

BOROUGH OF JEFFERSON HILLS

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January 17, 2019

Dear Borough of Jefferson Hills Residents,

On January 14, Borough Council voted to decertify the Gill Hall Volunteer Fire Company and authorize Borough officials to undertake the actions necessary to accomplish this action. This means that Gill Hall is no longer a recognized Borough fire company and may not respond to fire calls in Jefferson Hills.

I am writing this letter to clarify some misconceptions in the community about the decertification of Gill Hall and reassure our community that in case of fire all of our Borough neighborhoods are protected with a competent and highly trained staff of fire fighters. Included with this letter is information about how our fire companies, along with the mutual aid of surrounding fire companies, continues to ensure the Borough's fire protection.

In 2016, the Borough and Gill Hall, Floreffe, and Jefferson Hills fire companies agreed to commission a study, "Feasibility of Consolidation of Fire Services in Jefferson Hills," to address the huge decrease in the number of volunteer fire fighters in PA from 300,000 in the 1970's to 38,000 in 2018. The commission findings after 18 months recommended consolidation of our fire departments to improve organizational, operational, deployment and management of the VFC's. The results of this study were posted on the Borough web site and referenced dozens of times since then in public Council meetings.

In addition, a task force made up of members of each of the fire companies as well as at-large members with fire service experience was established in 2017 to work together to remedy deficiencies brought to light in the feasibility study and come up with a consolidation plan acceptable to all three departments. Under the plan developed throughout 2018, no company would be closed, and all three stations would operate as one unified organization to provide fire protection to our Borough neighborhoods. The proposed consolidation would leverage the power of unity and teamwork to provide a higher level of fire protection as well as increased fiscal accountability. As talks continued, Gill Hall eventually refused to cooperate and work with the task force. Over the past two years, many of the qualified interior firefighters at Gill Hall resigned their positions and joined other Borough fire companies.

It was not an easy decision on the part of Borough Council to decertify Gill Hall, but the safety of our community is our number one priority. It is important to remember that a fire station and a fire truck do not make an effective fire company by themselves. Qualified firefighters are the foundation of a fire company. A high level of fire protection requires tireless work by our firefighters who train hard to be certified and prepared to enter a burning building to save lives, extinguish a fire and protect property. Not only was Gill Hall unwilling to cooperate with the consolidation, they often did not respond with the qualified and capable firefighters required to perform the arduous tasks on an active fire scene.

It is important to note that Gill Hall has been consistently encouraged and welcomed to join the consolidation and become a part of our improving fire service. Council believes that a consolidated force is a safer force for our Borough.

Sincerely,



Charles Bennett
Interim Borough Manager/Finance Officer

Facts About the Operation of Jefferson Hills Volunteer Fire Departments

With the decertification of Gill Hall Volunteer Fire Department, the Jefferson Hills Volunteer Fire Department, Route 885 Area has been assigned as the primary response agency and given operational control for the former Gill Hall District. The Jefferson 885 Fire Department has been responding into Gill Hall's district for many years, so this should be nothing new for anyone to see the yellow fire trucks in that area. We currently have over forty firefighters on our membership roster that are Nationally Certified to the NFPA 1001 Fire Fighter 1 level or beyond. By January 1, 2020, ALL interior firefighters in Jefferson will be certified to the Fire Fighter 1 level.

Jefferson Hills has had mutual aid agreements with all of the surrounding communities for many years, even decades. The concept of one municipality responding into another is not a new concept, and in fact, most, if not all municipalities rely on mutual aid support for many different types of incidents on a regular basis, completely free of charge.

Fire Departments across the county utilize a system that we refer to as "Run Cards" which helps the dispatch center determine which department should be notified for different types of calls in different areas. The system breaks each incident down into "Alarms." A "first alarm assignment" consists of the departments that are notified immediately when a call is made to 911. A second alarm assignment is used to supplement the first alarm companies and provide additional manpower, apparatus, and equipment. The alarms are built out to many different levels, all the way to the fourth alarm or beyond.

Depending on which zone you live in will determine which departments you can expect to respond when you experience an emergency. Non-emergency incidents, or incidents that are not imminently dangerous to life and health, you can expect to see a fire response from both Jefferson 885 and Floreffe VFD's.

For an emergency response, such as a house fire, natural gas leak inside of a residence, vehicle fire, physical rescue, etc., you will still see a response from Jefferson 885 and Floreffe VFD's, but you will also see a response from one or more of the surrounding communities right away. Fire Departments from Pleasant Hills, South Park, and Elrama have volunteered to provide assistance on the first alarm.

In Jefferson Hills, for many years, as soon as we receive notification of a house fire, or as we refer to as a "working incident" we immediately request our second alarm companies be notified. Depending on the zone the emergency occurs in, departments from Baldwin, Clairton, Elizabeth, and Glassport will be notified and requested to respond to the scene.

There is a very fine line between a department that arrives with members and a department that shows up with qualified and capable firefighters that are able to perform the necessary tasks to save lives, extinguish a fire, and preserve property. Rest assured that we have carefully selected, trained with, and will continue to train with our mutual aid companies on a regular basis so that we can continue to provide you the highest level of service that you deserve.

We are always looking for new members, if you are interested in volunteering for your community, please feel free reach out to us at:

Jefferson Hills 885 VFD:
380 Wray Drive
Jefferson Hills PA 15025
412-384-5141

<https://www.facebook.com/jeffersonhills885vfc/>

Floreffe VFD:
1540 State Street
Jefferson Hills PA 15025
412-384-9644

<https://www.facebook.com/FVFC178/>