

## Rome Fire Department Information and Survey

Fire departments have been an integral part of our towns since shortly after the first homes were built. Once consisting of bucket brigades and horse-drawn equipment, our fire departments now include state of the art equipment for fire suppression and emergency medical care. The odds are good that we have each seen these women and men in action and know of their impact on our family, friends, and neighbors.

We have come to rely on these departments and appreciate their ability to respond to emergencies 24/7/365 whenever a call is placed to 9-1-1. However, what many may not realize is how strained these departments have become over the years to the point where it can no longer be guaranteed that when a call is placed a local response will be available.

At an increasing level, our towns need to rely on neighboring towns (each of whom are similarly strained) to provide primary coverage. In the case of medical emergencies this can mean waiting until an ambulance arrives from Waterville or Augusta, which for some parts of our town can be 20-30 minutes or more.

The reasons for this strain are many. On the fire side, safety regulations and new building construction means increased training and equipment. As firefighting technology and techniques have become more sophisticated, the physical demands remain significant and emphasize the need for recruiting younger members at a time when our population is aging.

The aging population also has a significant impact on rescue providers (EMTs and Paramedics) as contemporary medical care means people with a variety of health care needs are staying in their homes. As communities make a concerted effort to support aging in place, these medical needs and safety considerations grow.

The towns of Belgrade and Rome have had a long-standing mutual aid arrangement, which continues to provide these essential public safety services. But even that model is being strained to nearly a breaking point.

For many years, both departments were staffed entirely by volunteers. Recognizing the significant administrative responsibilities, an annual stipend has been provided to the chiefs of both departments and to the Rome deputy chief. Members still volunteer to be on call and receive a modest hourly pay when on a call and for training. Due to the increase in rescue calls, Belgrade hired a full-time paramedic in 2014 and supplements that coverage, primarily during the work week, with per diem paramedics.

To try and plan for the future, a committee of residents from both towns have been meeting to discuss our options, one of which is to consider merging the two departments into one. Ultimately, whatever happens will be determined by voters in both towns.

To help assure our recommendations take into consideration the wants and needs of our community, we have developed a brief survey. Please take a few minutes to share your opinion and ideas through this survey, and please feel welcome to reach out to anyone on the committee for more information.