

# Blue Ribbon Commission Meeting Minutes

**Date:** March 4, 2025

**Time:** 10:00 a.m.

**Location:** Erie County Services Center Chambers, 2900 Columbus Avenue, Sandusky

## Welcoming Remarks – Co-Chairman Mike Parker

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chairman Mike Parker. Roll was taken, confirming the presence of commission members and audience members.

Mr. Parker welcomed all participants and provided an overview of the agenda, emphasizing the significance of today's discussion on brainstorming ways to improve fire and EMS services.

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## Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes that were distributed electronically was made by Mr. Forster and seconded by Mr. Krabill. The motion carried unanimously.

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## Purpose of the Meeting

Mr. Parker stated that the hope of this meeting is a start of a conversation on ways to improve services and save taxpayer dollars. He explained that this meeting is in no way about taking anything away from the fire departments. Mr. Parker and Mr. Moon have been invited to attend the next Fire Chief's Association meeting to follow up after this meeting to keep the line of communication open. Mr. Parker explained that a series of questions were given to the Fire Chief's ahead of this meeting in the hopes that the Commission can gain insight into how the departments are already working together.

Fire Chiefs in attendance: Chief Mario D'Amico, Sandusky Fire; Fire Chief David Murphy, Perkins Fire; Chief Brian Rospert, Milan Fire, Chief Kerry Jett, Groton Township Fire; and Chief Frank Triana, Vermilion Fire.

Together, the Fire Chiefs and the Blue Ribbon Commission reviewed the following questions with the Fire Chief's giving input as to what current protocols are.

### Review

- **Types and numbers of equipment individually and collectively?**
  - Fire Chief Murphy explained that a countywide inventory had been gathered by Retired Chief Johnson, but has not be updated in a few years.

- IT has an inventory list compiled in their CAD program to assist in mutual aid coordination of equipment
- **Depreciation schedule for equipment replacements?**
  - Fire Chief Murphy explained that the fire departments work off of national standards for timeline of replacements and each department is on a different timeline. He stated that it may be easier for all departments to coordinate through same vendor, but may not always line up with replacement schedules. He added there is a multitude of different reasons why it may not occur based on culture, timing, and department needs.
    - Ambulances get replaced more often and would be best opportunity for coordinated equipment replacement
    - Sandusky noticed limited financial impact based on ordering more than 1 ambulance at a time because of national delays/backups on fire apparatus
      - (700 engines in front of 1 new equipment piece for Sandusky)
    - Larger Cities (NYC) may be ordering 30 apparatus at once vs. smaller cities needing 1 or 2, so no expected cost savings, as demand is greater than supply
- **What large capital trucks would be able to be shared between entities?**
  - Perkins has previously borrowed ambulances from Sandusky and Margaretta
    - Works in emergency situations for short term solution while a separate vehicle is down
  - Sandusky Fire and Perkins Township Fire share their fire safety education trailers county wide to any department, as well as Norwalk's Fire Department
    - Joint small purchases are being shared across fire departments such as life pack monitors and Seva test kits for masks.
  - Sandusky Fire and Perkins Township also share their respective fire extinguisher trailers and training equipment, and are made available to other Erie County Fire Departments.
  - State Bid pricing and Sourcewell are used for purchasing, and Sourcewell will match state bid pricing
  - Milan refurbished a ladder truck last year, as cost saving effort, and should last another 10-15 years
  - Milan knows they can call in larger ladders (Perkins) versus purchasing a larger ladder truck
  - Mutual Aid: biggest way fire departments share equipment and people, current staffing is below recommended standards but mutual aid fills the gap locally

- **Any standardized equipment purchases or contracts**
  - Multiple departments made a group purchase of new cardiac monitors, saving several thousand dollars per monitor. Spearheaded by Perkins Township Fire Department (PTFD) Captain Pearson.
  - The group purchase of a new SCBA mask fit-testing kit. Led by Chief Jett, area departments will share the use and cost of the equipment.
- **Maintenance of vehicles, how much and by who per dep't**
  - Perkins – One maintenance person that handles the entire Township but focuses on smaller items at the fire department. Major issues are taken to local mechanic in Sandusky. Each apparatus is tied to own vendor and may go to vendor for large issues
  - Sandusky has fleet maintenance but only one certified technician to work on vehicles for fire departments. This process has worked well
    - Pay can be more competitive in private sector vs public sector
    - Would have to hire somebody who then needs specialized training for the apparatus
  - Maintenance wages may be more than current expenditures for maintenance with 3<sup>rd</sup> party
  - Vermilion TWP: yearly contract for maintenance (\$35k) with emergency availability within 24 hours to address maintenance issues
    - Mileage an issue with larger maintenance issues between the vendor and Vermilion TWP.
    - Local Firefighters will do light maintenance on vehicles within their scope of work

Mr. Krabill asked those in attendance if they had any interest in the centralized fleet maintenance concept. Fire Chief D'Amico stated that having in-house Fleet Maintenance has worked well for Sandusky and has seen good turnaround times on equipment repairs. He mentioned that utilizing an outside contractor for maintenance might have a slower turnaround. He stated there might be a possibility to share various mechanics around the County based on availability.

- **TO DO: find list of all entity mechanics (who is trainable)**

Vermilion Township Fire Chief Frank Trianna stated that this Blue Ribbon Commission came to a surprise to many of the Fire Chiefs. He believes that the knowledge of the Fire Chiefs has been overlooked. Each department has a 20 year plan. He noted that Vermilion Township is improving every day. He stated that his fire engines are from 1980. Vermilion Township utilized mutual aid five times in the last two days. He stated the Fire Departments look out for each other and we are doing the best we can with what we have available. Mr. Parker noted there is a lot of brainpower in this room and our goal is not take anything away from the Fire Departments.

The Commission has been tasked with looking objectively to see if there are new ideas or ways to being more efficient. Mr. Parker stated that the Board appreciates what all Fireman and First Responders do for the citizens in Erie County. Mr. Krabill added that any Chief is welcome to reach out to any of the Blue Ribbon Board members after this forum to continue the line of communication.

- **Maintenance/replacement schedule for response equipment (turnout gear, hoses)**
  - Very similar to fire trucks – 10 year life driven by vendors
  - Perkins & Sandusky - 5 year frontline, 5 year backline, then removed
    - Opportunity to go to single vendor? Chief Murphy stated that turn out gear is all similar and there is a possibility of pursuing single vendor but has some of the same issues as trucks currently
- **Standard uniform contracts**
  - Sandusky tries to shop local as possible, presumed a lot of the departments are using similar vendors at similar prices such as, Lucky Stone in Huron
  - Uniform allowance is a contractual amount that they have to replace a certain amount a year
- **Number of full-time personnel vs part time/volunteers**
  - Huron: 15 full time 26 part time combined with Township
  - Sandusky: 51 Full time including admin
  - Perkins: 30 Full time
  - Vermilion Township: 29, half are part time, half volunteers
  - Milan: 34 volunteers
  - Florence: 25 volunteers
  - Bay View: 16 volunteers
  - Margaretta: 9 full time, 13 part time
  - Groton/Oxford: 17 volunteers
  - Kelley's Island Fire:
  - Berlin Township Fire:
- **Recruitment:**
  - Primarily advertising through Facebook/social media
    - Newspaper no longer used with generational shift
  - Some job fairs and advertisements to local fire training programs as testing comes around
- **Opportunities to share personnel and/or equipment costs, in progress or additional**
  - Most departments are currently sharing resources through Mutual Aid
  - Sandusky Fire Department and Perkins Township Fire Department are currently sharing fire safety education trailers, fire extinguisher trailers and training equipment.

- Bay View Fire Department shares CPR equipment and mannequins for training, and Perkins Township Fire Department shares their technical resource trailer.
- **Facility maintenance schedule – roofs, windows, doors, furniture, lockers etc.**
  - Sandusky Fire Department – combination of city staff handling maintenance and contracting for larger projects
    - Anything over \$1,000 solicit three bids and primarily hire locals
    - Large maintenance contract may miss out on local contractors
  - Perkins Fire Department – firemen will handle smaller items, and contract out larger projects
  - It was noted that a shared contractor for generators might be an opportunity for county wide maintenance
- **Staff person for contracts/purchasing?**
  - Sandusky – Shift commanders in charge of handle soliciting/contracts, or public works department will help with larger bids over \$10,000
- **Major facility improvements?**
  - Perkins – New fire station
- **EMS planning for southern service area**
  - Florence uses Vermilion River Ambulance District (Citizens) and with Wakeman Fire Department ambulance or additional local mutual aid opportunities
  - Margaretta has their own Ambulance
  - Oxford, Groton, Milan have North Central EMS
  - North Central has first responder vehicle, but services are failing, with long response times. Fisher Titus continues to support them
  - Southern local entities have taken ambulatory calls to cover North Central EMS
    - Squads as far as Bellevue (20 minutes away)
- **Ideal Model for township ambulatory services?**
  - North Central has First Responder vehicle – but can be based on staffing/and calls for when its utilized
  - Milan has EMT on staff and adopted medical procedures
    - Run risk of doubling number of calls based on medical runs if no North Central and is cost prohibitive for the township
  - Vermilion Township had issue with ambulatory service and volunteers becoming inundated with constant emergency calls
  - Do smaller departments need to consider moving towards full time status to support increased runs?
    - EMS involvement steadily increases call volume
    - Volunteers can be challenged based on increase calls and work/life balance
    - Milan - a full time staffed ambulance would take 6 full time people vs contract with North Central costing approximately \$75,000

- **Training opportunities and levels of training for various depts.**
  - Regularly have joint training along with Erie County EMA, with EMA obtaining multiple grants to provide interagency technical rescue training
  - Departments participate in interagency training when possible, including structure fires, joint training at EHOVE, rope rescue, confined space rescue, and many others.
  - Bay View Volunteer Fire Department makes their CPR equipment and mannequins available to other Erie County Departments.
  - Department specialties
    - Each works together to align specialties
- **Discuss budget**
  - Revenue and carry overs per spreadsheet provided by Zach Rospert was distributed to the Chiefs
  - Many of the Fire Departments are funded through levies
  - Sandusky is funded by General Fund
- **Fire District Considerations?**
  - Fire Chief Murphy noted that this idea was discussed 15 years ago with then Chief Paul Ricci – mainly due to staffing issues at Sandusky and Perkins at the time
  - If combined, smaller volunteer communities would most likely need to go to full-time staffing, which would increase costs.
  - No countywide departments in state of Ohio–
    - West Licking is similar size as Perkins and Sandusky and runs 9,000 calls per year (Website: <https://www.westlickingfire.org/>)
    - Needed a high levy (11 mills) to run the larger West Licking District
    - 110 staffing on West Licking – (Sandusky and Perkins are 80) has grown from 80
  - A Fire District may cost more money rather than save funds
  - Milan – Would not consider fire district
    - Capital costs, by constructing new station if combined with Berlin Heights, would increase and cost more than any savings
    - Fire District not an advantage for rural areas. Expectation would not be for new personnel or stations, but use existing facilities to improve efficiency
  - Mutual aid replaces the district concept with existing facilities
    - 15 firemen on site within eight minutes is the national standard
    - Mutual aid across the county means underserved fire departments are meeting the standard by running together

- All Fire Departments, with emergency medical transport, operate under the same medical protocols, overseen by University Hospitals and Firelands Regional Medical Center, and makes for consistent medical treatment.
- **Current practices the fire chiefs do to promote cost savings?**
  - All operate on same protocol for medical protocol
  - County Standard Operating Guidelines
    - Erie County fire departments have multiple county standard operating guidelines covering incidents where multiple agencies may respond together. These include areas such as: incident command, hazardous materials response, active shooter incidents, and technical rescue emergencies.
  - Fire Chiefs meet together every other month to have this conversation
  - Fire Chiefs identified future opportunities for cost sharing
    - Group purchase of firefighting foam.
    - Group purchase of ladder and pump testing services.
    - Group purchase of “fire blankets” for assisting with containment of electrical vehicle fires.
    - Potential expansion of automatic aid.
    - Various equipment may be group purchased if department replacement schedules align.
- **Billing for Kalahari**
  - Huron Fire Department sees significant number of runs to Kalahari. These runs are billed to the individual or individuals that are staying at the Resort.
  - Oxford, Margaretta, Groton Townships bill runs for residents outside these Townships and do not bill the locals
  - Sandusky and Perkins bill everybody, city resident or non-resident
    - Perkins is a soft bill covered by insurance for residents

Mr. Krabill thanked those in attendance and thanked them for educating the Commission. It is good for the public as well to hear about the joint sharing initiatives that Fire Departments in Erie County participate. On behalf of the Commission, the Board genuinely appreciates all in attendance for their time.

A motion to approve to adjourn was made by Mr. Moon and seconded by Mr. Krabill. The motion carried unanimously.