



# HoseLine

FALL 2021

**IN THIS ISSUE:**

- Strategic Planning for 2021-2022
- Message from the Fire Chief
- The Apparatus Fleet Update: Vehicles Serving Community Needs
- Prevent Kitchen Fires
- PHFD Trustees



## Strategic Planning for 2021-22

Late last fall the PHFD implemented staffing reduction due to a significant amount of delinquent property tax revenue. 10 percent of the fire district's operating income is from fees charged for ambulance service. 90 percent of the fire district's operating income is from property taxes. Following last fall's property tax payment deadline the PHFD's collection was down by about

ten percent. That amount was roughly equal to one month's payroll. State law governs how fire districts may generate income. Property taxes cannot be raised without voter approval and Medicare and private health insurance limit the amount paid for ambulance service. Other sources of income permitted by state law would yield just a few thousand dollars additional annually. Based on the significantly reduced income last fall, the fire department implemented a staffing reduction.

For many years the PHFD staffed two fire engines and one ambulance. It did this with five firefighter/paramedics at the headquarters firehouse and three firefighter/paramedics at the firehouse adjacent to the airport. It was a good system, worked well, and provided flexibility to manage preventive maintenance and daily training. Since last fall the PHFD operates with a three-firefighter/paramedics team at the firehouse. Each team staffs either the ambulance or the fire engine, depending on the nature of the call received.

We have managed to get through the reduced income period of last fall. The spring tax collections were much better, nearly normal. We anticipate the same for this fall's tax collection. However, over the last year 12 of our part time firefighter/paramedics resigned after they obtained full time employment elsewhere. In that same period of time we were only able to recruit and hire ONE new part time firefighter/paramedic. We use part timers because it cost half of what a full time employee costs. Up until a few years ago we had a long line of applicants for these positions because we offered a path into a full time career. That path isn't available in most Chicago-area fire departments. For the past few years the number of applicants has been low and now it's almost non-existent. The process to train a new hire takes 13 weeks of full time service. Paramedic school takes another year of full time service. We ask that of part time employees.

The low pool of part time employees has led us to use our small pool of full time employees to keep staffing up. This resulted in a large amount of money being spent on overtime. We have been successful so far, but this plan isn't sustainable for many reasons. We have handled



*Continued on back page...*



# Message from the Fire Chief: Chief Drew Smith

I hope this newsletter finds you well and mostly recovered from the pandemic. While the pandemic may have slowed or stalled many aspects of life, it did not do so to the fire district. We have maintained serviced and I have much to share with you:

■ In the last nine months we have had 12 part time members resign as a result of their attaining full time employment at another fire department. We have only been able to recruit and hire one new part time firefighter/paramedic in that same time period. We do have three recruits currently attending the fire academy to obtain their basic training. However, only one is a paramedic. The ability to recruit and retain part time firefighter/paramedics is not unique to the PHFD. Many fire departments including those with full time openings are experiencing very low levels of applicants.

■ Battalion Chief Scott Olsen retired after nearly four years in that position. Prior to being appointed a full time battalion chief in 2017 he had served as a part time lieutenant. Scott grew up in Prospect Heights and began his service with the PHFD in high school in 1979. He took a pause between 1988 and 1996 and then served without interruption for the past 25 years. We thank Scott for his service to the PHFD and the residents of the Prospect Heights Fire Protection District. We wish him and his family well in the next chapter of their lives.



■ Shortly after Thanksgiving last year two of our members fell ill with Covid and experienced an extended recovery spanning several months. This required a significant overtime expense to maintain minimum daily staffing and supervision. Costs in excess of \$200,000, although budgeted, occurred. This is on top of the more than \$250,000 in overtime spent in 2020. Thankfully the PHFD received \$40,500 in Coronavirus Relief Funds from the Federal gov-

■ Full time firefighter/paramedic Jason Hardy was promoted to the rank of lieutenant in March of this year. In April a ceremony was held where Jason took the Oath of Office.

ernment that were administered by Cook County. We thank the county board president and board members for including fire protection districts in their plans for the CRF funds.

■ In the early part of this year we participated with other north suburban fire departments to staff a Mass Vaccination Clinic at New Trier High School. We provided a paramedic to administer vaccinations to hundreds if not thousands of first responders, essential workers, persons at significant risk.

■ The PHFD was proud to participate in the City's annual Independence Day Parade held on Saturday, July 3. While not the typical event of years past, it was well-attended and our firefighters proudly displayed our apparatus.

■ Each year the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance conducts a week-long summer camp for children who have had a significant burn injury. The school-age campers stay in cabins. They are mentored by young adults who are also burn survivors and past campers. The campground offers a variety of activities and allows the kids to engage with others who have experienced the physical and mental traumas of being burned. A variety of professionals (nurses, therapists, etc.) are on hand to assist as needed. I am so proud of our firefighters who raise money to help sponsor campers and attend the fire truck parade to show the kids their support. Our firefighters have done this for many years and plan to continue doing so.

■ With Covid restrictions lifted we are available and ready to enthusiastically engage all of you at block parties, youth groups, or at our firehouse. Just give us a call with your desire and we'll see what we can do.

■ We will not host an Open House for the second year. A great deal of planning is involved and given the uncertainties of earlier this year coupled with our reduced number of personnel we thought this was best. We look forward to seeing you all in 2022.

As you can see much goes on at the PHFD and it takes a lot of moving parts for us to deliver you service. Rest assured, however, that despite the pandemic or any disaster we are prepared to respond when called upon. Even if you do not believe your situation to be an emergency never hesitate to call us and we can help figure things out and rather quickly.



# The Apparatus Fleet Update: Vehicles Serving Community Needs

The PHFD operates a fleet of 14 vehicles: 6 fire trucks, 3 ambulances, and 5 support vehicles. The two most expensive and specialized vehicles are the aerial tower ladder truck and the aircraft rescue and fire fighting (ARFF) truck.

TOWER 9 is your aerial tower ladder truck. Purchased in 1993 at a cost of \$520,000 that was made possible from a voter-approved bond sale, it had an originally expected service life of 20 year. After 15 years of service its life was extended to 25 years as maintenance had kept it in good shape. Due to the financial impact of the recession, since 2009 the fire district was forced to stop funding its capital replacement plan and redirect money to daily operations. In 2019 funds were finally available to begin refunding the capital replacement plan. Then the pandemic struck and the same financial impacts returned. TOWER 9 is now 28 years old and the good news is it passed its Non-Destructive Test of the aerial device, a key measure to keeping it useable. Due to age and corrosion, repairs were made that permitted it to pass the test. As a result of passing that test we have another five years of life in the aerial. However, there is nothing to say something else will not occur that disables it or would cost so much money that repairs don't produce a cost-benefit. Planning for this replacement is a huge financial commitment.



duce large amounts of foam that can be applied while the vehicle is driven off-road. The main use is for aircraft crashes on the airport but those crashes can occur anywhere in Prospect Heights. While we have spares of the common fire engine, we do not have a spare ARFF truck. We rely on Wheeling and Wheeling relies on us. Our neighboring fire departments do not have these trucks as they don't have airports. Our goal with the Wheeling Fire Department is to develop a plan in cooperation with the airport to fund new vehicles.

Besides planning the replacement of TOWER 9 and CRASH TRUCK 39 we do have plans to replace the other fire trucks and ambulances as they age. Over the past five years we have replaced two ambulances and two other fire trucks. We do this using the savings that funds our capital replacement plan. Many years ago we also used funding from the 1991 voter-approved bond sale. Our current planning also involves repairs and updates to both firehouses. The main firehouse with our offices hasn't had any major work in 30 years and has areas not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Our second firehouse adjacent to the airport will be 20 years old soon and also needs some repairs. Most notable and expensive are overhead door, roof, and ventilation system replacement among other things. Our goal is to keep you informed about our needs and plans so we can ensure you get the service you need when you need it.



CRASH TRUCK 39 is your aircraft rescue and fire fighting (ARFF) truck. Originally built in 1991 for a Louisiana airport, the PHFD purchased it used and refurbished it in 2005. Now 30 years old it has seen a full life. While we keep it going, it has a repair that will cost more than \$60,000. To purchase a new ARFF truck is around \$750,000. 16 years ago we paid about \$100,000 to buy it and refurbish it. The Wheeling FD operates a similar vehicle that is even older. The key feature of these ARFF vehicles is that they pro-





## 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

PRSR STD  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Mt. Prospect IL  
**Permit No. 33**

Visit Our Website:  
**WWW.PHFIRE.COM**



**ECRWSS  
POSTAL CUSTOMER**

### Strategic Plan... continued from front page

all calls but there is one Achilles heel in all of this: With fewer firefighters on duty we are unable to guarantee that our water tanker truck will be staffed for every reported structure fire. Over 70 percent of the City of Prospect Heights is without fire hydrants and the tanker truck is essential. We rely on the Long Grove Fire Department as our backup but they are not right next door.

In the 2022 budget we plan to reduce reliance on part time firefighters and add more full time firefighters. This comes with a large financial commitment, one we don't take lightly. We find ourselves with no other choice given the lack of part time applicants and that those who do apply leave after a short period for full time employment at another fire department. Adding more full time personnel will require us to maintain the current, reduced staffing level due to the costs involved. Roughly, wages and benefits for one full time firefighter equals that of two part time personnel.

The strategy will allow us to have two full time firefighters and one part time firefighter on each vehicle. The role of

the part time person becomes one of support rather than one who must also be qualified to drive the truck and operate the pump or aerial ladder. That driver-operator ("Engineer") position requires about six-to-twelve months of additional training that also incurs other expenses.

As the start of 2022 approaches we will keep you informed about our plans.

**Cook Safely!**  
**Prevent Kitchen Fires**

**Did you know?**  
Each year, from 2016 to 2018, fire departments responded to an estimated average of **189,300** home cooking fires.

**These fires caused an estimated:**

- 170** deaths
- 3,300** injuries
- \$443 million** in property loss

FEMA | U.S. Fire Administration | Fire Everyone's Life

# PROSPECT HEIGHTS FIRE DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES



**JON TAMMEN**  
PRESIDENT



**SHAWN CLISHAM**  
TREASURER



**CHARLES "KC" FERGUSON**  
TRUSTEE



**JAMES REBECCA**  
TRUSTEE



**JOE VERTONE**  
SECRETARY