



Borough of Chambersburg

A full service municipality in Franklin County celebrating over 65 years of consumer owned natural gas service over 120 years of community electric and a regional wastewater, water, storm sewer and municipal solid waste utility

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHAMBERSBURG & FIRE UNION INK NEW DEAL FOR YEARS 2017-2021

Chambersburg – On Monday, May 8, Town Council authorized a new labor agreement with representatives of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local #1813 fixing the wages and benefits between the Borough and the professional firefighters employed by the town for the years 2017 through 2021.

This agreement, which is retroactive to January 2017, will settle the arrangement for Pennsylvania’s largest Borough fire department for the next few years.

“I cannot be prouder for the hard work that went into this arrangement,” added Borough Manager Jeffrey Stonehill. “Our negotiating team, which included Councilmen Allen Coffman and Herb Dolaway, worked to avoid the State arbitration process and make a fair and mutually beneficial deal with the fire union.”

In Pennsylvania, with uniform employees such as professional firefighters and police officers, if a municipality and a union cannot agree on a labor contract, an arbitration panel imposes an award upon the parties. Such arbitration panels can make decisions that are far reaching with their impact and they are not able to be challenged under the State Law called Act 111.

“We really worked this out together,” said Council President Allen Coffman. “The Borough and the fire union really wanted to avoid arbitration this time and I think we had a successful outcome.”

On Wednesday, May 3, representatives of IAFF Local #1813 had executed a Memorandum of Understanding to settle the agreement between the Borough and our professional fire fighters.

This five year contract includes sweeping organizational changes to improve the department:

First, the proposed contract changes the Fire Department work schedule. The new agreed upon work schedule will increase the number of firefighters and the number of captains but change the work schedule from 24-hour work shifts to 12-hour work shifts, to mirror the operation of the Chambersburg Police Department.

According to Mr. Stonehill, “for a variety of reasons 12-hour work shifts are far superior in both productivity and deployment. Further, the department personnel will now be divided into 4 squads rather than 3 squads, each with their own Captain.”

Also beginning in 2018, the Borough will be hiring qualified part time firefighters to work on Chambersburg’s two ambulances as well as supplementing fire suppression operations.

“This will add personnel and productivity to our department while controlling costs. If successful, we might add a third ambulance to our services by 2019.”

While it will take six months to implement these changes, on Monday Chambersburg began the process to increase the number of firefighters from 21 employees to 24 employees (not including the 2 Fire Chiefs), by asking the Civil Service Commission to produce a list of qualified candidates to hire new firefighters for the Fire Academy.

Also, the new contract freezes all benefits for pension, health insurance, etc. to 2017 levels and maintains employee financial contributions to all categories.

Finally, the contract includes 1.95% per year cost of living increases in each of the five years of the contract.

Assistant Borough Solicitor Sam Wiser stated “we think this has been a very successful negotiation. The last negotiations ended in a binding arbitration decision by Mr. Richard Kasher, who decided the terms and conditions for the last contract. Now we can move past the Kasher decision to a new negotiated framework.”

Chambersburg is one of the only boroughs in Pennsylvania with a large professional paid fire department. In addition, Chambersburg levies a separate Fire Tax on property owners to help pay for that department. Mr. Stonehill explained that “the State only allows funding to come from a property tax on property owners, but Chambersburg also uses its ambulance fees, and miscellaneous taxes, combined to help pay the cost of the large professional department.”

Chambersburg is a unique community. Chambersburg supplies more services than any other municipality in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In addition to typical town functions, Chambersburg is Pennsylvania’s only municipality supplying electric and gas. Chambersburg is 1 of 35 Boroughs to operate a municipal non-profit electric utility. Chambersburg is the largest municipal electric utility in the State, twice as large as the second largest, Ephrata, Lancaster County; and, the only one to operate generation stations. Chambersburg is 1 of 2 municipalities in PA to operate a natural gas utility. The other is Philadelphia, which does not operate an electric utility. Nationally, Chambersburg is 1 of 2,000 communities to have its own electric system and 1 of 800 communities to have a natural gas system but 1 of only about 50 to operate both. Chambersburg manages a regional water system, a regional sanitary sewer system (not through an independent Authority), and a new storm sewer utility; one of the first storm sewer utilities to form under the new Federal mandate to regulate stormwater.

Chambersburg currently has 20,508 residents (2013). www.chambersburgpa.gov