



# HoseLine

SPRING 2021

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Welcome to our Spring newsletter! This newsletter is generally sent to our residents in the spring and fall, but due to the effects of COVID-19, we were not able to publish a fall issue. Throughout this issue, you will see several changes that were put into place and nearly all are somehow related to COVID.

The biggest change for us was reducing daily staffing, from nine firefighter/paramedics to seven. This has resulted in the staffing of two vehicles instead of three. Since 2009 we had operated with one fire engine at each fire station and an ambulance at the main fire station. When a second ambulance was needed we would have the crew of one fire engine move over (or “jump” as we call it) to staff that second ambulance. This would leave one fire engine left to cover all of Prospect Heights. We also would be able to get help from our neighboring fire departments automatically, should it be needed. We rarely needed it but when we did it would come with speed as it’s an automated process; the request and response were seamless.

We currently have one, 3-firefighter/paramedic crew at each firehouse. They respond in either the ambulance or the fire engine, depending on the nature of the call. The shift commander (battalion chief) responds alone in a specially equipped truck and either takes command at larger or critical incidents or can assist at smaller incidents.



You are probably asking why we had to do this. The answer is money. The fall 2020 property tax payments were delayed by 60 days without penalty from August 1 to October 1. October came and went and in early November more than \$330,000 of property taxes had not been received by the fire district. This is about eight percent of our income. By state law, the fire district’s two substantial sources of revenue are property taxes (which make up about 87 percent of all income) and fees charged for ambulance transportation (which makes up about 10 percent of all income). We are not allowed to raise taxes above the current rate without voter approval and state law does not allow us to create other fees or charges. Simply put, several businesses and some homeowners did not pay their fall taxes. We suspect that with COVID, many could not afford to pay. If we employ people, we have to be fiscally responsible for those people. So to ensure we could pay, we had to reduce staffing. We don’t like it but we didn’t have another choice. There are a lot of factors that go into these decisions. This wasn’t a knee-jerk reaction but one that was made by the command staff after much analysis and discussion that began months before the plan was implemented.



Property tax payments in 2021 are for the taxes of 2020. Those spring and falls payment deadlines have also been extended an extra 60 days. So now we enter 2021 with less money than anticipated and will have to wait longer to ensure income estimates are realized. It is our belief that many who couldn’t

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# Message from the Fire Chief: Chief Drew Smith

I hope this newsletter finds you and your family well or at the least not experiencing any debilitating effects of COVID, either medically, mentally or financially. We accept great responsibility as stewards of your fire protection and ambulance service tax dollars. We view it as part of our mission to not only save lives and property but to spend money wisely. On Page One of this newsletter you learned about our reduced staffing, how it will operate, and why we had to do this. There is a lot that had gone on behind the scenes and I would like to tell you about that.



There is much, much more to preparing to respond to your 9-1-1 call that simply waiting. We must ensure the vehicles and equipment are ready and in a

good state. We must train and stay proficient on the latest knowledge and skill required of modern firefighters and paramedics (almost every firefighters is also a paramedic). We must administer and manage the business of doing all of that; pay bills, meet payroll, arrange for repairs, maintain the firehouses, prepare members to assume leadership roles when retirements occur, and the list goes on.

## Some Quick Things of Interest:

- In October and then again in February a plane went off a runway at Chicago Executive Airport. We responded with our specialized Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting vehicle as did the Wheeling Fire Department. Together we determined there were no injuries and no fire. Our joint response plan has been in place since 1997 and although such incidents at the airport are rare, they are handled swiftly.
- Since the onset of COVID we have worked to maintain our Continuity of Operations Plan – CoOP. The CoOP provides a framework for us and our members to maintain services to the community should an event such as illness, fire, or natural disaster impact the workforce, our facilities, or operations. Unlike all of you who can call us for your emergency, we don't have a 9-1-1 to call for our emergency, so we plan.

- In August we promoted two full time firefighter/paramedics to lieutenant. With three shifts and two fire houses we need six lieutenants. Until this promotion, we had a mix of part time and full time lieutenants. With resignation and retirements of our last part time lieutenants I took the opportunity, and with the support of the board of trustees, created an all-full time group of first-line supervisors; lieutenants.



- We have experienced significant turnover in our part time workforce. Since January of 2020 we have hired 18 part time personnel as replacements for those who resigned or retired. Many of our 20-plus year members (some had over 30 years' service) decided to resign and move on to a new chapter in their lives. Some of our young part time members attained full time employment elsewhere and resigned to avoid conflicts with their new employer. Our part timers make up two-thirds of our workforce and are paid roughly two-thirds of what our full time members earn. Part timers perform the same role as full time firefighter/paramedics but with turnover, it is now much less experienced.
- When we hire new personnel most have already completed paramedic training. If necessary, we send them to the fire academy to become trained firefighters. A class is made up of many students and they receive instruction simultaneously. We also need our firefighters to drive the fire engines and operate the pump. This training can only be accomplished in a one-on-one setting. Only one person drives at a time. Only one person operates the pump at a time. While we hire in groups, we can only conduct driver/operator training using a one instructor/one student method. This is where we back up and a bottleneck occurs. Each new hire must master their core job duties first then undergo 60 hours of driver training so that we can get the fire engine to your home. With full time members serving as the first-line supervisor, it is our part time members who we rely on to drive and pump. Part time members with less than three years of service with the PHFD make up 75 per-

cent of our part time workforce and this is where the bottleneck's effect is felt. We cannot pair the full time member with two part time members when neither can drive and pump. We are diligently working to rectify this but it is a never-ending task as members resign and are replaced with new hires.

## 2020 Retirements and Resignations

Last year we saw a number of resignations and retirements:

- Roderick Abernathy resigned from the board of fire commissioners. Mr. John Goode replaced Mr. Abernathy on the fire commission.
- Part Time Firefighter and past lieutenant Padraic Lahey retired after 37 years of service.
- Part Time Firefighter Michael Kreher retired after 28 years of service.
- Part Time Lieutenant Ed Kotowski retired after nearly 23 years of service.
- Part Time Firefighter Darrin Maihack retired after 20 years of service.
- Retirement of Part Time Firefighters Gus Tsoulos (18 years of service), Greg Grish (12 years of service), Brian McDonald and Michael Pacocha (11 years of service).

We are thankful for the many years of service each member contributed to serving our community.

## Capital improvement

The purchase of a new pumper culminated with its delivery in January of 2021. The process of making this purchase began over two years ago and was started before the pandemic struck. Construction of a new fire engine takes about one year. This new pumper replaces a 20-year old one that has

served us well. We will be keeping the old one as a spare for when either of the two front-line pumpers breakdown or need maintenance. This new pumper was paid for with our capital savings we mustered before 2009.

Other major projects this past fall included the recoating of the main firehouse roof. This project had been in the queue for over a year. We did it ourselves and saved over \$10,000. Another major project was the tuckpointing and stuccoing of exterior walls as well as installation of glass block windows at both firehouses. The glass block windows replaced wood windows that were more than 40 years old.

## Firefighter of the Year Nick Fuderer

Nick was selected by his fellow firefighters as the 2020 Firefighter of the Year. Each fall nominations are solicited from the active firefighters. Any active firefighter can nominate any other active firefighter. Three members were nominated and after voting, Nick Fuderer had the majority of all the votes. There were three nominations for Nick that mentioned several reasons for Nick being selected: his serving as a preceptor for multiple paramedic students; researching and specing out new EMS bags and seeking out member input on this project; his positive attitude every day; his participating in everything going on when he's on duty; and the way he represents us and always goes above and beyond the call of duty. For all these reasons, and I'm sure many others, I concur that Nick is our 2020 FFOTY.

*Congratulations Nick, you earned this!*



Cover Story...  
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pay in late 2020 will also be unable to pay in 2021 so the problem may be compounded.

We have compensated for the reduced staffing by examining how we handle calls and more closely aligning the response resources with the reported nature of the emergency. Our highly trained dispatchers can determine with near-perfect accuracy the severity of each 9-1-1 call which allows us to "right-size" the number of vehicles and personnel sent on each call. This prevents asking our neighbors for help unless it is necessary. Since we started this reduced staffing model in mid-November we have had to ask for assistance from our neighbors (usually only one fire department) for one emergency call each week. That's

about two percent of all calls. Ultimately, residents will receive the same quality of care for their medical emergency and if they experience a fire the same number of fire engines and support vehicles with the same number of firefighters will arrive at their home expeditiously although a few of them will now come from another fire department.

We often hear that government should do more with less. The PHFD has done more with the same every year for the past many years. Now we are faced with doing the same with less and we will. One thing is guaranteed: If you call us we will come.

# COVID Spending in 2020

For the past year the PHFPD firefighter/paramedics have had to adapt to the pandemic. Equipment and procedures rarely used in the past are now standard operating procedure. We operate under the assumption that everyone we contact may be a carrier of the virus regardless of whether they are symptomatic or not. An equal threat comes from both fire and ambulance calls and family or bystanders we contact. We can't make broad assumptions about who is or is not infected or an asymptomatic carrier. Family members often set aside their own mild illness in order to care for a sicker relative, particularly their children or elderly parent. In all of this, the amount of cleaning and wearing of PPE (personal protective equipment) has skyrocketed to new level. As a result, we have had two major expenses: Purchasing PPE and overtime. Here's some background on each:

## PPE

Typical annual PPE expense is around \$1,000. For 2020, PPE expense was \$12,851.34. We are fortunate to have received a Federal grant for \$3,000 that was designated for PPE. We have gone from using under 100 masks a year to using in excess of 6,000 masks. We have also used more than 100 gallons of disinfecting products and also purchased many more times the amount of disposable exam gloves and gowns than ever before.

## Overtime

Each year we include money in the budget for overtime. It is used for a variety of reasons but all those reasons relate to maintaining the minimum number of firefighter/paramedics necessary each day to ensure an adequate response to any emergency call. Significant reasons for 2020 overtime spending include:

- Between late March and the first week of June, nine of our part time members were prohibited by their full time

employing fire departments from having any secondary employment due to concerns about Covid transmission. This required many shifts to be covered by our full time members who then were required to be paid overtime.

- As part of the above necessary coverage, all full time member's vacation time was cancelled.
- One full time member remained off, unable to work due to a serious off-duty injury that occurred in late 2019. This member returned to work in late June 2020.
- Two full time members, one in the spring and one later in the year, required multiple weeks of time off for medically necessary treatments.
- Two full time members developed Covid the weekend after Thanksgiving. Due to the impact of their illness (one was hospitalized) both remain off as of this writing.

## What About the Vaccine?

Over 90 percent of our firefighter/paramedics have now received both doses of the vaccine. Thanks to the staff and administration at Northwest Community Hospital, our paramedics were included in the first round (1a) of the vaccinations. We are grateful for their inclusion of us. Of the less than ten percent not vaccinated some had contracted Covid and were therefore ineligible to receive the vaccine until they make a full recovery.

We are also partnering with other area fire departments to assist with the administration of vaccines to all citizens under phases 1b, 1c, and 2 of the CDC and state's plans. Don't be surprised if you see one of our paramedics working at one of the mass vaccination sites.



# Exit Drills in the Home



Once a fire starts in your home, there's no time to plan an escape. A home can fill with thick black smoke and be engulfed in flames in minutes. Most house fires also occur at night, when people are the least

prepared. With the current emphasis on working from home and remote learning, more people are in their homes during the day than ever before. That's why it's important to create a home fire escape plan for your home and family. Practice your exit drills in the home often with every member of your household. Advanced planning will ensure that you and your family are ready for any fire emergency.

## Create a Home Fire Escape Plan

To create your very own home fire escape plan, follow these steps:

1. Draw a floor plan of your home on a piece of paper.
2. Mark down all doors, windows, stairways, porches, porch roofs and other areas where you could escape from.
3. Choose and mark down a meeting place (such as a mailbox or street light) a safe distance away from your home where everyone can gather.
4. Draw arrows to show your escape route from every room in your home. Look for the easiest and quickest way to get out of each room.
5. Use a different color to show an alternative exit route from each room in your home. You'll use this as your backup plan in case your primary escape route is blocked or unsafe to use.

## Practice Your Home Fire Escape Plan

Your fire escape plan may look great on paper, but does it really work? Practicing exit drills in the home will allow you to test the plan and make adjustments as needed.

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# Community Connect Safety Program

As you may have heard, we have been working with technology partner First Due to release a new public safety program for Prospect Heights. The program is called Community Connect and it allows the residents and businesses in Prospect Heights to share valuable life safety information with our department. Residents/Businesses can provide details about their home, family, children, pets, medical/functional needs and more, so that when First Responders are dispatched to an emergency at that residence, they have the most information possible before arriving on scene.

This is an incredible program for our community and will allow us to keep Prospect Heights much safer, but in order to run a successful program we need the involvement and engagement of all residents, families, businesses and homeowners.

You can find more information about Prospect Heights Community Connect here: [www.phfire.com](http://www.phfire.com) and click on the Community Connect button.

The program is called Community Connect and it allows you to share life safety information about your home, family, pets, and more with Prospect Heights Fire Protection District so that if First Responders are ever dispatched to an emergency at your home or business, they have the most information as possible before arriving on scene. To register your household, go to our website, [www.phfire.com](http://www.phfire.com) and click the button Community Connect.

Sharing information such as the below can be incredibly helpful for First Responders to know if they are dispatched to your home. Having this information inputted beforehand will allow them to customize their approach before they arrive on scene so they can best meet the specific needs of your home, business and family:

- Occupant & Contact Info
- Home Access/Details and Utilities
- Gate Code
- Pool/Basement
- Gas/Water Shut Off
- Medical & Functional Needs
- Where medicine is located
- How a person in the home reacts in a stressful situation
- If someone has mobility needs and will need assistance evacuating
- Pets
- Name of pet
- If the pet(s) have a hiding place
- If the pet(s) are dangerous or will attack strangers



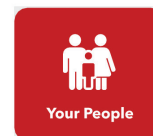
**Prospect Heights Community Connect**

- 1 Create an Account**  
Sign in for free and get started doing your part. It just takes your email, phone number and address.
- 2 Enter the Info that Matters Most**  
Enter valuable information that can help us assist more effectively during an emergency.
- 3 Help your First Responders When Seconds Count**  
That's it. Just keep us updated when things change overtime so we can always be prepared.

Go to: [WWW.PHFIRE.COM](http://WWW.PHFIRE.COM) Click on the Community Connect Button

## Register for Community Connect Program

Protects Your Home:



Protects Your Business:



Community Connect is a secure platform and the information you provide will only be used by the Prospect Heights Fire Protection District at the time of dispatch for the purpose of better serving you during emergency situations. All logins and passwords are protected with bank-level encryption and security. If you're comfortable logging into your online bank, you'll be comfortable logging into Community Connect.

Please reach out to us if you have any questions or concerns or need further information. We are confident we will see a large increase in sign-ups and the word about the program will continue to spread throughout Prospect Heights, which will continue to engage our entire community and help us improve the safety in our community. Thank you for your involvement and engagement in this program.



## Prospect Heights Fire District

10 East Camp McDonald Road  
Prospect Heights, IL 60070

Non-Emergency Phone: 847-253-8060  
Fax: 847-253-4759  
Email: phfd@phfire.com

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### Exit Drills in the Home ... continued from page 4

Here are some tips to help you practice.

- Review your escape plan with everyone in your home, including children.
- Appoint a "fire chief" to hold realistic fire drills in the home.
- Practice your escape plan both during the day and night.
- Keep a close eye on children during drills.
- Make sure everyone in the household can unlock all doors and windows quickly.
- Practice crawling on the ground to simulate staying below smoke in your home.
- Close the doors as you leave as this slows the spread of a fire.
- Go directly to your meeting place. Make sure everyone is accounted for.
- Pretend some exits are blocked by the fire and practice alternative escape routes.

- Incorporate an escape ladder into your escape plan if you live in a two story home.
- If there are infants, older adults, or family members with mobility limitations, make sure that someone is assigned to assist them in an emergency.
- Keep slippers and a flashlight next to your bed in case you need to escape at night.
- Practice your home fire escape plan at least twice a year.

During a real fire in your home, remember to get out first and then call 9-1-1 for help. Never go back into a burning building for any reason. Firefighters have the skills and equipment to perform rescues.

If you become trapped inside, close all doors between you and the fire. Stuff towels or other objects in cracks around the doors to keep smoke out. Call 9-1-1, wait at a window and signal for help by waving something out the window.

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