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Borough of Bellevue Fire Department

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Who is providing fire services to the residents and business owners of Bellevue?

A: Bellevue will continue to be served by the career firefighters of the Bellevue Fire Department, with ongoing support from volunteer departments who provide mutual aid, including Avalon and Emsworth. Bellevue will also receive “automatic aid” from the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire in the event of a structural fire.

Q: Why did Council decertify Columbia Hose, Hook & Ladder?

A: Many volunteers have jobs, families, and lives outside the volunteer department, resulting in a lower call response. For example, 21% of the calls in 2022 had no volunteer response, 82% of calls had 4 or fewer volunteers respond, and more than half had 2 or fewer. This is a statewide problem – from the 1980s through 2019, the number of volunteer firefighters in PA has decreased more than 87%. PBF will only provide automatic aid to the Bellevue Fire Department in the absence of a volunteer department, due to their union rules. Their assistance gives Council the opportunity to develop a plan for moving forward in the face of declining volunteer numbers while still providing protection for residents.

Q: Won’t response times be slower?

A: PBF has a station in Brighton Heights, just 1.7 miles away from the Borough Building. The station is staffed 24/7 by career firefighters who will not need to return to the station for gear and equipment. Mutual aid companies’ response times will not change.

Q: Does Bellevue still have a fire engine?

A: The Borough owns a fire truck (aka a “pumper”) that is nearly always the first vehicle on the scene. The pumper’s size allows it to easily navigate the narrow streets of Bellevue, and to provide water immediately upon arrival, so water can be pumped even before a hydrant is tapped.

Q: Will the Borough have a volunteer department again?

A: The Future of Fire Committee continues to meet to develop a plan for providing fire services. This may include a paid Fire Chief to administer a “combination department” made up of career and volunteer firefighters. A paid Chief ensures accountability, as he or she will answer to Council.

Q: Why was this decision made so quickly?

A: The issues with Bellevue’s fire services has been going on for more than 20 years, as evidenced by a 2002 report following a study completed by an independent peer consultant through the PA Department of Community and Economic Development. Most of the issues addressed in that report remain today, negatively impacting fire safety for residents and business owners.