



**SPECIAL MEETING  
OF THE  
BRYN ATHYN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

***COUNCIL CHAMBER***  
**March 25, 2024**

The meeting was called to order by President Jeffrey Elsing at 7:00p.m. The following were present:

**MEMBERS OF COUNCIL**

Glenn Gurney  
Ric Asplundh  
Jeffrey Elsing  
Duane D. Hyatt

Brent McCurdy  
Mark Pennink  
Steven Huntzinger

ALSO: Victoria S. Trost, Mayor Ken Schauder, Solicitor R. Rex Herder

President Jeffrey Elsing welcomed all to the Special Meeting of Borough Council, noting that only one topic – **AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION AGREEMENT (“AGREEMENT”) WITH LOWER MORELAND TOWNSHIP TO CREATE A JOINT FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT** - will be discussed.

Mr. Elsing presented an introduction on the history of the proposed agreement. After years of conversations and professional studies since 2008 the municipalities are considering consolidation of the Bryn Athyn Fire Company (BAFC) and the Huntingdon Valley Fire Company (HVFC). The Agreement was first introduced at the February 5, 2024 meeting of Borough Council and since there were many questions, it was decided to hold this special meeting to give background on the potential consolidation.

Chief Mark Showmaker prepared a power point presentation showing how both municipalities have gotten to this Agreement which included information from previous professional studies conducted at the request of the municipalities. Chief Showmaker reminded those present that the Borough Code and Township Code state that it is an obligation of the municipalities to provide Fire and EMS services to residents of the Borough and the Township.

Chief Showmaker noted that a mutual aid agreement was signed by both Huntingdon Valley Fire Company and Bryn Athyn Fire Company in 1917 that both fire companies would respond to all but minor fire calls in both municipalities. The fire companies had already committed to working together.

In 2018, both municipalities requested that Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (PA DCED) conduct a study to determine a plan for the future of their fire departments. The PA DCED recommendations of the comprehensive review were clear:

- Consolidation of the departments creating a new Fire Company
- Temporarily operate the new fire company from the Bryn Athyn building due to poor condition of Huntingdon Valley facility
- Construct a new fire house for the new Fire Company

Chief Showmaker demonstrated how fire fighting has changed over the years. Because of synthetic materials commonly used now, there is a need to decrease response times to fires. Neither fire company currently meets the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards for response time. We count on our mutual aid partners to meet the standards. The Chief also reported that fifteen years ago there were 360,000 volunteer firefighters in Pennsylvania; today there are 30,000 volunteer firefighters. Chief Showmaker recommended that members of Council review the PA Intergovernmental Cooperation Handbook.

Chief Showmaker showed that savings would be realized by both municipalities for personnel, capital equipment and facilities costs, resulting in a more efficient use of tax funds. The Chief noted that this duplication of expenses is unsustainable for the future.

The Agreement would create an umbrella organization to work towards consolidation and provide the authority necessary for the Chief of Emergency Services to move forward towards the final model. Chief Showmaker presented the flow charts for the umbrella organization and for the final model. At this point, we do not know what the cost for the new fire company will be. The Chief acknowledged the legacy and history of both departments.

President Elsing thanked the Chief, the Emergency Services Committee and both fire companies for their input into the Agreement. He noted that at the February meeting of Borough Council all members of Council were not present, so in order that everyone understand the background and details of the Agreement. All minutes from meetings were distributed to Council. The Emergency Services Committee, whose members are Jeff Elsing, Vikki Trost, David Sirken and Chris Hoffman) met with both fire companies to address questions raised by Chief Schauder. Mr. Elsing related that the Emergency Services Committee would like to have all of Council be comfortable with the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement and understand what it does and what it does not do. The Emergency Services Committee has been meeting for several years to get to this point. This point is here now with the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement

which sets forth that umbrella organization which for now and the near future both fire companies will operate as they are with Mark Showmaker as the chief of both houses. We are creating the vehicle for funding that umbrella organization with the cooperation of both fire companies and setting forward for the future. There are timelines in place with both fire companies for equipment replacement and budgeting, planning for the future. We hope for one consolidated fire company and we must keep moving forward. This Agreement recognizes Chief Showmaker as the Chief of an entity. We are not sure if that entity will be municipal-based or if it will be a 501(c)3 organization; there are benefits for both options. This Agreement sets forward the funding for those new acquisitions, it maintains the identity of both fire houses for the time being, it gives Chief Showmaker control and it lets the two municipalities to decide how to provide services to our communities.

The discussion was opened to comments and questions from members of Borough Council.

Councilman Mark Pennink expressed concerns over the financial aspect of the consolidation. He asked if the 25/75 split was the formula for the future. Should it be split on population, number of houses or square miles? Mr. Elsing explained that the 25/75 split was a first pass on the plan and that he and Vikki Trost have expressed concern that the 25/75 is equitable going forward. There are certain purchases going forward that may require some split and other costs that may be a different split. This will be further discussed. Chris Hoffman related that an appropriate ratio should be decided going forward. It was agreed that both municipalities will have equal seats at the table in terms of decision making and that the two municipalities are such obvious partners. If each municipality had to move forward independently when our resources run out, there is concern regarding what would be needed from taxpayers to meet the independent obligations. Mr. Hoffman expressed that we are important partners in this endeavor. Mr. Pennink expressed concern that a large portion of Borough property owners pays no tax.

Councilman Steven Huntzinger asked if the funding decisions would be made before an agreement to consolidate is signed. Mr. Elsing answered in the affirmative. Mr. Huntzinger asked if the joint fire house is part of the deal. Mr. Elsing replied yes, a new building is part of the deal. Mr. Huntzinger asked if the combined fire company would meet the NFPA incident response time. Chief Showmaker replied that we would still fall short at nighttime. During the day response is better because we always rely on mutual aid partners.

Councilman Ric Asplundh asked if any fire company in Pennsylvania currently meet the NFPA standards. Chief Showmaker replied that one company in Bucks County does, though they have a professional career staff with a volunteer supplement. They also count on mutual aid partners. Costs are probably \$2 - \$3 million per year. Chief Showmaker explained that it is important to keep volunteers to keep costs lower. Mr. Asplundh is generally in favor of the concept but can't see how it will be cheaper. Chief Showmaker explained that the savings come in the non-duplication of everything.

Mayor Ken Schauder/Fire Chief Schauder wonders how the Borough can afford this. He noted that the Agreement allows either party to back out of the agreement, but he hopes this doesn't happen. Mayor Schauder is confident in the group that we have in place works very well together on the municipal level. The mayor noted that Chris Hoffman has stated that this process is happening whether the Borough goes along with it or not. The Borough needs to figure out how to be part of the process. Mayor Schauder is excited and is looking forward to it and hopes it happens before he retires.

Councilman Duane Hyatt, who is chair of the Finance Committee, has concerns about the costs and understands that it is a difficult question to ask and it may be premature to have those numbers. He believes that before Council votes, the split allocation should be ironed out. He does not believe that the allocations should be difficult. Mr. Hyatt asked how many vehicles will be reduced for cost savings. Chief Showmaker explained that one engine will be eliminated along with utility vehicles, but that a certain level must be retained to meet ISO levels. ISO levels are standards set by insurance companies that set the rates for homeowners' insurance. Fire companies are rated on their capabilities. Mr. Hyatt asked if Huntingdon Valley Fire Chief is in favor. Chief Showmaker responded that many are in favor at HVFC and some are not. The Chief noted that things have changed and we need to adjust to modern day fire service. New fire stations have to be designed to protect firefighters from chemicals that they come into contact with when fighting fires. These are new standards. Chris Hoffman noted that the president and chief of HVFC gave their approval to this version of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement. Mr. Hyatt asked if the average Bryn Athyn resident is aware that this is the direction that the Borough is going. Mr. Elsing responded that the Public Relations committee is getting the word out. Mr. Hyatt suggested a letter be sent to residents. Mr. Elsing agreed that a letter can be sent out. Mr. Hyatt stated that we probably don't have much choice other than to go this direction, however he would feel better voting on this resolution if he knew that the residents have been informed.

Mayor Schauder noted Mr. Hyatt's discomfort with the cost split and explained that the first document that the Borough signed for the hiring of Chief Showmaker was the 25/75 split. Mayor Schauder noted that these numbers can be negotiated. Mr. Schauder noted that 80% of ambulance calls are to Lower Moreland and that is a basis for an equitable split. Chris Hoffman replied that he had developed the 25/75 split and, in his calculation, did not believe that a 15% split was a meaningful financial contribution. Mr. Hyatt acknowledged that we can agree on a cost split or get out of the agreement, but he would like the Borough residents to be aware of what is happening.

Councilman Glenn Gurney stated that a lot of his questions have been addressed and a lot have to do with finances and he appreciated Chief Showmaker's presentation which was extremely helpful. Mr. Gurney expressed the need to evaluate the financial formula and asked how the staffing of a joint fire company would work. Chief Showmaker explained that the career staff would take care of daily operational activities while volunteers come at night to train and run the organization. It was explained that the savings would come from less apparatus and equipment needed. Not replacing Engine 11 in 2027 would be

the first savings realized. Mr. Gurney asked about the location for the new fire company and if a study has been done for this location. Chris Hoffman reported that Lower Moreland Township purchased 2683 Huntingdon Pike in 2018, but the property by itself is not enough to build the firehouse to meet the current standards. Lower Moreland is working on the next acquisition of property next to it which is owned by the Academy of the New Church. An offer was made and a survey conducted. The next step is a stakeholder meeting to see if there is an opportunity to put a deal together. If not possible, the Township will discuss how to acquire the property directly. Chief Showmaker reiterated that the most effective response will be possible by consolidating and bringing the joined fire company into one building.

Councilman Brent McCurdy asked if Council is expected to vote on this resolution tonight. Mr. Elsing was hopefully optimistic and was pleased that all members of Council were in attendance. Mr. McCurdy understands that the Lower Moreland building does not meet standards, and asked if the Bryn Athyn Fire House fits the requirements and wondered why we are not looking harder at that rather than a complicated new building. Chief Showmaker replied that the Bryn Athyn Fire House at the time of the study was intended to be used temporarily, and that it is not currently conducive as a modern-day fire house facility. It is not large enough for a combined fire company and does not have adequate sleeping facilities. There are also accessibility issues. Mr. McCurdy was concerned that Bryn Athyn Fire Company leaving the current building would put the Academy in a bind with an empty building. Also, he noted that the project would be taking a piece of property from the Academy that the Academy does not want to sell. Noting the generosity of the Academy in leasing the building to the Borough, that does not sit well with Mr. McCurdy.

Mr. Huntzinger asked about the annual deficit number for the Fire Company. Mayor Schauder explained that BAFC has been fortunate enough over the years to build a nest egg of \$6 million and when they cannot meet payroll or purchase a piece of equipment, they withdraw from the savings account. For the last five years, the market has appreciated more than the deficit. Mr. Huntzinger compared the current deficit and the future cost of building a fire house. Mayor Schauder explained that we will give a better service, quoting Lach Brown's saying that "by putting the fire companies together, we will be building something better than each of us individually". There will be a cost shift from the BAFC to the Borough.

Solicitor Rex Herder explained that the ICA can be adopted by resolution. The advertisement for this meeting was a discussion of the agreement, and not consideration for action, so a resolution can be approved at the April meeting.

Mr. Hyatt requested that a letter be sent to residents giving them the information discussed this evening. Chris Hoffman noted that the Lower Moreland Commissioners have not approved this agreement, but it will be on the agenda for their April meeting. An advertisement was run for notice to Lower Moreland residents.

Mr. Huntzinger will put something on the website and a letter will be sent out to residents this week.

Council does not plan to vote on this at the April meeting.

Lach Brown spoke about the unsustainability of the current model, noting that the Borough has a million-dollar fire service that is not paid for by the Borough. The Fire Company has been a good steward to the community. It was agreed that the community would likely be in favor of the consolidation. Chief Schauder offered to use the BAFC database to send letters to residents. Mr. Hyatt said the presentation tonight was the best that Council has seen.

Mr. Elsing will work on a draft letter to residents with the assistance of the Fire Company database. The letter will go out this week. The resolution will be on the agenda for consideration at the April meeting.

Sarah Elsing, resident, and President of the Board for Cairnwood Village, thanked the Fire Company for coming to Cairnwood Village and speaking to the residents. Mrs. Elsing felt that it is the responsibility of Borough residents to seek information about Borough Council meetings. This information has been advertised and available to all residents.

There being no further business presented, the meeting was adjourned at 8:27 pm.

Victoria S. Trost  
Secretary