

What are the different ways fire protection is provided by townships? How is the cost of fire protection funded by a township and at what meeting is the extent of that cost approved? What challenges are faced by rural fire departments in providing fire protection?

15-123 Molly Maudal ~ Carlos Township ~ Douglas County

I attended my first town board meeting when I was in elementary school. It was at this meeting that I realized the role of the township board. Townships play an important part in rural communities, especially when it comes to the safety of our citizens. One aspect that all residents find comfort in is knowing there is a fire department. When a fire, severe weather, or disaster strikes, it is reassuring to know that a fire department will come to our aid. Firefighters are courageous, committed, and generous individuals who risk their lives to serve their neighbors. I have an utmost respect for them.

In my community, we have a volunteer fire department. The individuals who serve on the fire department are highly trained; they have monthly meetings, controlled burns for proper training, etc. Fighting fires isn't all they do. They are the members of my town who watch for severe weather, such as tornadoes, and start the tornado siren when needed, respond to car accidents, and assist neighboring fire departments when needed, as well as fighting fires in our own township.

Funding for townships is determined at the annual town board meeting. The township annual meetings are held on the second Tuesday in March. The board decides on levies, and the funds toward the fire department are a part of that levy process. Each year they must approve the funding in the levy.

The fire department in my town hosts a street dance each July as a fundraiser. They have a stand where they grill hamburgers and hot dogs, and make homemade French fries. In addition, pop and beer are sold. It is amazing to see the crowd that comes to join in the celebration and help support the local fire department. In the afternoon, they have a parade followed by a water fight against neighboring fire departments. The kids look forward to getting wet during the water fight. Individuals are encouraged to make monetary donations to help support our fire departments.

Recruiting and retaining new members, risking lives, time commitment, and volunteer conflict are a few of the challenges faced by rural fire departments. In small communities, it can be difficult to find members to join the fire department. Perhaps even harder is keeping them on the department. Many of the volunteers are young and starting families of their own. It can be difficult to leave during their child's piano recital or in the middle of the night to put out a blazing fire. The decision to join a fire department is a commitment for both the volunteer, and their family. Conflict between volunteers on the fire department can lead to disagreements, taking sides, and even hostility. Maintaining a strong fire department definitely has its challenges.

I greatly appreciate the comfort of knowing that I will be taken care of in a disastrous situation, thanks to my fire department. Thank you for your consideration.