



SOUTH STRABANE
TOWNSHIP
WASHINGTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

July 28, 2021

Township Resident
South Strabane Township

Re: Planning for the Future of Fire and Emergency Medical Services

Dear Resident,

As you may realize, South Strabane Township is currently experiencing rapid residential and commercial growth. To address this growth, it is in the Township's best interest to plan responsibly and better coordinate resources to ensure the continued delivery of core public services, one of which includes fire and emergency medical services (EMS). Unfortunately, the level at which fire protection and EMS are provided currently is inadequate to meet the growing needs of the Township.

For the past 65 years, the Township has depended upon the services performed by our volunteer firefighters, which at one time included two separate departments operating from the Pancake and Oak Spring stations. In 1998, the Township hired four paid firefighters, including a Fire Chief, to begin to support and supplement the services provided by the volunteer fire departments (VFD). In 2005 the two departments merged and the Township revised its agreement to provide services with what we know today as the South Strabane VFD.

According to a report published in 2018, the *Pennsylvania Senate Resolution 6 Report*, there has been a significant decrease in the levels of volunteer firefighters with approximately 300,000 volunteers in the 1970s to just 38,000 in 2018. This is the result of changes in society (time, work, family commitment, etc.) that challenge the volunteer model of fire and EMS. South Strabane is no different with having 41 volunteers in 2003 to now only 12 members. In response, the Township continues to dedicate ever-increasing human and financial resources to supplement the VFD with the Township's monetary contribution making up 40% of the VFD's revenues as of 2018. Additionally, \$178,000 of the 2021 Fire Department budget is dedicated to supporting the VFD and \$937,000 for the career Fire Department resulting in \$1.12 million this year.

In 2020, the Township engaged a consultant to facilitate a strategic planning process with the VFD to assess challenges and recommend improvements to service delivery that will set us up for future success for the benefit of our community. A steering committee was formed with Supervisors, management, paid firefighters and the VFD. A report was prepared with recommendations on improvements to: communications, governance, performance, recruitment and training, financial and capital planning, and accountability, among others. Unfortunately, the VFD membership rejected the results of the strategic planning process it helped to develop. The Township appreciates the services rendered by the VFD and will continue to support them as we meet and discuss the best ways to respond to the ongoing growth of our community. In moving forward, the Township has purchased a fire rescue truck to build upon the career Fire Department ensuring fire and EMS service levels are maintained and ultimately improved.

As information becomes available, the Township will be providing what we hope will be useful information through its website (southstrabane.com) and other media that will help residents to keep informed of the Board's future actions in providing fire and EMS services.

Yours truly,

South Strabane Township Board of Supervisors

Bob Weber, Chairman

Russell Grego

Mark Murphy, Vice Chairman

Richard Luketich

J. Bracken Burns, Sr.