



## Emergency Services Round Table Summary 7-9 pm, April 12, 2022

### Attendees:

**In-person** –Chris Cruz, Bob Mills, Eric Snyder of East Allen Ambulance, Mark Thomas of Hanover Twp. Planning Commission, Vicky Roth? Of Hanover Township, Nick Marlowe Fire Chief of Han-Le-Co, Chris Spadaccia of Han-le-co Fire, Maria Wesco of Northampton Regional Ambulance and Joe Carl Northampton Borough EMS director.

**Virtual:** N. Catty Councilman Pete Paone, N. Catty Police Chief Chris Wolfer, Northampton Boro Manager LeRoy Brobst, Northampton fire chief Keith Knoblach, Northampton Planning commission Victor Rodite, Catasauqua Boro Manager Steve Travers.

LVPC Staff: Jill Seitz, Brad Stewart, Julie Benco, Bambi Griffin Rivera, Dean Severson, Steve Neratko, Matt Assad.

### Discussions of note:

#### Ambulance

1. Ambulance crews are short on staffing and have difficulty recruiting new volunteers and paid staff.
2. With incomes increasing in other jobs and industries – and funding issues not allowing that in ambulance – they are now have increased competition for volunteers and staff.
3. Smaller operations like the East Allen EMS are facing the most difficult hurdles.
4. Otherwise competing ambulance corps work with each other informally to help fill the coverage cracks, with mutual aid agreements to make sure people can get help in a timely manner.
5. Because they cover each other's areas, they sometimes find themselves several miles outside their coverage areas.
6. Medicare reimbursements often don't cover the cost of responding, but crews must respond to every call.
7. Ambulance operations are frustrated by an inability to be eligible for most EMS grants that are targeted mainly for fire service.
8. 7. Northampton Regional Ambulance is an example in which several previous separate ambulance operations were able to merge to produce a more efficient system.
9. Training costs and time are barriers to keep staffs full.

## **Fire**

1. Fire Crews are facing a shortage of volunteers, with Han-Le-Co often having only about 6 firefighters that can be counted on to show up for emergencies.
2. Fire companies also face funding shortage, but do have greater access to grants and usually get some stipend from municipalities they cover.
3. They also have mutual aid agreements to cover neighboring areas when those crews are busy or need extra help.
4. Few employers allow workers to leave for fire emergencies – a change from the distant past.
5. Han-Le-Cos location is no longer convenient for volunteers who often live several miles from the firehouse.
6. Traffic and development have extended response times, both for volunteers getting to the firehouse and crews getting to emergencies.
7. Training time and costs are barriers to keeping staffs full. Most fire crews pay for training that can take as many as 200 hours, but volunteers usually have to pay the cost upfront, and wait for reimbursement.
8. Buildings – often warehouses -- in the River Central area are now bigger and more difficult to protect than 20 years ago, but staffing is smaller and response times are higher. “The Days Inn used to be our biggest building,” said Han-Le-Co Fire Chief Nick Marlowe. Now we have warehouses and an expanding B.Baun”.

## **Police**

1. River Central area police have barriers to responding to incidents on the region’s growing and increasingly used trail network because vehicles don’t fit on the trail and mile markers don’t give people needing help a clear picture of where they are.
2. With locked trail heads – barriers allow walkers and rollers – but nothing bigger. Some police and fire don’t have access to open the gates that are used.

## **EMA**

1. EMA is often forgotten at the local level, with most grants and funding only available on the regional basis.
2. North Catty EMA Director Joe Carl said he’d like to see more coordination with the county. For example, he said Northampton County hasn’t allowed him to have a county radio to hear what is happening outside his borough.
3. Only source of money is municipality, but as the borough grows, the expense and complexity of emergency logistics grows.
4. “It’s not sustainable,” Carl said.

## **What will help**

1. Continued/more coordination between individual EMS operations
2. Additional grants/funding that could help EMS operations cover the cost of training volunteers and staff.
3. EMS more eligible for all emergency response grants. They're currently closed out of most that are targeted primarily to fire.
4. More grants/funding to fire to help pay for recruiting and training volunteers.
5. A long-term plan to determine the best locations for fire stations.
6. County, trail and municipal organizations sharing keys with Fire, Police and EMS to access trails at trailheads during emergency incidents. **During roundtable, all municipal and county officials said they would meet later to discuss sharing keys.**
7. A Utility Task Vehicle (UTV) that allows police, fire or ems to easily respond to incidents along the trail. North Catasauqua Police chief Chris Wolfer said he's already applying for a grant to buy a UTV and has begun to "design" what they want. **During roundtable, NORCO EMA planner Mike Rinker said he can help Wolfer with that.**
8. The county sharing its EMA radios with communities in the neighboring county so they can know what's happening just over the border. **Rinker agreed during the roundtable to provide Carl with a radio.**
9. **Regionalization – Everywhere.** Most agreed at the meeting that **Fire, EMS and EMA will work more efficiently if they regionalize them across the entire River Central region. "What we're doing today isn't working. We can't keep thinking the way we did the last 35 years," said East Allen Supervisor Bob Mills. We have to think for the future... Regionalism is the answer.**
10. Continue meeting to discuss how to regionalize and be more efficient. Most at roundtable agreed to continue meeting.