities be handled? Teen Challenge for example, would we propose a fee in lieu of tax?
- Apartment / Multi Units - If based on assessment value, the property owners bill will be determined by the property value, not the number of units.
- Can a tax break be given to volunteers that reside in the township? Would that be a flat amount or would it be a reduction to the rate being imposed on each volunteer's individual assessment value?
- Can relief for financial hardship be applied for?
- Would like to have this ready for 2025 tax bills.

### **If Fire and Emergency Medical Service Taxes are levied:**

- The Township annual donations to Ambulance and Fire Companies would cease
- Tax payers are automatically members of the Ambulance Services
- The Fire Tax and the EMS Tax would appear as separate lines on the tax bill, and it will not appear as an increase to the property tax line amount.
- As additional municipalities institute a tax, if the fire companies' and ambulance service's revenues increase enough to cover expenses and increase savings, maybe reductions in the tax rate can be considered.

### **Future Planning:**

- Provide number of properties by type and assessment values, Township wide and also split by FC Run Card areas
- Provide list of churches and exempt properties
- Provide Mt. Aetna Fire Company Financials
- Find examples of fee in lieu of tax arrangements for exempt properties
- Next workshop will be on Wednesday, June 19, 2024 at 6:30 PM