

East Lampeter Township Emergency Services Committee – Meeting Minutes

November 20, 2025

1. **Call to Order** – The ELT Emergency Services Committee meeting was called to order by Mike Thorton at 1902 hrs at the ELT Office and via Zoom. The Pledge of Allegiance followed.

The following Committee Members were in attendance:

East Lampeter Township: Mike Thorton (Chair), Stephanie Johnson (Citizen)
Hand-in-Hand Fire Company: Paul Fisher
Lafayette Fire Company: Jason Beiler, Robert Patterson (Citizen)
Ronks Fire Company: Dave Gribble*, Melanie McHenry*
Witmer Fire Company: Mike Creamer, Chad Englerth (Citizen)

The following Alternate / Non-Voting Committee Members were in attendance:

East Lampeter Township:
Hand-in-Hand Fire Company:
Lafayette Fire Company:
Ronks Fire Company: Nate Church
Witmer Fire Company:

Additional Attendees:

Tara Hitchens, ELT Township Manager
Kimberly Piestrak, ELT Assistant Township Manager
Rhiannon Eckinger-Seda, ELT Administrative Assistant
Steve Gribble, Ronks Fire Company
Suzi Sutton, Lafayette Fire Company
Nick Wagner, Citizen
Jared Null, Null's Towing

*Joined via Zoom

2. **Approval of Minutes** – September 18, 2025 meeting

Mike Creamer made a motion to approve the minutes. Motion was seconded by Paul Fisher.

3. **Old Business**

Sub Committee Reports

- a. Fire Apparatus Replacement

- Hand-in-Hand – Engine 41-1 (2027) – Paul Fisher reported there are no updates.
- Lafayette – Ladder Truck 63 (2028) – Jason Beiler reported there are no updates.

- b. Public Information

- Suzi Sutton reported that the next deadline is the 12th and that Brad moved out of the area and the committee will need to revisit who will lead.

c. Finance

- Tara Hitchens reported the committee met and discussed the proposal that was put before the Board of Supervisors at their budget meeting regarding the fire service tax. The committee came to a 3-1 conclusion that a fire tax may be viable in the township. The board decided not to move forward, but to do more research to look at other options and whether it covers all or a portion of the township's obligation, apparatus only and for what period of time.
- Original proposal was .15 mils covering the township's obligation, apparatus only. Committee discussed covering all township obligation which would be .7 mils.
- Looked out to 2048 following the Apparatus Replacement Plan, this would require a 1.2M budget for a number of years. Apparatus Replacement Plan is to be revisited every 5 years. A member of the board indicated possibly looking at a shorter term and to reevaluate the fire service tax at that time.
- Robert Patterson shared that the police department is 68% of the township's budget and less than 6% is being invested in a volunteer fire service. Volunteers are being forced to raise money for daily operations, apparatus, equipment, training, etc.
- Robert also shared concerns that additional housing being developed in the township will further strain volunteer fire companies and not investing in the volunteer fire companies now will eventually result in paid fire services in the future.
- Tara Hitchens responded by saying she agrees that the township is headed in the direction of paid fire service and is the reason she brought it to the board's August budget meeting. The board asked that it be taken to the ESC finance committee.
- Tara also shared that the majority of the committee feels volunteers will be lost if a fire tax is implemented and the township will move faster to paid services.
- Paul Fisher shared that the committee looked at balance statements and feels each fire company is financially healthy.
- Mike Thorton shared that the budget difference between police and fire has existed for a long time and is due to fire services being volunteer. Mike feels fire services should be looked at differently and is why a fire tax was proposed while preparing the budget.
- Suzi Sutton shared that the tax increase cap of 5% given to the committee was different compared to what was discussed during the budget workshop meeting. The committee worked off the 5% figure and concluded that it would not move the needle for the fire companies or the township's budget. The numbers used in the budget workshop would have made a difference in the conversations that occurred during the finance committee. Moving forward she asked if communication from the township supervisors could be improved when figures change.
- Tara Hitchens clarified the reason for the difference. 5% was the maximum tax increase after the August budget meeting. This figure was given to the ESC and the finance committee. During the October budget workshop, the board was given figures at 5%, 5% + fire tax, 10%, and 10% + fire tax.
- Jason Beiler shared that while the fire companies are not in a financial crisis, manpower/staffing is not sustainable and will drive changes (fire tax, incentives, paid staff) sooner than later.
- (4:08 – 28:30) <https://www.youtube.com/live/bpmBbO42TGo?si=hb0krq34apRCUxzQ>

d. Human Resources

- Nate Church shared that committee has not met in six months. Suzi Sutton shared that participation has declined and there is a lack of interest. Mike & Tara will contact committee members to see if there is interest in meeting again.
- Robert Patterson shared an example of a property tax incentive; \$1,000 property tax credit to 100 firefighters would be an investment of \$100K = 1 paid firefighter
- Recruitment and retention along with incentives will need to be a collaborative discussion between the finance and HR committees.
- Suzi Sutton shared that the committee needs a driver and feels it would help if it would be someone outside of the fire companies.
- (28:33 – 38:00) <https://www.youtube.com/live/bpmBbO42TGo?si=hb0krq34apRCUxzQ>

Calendar Activities

- Tara Hitchens distributed the 2026 revised event calendar. Any changes should be emailed.

4. New Business

Committee Poll

a. Township & Fire Companies

- ELT – Tara Hitchens reported the following:
 - Comprehensive Plan — Township met individually with each fire company representative and completed a list of 27 questions. The information was provided to the consultant are now waiting for recommendations and a draft document. At this time it looks like the consultant will recommend the township move forward with a fire service study due to; lack of volunteers, if there should be four fire companies, whether or not apparatus should be consolidated, are fire stations located in the correct location within the township, and how the township's fire services move forward financially as a whole.
 - Robert Patterson asked if the township is prepared to make changes. Mike Thornton answered that the township does not know if they are going to do what they are asked to do. Robert also asked how much the study is going to cost. Tara responded that there are no answers at this time.
 - Paul Fisher asked if there is a timeline on how long the fire study will take. Tara responded that she hasn't seen the final full draft yet. She is not aware of a fire service study being completed in ELT.
 - (38:45 – 43:00) <https://www.youtube.com/live/bpmBbO42TGo?si=hb0krq34apRCUxzQ>
 - False Alarm Policy Draft — Updated policy was drafted and reviewed by the township solicitor who had major comments; alter the existing policy, take out quarterly billing requirement, and add in yearly billing requirement, cannot include a suspension of fire or police response which is a major liability issue, can include a suspension of operator's occupancy. Add'l comments were made, all will need to be addressed and the draft will need to be updated before it is presented to the Board of Supervisors. An updated draft will be provided at January ESC meeting for review.

- The following comments/concerns were shared:
- Fines are still too low, should be reevaluated and increased to cover response costs and force businesses to repair alarm systems.
- Enforcement of fines and what mechanism is in place to enforce and collect the fines.
- Fines are an administrative burden on the township. The lower fines cost the township more in legal and collection agency fees and are not worth enforcing.
- Waiting to hear back from the solicitor if the policy can be tied in with the International Property Maintenance Code so that it can be code enforced. IPMC covers all commercial properties and renting properties.
- If an alarm registration is established, a third-party would need to be hired to manage at an additional cost.
- (43:04 – 59:10) <https://www.youtube.com/live/bpmBbO42TGo?si=hb0krq34apRCUxzQ>
- Tow Policy Draft — The Police Chief revised the Non Preference Tow Policy; Letter F (Emergency Towing Service 2) was added, procedures were added to separate Service 1 (light duty towing) & Service 2 (hazmat cleanup, heavy duty towing). Once an agreement is reached, the updated policy will go into place as a general order within the police department.
- Service 1 list requires facility to be located within ELT, along with other requirements. Service 2 list was compiled by the Police Chief and must be called by the police department.
- The following comments/concerns were shared:
- Jared Null from Null's Towing shared concerns regarding the policy. They have a location within the township but it is not feasible for Null's to provide Service 1 towing based on the township's set rates. He shared that the State Police do not set rates and it is uncommon for townships to set rates. If they were to respond to an incident, they are required by law to clean up spills which they would not be permitted to charge for. (Null's Towing is a full service towing company that can handle Service 1 & Service 2)
- The Police Chief follows up on the rates and has recently suspended a towing company due to charging more than the policy's set rate.
- PA law (Towing Standard Storage Act) requires that rates be posted in the towing companies office and on their website so consumers can check that they are being billed fairly.
- The township sets the rates that can be charged and are capped at \$300. The rates were in place in 2009 and last approved by the Board of Supervisors in 2022.
- The average light duty towing/cleanup incident is \$750-\$1,200, compared to the township's set rate of \$300. The capped rates result in subpar towing services.
- Fire companies would like to see the set rate increased or removed altogether
- The question was asked as to why the rates are being price controlled and suggested moving to market-based pricing.
- Fire command should have the authority to call appropriate towing/cleanup services. Fire Chief/Officers understand what resources and towing services are needed to respond to an incident. Many times the police officer responding to the incident does

not know who to call, resulting in delayed responses, towing companies responding that are not equipped to handle the incident and subpar quality from the towing companies that respond.

- Fire companies are concerned about the amount of time volunteers are spending on scene waiting for the police to call the appropriate towing/cleanup resources.
- The question was raised as to why the police officer has sole authority to make the decision about which tow company to call, and why the fire command does not have authority. The fire command better understands what equipment is needed to clear the incident efficiently.
- (59:15 – 1:28:05) <https://www.youtube.com/live/bpmBbO42TGo?si=hb0krq34apRCUxzQ>
- ESC Terms Ending — ELT: Mike Thorton, Stephanie Johnson; Hand-in-Hand: Don Boyer, John Petersheim; Ronks: Nate Church, Melanie McHenry; Witmer: Mike Creamer; Lafayette: Jason Beiler
- Willow Road culvert replacement; road will be closed January through April
- Witmer – Mike Creamer reported the following:
 - ELT Fall Fest – October 4
 - Fall Fest – October 10
 - Child Protect Vaccination Clinic – October 14
 - Ox Roast – October 18; sold out 2,861 meals
 - Line Dancing – November 8; 80 people attended
 - Community Blood Drive – October 29
 - Milk & Cookies – December 6 (6-8:30pm)
 - Child Protect Vaccination Clinic – December 9
 - New duty vehicle (2026 Tahoe) arrived; in service by early January
- Lafayette – Jason Beiler reported the following:
 - Revamping 2026 member requirements; hours of service model
 - Lack of executive board interest; influx of admin
 - ExtraGive – November 21
 - Steak Cook Off; \$3K+ profit
 - Capital Campaign; update next meeting
 - Holiday fund drive ready to go out
 - Rick Glasky training with Witmer – January 10
 - Evaluating in-house training classes at Public Safety Center
 - Interior firefighter training costs \$4K
 - 2025 call volume up 650-700; 2024 was ~620
 - High Winter Event – December 4

- Santa on the fire truck – December 13
- Ronks – Dave Gribble reported the following:
 - Portable radio replacements
- Hand-in-Hand – Paul Fisher reported the following:
 - Portable radio replacements
 - Replacing Squad 2 with traffic control vehicle
 - HVAC unit replacement

b. EMC

- Jeff Hatfield not in attendance

c. Citizen Reps

- Robert Patterson — drowning pediatric patient at a local hotel during the summer; recognize first responders at January meeting

5. **Public Comments**

- Suzi Sutton shared information about an online pilot program called Round About CV, hosted by non-profit New Public

6. **Additional Comments**

- None

7. **Adjournment** – Paul Fisher made a motion to adjourn. Motion was seconded by Jason Beiler. Meeting adjourned @ 2042 hours.

Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 15, 2026 @ 7 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chad Englerth, Secretary