



CONNECT Future of Fire Services
Wednesday | April 20, 2022 | 12:30 pm
[Via Zoom](#)

Municipal and Partner Attendees: Tom Theilacker, Forest Hills; Brandon Schmidt, White Oak; Roby Brady, Robb Consulting; Alex Henderson, Marist College; Karen Bucy, Jefferson Hills; George Zboyovsky, Brentwood; Anthony Terrace, Englewood; Jon Neumann, Indiana Township; Matt Brown, Allegheny County; Steve Imbarlina, Allegheny County

CONNECT/GSPIA: Brett Stewart, Blair Mickles, Lydia Morin

Introductions & CONNECT Updates:

- Brett opened the meeting—introduced the agenda, and the guest speakers Chiefs Matt Brown and Steve Imbarlina from Allegheny County Emergency Services
 - Brett began with a quick overview of our recent partnership with the County—they are excited to partner with us on future projects, including subjects on data collection and housing.
- **CONNECT UPDATE:** If you haven't already, please register for the 12th Annual Legislative Session and Reception, scheduled for Thursday, May 19th from 4pm-7pm at the Circuit Center and Ballroom. Each of the CONNECT resolutions will be formally passed to showcase the work CONNECT plans to continue over the next year. All are welcome!

[Annual Legislative Session & Reception](#)

Thursday, May 19, 2022
4:00-7:00 pm
The Circuit Center and Ballroom

- **Resolution Update:** If you have any suggested comments or edits for the Future of Fire Resolution, please add your comments [at this link here](#): This will be presented by our Chair, Greg Porter (Etna) at the Legislative Session.

Conversation with Chief Matt Brown and Chief Steve Imbarlina – Allegheny County

- **Brett:** Received a few questions from our elected officials who couldn't make it today: First one is *"What can municipal officials do to help support their fire departments—and noting the many small governments in Allegheny County—what can they do to support their fire departments in their communities?"*
- **Chief Brown:** I always stopped short of saying, you know, walk a day in their shoes. I don't necessarily want to promote that. But I would just preface it with the realizations, especially with all of societal changes and issues that we have going on right now. And I'm reminded, I remind myself of this every day as I'm transitioning, and the job I mean, it was last night till 10 o'clock, meeting with the County Fire Chiefs Association on North Bay yet. And you know, I'm walking that meeting pretty tired, pushing a 16 hours a day, I'd never say that, I do my best to not complain about that. Because the reality is, I'm

walking into a meeting that had about 20 other firefighters in that room, who are all volunteer and don't get paid, ever, and they're getting yanked away from their families and their family events and their jobs and their every day at the drop of a hat, you know, to protect their community. So, you know, obviously, having walked in those shoes, I'm very respectful with mine for but I think for the elected officials, again, I would never curse them with saying you need to walk in their shoes. But I think just building that relationship, getting to know the leadership of those services, that provide public safety to your municipality. What, frankly, whether it's fire police or EMS. And when I say leadership, there's an administrative side and nurturing and operational side and a chief, sometimes are one in the same. But you know, just start that relationship. And even if it's once a month to touch base with that person. And I think inevitably, because you're representing your community or you're in your community, you'll be drawn into that, you'll have a better understanding of what the challenges are, and what the true need and benefit is, of the community. Steve anything to add?

- **Chief Imbarlina:** Yeah, Chief, you know, again, I'm gonna come at it from my perspective, I mean, obviously, everybody that's on here, that's, that's from the volunteer fire service. You know, we all have our own. We're looking at this from our perspective, and not every volunteer fire department is the same. You know, so again, we're all products of our environment, and depending on depending on where we come from, but I came from a volunteer department where, you know, we didn't have a social hall. We didn't have to work bingos. We did do some fundraising. But overall, the bulk of our time, was spent answering calls and training. And I think that was possible, because we did get good support. Not, you know, not just from our municipality. When we would do a fun drive by mail, we got good response, which made us pretty financially stable. You know, we were able to be selective on our fundraisers, so we could spend our time answering calls and training and the minimal amount of time and fundraising. Now I understand not everybody is in that boat. And if they have to spend more time fundraising so that they can get out the door? Well, that's, again, we're asking volunteers to either volunteer more time, or we're asking them to do things that they really didn't sign up for. You know, I mean, it's, it's when I joined the fire department, I didn't sign up to sell cookies or bake sales. That's that's not what my intention was. But many people find themselves there. So find ways to support them financially. It doesn't always have to necessarily mean it's a direct municipal funding, you know, and that funding could be hey, look, do we really need to have X number of apparatus in this town? You know, the, is there more ways? Are there more ways to make the volunteer fire service more more financially solvent so so I think they can spend their time doing what it is they actually signed up to do when they came through the door. Again, that's that's just my opinion looking at it from from where I came from, of course, there's people on this call that everybody on here has their own perspective and their own, you know, sort of experiences that that they come from
- **Council President Karen Bucy, Jefferson Hills:** Absolutely. Okay. I'm speaking as a council member. And I have been on council in Jefferson Hills for two and a half years. And prior to that, I sat in the audience. And there was a desire to have Jefferson Hills merge. And I can tell you that I don't think that we're the only municipality that has

experienced this. But we might be the most well now, since we do broadcast our meetings all the time. But as a council member, I would like to know if there's possibility to have outside Allegheny County officials come to the boroughs individually, and hold like a township town meeting workshop about why mergers are more beneficial. And the reason I asked that is because I can bring to the table all the data in the world, but because it comes from me, and there's, there are council members, and I'm sure there's council members everywhere, that I do not find this to be something they want to participate in. So they create a level of animosity between fire companies, they create chaotic responses from people that will come to meetings, and they are very disruptive forces. And I think that if some of the public was a little bit more educated from an outside source, that they might be a little bit more willing to back the mergers. All right. And, and, you know, like I said, I could stand up there and do a song and a dance. And it's just not the same coming from somebody who's an outside source. So I don't know if that's available. And that's what I'm asking for.

- **Blair Mickles, GSPIA:** Can I jump on this right now? I love that you are asking this question right now. Because and this is why I love connect, your best friend is in this meeting right now. If you were able to I want you and Rob Brady to exchange information, but that is who you were looking for. I saw Rob on mute. So he was probably about to say the same thing to
 - Conversation continued on this question of the relationships within the municipalities
- **Chief Imbarlina** discussed how municipalities are there to provide fire services to their community under the municipal code—which is why you do not see county fire departments. Mergers have happened and can happen
- **Chief Brown** concurred with Chief Imbarlina—its up to the municipalities to make those decisions, and should collectively agree before moving forward. Especially when considering the loss of individual identities and past histories. We need more data-driven decision-making at this level as well.
- **Lydia Morin, CONNECT:** Well, I think this also just really speaks to that this conversation is happening in a lot of councils. I think Matt and Steve said it really well. This is what the future of fire summit might be a really good place for, you know, we're talking about that being a big part of this research is bringing everyone to there and discussing the data. I think getting those experts that you are referring to Matt, there would be really important. And I guess, maybe what we have to do is have a part of that be a tour of our member councils who want a presentation at their council, by a sort of panel of experts. I mean, I was thinking of the future of fire Summit, where we like pitch this the DCED. Because I don't know if Matt and Steve are aware of where we are working with DCeD on this has kind of a pilot with a map grant. But we want to build it into a bigger, more regional conversation and study. Not telling anybody what to do or anything but you know, strongly suggesting with data and grey collaborative conversations, that there could be a better way. And that's the point I want to bring up

just that like I think maybe the future fire Summit is a isn't a one and done type program. But like an ongoing toward panel that hits that is like hitting up all the counselors who need to have this discussion, whose council members may or may not make it to a one and done deal.

- **Brandon Schmidt, White Oak:** We know there's issues with the fire service all both of you, I know you listen to the radios during the day. Listen to any radio, and you can tell we have a bunch of fire departments. And then you just listen to calls that get scratched, you know, filled in with other people and whatever else these calls go. Chief Imbarlina I took a class with you before where, you know, fires, or you had already stated If, you know, fires are real flash in the pan kind of issues, you know, they happen, but then they go out, you know, there's no fires that are still burning, they've all gone out. So that's why this issue doesn't really like come up a bunch. And I guess what the big thing I'd be roundabout coming to is there is no real data per se, to tell us which areas are lacking municipalities, which, you know, fire departments aren't doing that hot. I know, I so does their little ratings and everything too. But that's, you know, take that for what you will, you know, something that had come to me is something that I think the county could help everybody with and, you know, help us with to is, is there a way through dispatch, that we can start tracking, when stations have to be returned? When they have to be filled? When they scratch on calls in their own municipalities. They're in there that could give some concrete data to show, hey, this department, you know, 60% of the time is not answering calls. Okay. So then their council people can go back and look at that and go, Hey, why are we buying you a new engine? When you don't even the town next to us is answering the calls more than you're answering them here? Is there something that like you guys can start tracking through county to actually give us real data on it? Because we can go through certifications. And ISO can tell us how much feed a hose we got on our trucks and everything like that. But we don't have a good set of data to show call wise, where the stations that are lacking are lacking.
- Matt Brown added that the data may not be clearly evident in the CAD reporting. There are certain standards, but the issue of standardization or lack thereof, has been an issue. Mentioned the creation of Allegheny Count 911, and how municipalities can still dispatch themselves—13 still choose to do so. But standardization in public safety has been one of the biggest steps forward with the many entities involved in the County.
- Steve Imbarlina agreed with Brandon's assessment and added that we would never release data without consent for that fire department.
- **Rob Brady, Robb Consulting:** Mentioned how recordkeeping is bad in Allegheny County, but much worse in other places. Continued adding that the programs that exist today are no longer the same as they were before. This group needs to send a message, and also needs to share the best practices—like the ideas of partnering with the council of governments association, and doing roundtable discussions at the future of fire summit.
- Chiefs Brown and Imbarlina agreed with the assessment, especially considering the complexities within both fire and EMS—along with the passions involved in these issues.

- **George Zboyosvky, Brentwood:** Just wanted to add if anyone's familiar with the Centre County Cog and what they found with their regional fire services. One of the outcomes should be—take a look at what they developed.
 - **Action Item:** Steven Blair should be invited for a future discussion. Lot of good work the Centre COG is doing,
- **Tom Theilacker, Forest Hills:** First we had to identify the problem, and create the organization, which is why we're here. The next thing we're working on—something can we do to work on—maybe CONNECT should be talking about standards.
- **Anthony Terrace, Englewood:** Brought up the issue of data. How do we measure the times of a second tone, or a department scratching off a call—as far as consistency, would it be trackable in CAD from a dispatch time or alarm time? Wouldn't we still have an overall dispatcher on scene time?
- Had a discussion along the lines of standardizing scratch data and data that exists within CAD—there are still some issues such as limitation of data available.
- **Brett** concluded the discussion as we were running late. While we cannot get to the resolution workshop, Brett added that if you have any comments or suggestions, please add them to the google document.

Action Item: Next meeting we'll have a guest speaker from the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, Tracie Young-Brungard who is handling some new programming involving the state's efforts to improve recruitment and retention. Along with potentially acting as a trainer for fire departments and municipal officials.

Adjourn