

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REPORT CONSOLIDATION STUDY REPORT

Several meetings were held to gathering the information contained in this report. The purpose of the report is multifaceted. Firstly, gain knowledge and understanding of how each respective department functions currently. Secondly, make recommendations for the departments if consolidation were to take place. Thirdly, offer some suggestions of possible efficiencies for the departments if consolidation did not take place.

We wish to thank the Sussex and Wantage Fire and Rescue departments for their invaluable input. Without it we would not have been able to complete this report. Their professionalism and unselfish service provide outstanding fire and rescue services to both communities.

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE DISTRICTS

WANTAGE TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT

Wantage Township currently enjoys the benefits of “First Response” service from any one of four separate fire companies, with regard to firematic response to an incident in Wantage Township.

The northeasterly sector of Wantage Township is covered on “first response” for fire events by Unionville Fire Department of Unionville, NY (Minisink Hose Company). Several years ago, Minisink Hose Company alerted Wantage Township to a “Catch-22” situation in which the Unionville Insurance carrier in the State of New York could not provide them with worker compensation eligibility for activities they undertook outside the state of New York. The Wantage Township insurance carrier could not offer worker compensation eligibility for Unionville firefighters because they were not based in New Jersey. Rather than lose Unionville’s first responder services, Wantage Township has agreed to pay a separate worker compensation Rider policy for Unionville FD each year (\$4,050 in 2008). Wantage Township also makes an annual contribution to Unionville FD to help defray their costs of operations under the budget line item “Aid to Volunteer Fire - Adjoining Municipalities” (\$12K in 2008).

Wantage Township, the Wantage Township Fire Department, and Minisink Hose Company #1 have entered into a signed contractual agreement establishing firematic response obligations and coordination of procedures within Wantage Township. The current contract runs through June 30, 2012.

The northwesterly sector of Wantage Township is covered by Colesville Fire Company. The southwesterly sector of Wantage Township is covered by Beemerville Fire Company.

Wantage Township currently has an ordinance in place which creates the “Wantage Township Fire Department”. The Wantage Township Fire Department is comprised of Beemerville Fire Company and Colesville Fire Company.

On a purely informational level, it is relevant to understand that even if the Mayor and Committee of the Township of Wantage were ever to repeal its ordinance creating the Wantage Township Fire Department, both Beemerville Fire Company and Colesville Fire Company would continue to “exist”, for they are separately incorporated entities in their own right. Wantage Township provides annual contributions to both fire companies. Each company receives a donation of \$45,000, which adds up to \$90,000, representing the maximum contribution allowed under current NJ statutes. Wantage Township budget also provides an “operating expense” budget for the Wantage Township Fire Department (\$25,685 in 2008), as well as covering the costs for Hepatitis B inoculations (\$2K in 2008), OSHA required turnout gear (\$27K in 2008), and PEOSHA Respiratory Program expenses (\$6K in 2008)

Sussex Fire Department provides First Responder service to the southeasterly sector of Wantage Township. Wantage Township provides an annual donation to Sussex Fire Department to help them defray the costs of operations (\$45K in 2008, matching the amount given to Colesville and Beemerville).

On January 1, 2007, Wantage Township entered into a contractual agreement with Beemerville Fire Company, Colesville Fire Company, and Sussex Fire Department, in which all three fire departments agree to provide fire response services in Wantage Township. The agreement creates a Board of Fire Chiefs which acts as an advisory body for fire service issues in Wantage Township. This agreement is valid through December 31, 2011.

Firematic First Response territories are delineated on a map dated February 1, 1979.

SUSSEX BOROUGH FIRE AND RESCUE

Sussex Fire Department provides first response fire service to the Borough of Sussex and the southeastern sector of Wantage Township as is delineated in the 911 map.

The 2008 Sussex Borough budget had a line item of \$27,810 for “Aid to Vol. Fire Department”, and “Hepatitis B Vaccination” line item of \$500.

The Sussex First Aid Squad is a part of the Sussex Fire Department. The Sussex First Aid Squad provides first response activity for EMS within Sussex Borough.

WANTAGE FIRST AID

The Wantage Township First Aid Squad is a separately incorporated entity. Wantage Township contracts with the Wantage Township First Aid Squad to provide first response activity for EMS within the borders of Wantage Township. The written contract for these services was first signed in January of 1993, and has continued by mutual verbal agreement ever since. Wantage Township provides an annual donation to the Wantage Township First Aid Squad in its municipal budget (\$30,500 in 2008).

MUTUAL AID

All entities involved - Beemerville Fire Company, Colesville Fire Company, Sussex Fire Department, Sussex First Aid Squad, Wantage Township First Aid Squad, and Minisink Fire Company - provide mutual aid responses as needed and requested. The interaction among these agencies represents a high degree of professionalism. The coordination of response activities within Sussex Borough and Wantage Township affords a high level of success, and represents a fine example of volunteers keeping open the lines of communication for the benefit of an entire community of residents.

LONG RANGE PLANNING

In 2007, Wantage Township, Sussex Borough, the Wantage Township Fire Department, the Wantage Township First Aid Squad, and the Sussex Fire Department met for a series of meetings, to discuss long range planning of the vehicle/capital needs of the Wantage and Sussex communities. These meetings revealed a number of relevant facts that may impact a newly consolidated municipality.

With respect to the long range needs of the Wantage Township Fire Department and First Aid Squad, Wantage Township has created a ten year vehicle replacement schedule which maps out when a new fire truck or ambulance will be needed. To date, Wantage Township has been able to fulfill the needs of the Fire and First Aid functions in the year identified for action. The long range plan estimates that \$2.2 million will be spent by Wantage Township for fire vehicles and ambulances between 2009-2020. Wantage Township shall be pursuing the purchase of a new fire truck in 2009, to replace a 20-year old truck.

The long-range needs of the Sussex Fire Department were identified in 2007. That needs analysis estimates the Sussex Fire Department will require \$915,000 in funding for replacement of fire and ambulance vehicles from 2009 - 2020. The discussions held with Sussex Fire Department personnel have indicated that, in the past, the purchase of fire or ambulance vehicles has sometimes been left to the Department. While the Borough desires to help out with these purchases, the financial situation of the municipality sometimes prevents them from being able to offer that assistance. It is extremely unlikely that the Sussex Fire Department shall be able to withstand the financial impact of having to pay for their own vehicle replacements over the next ten to twelve years.

In 2003, Wantage Township and Sussex Borough worked together to jointly purchase a Ladder Truck for the Sussex Fire Department.

Efforts in 2007, to create a contractual arrangement between the two municipalities that would meet the long range vehicle replacement needs of both towns were ultimately unsuccessful. However, the dialogue from these meetings was very beneficial, and has led to an extremely productive working relationship between Wantage Fire Department and Sussex Fire Department.

OPTIONS FOR A CONSOLIDATED FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENTS

Below are several options to be considered by a future governing body should consolidation occur. When weighing the options the following concerns of the fire and rescue departments should be given a priority. The autonomy of each department needs to be maintained as much as possible. If all departments were merged the line of officers could be greatly affected. This would create a situation where it could take much longer than it currently takes a recruit to ascend to chief. The Length of Service Awards Program needs to be addressed to maintain continuity. Maintaining the “status quo” where possible for each department is essential.

OPTION ONE

FIRE DEPARTMENTS: The Beemerville Fire Company, Colesville Fire Company, and Sussex Fire Department to agree that they would become a unified Fire Department, created by Ordinance of the new municipality, to serve the needs of that new town.

RESCUE SQUADS: The Rescue Squads could be structured in the same manner as the Fire departments with their own captains. The current services areas could be maintained.

This would be the most logical course to take. The same structure for each department could be maintained by creating a Beemerville District, Colesville District and Sussex District. Each district would have their respective chiefs. The districts could be delineated by the current 911 service areas.

OPTION TWO

If the fire departments are not prepared to become part of a unified municipal fire department, then another alternative would be for the newly consolidated town’s governing body to enter into a series of contracts with the various fire departments and ambulance squad - much as Wantage Township currently does - to provide the assurance of on going response to firematic needs and first aid calls. Such an arrangement, however, would prove problematic when dealing with the issue of paying for vehicle replacements. Wantage does not currently pay for the cost of any vehicle replacements in Unionville, limiting its contractual arrangement to first response service in a sector of the town. Creating an alternate arrangement for Sussex FD, in which the town contracts for first response service and pays for vehicle replacements, may lead to issues of equity in contractual arrangements.

OPTION THREE

It would be prudent to consider creating a special service district within the newly-merged town, comprised of the current Sussex Borough households. This special service district could be identified as the primary service area for the Sussex Fire Department/First Aid Squad, and the households could be assessed a special tax equal to the current budget contribution given by the Sussex Borough budget. In this way, the primary service area of the Sussex FD would be preserved; the amount of funding they receive as municipal donations would continue to be paid by that section of town that enjoys their primary response activity, and the current "first response" agreements between Sussex FD and Wantage Township could be incorporated into the newly merged town.

This, then would be a viable justification to use in order to help pay for the vehicle replacement needs of Sussex FD but not Unionville - our special district arrangement for primary service would 'dictate the need as well as the rationale for doing so.

TRANSITIONAL FUNDS

Based on the information contained in this report there is an apparent disparity in the funding for equipment for the departments between Sussex Borough and Wantage Township. A merged community would incur increased costs in their long term equipment needs. Assistance from the State of New Jersey in the form of a one-time grant to help defray the vehicle replacement needs of the newly-merged town would be required to offset these increased costs. Requesting the State for \$500,000 to be provided to the new town in 2010 would pay for a new Sussex ambulance, a new Wantage ambulance, and help defray half the cost of a new Fire vehicle. Thereby eliminating this disparity and eliminating a possible "roadblock" to consolidation.

POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS

There were several potential cost savings measures that were discussed during the meetings. There could be an economy of size savings for all purchases of equipment if purchased in concert. This would require coordination between the departments regarding timing of purchases and brands of equipment purchased. Hose and ladder testing presents another possibility of savings for the departments. This would require coordination of the inspections between the departments. These are potential cost savings if consolidation occurs or not.







