



Westminster Fire Engine & Hose Co. No. 1

"Volunteering Today for Your Tomorrow"

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THE FORMATION OF THE NEW FIRE & EMS DEPARTMENT MUST BE A PARTNERSHIP

As we move on from the resignation of Carroll's first Fire Director, we must recognize the deficiencies that existed in the first attempt at changing the delivery of Fire and EMS services to the citizens of Carroll County. All the volunteer departments in Carroll County are individual private corporations. These organizations have provided fire and emergency medical services to the citizens of Carroll County for a long time at a fraction of the cost of a fully paid department. Although the county provides a large share of the operating expenses, only a portion of the expense of employing paid fire and EMS personnel are provided. The remaining cost of paid staffing is covered by EMS billing from ambulance transports and fundraising activities. In addition, no funds are provided for capital expenses such as fire stations or emergency response vehicles, including ambulances, fire engines, ladder trucks, rescue squads, or support vehicles. These are all purchased using monies that volunteers must raise through their fundraising efforts, such as carnivals, raffles, and mail solicitations. The volunteers that make all this happen are everyday citizens that have regular jobs and families. Their commitment and hours of volunteering to make this all happen are unparalleled to any other organization.

Three years ago, after the Enabling Legislation was passed strengthening the responsibility of Emergency Fire and EMS on Carroll County Government, an advisory committee and workgroup were both formed. These bodies were charged with developing a strategy to transition from the volunteer fire department employing paid fire and EMS personnel to the county taking over the employment burden. These groups worked for two years on this task. The result was language for a county code and bylaws to govern the formation of an Emergency Services Advisory Council (ESAC). ESAC's purpose was to advise the Director of Fire and EMS once hired to construct this combination department. ESAC representatives include a CC Commissioner, Carroll County Volunteer Emergency Services Association's (CCVESA) President, Chair of Fire and EMS Operations committees, County Medical Director, employee delegates, citizen representatives, and select volunteers from the fourteen volunteer fire departments. This designed partnership between the Director and the various stakeholders of ESAC was to work together to lay the foundation for the newly formed combination department. Shortly after hiring the Director, it was evident that the partnership was not what was promised or expected by most stakeholders. As the Director began to roll out his plan of action, no concepts were presented to ESAC for advice, suggestions, or approval. Several volunteer department leaders began to express concerns that the proposed action plan had several flaws and did not address the real problems that exist in the current system. These concerns were pointed out to the Director during numerous meetings, including ESAC, CCVESA, CCVESA Fire and EMS operation committees, volunteer fire department President's gatherings, and several meetings between individual departments. Letters, emails, and phone calls to CC Commissioners expressing the deep concern shared by many departments have received minimal to no response in most cases.

As we move forward, a partnership must exist to plan the future of the Carroll County Fire and EMS Department. There is an extreme amount of pride among the officers and members of these departments. Many of them have a good understanding of what is needed; many of them have good ideas that must be heard. No one denies that the current system needs change. The increase in required training and the increase in calls for service over the years has taken a toll on volunteer memberships. Declining numbers in the volunteer system is a national problem that must be addressed. But for this to work, the departments must have a voice and input into how the transition occurs. We must correct the problems, not create new ones.

A current Commissioner once said something to the effect of, "Who better knows how to fix Carroll County than Carroll Countians."

Dan Plunkert
President Westminster Fire Department
Central Region Rep Carroll County Emergency Service Advisory Council

Maryland State Fireman's Association
Carroll County Volunteer Emergency Services Association

National Fire Protection Association
Emergency Ambulance Services