PUBLIC FIRE PROTECTION STUDY

Aspinwall Borough, Blawnox Borough,
O'Hara Township, and Sharpsburg Borough
Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

July 2023

pennsylvania
GOVERNOR'S CENTER FOR
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Governor's Center for Local Government Services
Charles J. Miller
Fire Peer Consultant

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania | Josh Shapiro, Governor
PA Department of Community & Economic Development | Rick Siger, Secretary | **dced.pa.gov**

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Introduction

This report is prepared for the use of the elected officials and officers of Aspinwall Borough, Blawnox Borough, O'Hara Township, and Sharpsburg Borough, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, and other so designated by the participating communities.

The project is funded through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Community and Economic Development, Governor's Center for Local Government Services. This project was initiated at the request of the participating communities.

The principal contacts for each community are as follows.

• Aspinwall Borough	Chief Gene Marsico	Manager Melissa Lang
• Blawnox Borough	Chief Jeff Stephens	Manager Kathy Ulanowicz
• O'Hara Township	Chief Tom Fannie Chief Ed (Butch) Michalowski	Manager Julie Jakubec
• Sharpsburg Borough	Chief Lou Costanzo	Manager Jason Dailey

Technical information and data for this report has been provided by various sources. These sources are deemed to be reliable, valid, and cited where appropriate. In some cases, information was requested but not provided. Additional information has been gathered from written documents, site visits, and interviews. Such information is taken at "face value" and is believed to be valid for the purpose presented. No part of this report constitutes an audit of financial statements or performance standards.

The intent of this report is to provide information for municipal officials to assist in making informed decisions regarding public fire protection within the region and for their jurisdiction.

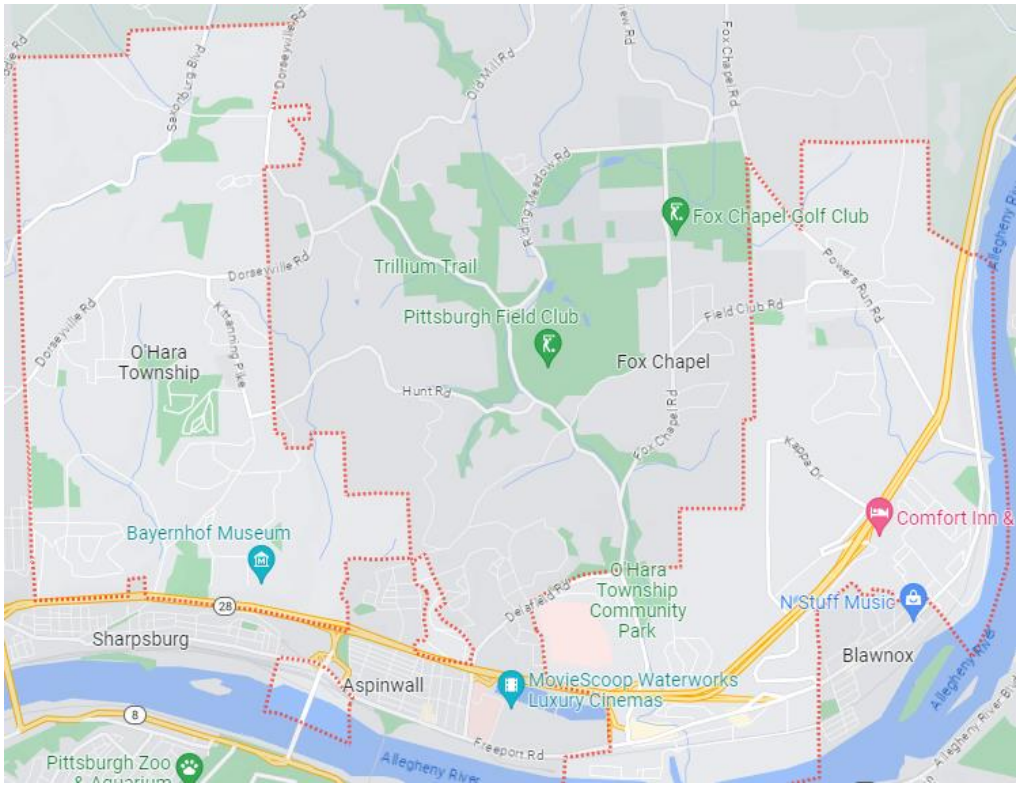
Opinions expressed herein are those of the consultant and should not be construed or interpreted as the opinion of any agency with which the consultant is affiliated.

Regional Overview

The Allegheny Valley Region is a geographic area in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania that consist of the Aspinwall Borough, Blawnox Borough, O'Hara Township, and Sharpsburg Borough. Throughout this report, it may simply be referred to as the Region. The term "Allegheny Valley Region" and "Region" may be used interchangeably throughout this report.

According to U.S. Census Bureau from 2020 the region has a combined estimated population of 16,845. The regions land mass is approximately 8.84 square miles. The region is a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and agricultural properties. The participating departments all border each other along an 8-mile stretch of the Allegheny River. However, Fox Chapel is not participating in the study, which creates a horseshoe shape of the region being studied.

The region is a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. The region borders the City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The region resembles Pittsburgh in several ways, including the fire protection challenges associated with a large population and infrastructure.



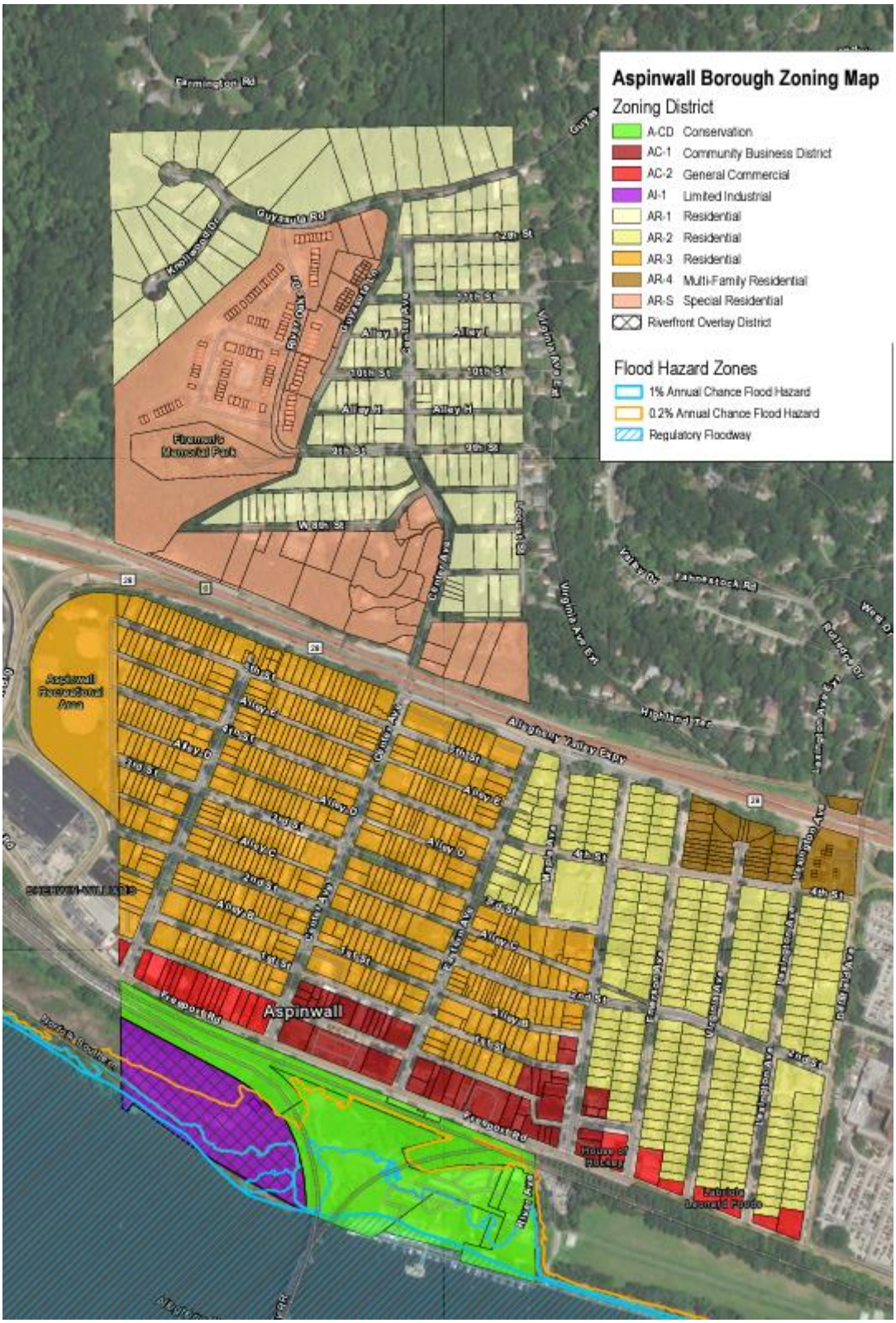
Aspinwall Borough Overview

Aspinwall is a borough on the Allegheny River in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, United States, and is part of the Pittsburgh Metro Area. It is essentially a residential place operating under a commission form of government. Throughout this report, it may simply be referred to as Aspinwall. The term "Aspinwall" and "Borough" may be used interchangeably throughout this report. The population was 2,916 at the 2020 census. The Aspinwall Borough is .39 square miles with a population density of 8,307 residents per square mile.

Aspinwall has a demographic makeup of 98.11% White, .27% Black or African American, 0.03% Native American, .91% Asian, and .51% were two or more races. 1.01% of the population was of Hispanic or Latino ancestry. The median income for a household in the city was $41,993, and the median income for a family was $58,750. Males had a median income of $45,231 versus $34,180 for females. The per capita income in 2020 for the city was $31,344. About 6.6% of families and 5.9% of the population were below the poverty line, including 3.1% of those under age 18 and 10% of those age 65 or over.

Aspinwall Borough is a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional properties. Aspinwall is primarily residential in nature. Aspinwall resembles the City of Pittsburgh in several ways, including the fire protection challenges associated with its dense population and infrastructure.

Aspinwall Borough is governed by a council consisting of the Mayor, Council President and six council members. The day-to-day operations are overseen by a Borough Manager who is appointed by the Council.


Aspinwall Borough Zoning Map
Zoning District
A-CD Conservation
AC-1 Community Business District
AC-2 General Commercial
AI-1 Limited Industrial
AR-1 Residential
AR-2 Residential
AR-3 Residential
AR-4 Multi-Family Residential
AR-S Special Residential
Riverfront Overlay District
Flood Hazard Zones
1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
0.2% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
Regulatory Floodway
Firemen's Memorial Park
Aspinwall Recreational Area
Aspinwall
Allegheny Valley Expy
Freeport Rd
Guyasuta Rd
Farmington Rd
Fahnestock Rd
Highland Ter
Virginia Ave Ext
Lexington Ave
Center Ave
Fortem Ave
Maple Ave
Knollwood Dr
Valley Dr
Rutledge Dr
Lewis Dr
Alley I
Alley H
Alley C
Alley D
Alley B
Alley E
9th St
10th St
12th St
W 8th St
1st St
2nd St
3rd St
4th St
5th St
Sherwin-Williams
North Southern
House of Hockey
Lubrizia Leonard Foods

Authority

Aspinwall was incorporated as a borough in 1892. As such, the Aspinwall Borough may perform functions and provide services unless prohibited by law. The ***authority and responsibility*** to provide public fire protection is vested to Aspinwall Borough by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by virtue of the Borough Code. This authority and responsibility for emergency services is established by state law and has been amended as recently as 2008.

BOROUGH CODE - SPECIFIC POWERS RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES

Act of Mar. 17, 2008, P.L. 48, No. 8 **Cl. 08**
Session of 2008, No. 2008-8, HB 1133

AN ACT

Amending the act of February 1, 1966 (1965 P.L.1656, No.581), entitled "An act concerning boroughs, and revising, amending and consolidating the law relating to boroughs," providing for specific powers of boroughs relating to emergency services.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Section 1202 of the act of February 1, 1966 (1965 P.L.1656, No.581), known as The Borough Code, is amended by adding a clause to read:

Section 1202. Specific Powers. --The powers of the borough shall be vested in the corporate authorities. Among the specific powers of the borough shall be the following, and in the exercise of any of such powers involving the enactment of any ordinance or the making of any regulation, restriction or prohibition, the borough may provide for the enforcement thereof and may prescribe penalties for the violation thereof or for the failure to conform thereto:

* * *

(82) Emergency services. The borough shall be responsible for ensuring that fire and emergency medical services are provided within the borough by the means and to the extent determined by the borough, including the appropriate financial and administrative assistance for these services. The borough shall consult with fire and emergency medical services providers to discuss the emergency services needs of the borough. The borough shall require any emergency services organization receiving borough funds to provide to the borough an annual itemized listing of all expenditures of these funds before the borough may consider budgeting additional funding to the organization.

Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.

APPROVED--The 17th day of March, A. D. 2008.

With respect to the legal requirements above, the elected officials of the Aspinwall Borough must determine **"acceptable level of risk"** regarding public fire protection. As the borough is very diverse, more than one acceptable level of risk may be appropriate. This may be determined by zoning or potential land use areas.

The residential, commercial, and industrial areas might each have their own level of risk. Factors affecting this decision could include life safety issues and value of property protected, as well as the intrinsic hazard of the properties protected.

Several references are available to aid the elected officials in making this decision. These references include, but are not limited to, the Public Protection Classification Summary Report of the Insurance Services Office and information supporting their classification system; the report of the SR 60 Commission of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and various codes, standards, and recommended practices of the National Fire Protection Association. Other references are also available and should be considered as necessary.

The report of the SR 6 Commission, successor to the SR 60 Commission, may also contain new information which may be beneficial to the Municipality. This report was released on November 29, 2018 and is available at www.osfc.pa.gov.

Aspinwall Borough Fire Service Overview

Fire service is currently provided primarily by the Aspinwall Volunteer Fire Department, operating out of two fire stations. The main station is located at 217 Commercial Avenue, Aspinwall, PA 15215 and the reserve station is located at the corner of 12th Street & Center Avenue, Aspinwall, PA 15215. However, at the time of this study Aspinwall VFD and Sharpsburg VFD were undergoing a merger to form the Southern Allegheny Valley Emergency Services (SAVES). The term "Aspinwall Volunteer Fire Department" and "Aspinwall VFD" may be used interchangeably throughout this report.

The Aspinwall Volunteer Fire Department is an "all hazard" response agency providing emergency response to fires, hazardous conditions, vehicle collisions, water rescue, and a host of other emergency and non-emergency events. Aspinwall VFD has a current ISO rating of 4 according to the last ISO review conducted in 2021.

This report does not specifically include the delivery of emergency medical services or the operation of Emergency Medical Services Provider. The response of the fire companies to selected medical emergencies is acknowledged.

NO PARKING

ASPINWALL
VFD CO. NO. 2

Governance

Aspinwall VFD is currently funded by donations, fundraisers, grants, and some tax monies. The Aspinwall VFD also receives funding from foreign fire insurance money which is provided to the Aspinwall VFD Relief Association. Based on information provided, Aspinwall VFD is organized as a Pennsylvania Nonprofit Corporation and is recognized as a charitable or similar organization by the Internal Revenue Service. The fire department files an IRS 990 Return. This information is believed to be correct but has not been verified for this report.

Recommendation: The corporation should review their bylaws and remove all items relating to operations and establish them as a separate document. The bylaws should be written in a contemporary manner that is easy to understand. Duties of officers should be established in position descriptions which can be revised as necessary without revising the bylaws. The corporations should consider membership in the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations, which can provide support in many areas of governing the corporation.

Personnel

Aspinwall VFD is an all-volunteer fire department that is National Incident Management Compliant (NIMS). The department is comprised of (13) firefighters. Ten (10) firefighters are nationally certified to NFPA 1001 Firefighter 1. The operational structure of the department consists of a Fire Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain, and two (2) Lieutenants. The administrative/executive structure of the department consists of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

Every effort should be made to recruit and retain competent personnel for these firefighting positions. It should be noted that not everyone is suitable to hold a position within this or any fire or emergency service. Close and careful consideration should be given to each candidate to ensure that the appropriate people are selected for the specific positions.

The fire department is challenged with staffing issues. This varies depending on the time-of-day which needs to be considered for staffing and response considerations.

As with many volunteer-based emergency service organizations throughout Pennsylvania and the nation, volunteer resources are dwindling. While these volunteers are not monetarily compensated, there is a cost associated with this type of service. These costs include training, personal protective equipment, and all other expenses associated with the administration of the volunteer system.

Dollar-for-dollar, these volunteers provide an enormous cost savings to the borough and its taxpayers. The lack of sufficient volunteer personnel may require that staffing be supplemented by paid personnel, on a part-time or full-time basis, depending on the level of service desired.

There were no job descriptions provided for any positions. Training and personnel records are detailed and readily available upon request. Training records are maintained by the fire chief.

Recommendation: The Borough Management and fire department should jointly formulate position descriptions for all operational positions from entry level personnel through chief. The position descriptions should include detailed information regarding the job performance requirements and the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for these positions. The current process of selecting line officers by the popular vote of fire department members is archaic and often produces less than desirable results. (This is not to refer to the talent of any existing line officer, simply the process.) Line officers should be selected based on merit, and jointly approved by the fire company and the borough.

Recommendation: The delivery of fire and emergency services should be closely and carefully reviewed by the Fire Chief and Borough Management to ensure that an appropriate level of service delivery exists. Decisions relating to service delivery should be based upon the pre-determined level of risk.

Recommendation: The Borough should recognize the value of volunteer personnel and the cost-savings they provide to the taxpayers, and work with the fire company to establish a recruitment and retention program and a length of service awards program. The Borough should provide sufficient funding for these programs. Additional information may be provided by the National Volunteer Fire Council. Selected insurance companies specializing in emergency service organizations may also be helpful in establishing these programs.

Staffing

The department has a current roster of thirteen personnel, however only five to seven responds to incidents on a regular basis. Historically volunteer fire service can only turnout 25-35% of active firefighters to an incident. Accordingly, the department may only be able to respond with 4-6 firefighters. This is well below the recommended staffing of four (4) firefighters per unit. It is recognized that volunteer response during daylight hours is even lower due to a majority of firefighters working during these hours.

The fire department is challenged with staffing issues. As with many volunteer-based emergency service organizations throughout Pennsylvania and the nation, volunteer resources are dwindling. While these volunteers are not monetarily compensated, there is a cost associated with this type of service. These costs include training, personal protective equipment, and all other expenses associated with the administration of the volunteer system. Dollar-for-dollar, these volunteers provide an enormous cost savings to the borough and its taxpayers.

Training

Training records for the fire department were complete and easy to follow and cross-reference.

Recommendation: Based upon newly revised job descriptions for each position, the fire department should conduct a training needs assessment and develop and implement a training program accordingly. It is imperative that the training program include compliance with all legal mandates.

Facilities

The Aspinwall Volunteer Fire Department operates out of two fire stations that are owned by the borough. Both facilities are antiquated at best and have run out of space for modern fire equipment. The facility is owned and maintained by the borough. However, the stations are not strategically placed.

Recommendation: The fire department should conduct an inspection of the current fire stations. This inspection should be done for the following reasons:

1. ***Identify any items in need of immediate repair.***
2. ***Identify any items that might need future attention, including items that would be capital expenses.***
3. ***Assess current space utilization issues and needs for future consideration including dormitory and living space for firefighters and the potential to house new fire apparatus.***

Recommendation: Aspinwall Borough, with input from the fire department, may want to consider conducting a needs assessment to explore the advantages of a new fire station. Considerations for this should be driven by data projecting the need for future services. Additional considerations should be given to roadway infrastructure and projections for future growth within the Borough.

Apparatus

The fire department operates and maintains a fleet of the following emergency response apparatus:

Engine 102-1	2006 HMI Toyne	1500gpm/500-gal tank
Engine 102-2	1997 HME 4-Guys	1500gpm/500-gal tank
Rescue 102	2000 Kenco	mobile cascade system
Squad 102	2012 Ford F350	

The borough owns all fire apparatus. The apparatus is checked periodically by fire department personnel. Minor repairs may be done inhouse, depending on the skill level of the fire department personnel.

Most maintenance is done by a vehicle maintenance shop. Specialty work, such as pump repairs, are done by a specialty contractor. Documentation of vehicle maintenance is provided.

Hose, pump, and ladder testing is done by an independent contractor. Records are maintained to support this.

Financials

The borough provides some funding for Aspinwall VFD through the borough's annual budget for special projects, apparatus, and insurances. These line items are reflected in the borough's 2022 Budget document.

The borough also distributes the Foreign Fire Insurance allocation from the State Auditor General to the Firefighters' Relief Association in accordance with the guidelines of the Auditor General.

Review of financial information for this report should be considered cursory, at best. Nothing related to this project should be considered an audit or comprehensive financial review.

Recommendation: The fire department should implement* a *policy for fiscal management. This should include policies and procedures for the handling of cash, tracking of* assets*, and financial risk management. The management guidelines of the Pennsylvania Auditor General that are used for Volunteer Fire Relief Associations may be helpful in guiding this process for the fire companies* as *well* as *their relief associations. The fire department's insurance carrier may also be able to provide information regarding responsible financial management.

Recommendation: The borough management and the fire chief should* meet *regularly to formulate* a *budget for operating and capital expenses. It is important for borough officials to understand the financial needs of the fire department and to fund public fire protection* as *the borough deems appropriate for the level of service desired*. ***Borough management should consider the institution of a fire tax to provide adequately finance the fire service well into the future.

Operations

The fire department is an "all hazards" response agencies providing emergency response to fires, vehicle collisions, hazardous materials incidents, environmental emergencies, and associated events. Non-emergency operations are varied and include some public service responses and public awareness activities.

Mutual aid is provided by surrounding fire companies on a reciprocal basis.

Every municipality must determine the type and amount of fire apparatus for its community and where the apparatus should be located. These are difficult questions and there are no answers that are totally correct or totally incorrect. It's a matter of local choice.

Aspinwall VFD responded to the total number of **617** incidents in **2022**.

The fire department has written procedures for operational issues. These should be revised and expanded as necessary.

Recommendation: The borough and fire chief should formulate a service delivery agreement. This agreement should define the "acceptable level of risk" as well as service delivery expectations.

Recommendation: The borough and the fire chief should meet and discuss formalizing mutual aid agreements with surrounding municipalities and fire companies to ensure acceptable levels of response is met to changing needs.

Recommendation: The borough and the fire chief should consider implementing automatic aid agreements with surrounding municipalities and fire companies on certain types of incidents. This should include consideration for use of proximity dispatching if available from the County Emergency Communications Center. If proximity dispatching is not currently available, the Borough Officials and the fire chief should encourage the County Commissioners to establish such a system.

Recommendation: The borough and the fire chief should closely and carefully review the most recent ISO report. The report projects a needed fire flow of 3500 GPM (see the ISO report). It is important that the capability of the borough to maintain this fire flow be considered in the replacement of fire apparatus. The fire apparatus, especially those with pumping capabilities, are aging. A vehicle replacement plan should be devised soon.

Water Supply

A reliable and sustainable water supply is critical to the suppression and extinguishment of fires. The borough is provided with a public water supply and is protected by fire hydrants. The hydrants are located throughout the borough, although some areas may need to be reinforced. The condition of the water infrastructure is not evaluated in this report. (See the ISO report for water supply information.)

The public water system is owned and operated by the Borough of Aspinwall.

Recommendation: The borough, the water authority, and the fire chief should meet to discuss reinforcement and possible expansion of the public water system and adding additional hydrants as needed. This discussion should include the inspection and maintenance of existing hydrants and the consideration of future hydrants.

Recommendation: The borough and fire chief should work jointly to pre-determine sites to establish drafting areas for local sources of water in the event of failure of the public water system. These sites should be identified and marked accordingly and included in the fire departments pre-planning information. The borough should enter into formal agreements with landowners for operating at these sites. Dry hydrants should also be considered at these locations if practical. While the catastrophic failure of the public water system may be remote, contingency plans should be established.

Reporting and Recordkeeping

The fire department is a participating agency in the Pennsylvania Fire Incident Reporting System.

The collection, analysis, and interpretation of data is critical for future decision making. Future decisions should be objective, and data driven.

Recommendation: The fire chief should thoroughly train all line officers who might serve as incident commanders in the incident reporting system. Information collected should be gathered in a standard and uniform manner. Prior to submission to the state, incident reports should be reviewed by a fire department quality control officer. There should be at least two people assigned for incident report review; one primary and at least one alternate.

In addition to the incident reports, the fire department should attempt to follow guidelines and standards of the National Fire Protection Association for applicable documentation and record retention.

Additional resources for documentation should be available from dedicated risk managers such as specialty insurance companies and commercial firms that specialize in this area. Lexipol is an example of one of the commercial service providers.

Community Risk Reduction

A primary consideration in public fire protection is the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive Community Risk Reduction (CRR) plan.

The elements of community risk reduction include:

- Education
- Engineering
- Enforcement Emergency Response
- Economic Impact (also referred to as economic incentives)
- Vision 20/20, a leading source for information for strategic fire and injury risk reduction, provides a great resource for this information. Their website is www.strategicfire.org.
- Training in Community Risk Reduction is available through a variety of programs from the National Fire Academy. This training if offered free of charge.

Additional information is also available from the Publications Office of the United States Fire Administration. This material is also free of charge. Internet access is available at www.usfa.fema.gov.

Effective community risk reduction involves a variety of stakeholders, including elected and appointed officials, fire department members, and the general public.

Recommendation: The borough should formally adopt the fire code. The fire code provides for the safety of the residents and visitors to the borough, as well as its firefighters. Due to the

population density and closeness of structures a major fire could lead to catastrophic long-lasting effects on the community not only in loss of property but also the loss in tax revenue.

The International Fire Code (IFC) is a model code that regulates minimum fire safety requirements for new and existing buildings, facilities, storage, and processes. The code addresses fire prevention, fire protection, life safety, and safe storage and use of hazardous materials in new and existing buildings, facilities, and processes. The IFC provides a total approach in controlling all buildings and sites, regardless of the hazard being indoors or outdoors.

A properly adopted and administered fire code is the foundation for fire and life safety in every jurisdiction.

The intent of the fire code is to establish the minimum requirements consistent with nationally recognized good practice for providing a reasonable level of life safety and property protection from the hazards of fire, explosion, or dangerous conditions in new and existing buildings, structures, and premises, and to provide safety to firefighters and emergency responders during emergency operations.

Portions of the above references are furnished from the International Code Council.

Borough officials should note that the fire code is not a replacement for the building code. Both codes are designed to complement each other. In Pennsylvania, the building code is adopted as part of the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code (UCC). The fire code is not adopted at the state level. Only portions of the fire code are referenced by the UCC and only when it applies to construction.

The borough and fire chief should meet to discuss the adoption, implementation, and execution of a fire prevention division to perform fire and life safety inspections in commercial and multifamily residential buildings.

Recommendation: The borough should facilitate a meeting with fire officials, elected officials, and other interested parties to discuss the adoption of a comprehensive Community Risk Reduction program for the borough. Key stakeholders include the school district and health care providers.

Public Protection Classification

Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) collects and evaluates information from communities from throughout the country regarding their structure fire suppression capabilities. This is referred to as the Public Protection Classification (PPC). The most recent report for the Aspinwall's FPSA became effective on May 1, 2021. This area is currently classified as Class 4 with a total credit of 61.87 points awarded from a possible total of 105.50.

It is important to remember that this classification is for the borough, and while it includes the fire department, it also encompasses emergency communications and water supply.

Page 7 of the PPC report provides a review of the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS). The report shows credit for the items listed below.

- Emergency Communications: 8.88 of possible 10
- Fire Department: 32.69 of possible 50
- Water Supply: 19.54 of possible 40
- Community Risk Reduction: 4.07 of possible 5.50.

The Borough might see significant improved credit by addressing the following areas:

- 414 Credit for Emergency Reporting (County function)
- 432 Credit for Dispatch Circuits (possibly a joint County/Municipal function)
- 561 Credit for Deployment Analysis
- 571 Credit for Company Personnel
- 581 Credit for Training
- 616 Credit for System Supply (water system)

The above referenced items might be improved by addressing certain administrative issues such as record keeping or operational issues. Examples of these items include fire company training issues and records relating to personnel and their availability. Other items may require a capital expense such as the relocation or existing fire stations and/or addition of new fire stations.

Another significant item is the capability of the water supply system and its ability to provide a reliable and sustained fire flow. This may require a detailed engineering study by the water purveyor and indicate possible needed improvements to the water distribution infrastructure.

It is important to remember that the PPC was determined with two fire stations. A change in the number and/or location of fire stations may affect future property protection classifications. Any changes may be either a positive or negative influence. This is why the selection of a new station location must be data driven.

Questions and additional information regarding the ISO report and possible ways to improve the community's classification may be obtained by contacting their office at 800-444-4554.

Detailed documentation and records retention are critical to support the information needed for such reports.

Recommendation: The borough should meet with the fire officials and representatives of the water purveyors to discuss the findings of the ISO report and opportunities for improvement.

Deployment Options

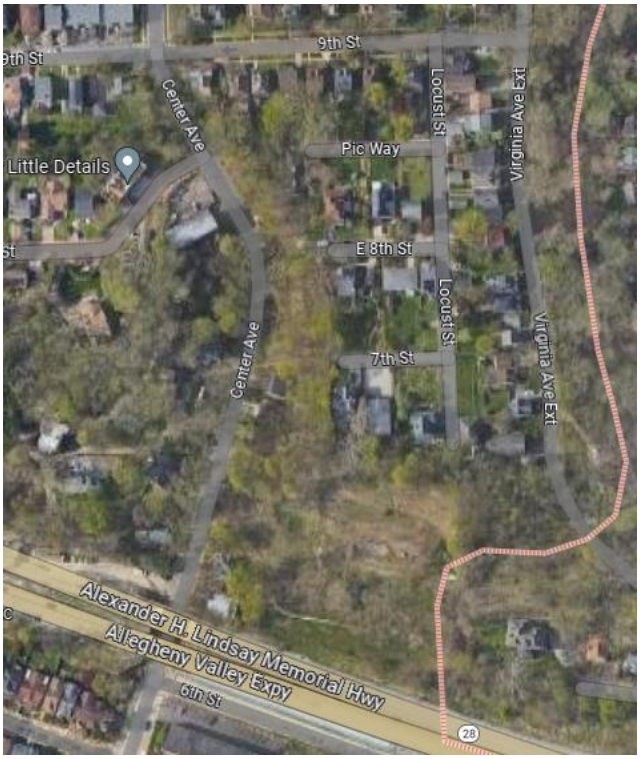
Fire apparatus are currently located in two stations. Borough officials must always consider the acceptable level or risk when assessing locations for the placement of fire apparatus.

In addition to apparatus type and placement, the fire chief and borough officials should remember that the existing fire stations, while reasonably maintained, needs regular maintenance and possible improvements.

While maintained and renovated, the station was never designed to meet today's standards for modern fire stations. Construction methods and older design criteria might make the station impractical for future renovations. Historically, station locations were not strategically planned.

Due to the compact nature of the borough not many options exist for a new station location. The borough does have a few options to choose from. One is to keep the operation as it currently is with the existing fire stations, while this remains an option, greater effectiveness could probably be gained by constructing a new fire station strategically placed to provide optimal fire response.

Recommendation: The borough should meet with the fire chief to discuss the possibility of constructing a new fire station located at the vacant property on Center Avenue. Another consideration is to look at housing the newly created SAVES into a single station that can service both Aspinwall and Sharpsburg Boroughs while maintaining an acceptable level of risk.



Recommendation: Data driven decision making is critical for the success of any organization. It is recommended that no decisions regarding closing a current fire station, or the construction of a new station be done until sufficient data is analyzed to support such a decision. The same should apply to fire apparatus as well.

Decision makers should use data from the most recent three years of operations to support such a decision. Doing so should be able to identify trends and demands for service.

Blawnox Borough Overview

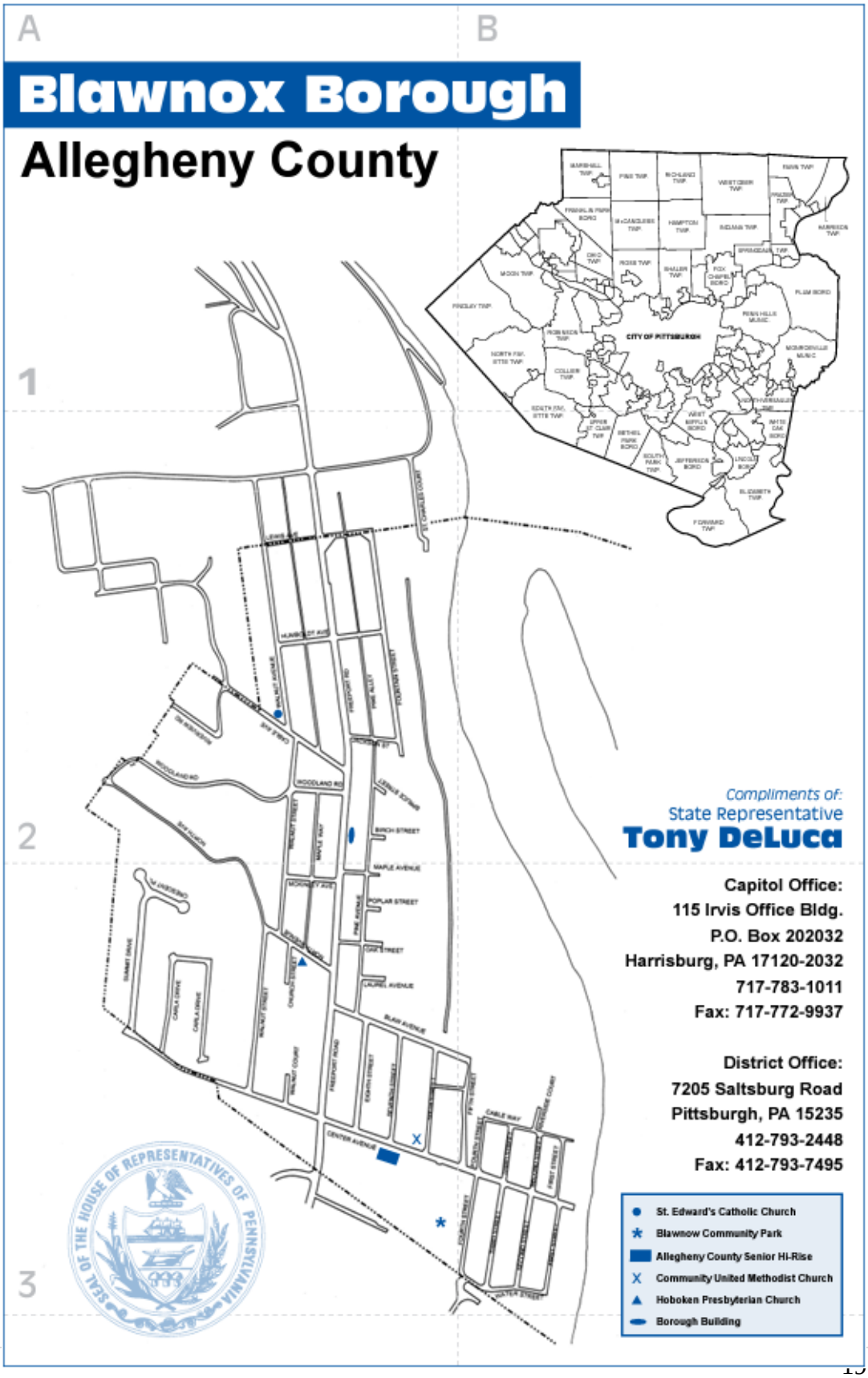
Blawnox is a borough on the Allegheny River in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, United States, and is part of the Pittsburgh Metro Area. It is essentially a residential place operating under a commission form of government. Throughout this report, it may simply be referred to as Blawnox. The term "Blawnox" and "Borough" may be used interchangeably throughout this report.

The population was 1,454 at the 2020 census. The Blawnox Borough is .44 square miles with a population density of 4,912 residents per square mile.

Blawnox has a demographic makeup of 93.03% White, 1.03% Black or African American, 0.06% Native American, 5.23% Asian, and .45% were two or more races. 0.65% of the population was of Hispanic or Latino ancestry. The median income for a household in the city was $30,203, and the median income for a family was $43,500. Males had a median income of $34,450 versus $26,406 for females. The per capita income in 2020 for the city was $19,858. About 5.8% of families and 8.7% of the population were below the poverty line, including 9.5% of those under age 18 and 5.6% of those age 65 or over.

Blawnox Borough is a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional properties. Blawnox is primarily residential in nature. Blawnox resembles the City of Pittsburgh in several ways, including the fire protection challenges associated with its dense population and infrastructure.

Blawnox Borough is governed by a council consisting of the Mayor, Council President and six council members. The day-to-day operations are overseen by a Borough Manager who is appointed by the Council.


A
B
Blawnox Borough
Allegheny County
1
2
3
Compliments of:
State Representative
Tony DeLuca
Capitol Office:
115 Irvis Office Bldg.
P.O. Box 202032
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2032
717-783-1011
Fax: 717-772-9937
District Office:
7205 Saltsburg Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15235
412-793-2448
Fax: 412-793-7495
St. Edward's Catholic Church
Blawnox Community Park
Allegheny County Senior Hi-Rise
Community United Methodist Church
Hoboken Presbyterian Church
Borough Building
SEAL OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF PENNSYLVANIA

Authority

The ***authority and responsibility*** to provide public fire protection is vested to Blawnox Borough by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by virtue of the Borough Code. This authority and responsibility for emergency services is established by state law and has been amended as recently as 2008.

BOROUGH CODE - SPECIFIC POWERS RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES

Act of Mar. 17, 2008, P.L. 48, No. 8 Cl. 08
Session of 2008, No. 2008-8, HB 1133

AN ACT

Amending the act of February 1, 1966 (1965 P.L.1656, No.581), entitled "An act concerning boroughs, and revising, amending and consolidating the law relating to boroughs," providing for specific powers of boroughs relating to emergency services.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Section 1202 of the act of February 1, 1966 (1965 P.L.1656, No.581), known as The Borough Code, is amended by adding a clause to read:

Section 1202. Specific Powers. --The powers of the borough shall be vested in the corporate authorities. Among the specific powers of the borough shall be the following, and in the exercise of any of such powers involving the enactment of any ordinance or the making of any regulation, restriction or prohibition, the borough may provide for the enforcement thereof and may prescribe penalties for the violation thereof or for the failure to conform thereto:

* * *

(82) Emergency services. The borough shall be responsible for ensuring that fire and emergency medical services are provided within the borough by the means and to the extent determined by the borough, including the appropriate financial and administrative assistance for these services. The borough shall consult with fire and emergency medical services providers to discuss the emergency services needs of the borough. The borough shall require any emergency services organization receiving borough funds to provide to the borough an annual itemized listing of all expenditures of these funds before the borough may consider budgeting additional funding to the organization.

Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.

APPROVED--The 17th day of March, A. D. 2008.

With respect to the legal requirements above, the elected officials of Blawnox Borough must determine **"acceptable level of risk"** regarding public fire protection. As Blawnox is very diverse, more than one acceptable level of risk may be appropriate. This may be determined by zoning or potential land use areas.

The residential, commercial, and industrial areas might each have their own level of risk. Factors affecting this decision could include life safety issues and value of property protected, as well as the intrinsic hazard of the properties protected.

Several references are available to aid the elected officials in making this decision. These references include, but are not limited to, the Public Protection Classification Summary Report of the Insurance Services Office and information supporting their classification system; the report of the SR 60 Commission of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and various codes, standards, and recommended practices of the National Fire Protection Association. Other references are also available and should be considered as necessary.

The report of the SR 6 Commission, successor to the SR 60 Commission, may also contain new information which may be beneficial to the Municipality. This report was released on November 29, 2018 and is available at www.osfc.pa.gov.

Blawnox Borough Fire Service Overview

Fire service is currently provided primarily by the Blawnox Volunteer Fire Company, operating out of two fire stations. The main station is located at 376 Freeport Road, Blawnox, PA 15238 and the Reserve station is located at the corner on 2nd Street, Blawnox, PA 15238. The term "Blawnox Volunteer Fire Company" and "Blawnox VFC" may be used interchangeably throughout this report.

The Blawnox Volunteer Fire Company is an "all hazard" response agency providing emergency response to fires, hazardous conditions, vehicle collisions, water rescue, and a host of other emergency and non-emergency events. Blawnox VFC has a current ISO rating of 6 according to the last ISO review conducted in 2016.

This report does not specifically include the delivery of emergency medical services or the operation of Emergency Medical Services Provider. The response of the fire companies to selected medical emergencies is acknowledged.

Governance

Based on information provided, the fire company is organized as a Pennsylvania Nonprofit Corporation and is recognized as a charitable or similar organization by the Internal Revenue Service. The company files their own IRS 990 Return. This information is believed to be correct but has not been verified for this report.

Recommendation: The corporation should review their bylaws and remove all items relating to operations and establish them as a separate document. The bylaws should be written in a contemporary manner that is easy to understand. Duties of officers should be established in position descriptions which can be revised as necessary without revising the bylaws. The corporations should consider membership in the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations, which can provide support in many areas of governing the corporation.

Personnel

The department is an all-volunteer fire department, which is comprised of twenty-three active firefighters (23) in which eighteen (18) firefighters are nationally certified to NFPA 1001 Firefighter 1. The operational structure of the department consists of a Chief, Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain, Truck Captain, two Lieutenants, Engineer, and Medical Officer.

The administrative/executive structure of the department consists of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

The fire company is challenged with staffing issues. This varies depending on the time-of-day, which needs to be considered for staffing and response considerations.

As with many volunteer-based emergency service organizations throughout Pennsylvania and the nation, volunteer resources are dwindling. While these volunteers are not monetarily compensated, there is a cost associated with this type of service. These costs include training,

personal protective equipment, and all other expenses associated with the administration of the volunteer system.

Dollar-for-dollar, these volunteers provide an enormous cost savings to the borough and its taxpayers. The lack of sufficient volunteer personnel may require that staffing be supplemented by paid personnel, on a part-time or full-time basis, depending on the level of service desired.

Every effort should be made to recruit and retain competent personnel for these firefighting positions. It should be noted that not everyone is suitable to hold a position within this or any fire or emergency service. Close and careful consideration should be given to each candidate to ensure that the appropriate people are selected for the specific positions.

There were no job descriptions provided for any positions. Training and personnel records are detailed and readily available upon request. Training records are maintained by the fire chief.

Recommendation: The Borough Management and fire department should jointly formulate position descriptions for all operational positions from entry level personnel through chief. The position descriptions should include detailed information regarding the job performance requirements and the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for these positions. The current process of selecting line officers by the popular vote of fire department members is archaic and often produces less than desirable results. (This is not to refer to the talent of any existing line officer, simply the process.) Line officers should be selected based on merit, and jointly approved by the fire company and the borough.

Recommendation: The delivery of fire and emergency services should be closely and carefully reviewed by the Fire Chief and Borough Management to ensure that an appropriate level of service delivery exists. Decisions relating to service delivery should be based upon the pre-determined level of risk.

Recommendation: The Borough should recognize the value of volunteer personnel and the cost-savings they provide to the taxpayers, and work with the fire company to establish a recruitment and retention program and a length of service awards program. The Borough should provide sufficient funding for these programs. Additional information may be provided by the National Volunteer Fire Council. Selected insurance companies specializing in emergency service organizations may also be helpful in establishing these programs.

Staffing

The company has a current roster of 23 personnel, however only six to eight responds to incidents on a regular basis. Historically volunteer fire service can only turnout 25-35% of active firefighters to an incident. Accordingly, the company may only be able to respond with 4-6 firefighters. This is well below the recommended staffing of four (4) firefighters per unit. It is recognized that volunteer response during daylight hours is even lower due to a majority of firefighters working during these hours.

The fire company is challenged with staffing issues. As with many volunteer-based emergency service organizations throughout Pennsylvania and the nation, volunteer resources are dwindling. While these volunteers are not monetarily compensated, there is a cost associated with this type of service. These costs include training, personal protective equipment, and all other expenses associated with the administration of the volunteer system. Dollar-for-dollar, these volunteers provide an enormous cost savings to the Borough and its taxpayers.

Training

Comprehensive training records might exist; however, they were not submitted for review as part of this project.

Recommendation: Based upon newly revised job descriptions for each position in the fire company, the organizations should conduct a training needs assessment and develop and implement a training program accordingly. It is imperative that the training program include compliance with all legal mandates.

Facilities

The fire companies currently operate from two (2) fire stations. The main station is owned by the fire company. The main station generally appears to be well maintained. The current station locations appear to be located central to their need. However, they both are not in prime locations for pulling apparatus in and out of.

Recommendation: The fire company should conduct an inspection of the current fire stations. This inspection should be done for the following reasons:

4. ***Identify any items in need of immediate repair.***
5. ***Identify any items that might need future attention, including items that would be capital expenses.***
6. ***Assess current space utilization issues and needs for future consideration including dormitory and living space for firefighters and the potential to house new fire apparatus.***

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough, with input from the fire company, may want to consider conducting a needs assessment to explore the advantages of a new fire station or multiple fire stations at strategically selected locations. Considerations for this should be driven by data projecting the need for future services. Additional considerations should be given to roadway infrastructure and projections for future growth within the Borough.

Apparatus

The fire company owns and maintains their apparatus. Blawnox Borough owns an engine that is being replaced by a fire company owned engine in the near future. In addition, Blawnox Fire Company houses and operates an aerial device that is owned by O'Hara Township.

The fire company operates and maintains a fleet of the following emergency response apparatus:

Engine 111-1	2005 Pierce Dash	1750gpm/750-gal tank
Engine 111-2	1998 Luverne HME	1750gpm/750-gal tank
Truck 111	2004 Pierce Skyarm	100' aerial platform (O'Hara's)
Squad 111-1	2003 Ford F350	
Squad 111-2	2008 Ford F350	
Squad 111-3	2012 Ford Expedition	
Boat 111-1	24' Pontoon	
Boat 111-2	24' Rinker Flotilla	
Boat 111-3	Avon Inflatable	
Boat 111-4	Creature Craft Inflatable	
Jet Ski 111-1	2008 Seadoo Wake	
Jet Ski 111-2	2009 Seadoo Wake	

The apparatus is checked periodically by fire company personnel. Minor repairs may be done inhouse, depending on the skill level of the members.

Most maintenance is done by a vehicle maintenance shop. Specialty work, such as pump repairs, are done by a specialty contractor. Documentation of vehicle maintenance is provided, but not in a standard format.

Hose, pump, and ladder testing is done by an independent contractor. Some records are maintained to support this.

Recommendation: The fire chief, in conjunction with Blawnox Borough, should implement a comprehensive preventive maintenance program for all apparatus.

Components of the program should include those described in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1911, Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Automotive Fire Apparatus.

NFPA standards for testing of pumps, hose, ladders, etc., are available and should also be considered for reference.

An apparatus replacement plan should be developed to assess current and future fire protection needs of Blawnox Borough.

Financial

Financial statements were provided. Legal filing requirements of documents such as the IRS 990 Return are believed to be filed in a timely manner.

The Borough provides funding for the fire company in various forms from the annual budget. These line items are reflected in the borough's 2022 Budget document.

Blawnox Borough also distributes the Foreign Fire Insurance allocation from the State Auditor General to the Firefighter's Relief Association in accordance with the guidelines of the Auditor General.

Review of financial information for this report should be considered cursory, at best. Nothing related to this project should be considered an audit or comprehensive financial review.

Recommendation: The fire company should implement* a *policy for fiscal management. This should include policies and procedures for the handling of cash, tracking of* assets, *and financial risk management. The management guidelines of the Pennsylvania Auditor General that are used for Volunteer Fire Relief Associations may be helpful in guiding this process for the fire companies* as *well* as *their relief associations. The fire company's insurance carrier may also be able to provide information regarding responsible financial management.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough and the fire chief should* meet *regularly to formulate* a *budget for operating and capital expenses. It is important for Blawnox Borough officials to understand the financial needs of the fire companies and to fund public fire protection* as *Blawnox deems appropriate for the level of service desired.

Operations

The fire company is an "all hazards" response agencies providing emergency response to fires, vehicle collisions, hazardous materials incidents, environmental emergencies, and associated events. Non-emergency operations are varied and include some public service responses and public awareness activities.

Mutual aid is provided by surrounding fire companies on a reciprocal basis.

The fire company operates a variety of apparatus. These include engines, aerial devices, and specialty units, such as rescues, squads, QRS, and command units.

Every municipality must determine the type and amount of fire apparatus for its community and where the apparatus should be located. These are difficult questions and there are no answers that are totally correct or totally incorrect. It's a matter of local choice.

The Blawnox Volunteer Fire Company responded to the total number **430** of incidents during 2022.

The fire company has written procedures for operational issues. These should be revised and expanded as necessary. Ideally, these should be standardized with all mutual aid departments.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough and the fire company should formulate a service delivery agreement. This agreement should define the "acceptable level of risk" as well as service delivery expectations.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough and the fire chief should meet and discuss formalizing mutual aid agreements with surrounding municipalities and fire companies.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough and the fire chief should consider implementing automatic aid agreements with surrounding municipalities and fire companies on certain types of incidents. This should include consideration for use of proximity dispatching if available from the County Emergency Communications Center. If proximity dispatching is not currently available, Blawnox Borough Officials and the fire company officers should encourage the County Commissioners to establish such a system.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough and the fire chief should closely and carefully review the most recent ISO report. The report projects a needed fire flow of 3500 GPM (see the ISO report). It is important that the capability of Blawnox Borough to maintain this fire flow be considered in the replacement of fire apparatus. The fire apparatus of the fire companies, especially those with pumping capabilities, are aging. A vehicle replacement plan should be devised soon.

Water Supply

A reliable and sustainable water supply is critical to the suppression and extinguishment of fires. Blawnox Borough is provided with a public water supply and is protected by fire hydrants. The hydrants are located throughout the borough, although some areas may need to be reinforced. The condition of the water infrastructure is not evaluated in this report. (See the ISO report for water supply information.)

The public water system is owned and operated by the Fox Chapel Water Authority.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough, the water purveyor, and the fire chief should meet to discuss reinforcement and possible expansion of the public water system and adding additional hydrants as needed. This discussion should include the inspection and maintenance of existing hydrants and the consideration of future hydrants.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough and fire chief should work jointly to pre-determine sites to establish drafting areas for local sources of water in the rural areas and hydrant areas in the event of failure of the public water system. These sites should be identified and marked accordingly and included in the fire companies pre-planning information. Blawnox Borough should enter into formal agreements with landowners for operating at these sites. Dry hydrants should also be considered at these locations if practical. While the catastrophic failure of the public water system may be remote, contingency plans should be established.

Reporting and Recordkeeping

The fire company is a participating agency in the Pennsylvania Fire Incident Reporting System. Some reports, training records, maintenance records, and other administrative documents are lacking. The collection, analysis, and interpretation of data is critical for future decision making. Future decisions should be objective, and data driven.

Recommendation: The fire company should thoroughly train all line officers who might serve as incident commanders in the incident reporting system. Information collected should be gathered in a standard and uniform manner. Prior to submission to the state, incident reports should be reviewed by a fire company quality control officer. There should be at least two people assigned for incident report review; one primary and at least one alternate.

In addition to the incident reports, the fire companies should attempt to follow guidelines and standards of the National Fire Protection Association for applicable documentation and record retention. Additional resources for documentation should be available from dedicated risk managers such as specialty insurance companies and commercial firms that specialize in this area. Lexipol is an example of one of the commercial service providers.

Community Risk Reduction

A primary consideration in public fire protection is the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive Community Risk Reduction (CRR) plan. The elements of community risk reduction include:

- Education
- Engineering
- Enforcement Emergency Response
- Economic Impact (also referred to as economic incentives)

Vision 20/20, a leading source for information for strategic fire and injury risk reduction, provides a great resource for this information. Their website is www.strategicfire.org.

Training in Community Risk Reduction is available through a variety of programs from the National Fire Academy. This training if offered free of charge.

Additional information is also available from the Publications Office of the United States Fire Administration. This material is also free of charge. Internet access is available at www.usfa.fema.gov.

Effective community risk reduction involves a variety of stakeholders, including elected and appointed officials, fire company members, and the general public.

Blawnox Borough has adopted the fire code. The fire code provides for the safety of the residents and visitors to Blawnox Borough, as well as its firefighters.

The International Fire Code (IFC) is a model code that regulates minimum fire safety requirements for new and existing buildings, facilities, storage, and processes. The code addresses fire prevention, fire protection, life safety, and safe storage and use of hazardous materials in new and existing buildings, facilities, and processes. The IFC provides a total approach in controlling all buildings and sites, regardless of the hazard being indoors or outdoors.

A properly adopted and administered fire code is the foundation for fire and life safety in every jurisdiction.

The intent of the fire code is to establish the minimum requirements consistent with nationally recognized good practice for providing a reasonable level of life safety and property protection from the hazards of fire, explosion, or dangerous conditions in new and existing buildings, structures, and premises, and to provide safety to firefighters and emergency responders during emergency operations.

Portions of the above references are furnished from the International Code Council.

Borough officials should note that the fire code is not a replacement for the building code. Both codes are designed to complement each other. In Pennsylvania, the building code is adopted as part of the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code (UCC). The fire code is not adopted at the state level. Only portions of the fire code are referenced by the UCC and only when it applies to construction.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough should facilitate a meeting with fire officials, elected officials, and other interested parties to discuss the adoption of a comprehensive Community Risk Reduction program for the Borough. Key stakeholders include the school district and health care providers. Due to the population density and closeness of structures a major fire could lead to catastrophic long-lasting effects on the community not only in loss of property but also the loss in tax revenue.

Public Protection Classification

Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) collects and evaluates information from communities from throughout the country regarding their structure fire suppression capabilities. This is referred to as the Public Protection Classification (PPC). The most recent report for the Blawnox Borough FPSA became effective on April 16, 2016. This area is currently classified as Class 6 with a total credit of 42.21 points awarded from a possible total of 105.50.

It is important to remember that this classification is for Blawnox Borough, and while it includes the fire department, it also encompasses emergency communications and water supply.

Page 7 of the PPC report provides a review of the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS). The report shows credit for the items listed below.

- Emergency Communications: 7.08 of possible 10
- Fire Department: 16.72 of possible 50
- Water Supply: 14.77 of possible 40
- Community Risk Reduction: 4.34 of possible 5.50.
- Blawnox Borough might see significant improved credit by addressing the following areas:
- 414 Credit for Emergency Reporting (County function)
- 432 Credit for Dispatch Circuits (possibly a joint County/Municipal function)
- 561 Credit for Deployment Analysis
- 571 Credit for Company Personnel
- 581 Credit for Training
- 616 Credit for System Supply (water system)

The above referenced items might be improved by addressing certain administrative issues such as record keeping or operational issues. Examples of these items include fire company training issues and records relating to personnel and their availability. Other items may require a capital expense such as the relocation or existing fire stations and/or addition of new fire stations.

Another significant item is the capability of the water supply system and its ability to provide a reliable and sustained fire flow. This may require a detailed engineering study by both water purveyors and indicate possible needed improvements to the water distribution infrastructure.

It is important to remember that the PPC was determined with a single operating fire stations within Borough. A change in the number and/or location of fire stations may affect future property protection classifications. Any changes may be either a positive or negative influence.

Questions and additional information regarding the ISO report and possible ways to improve the community's classification may be obtained by contacting their office at 800-444-4554.

Detailed documentation and records retention are critical to support the information needed for such reports.

Recommendation: Blawnox Borough should meet with the fire chief and representatives of the water purveyors to discuss the findings of the ISO report and opportunities for improvement.

Deployment Options

Fire apparatus are currently located at the main fire station. Blawnox Borough officials must always consider the acceptable level or risk when assessing locations for the placement of fire apparatus.

In addition to apparatus type and placement, fire company officers and Borough officials should remember that the existing fire stations, while reasonably well maintained, need regular maintenance and possible improvements. Some have had more recent additions and renovations.

While maintained and renovated, these stations were never designed to meet today's standards for modern fire stations. Construction methods and older design criteria might make the stations impractical for future renovations. Historically, station locations were not strategically planned for future growth.

There are options exist for Blawnox Borough. One is to keep the operation as it currently is with the two (2) existing fire stations. While this remains an option, greater effectiveness could probably be gained by combining the existing fire stations into one central fire station. This concept has worked well in other municipalities.

Recommendation: Data driven decision making is critical for the success of any organization. It is recommended that no decisions regarding closing* a *current fire station, or the construction of* a *new station be done until sufficient data is analyzed to support such* a *decision. The same should apply to fire apparatus as well.

Decision makers should use data from the most recent three years of operations to support such* a *decision. Doing so should be able to identify trends and demands for service.

O'Hara Township Overview

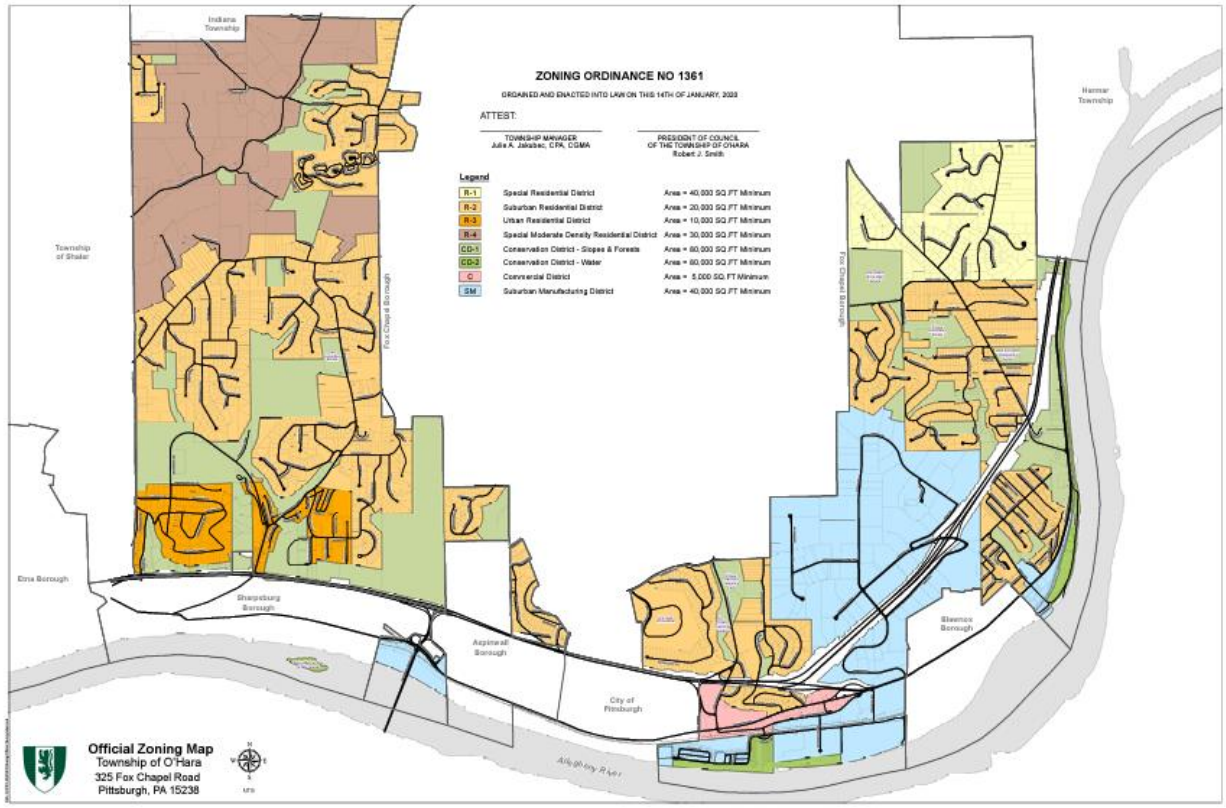
O'Hara Township is a township in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, United States, and a suburb of Pittsburgh. The population was 9,288 at the 2020 census. O'Hara Township is located along the Allegheny River. According to the United States Census Bureau, the township has a total area of 7.38 square miles.

The population density was 1,210 people per square mile. The racial makeup of the township was 95.25% White, 0.84% African American, 0.05% Native American, 3.04% Asian, 0.26% from other races, and 0.58% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 1.14% of the population.

The median income for a household in the township was $67,725, and the median income for a family was $77,594. Males had a median income of $58,125 versus $36,458 for females. The per capita income for the township was $33,356. About 2.7% of families and 3.6% of the population were below the poverty line, including 3.1% of those under age 18 and 5.7% of those age 65 or over.

O'Hara Township is a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional properties. O'Hara Township is primarily suburban in nature. O'Hara Township resembles the City of Pittsburgh in several ways, including the fire protection challenges associated with its dense population and infrastructure.

O'Hara is governed by a council consisting of the Council President and six council members. The day-to-day operations are overseen by a Township Manager who is appointed by the Council.



Authority

O'Hara Township was long organized as a township, and retains "Township" in its official name, but adopted a Home Rule Charter in 1973 (taking effect on January 5, 1976).

As such, the Township may perform functions and provide services unless prohibited by law.

The authority and responsibility to provide public fire protection is vested to the Township by the Commonwealth by virtue of the First-Class Township Code.

This authority and responsibility for emergency services is established by state law and has been amended as recently as 2008.

Act 9 of the Session of 2008 of the Pennsylvania General Assembly amends the First-Class Township Code as follows:

Act 9 of the Session of 2008 of the Pennsylvania General Assembly amends the

First-Class Township Code as follows:

Section 1502. The corporate power of a Township of the first class shall be vested in the board of township commissioners. The board shall have power--

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LXXIX. Emergency Services. (a) The township shall be responsible for ensuring that fire and emergency medical services are provided within the township by the means and to the extent determined by the township, including the appropriate financial and administrative assistance for these services.

(b) The township shall consult with fire and emergency medical services providers to discuss the emergency services needs of the township.

(c) The township shall require any emergency services organizations receiving township funds to provide to the township an annual itemized listing of all expenditures of these funds before the township may consider budgeting additional funding to the organization.

With respect to the legal requirements above, the elected officials of O'Hara Township must determine the ***"acceptable level of risk"*** regarding public fire protection.

As O'Hara Township is very diverse, more than one acceptable level of risk may be appropriate. This may be determined by zoning or potential land use areas.

The residential, commercial, and industrial areas might each have their own level of risk. Factors affecting this decision could include life safety issues and value of property protected, as well as the intrinsic hazard of the properties protected.

Several references are available to aid the elected officials in making this decision. These references include, but are not limited to, the Public Protection Classification Summary Report of the Insurance Services Office and information supporting their classification system; the report of the SR 60 Commission of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and various codes, standards, and recommended practices of the National Fire Protection Association. Other references are also available and should be considered as necessary.

The report of the SR 6 Commission, successor to the SR 60 Commission, may also contain new information which may be beneficial to the Municipality. This report was released on November 29, 2018, and is available at www.osfc.pa.gov.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township should continue to formally* meet *with the fire companies to discuss and agree upon response capabilities and limitations and formulate a service delivery agreement that meets the changing needs of the township. Both parties should document the role of O'Hara Township and the fire companies in a written agreement.

O'Hara Township should consider establishing fire protection requirements in the form of an ordinance.

O'Hara Township Fire Service Overview

Fire services are currently provided primarily by two (2) companies, each operating its own fire station. Mutual aid from surrounding fire companies is provided on an as-needed basis. Throughout this report the O'Hara Township Fire Department may simply be referred to as the Department. The term "O'Hara Township Fire Department" and "Department" may be used interchangeably throughout this report. The fire stations providing primary response to O'Hara Township are as follows:

O'Hara Station 217

Pleasant Valley VFC

O'Hara Station 218

Parkview VFD

While independent, the two (2) fire companies cooperate on an operational basis and essentially form the O'Hara Township Fire Department.

The fire companies are "all-hazards" response agencies providing emergency response to fires, hazardous conditions, vehicle collisions, and a host of other emergency and non-emergency events. They may also provide emergency response to selected medical emergencies. Parkview VFD operates Parkview EMS.

This report does not specifically include the delivery of emergency medical services or the operation of the Emergency Medical Services Provider. The response of the fire companies to selected medical emergencies is acknowledged.

Governance

Based on information provided, each fire company is organized as a Pennsylvania Nonprofit Corporation. Each fire company is recognized as a charitable or similar organization by the Internal Revenue Service. The fire companies each file their own IRS 990 Return. This information is believed to be correct but has not been verified for this report.

Recommendation: The corporations should review their bylaws and remove all items relating to operations and establish them as* a *separate document. The bylaws should be written in* a *contemporary manner that is easy to understand. Duties of officers should be established in position descriptions which can be revised as necessary without revising the bylaws. The corporations should consider membership in the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations, which can provide support in many areas of governing the corporation.

Personnel

The fire companies are an all-volunteer fire department that is National Incident Management Compliant (NIMS). The department is comprised of (32) firefighters. Ten (10) firefighters are nationally certified to NFPA 1001 Firefighter 1. The operational structure of the department consists of a Fire Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs, Captains, and Lieutenants. The administrative/executive structure of the department consists of a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer

The fire companies are challenged with staffing issues. This varies from company to company. Time-of-day is also a consideration for staffing and response considerations.

As with many volunteer-based emergency service organizations throughout Pennsylvania and the nation, volunteer resources are dwindling. While these volunteers are not monetarily compensated, there is a cost associated with this type of service. These costs include training, personal protective equipment, and all other expenses associated with the administration of the volunteer system.

Dollar-for-dollar, these volunteers provide an enormous cost savings to O'Hara Township and its taxpayers.

Every effort should be made to recruit and retain competent personnel for these volunteer positions. It should be noted that not everyone is suitable to hold a position within this or any fire or emergency service. Close and careful consideration should be given to each candidate to ensure that the appropriate people are selected for the specific positions.

There were no job descriptions provided for any positions. Training and personnel records were detailed. There is no formal recruitment and retention program in place.

The lack of sufficient volunteer personnel may require that staffing be supplemented by paid personnel, on a part-time or full-time basis, depending on the level of service desired.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township and the fire companies should jointly formulate position descriptions for all operational positions from entry level personnel through chief. The position descriptions should include detailed information regarding the job performance requirements and the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for these positions. The process should be standardized throughout all the fire companies. The current process of selecting line officers by the popular vote of fire company members is archaic and often produces less than desirable results. (This is not to refer to the talent of any existing line officer, simply the process.) Line officers should be selected based on merit, and jointly approved by the fire chief and O'Hara Township.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township should recognize the value of volunteer personnel and the cost-savings they provide to the taxpayers, and work with the fire companies to establish a recruitment and retention program and a length of service awards program. O'Hara Township should provide sufficient funding for these programs. Additional information may

be provided by the National Volunteer Fire Council. Selected insurance companies specializing in emergency service organizations may also be helpful in establishing these programs.

Recommendation: The delivery of fire and emergency services should be closely and carefully reviewed by the Fire Chiefs and the O'Hara Township elected officials to ensure that an appropriate level of service delivery exists. Decisions relating to service delivery should be based upon the pre-determined level of risk.

Training

Training records for the fire companies are well maintained and capture subject matter and time of each individual firefighter. More comprehensive records might exist; however, they were not submitted for review as part of this project.

Recommendation: Based upon newly revised job descriptions for each position in the fire companies, the organizations should conduct a training needs assessment and develop and implement a training program accordingly. It is imperative that the training program include compliance with all legal mandates.

Facilities

The fire companies currently operate from two (2) fire stations. The fire stations are owned and operated by the fire department.

The fire stations generally appear to be well maintained. Some need various repairs and improvements. The current station locations appear to be randomly located, i.e., their location was not a result of a strategic fire protection plan.

Recommendation: The fire companies should conduct an inspection of the current fire stations. This inspection should be done for the following reasons:

1. ***Identify any items in need of immediate repair.***
2. ***Identify any items that might need future attention, including items that would be capital expenses.***
3. ***Assess current space utilization issues and needs for future consideration including dormitory and living space for firefighters and the potential to house new fire apparatus.***

Recommendation: O'Hara Township, with input from the fire companies, may want to consider conducting a needs assessment to explore the advantages of a new fire station or multiple fire stations at strategically selected locations. Considerations for this should be driven by data projecting the need for future services. Additional considerations should be given to roadway infrastructure and projections for future growth within O'Hara Township.

Apparatus

Each fire company operates front line fire apparatus that is owned by the township. Each fire company owns and operates support units. The apparatus are checked periodically by fire company personnel, although there is limited documentation to support this. Minor repairs may be done inhouse, depending on the skill level of the members.

Most maintenance is done by a vehicle maintenance shop. Specialty work, such as pump repairs, are done by a specialty contractor. Documentation of vehicle maintenance is provided, but not in a standard format.

Hose, pump, and ladder testing is done by an independent contractor. Records are maintained to support this.

Recommendation: The fire companies, in conjunction with O'Hara Township, should implement a comprehensive preventive maintenance program for all apparatus.

Components of the program should include those described in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1911, Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Automotive Fire Apparatus.

NFPA standards for testing of pumps, hose, ladders, etc., are available and should also be considered for reference.

An apparatus replacement plan should be developed to assess current and future fire protection needs of O'Hara Township.

Financial

Financial statements from some fire companies were more detailed than others. Legal filing requirements of documents such as the IRS 990 Return are believed to be filed in a timely manner.

The fire companies generate revenue from various sources. In some cases, lack of financial documents made this unable to be verified.

O'Hara Township provides funding for the fire companies through allocations in the annual budget. These line items are reflected in the township's 2020 Budget document.

O'Hara Township also distributes the Foreign Fire Insurance allocation from the State Auditor General to the Firefighter's Relief Association in accordance with the guidelines of the Auditor General. The Relief Association consists of the two fire companies located within O'Hara Township.

Review of financial information for this report should be considered cursory, at best. Nothing related to this project should be considered an audit or comprehensive financial review.

Recommendation: Each fire company should implement* a *policy for fiscal management. This should include policies and procedures for the handling of cash, tracking of* assets*, and financial risk management. The management guidelines of the Pennsylvania Auditor General that are used for Volunteer Fire Relief Associations may be helpful in guiding this process for the fire companies* as *well* as *their relief associations. The fire company's insurance carrier may also be able to provide information regarding responsible financial management.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township and the fire chief should* meet *regularly to formulate* a *budget for operating and capital expenses. It is important for O'Hara Township officials to understand the financial needs of the fire companies and to fund public fire protection* as *O'Hara Township deems appropriate for the level of service desired.

Operations

The fire companies are "all hazards" response agencies providing emergency response to fires, vehicle collisions, hazardous materials incidents, environmental emergencies, and associated events. Non-emergency operations are varied and include some public service responses and public awareness activities. Mutual aid is provided by surrounding fire companies on a reciprocal basis.

The fire companies operate a variety of apparatus. These include engines and support units, the township owned aerial device is located in Blawnox and operated by the Blawnox Volunteer Fire Department.

Every municipality must determine the type and amount of fire apparatus for its community and where the apparatus should be located. These are difficult questions and there are no answers that are totally correct or totally incorrect. It's a matter of local choice.

The fire companies responded to the total number of **239** incidents in 2022.

The fire companies have written procedures for operational issues. These should be revised and expanded as necessary. Ideally, these should be standardized for all the fire companies within the O'Hara Township.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township and the Fire Department should formulate a service delivery agreement. This agreement should define the "acceptable level of risk" as well as service delivery expectations.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township and the Fire Department should continue to meet and discuss formalized mutual aid agreements with surrounding municipalities and fire companies.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township and the Fire Department should continue to evaluate current automatic aid agreements with surrounding municipalities and fire companies on certain types of incidents. This should include consideration for use of proximity dispatching if available from the County Emergency Communications Center. If proximity dispatching is

not currently available, the Municipal Officials and the fire company officers should encourage the County Commissioners to establish such a system.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township and the Fire Department should closely and carefully review the most recent ISO report. The report projects a needed fire flow of 3500 GPM (see the ISO report). It is important that the capability of O'Hara Township to maintain this fire flow be considered in the replacement of fire apparatus. The fire apparatus of the fire companies, especially those with pumping capabilities, are aging. A vehicle replacement plan should be devised soon.

Water Supply

A reliable and sustainable water supply is critical to the suppression and extinguishment of fires. O'Hara Township is provided with a public water supply and is protected by fire hydrants. The hydrants are located throughout O'Hara Township, although some areas may need to be reinforced. The condition of the water infrastructure is not evaluated in this report. (See the ISO report for water supply information.)

The public water system is owned and operated by the Fox Chapel Water Authority and the Hampton Township Municipal Authority.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township, the water purveyor, and the fire companies should meet to discuss reinforcement and possible expansion of the public water system and adding additional hydrants as needed. This discussion should include the inspection and maintenance of existing hydrants and the consideration of future hydrants.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township and fire companies should work jointly to pre-determine sites to establish drafting areas for local sources of water in the rural areas and hydrant areas in the event of failure of the public water system. These sites should be identified and marked accordingly and included in the fire companies pre-planning information. O'Hara Township should enter into formal agreements with landowners for operating at these sites. Dry hydrants should also be considered at these locations if practical. While the catastrophic failure of the public water system may be remote, contingency plans should be established.

Reporting and Recordkeeping

The fire companies are participating agencies in the Pennsylvania Fire Incident Reporting System. Some reports, training records, maintenance records, and other administrative documents could be improved upon.

The collection, analysis, and interpretation of data is critical for future decision making. Future decisions should be objective, and data driven.

Recommendation: The fire companies should thoroughly train all line officers who might serve* as *incident commanders in the incident reporting system. Information collected should be gathered in* a *standard and uniform manner. Prior to submission to the state, incident

reports should be reviewed by* a *fire company quality control officer. There should be at least two people assigned for incident report review; one primary and at least one alternate.

In addition to the incident reports, the fire companies should attempt to follow guidelines and standards of the National Fire Protection Association for applicable documentation and record retention.

Additional resources for documentation should be available from dedicated risk managers such* as *specialty insurance companies and commercial firms that specialize in this area. Lexipol is an example of one of the commercial service providers.

Community Risk Reduction

A primary consideration in public fire protection is the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive Community Risk Reduction (CRR) plan.

The elements of community risk reduction include:

- Education
- Engineering
- Enforcement Emergency Response
- Economic Impact (also referred to as economic incentives)

Vision 20/20, a leading source for information for strategic fire and injury risk reduction, provides a great resource for this information. Their website is www.strategicfire.org.

Training in Community Risk Reduction is available through a variety of programs from the National Fire Academy. This training if offered free of charge.

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Effective community risk reduction involves a variety of stakeholders, including elected and appointed officials, fire company members, and the general public.

O'Hara Township has adopted a fire code. The fire code provides for the safety of the residents and visitors to O'Hara Township, as well as its firefighters.

The International Fire Code (IFC) is a model code that regulates minimum fire safety requirements for new and existing buildings, facilities, storage, and processes. The code addresses fire prevention, fire protection, life safety, and safe storage and use of hazardous materials in new and existing buildings, facilities, and processes. The IFC provides a total approach in controlling all buildings and sites, regardless of the hazard being indoors or outdoors.

A properly adopted and administered fire code is the foundation for fire and life safety in every jurisdiction.

The intent of the fire code is to establish the minimum requirements consistent with nationally recognized good practice for providing a reasonable level of life safety and property protection from the hazards of fire, explosion, or dangerous conditions in new and existing buildings, structures, and premises, and to provide safety to firefighters and emergency responders during emergency operations.

Portions of the above references are furnished from the International Code Council.

O'Hara Township officials should note that the fire code is not a replacement for the building code. Both codes are designed to complement each other. In Pennsylvania, the building code is adopted as part of the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code (UCC). The fire code is not adopted at the state level. Only portions of the fire code are referenced by the UCC and only when it applies to construction.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township should facilitate a meeting with fire officials, elected officials, and other interested parties to discuss the adoption of a comprehensive Community Risk Reduction program for O'Hara Township. Key stakeholders include the school district and health care providers.

Public Protection Classification

Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) collects and evaluates information from communities from throughout the country regarding their structure fire suppression capabilities. This is referred to as the Public Protection Classification (PPC). The most recent report for O'Hara Township was not available at the time of this publication, there is reference to an ISO report from 1994 in a prior DCED fire protection evaluation conducted in 2000. The rating noted in that study was a 5.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township should schedule an ISO review in the immediate future. Typically, an ISO review is conducted every 5 years.

Recommendation: O'Hara Township should meet with the fire officials and representatives of the water purveyors to discuss the findings of the ISO report and opportunities for improvement. An updated ISO review is highly recommended.

Deployment Options

Fire apparatus are currently located at two (2) fire stations within the township and one in Blawnox Borough. O'Hara Township officials must always consider the acceptable level or risk when assessing locations for the placement of fire apparatus.

In addition to apparatus type and placement, fire company officers and O'Hara Township officials should remember that the existing fire stations, while reasonably well maintained, need regular maintenance and possible improvements. Some have had more recent additions and renovations.

While maintained and renovated, these stations were never designed to meet today's standards for modern fire stations. Construction methods and older design criteria might make the stations impractical for future renovations. Historically, station locations were not strategically planned.

Several options exist for O'Hara Township. One is to keep the operation as it currently is with the two (2) existing fire stations. While this remains an option, greater effectiveness could probably be gained by combining the existing fire companies into one fire station and constructing new fire station on the east end of the township.

For the purpose of this report, the term *fire company* refers to an entity, in this case, nonprofit corporations. The term *fire station* refers to the location where fire apparatus is housed.

O'Hara Township, along with its fire companies, should consider multiple options.

There are several examples to model the unification of two or more fire companies into one. One example that combined two fire companies into one is in York County. The new organization is known as Alliance Fire and Rescue.

This model also has a proven track record in Adams County. Nearly ten years ago, two fire companies there combined to form the United Hook and Ladder Company. This organization has expanded and has combined two additional fire companies. The organization now operates four fire stations within the county and is poised for future growth.

Another example is that of the recently formed Hanover Area Fire/Rescue in York County. In this case, the fire companies from multiple municipalities combined as one and operate with municipal direction within a combination career/volunteer system.

Another option would be to merge fire service capabilities with neighboring communities to create a regional fire department. This would reduce duplication of services and equipment and provide a more fiscal and efficient use of personnel, equipment, and funds.

O'Hara Township may also want to consider the possibility of building a new fire/emergency service station. The location of this or any future station should be strategically located and supported by data driven decisions. These decisions should be based on historical data and future projections.

The question also exists regarding the number and location of fire stations and the number, type, and location of fire apparatus.

Recommendation: Data driven decision making is critical for the success of any organization. It is recommended that no decisions regarding closing a current fire station, or the construction of a new station be done until sufficient data is analyzed to support such a decision. The same should apply to fire apparatus as well.

Decision makers should use data from the most recent three years of operations to support such a decision. Doing so should be able to identify trends and demands for service.

Sharpsburg Borough Overview

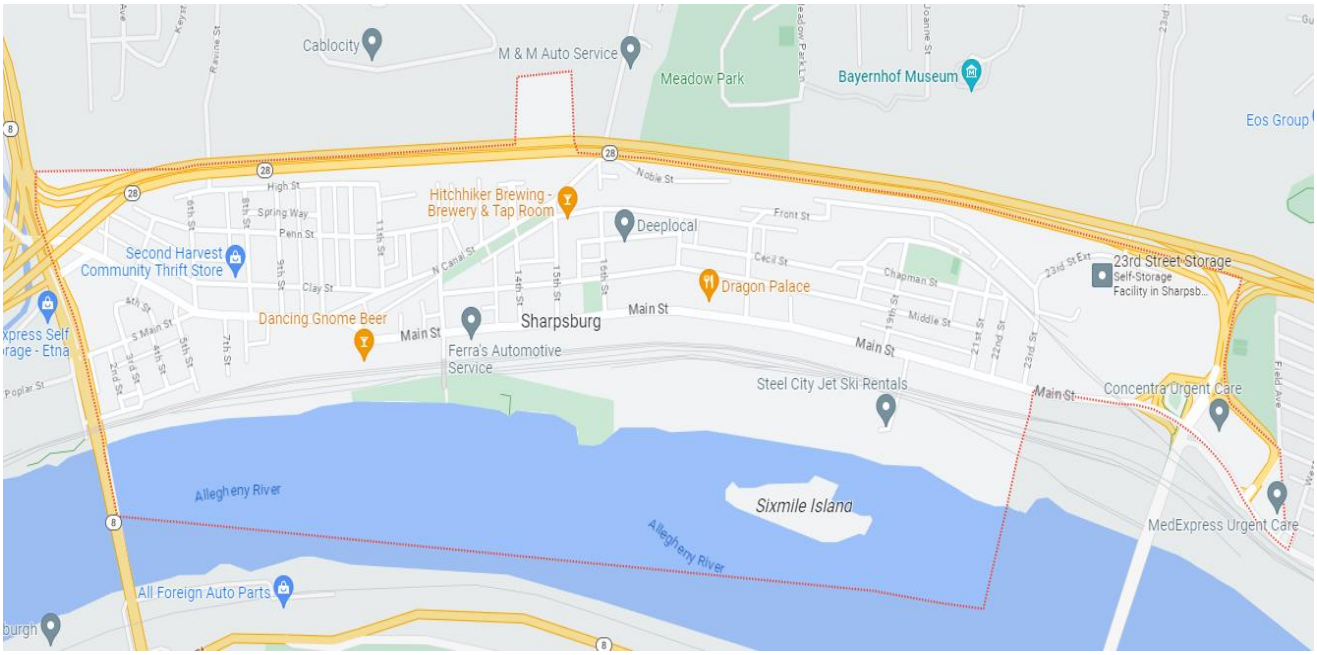
Sharpsburg Borough is a borough in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, United States, and a suburb of Pittsburgh. The population was 3,187 at the 2020 census. Sharpsburg Borough is located along the Allegheny River.

According to the United States Census Bureau, Sharpsburg Borough has a total area of .63 square miles with a population density of 6,926 residents per square mile.

The racial makeup of the borough was 93.74% White, 3.81% African American, 0.03% Native American, 0.64% Asian, 0.06% Pacific Islander, 0.36% from other races, and 1.36% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 2.11% of the population.

The median income for a household in the township was $22,828, and the median income for a family was $30,500. Males had a median income of $27,396 versus $22,238 for females. The per capita income for the township was $15,698. About 14% of families and 16.6% of the population were below the poverty line, including 22.8% of those under age 18 and 14.7% of those age 65 or over.

Sharpsburg Borough is a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial properties. Sharpsburg Township is primarily suburban in nature. Sharpsburg Borough resembles the City of Pittsburgh in several ways, including the fire protection challenges associated with its population and infrastructure.



Authority

Sharpsburg Borough was established in 1848. As such, the Sharpsburg Borough may perform functions and provide services unless prohibited by law. The ***authority and responsibility*** to provide public fire protection is vested to Sharpsburg Borough by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by virtue of the Borough Code. This authority and responsibility for emergency services is established by state law and has been amended as recently as 2008.

BOROUGH CODE - SPECIFIC POWERS RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES
Act of Mar. 17, 2008, P.L. 48, No. 8 Cl. 08

Session of 2008, No. 2008-8, HB 1133

AN ACT

Amending the act of February 1, 1966 (1965 P.L.1656, No.581), entitled "An act concerning boroughs, and revising, amending and consolidating the law relating to boroughs," providing for specific powers of boroughs relating to emergency services.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Section 1202 of the act of February 1, 1966 (1965 P.L.1656, No.581), known as The Borough Code, is amended by adding a clause to read:

Section 1202. Specific Powers. --The powers of the borough shall be vested in the corporate authorities. Among the specific powers of the borough shall be the following, and in the exercise of any of such powers involving the enactment of any ordinance or the making of any regulation, restriction or prohibition, the borough may provide for the enforcement thereof and may prescribe penalties for the violation thereof or for the failure to conform thereto:

*** * ***

(82) Emergency services. The borough shall be responsible for ensuring that fire and emergency medical services are provided within the borough by the means and to the extent determined by the borough, including the appropriate financial and administrative assistance for these services. The borough shall consult with fire and emergency medical services providers to discuss the emergency services needs of the borough. The borough shall require any emergency services organization receiving borough funds to provide to the borough an annual itemized listing of all expenditures of these funds before the borough may consider budgeting additional funding to the organization.

Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.

APPROVED--The 17th day of March, A. D. 2008.

With respect to the legal requirements above, the elected officials of Sharpsburg Borough must determine **"acceptable level of risk"** regarding public fire protection. As Sharpsburg is diverse, more than one acceptable level of risk may be appropriate. This may be determined by zoning or potential land use areas.

The residential, commercial, and agriculture areas might each have their own level of risk. Factors affecting this decision could include life safety issues and value of property protected, as well as the intrinsic hazard of the properties protected.

Several references are available to aid the elected officials in making this decision. These references include, but are not limited to, the Public Protection Classification Summary Report of the Insurance Services Office and information supporting their classification system; the report of the SR 60 Commission of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and various codes, standards, and recommended practices of the National Fire Protection Association. Other references are also available and should be considered as necessary.

The report of the SR 6 Commission, successor to the SR 60 Commission, may also contain new information which may be beneficial to the Municipality. This report was released on November 29, 2018 and is available at www.osfc.pa.gov.

Sharpsburg Borough Fire Service Overview

Fire service is currently provided primarily by a single volunteer fire department, operating out of one fire station located at 1611 Main Street Sharpsburg, Pa 15215. However, at the time of this study Aspinwall VFD and Sharpsburg VFD were undergoing a merger to form the Southern Allegheny Valley Emergency Services (SAVES). Throughout this report the Sharpsburg Volunteer Fire Department may simply be referred to as the Department. The term "Sharpsburg Volunteer Fire Department" and "Department" may be used interchangeably throughout this report. The Sharpsburg Volunteer Fire Department is an "all hazard" response agency providing emergency response to fires, hazardous conditions, vehicle collisions, and a host of other emergency and non-emergency events. The Department also provides emergency response to selected medical emergencies.

This report does not specifically include the delivery of emergency medical services or the operation of Emergency Medical Services Provider. The response of the fire department to selected medical emergencies is acknowledged.

The fire station providing primary response to Sharpsburg Township is as follows:

Governance

Based on information provided, the fire department is organized as a Pennsylvania Nonprofit Corporation and is recognized as a charitable or similar organization by the Internal Revenue Service. The fire department files an IRS 990 Return. This information is believed to be correct but has not been verified for this report.

Recommendation: The corporations should review their bylaws and remove all items relating to operations and establish them as* a *separate document. The bylaws should be written in* a *contemporary manner that is easy to understand. Duties of officers should be established in position descriptions which can be revised as necessary without revising the bylaws. The corporations should consider membership in the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations, which can provide support in many areas of governing the corporation.

Personnel

The department is an all-volunteer fire department. The department is comprised of fifteen (15) in which twelve (12) firefighters are nationally certified to NFPA 1001 Firefighter 1. The operational structure of the department consists of a Fire Chief, Assistant Chief, two (2) Captains, and two (2) Lieutenants.

The administrative/executive structure of the department consists of a Council President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

Every effort should be made to recruit and retain competent personnel for these firefighting positions. It should be noted that not everyone is suitable to hold a position within this or any fire or emergency service. Close and careful consideration should be given to each candidate to ensure that the appropriate people are selected for the specific positions.

The fire department is challenged with staffing issues. This varies depending on the time-of-day which needs to be considered for staffing and response considerations.

As with many volunteer-based emergency service organizations throughout Pennsylvania and the nation, volunteer resources are dwindling. While these volunteers are not monetarily compensated, there is a cost associated with this type of service. These costs include training, personal protective equipment, and all other expenses associated with the administration of the volunteer system.

Dollar-for-dollar, these volunteers provide an enormous cost savings to the borough and its taxpayers. The lack of sufficient volunteer personnel may require that staffing be supplemented by paid personnel, on a part-time or full-time basis, depending on the level of service desired.

There were no job descriptions provided for any positions. Training and personnel records are detailed and readily available upon request. Training records are maintained by the fire chief.

Recommendation: The Borough Management and fire department should jointly formulate position descriptions for all operational positions from entry level personnel through chief. The position descriptions should include detailed information regarding the job performance requirements and the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for these positions. The current process of selecting line officers by the popular vote of fire department members is archaic and often produces less than desirable results. (This is not to refer to the talent of any existing line officer, simply the process.) Line officers should be selected based on merit, and jointly approved by the fire company and the borough.

Recommendation: The delivery of fire and emergency services should be closely and carefully reviewed by the Fire Chief and Borough Management to ensure that an appropriate level of service delivery exists. Decisions relating to service delivery should be based upon the pre-determined level of risk.

Recommendation: The Borough should recognize the value of volunteer personnel and the cost-savings they provide to the taxpayers, and work with the fire company to establish a recruitment and retention program and a length of service awards program. The Borough should provide sufficient funding for these programs. Additional information may be provided by the National Volunteer Fire Council. Selected insurance companies specializing in emergency service organizations may also be helpful in establishing these programs.

Staffing

The department has a current roster of fifteen (15) personnel, however only five (5) respond to incidents on a regular basis. Historically volunteer fire service can only turnout 25-35% of active firefighters to an incident. This is well below the recommended staffing of four (4) firefighters per unit. It is recognized that volunteer response during daylight hours is even lower due to a majority of firefighters working during these hours.

The fire department is challenged with staffing issues. Time-of-day is also a consideration for staffing and response considerations. As with many volunteer-based emergency service organizations throughout Pennsylvania and the nation, volunteer resources are dwindling. While these volunteers are not monetarily compensated, there is a cost associated with this type of service. These costs include training, personal protective equipment, and all other expenses associated with the administration of the volunteer system. Dollar-for-dollar, these volunteers provide an enormous cost savings to the Township and its taxpayers.

Training

Training records for the fire department are detailed. More comprehensive records might exist; however, they were not submitted for review as part of this project. The fire department does maintain records of training hours per personnel that includes training type or activity. In some cases, detail might be insufficient; in other cases, records are very detailed.

Recommendation: Based upon newly revised job descriptions for each position in the fire department, the organizations should conduct a training needs assessment and develop and implement a training program accordingly. It is imperative that the training program include compliance with all legal mandates.

Facilities

The fire department currently operates from a single fire station. The fire station is owned by the department. The fire station generally appears to be well maintained. The current station location appears to be centrally located within the borough borders.

Recommendation: The fire department should conduct an inspection of the current fire station. This inspection should be done for the following reasons:

- ***Identify any items in need of immediate repair.***
- ***Identify any items that might need future attention, including items that would be capital expenses.***
- ***Assess current space utilization issues and needs for future consideration including dormitory and living space for firefighters and the potential to house new fire apparatus.***

Recommendation: Sharpsburg Borough, with input from the fire department, may want to consider conducting a needs assessment to explore the advantages of a new fire station at a

strategically selected location. Considerations for this should be driven by data projecting the need for future services. Additional considerations should be given to roadway infrastructure and projections for future growth within the Township.

Apparatus

Sharpsburg Borough owns and maintains all front-line fire apparatus which consists of an engine, ladder truck, and service unit.

The apparatus is checked periodically by fire department personnel, although there is limited documentation to support this. Minor repairs may be done inhouse, depending on the skill level of the members.

Most maintenance is done by a vehicle maintenance shop. Specialty work, such as pump repairs, are done by a specialty contractor. Documentation of vehicle maintenance is provided, but not in a standard format. No records of hose and pump testing were provided.

A complete vehicle roster is included this report.

Recommendation: The fire chief, in conjunction with Sharpsburg Borough, should implement a comprehensive preventive maintenance program for all apparatus.

Components of the program should include those described in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1911, Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Automotive Fire Apparatus.

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An apparatus replacement plan should be developed to assess current and future fire protection needs of Sharpsburg Township.

Financial

Financial statements from some fire companies were more detailed than others. Legal filing requirements of documents such as the IRS 990 Return are believed to be filed in a timely manner.

The fire department generates revenue from various sources. In some cases, lack of financial documents made this unable to be verified.

The Borough provides funding for the fire department through a fire tax allocation in Sharpsburg Borough's annual budget.

Sharpsburg Borough also distributes the Foreign Fire Insurance allocation from the State Auditor General to the Relief Association in accordance with the guidelines of the Auditor General.

Review of financial information for this report should be considered cursory, at best. Nothing related to this project should be considered an audit or comprehensive financial review.

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Every municipality must determine the type and amount of fire apparatus for its community and where the apparatus should be located. These are difficult questions and there are no answers that are totally correct or totally incorrect. It's a matter of local choice.

In 2022 the fire department responded to approximately **500** incidents

The fire department has started to form written procedures for operational issues. These should be revised and expanded as necessary. Ideally, these should be standardized for all responses within the borough.

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Recommendation: Sharpsburg Borough, water purveyors, and the fire chief should meet to discuss reinforcement and possible expansion of a public water system and adding dry hydrants as needed.

Recommendation: Sharpsburg Borough and the fire chief should work jointly to pre-determine sites to establish drafting areas for local sources of water These sites should be identified and marked accordingly and included in the fire departments pre-planning information. Sharpsburg Borough should enter into formal agreements with landowners for operating at these sites. Dry hydrants should also be considered at these locations if practical.

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Community Risk Reduction

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- Education
- Engineering
- Enforcement Emergency Response
- Economic Impact (also referred to as economic incentives)

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The intent of the fire code is to establish the minimum requirements consistent with nationally recognized good practice for providing a reasonable level of life safety and property protection from the hazards of fire, explosion, or dangerous conditions in new and existing buildings, structures, and premises, and to provide safety to firefighters and emergency responders during emergency operations.

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state level. Only portions of the fire code are referenced by the UCC and only when it applies to construction.

Recommendation: Sharpsburg Borough should facilitate a meeting with fire officials, elected officials, and other interested parties to discuss the adoption of a comprehensive Community Risk Reduction program for the Borough. Key stakeholders include the school district and health care providers.

Public Protection Classification

Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) collects and evaluates information from communities from throughout the country regarding their structure fire suppression capabilities. This is referred to as the Public Protection Classification (PPC). The most recent report for the Sharpsburg's FPSA became effective on May 1, 2021. This area is currently classified as Class 3 with a total credit of 74.49 points awarded from a possible total of 105.50.

It is important to remember that this classification is for the borough, and while it includes the fire department, it also encompasses emergency communications and water supply.

Page 7 of the PPC report provides a review of the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS). The report shows credit for the items listed below.

- Emergency Communications: 8.88 of possible 10
- Fire Department: 31.58 of possible 50
- Water Supply: 34.69 of possible 40
- Community Risk Reduction: 4.05 of possible 5.50.
- The Borough might see significant improved credit by addressing the following areas:
- 414 Credit for Emergency Reporting (County function)
- 432 Credit for Dispatch Circuits (possibly a joint County/Municipal function)
- 561 Credit for Deployment Analysis
- 571 Credit for Company Personnel
- 581 Credit for Training
- 616 Credit for System Supply (water system)

The above referenced items might be improved by addressing certain administrative issues such as record keeping or operational issues. Examples of these items include fire company training issues and records relating to personnel and their availability. Other items may require a capital expense such as the relocation or existing fire stations and/or addition of new fire stations.

Another significant item is the capability of the water supply system and its ability to provide a reliable and sustained fire flow. This may require a detailed engineering study by the water purveyor and indicate possible needed improvements to the water distribution infrastructure.

It is important to remember that the PPC was determined with two fire stations. A change in the number and/or location of fire stations may affect future property protection classifications. Any

changes may be either a positive or negative influence. This is why the selection of a new station location must be data driven.

Questions and additional information regarding the ISO report and possible ways to improve the community's classification may be obtained by contacting their office at 800-444-4554.

Detailed documentation and records retention are critical to support the information needed for such reports.

Recommendation: The borough should meet with the fire officials and representatives of the water purveyors to discuss the findings of the ISO report and opportunities for improvement.

Deployment Options

Fire apparatus are currently located at a single fire station. Sharpsburg Borough officials must always consider the acceptable level or risk when assessing locations for the placement of fire apparatus.

In addition to apparatus type and placement, the fire chief and Sharpsburg officials should remember that the existing fire station, while reasonably well maintained, need regular maintenance and possible improvements.

While maintained and renovated, the station was never designed to meet today's standards for modern fire stations. Construction methods and older design criteria might make the stations impractical for future renovations. Historically, station locations were not strategically planned.

Options exist for Sharpsburg Borough. One is to keep the operation as it currently is with the existing fire station, operating as its own entity. While this remains an option, greater effectiveness could probably be gained by exploring other options.

For the purpose of this report, the term *fire department* refers to an entity, in this case, nonprofit corporations. The term *fire station* refers to the location where fire apparatus is housed.

Another option would be to merge fire service capabilities with neighboring communities to create a regional fire department. This would reduce duplication of services and equipment and provide a more fiscal and efficient use of personnel, equipment, and funds.

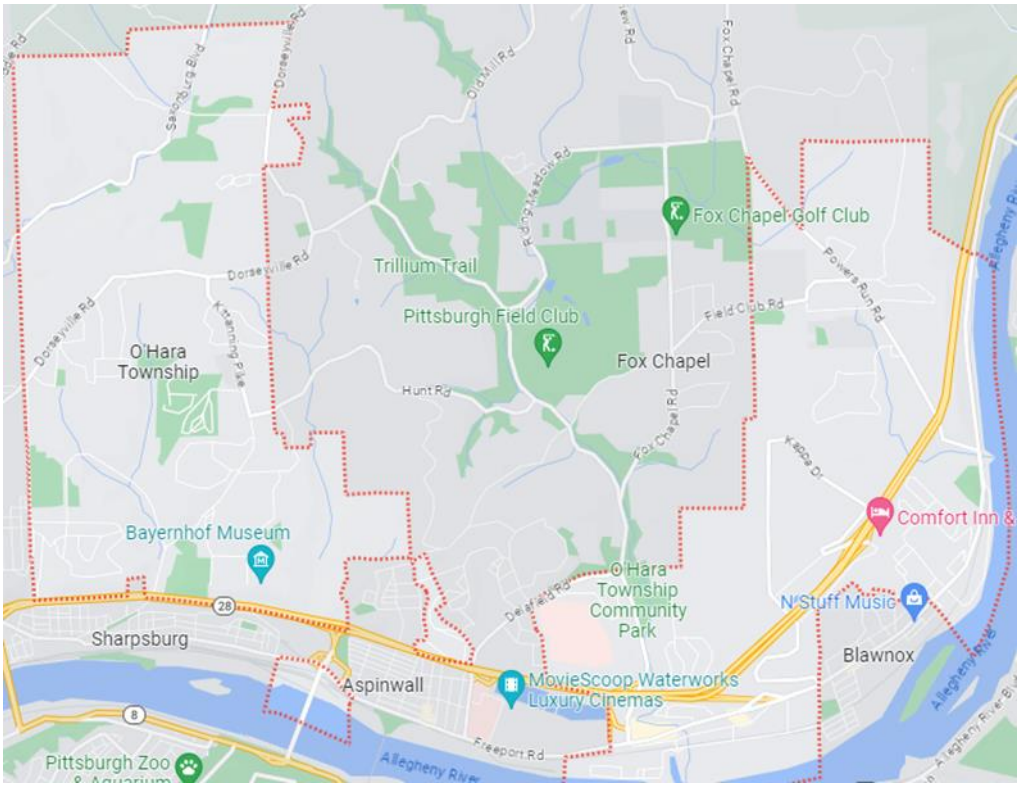
Recommendation: Data driven decision making is critical for the success of any organization. It is recommended that no decisions regarding closing* a *current fire station, or the construction of* a *new station be done until sufficient data is analyzed to support such* a *decision. The same should apply to fire apparatus as well.

Decision makers should use data from the most recent three years of operations to support such* a *decision. Doing so should be able to identify trends and demands for service.

Regional Overview

The Allegheny Valley Region is a geographic area in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania that consist of the Aspinwall Borough, Blawnox Borough, O'Hara Township, and Sharpsburg Borough. Throughout this report, it may simply be referred to as the Region. The term "Allegheny Valley Region" and "Region" may be used interchangeably throughout this report. According to U.S. Census Bureau from 2020 the region has a combined estimated population of 16,845. The regions land mass is approximately 8.84 square miles. The region is a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and agricultural properties. The participating departments all border each other along an 8-mile stretch of the Allegheny River. However, Fox Chapel is not participating in the study which creates a horseshoe shape of the region being studied.

The region is a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. The region borders the City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The region resembles Pittsburgh in several ways, including the fire protection challenges associated with a large population and infrastructure.



Authority

With respect to the legal requirements above, the elected officials of the Aspinwall Borough, Blawnox Borough, O'Hara Township, and Sharpsburg Borough must determine **"acceptable level of risk"** regarding public fire protection. As the Region is very diverse, more than one acceptable level of risk may be appropriate. This may be determined by zoning or potential land use areas.

The residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural areas might each have their own level of risk. Factors affecting this decision could include life safety issues and value of property protected, as well as the intrinsic hazard of the properties protected.

Several references are available to aid the elected officials in making this decision. These references include, but are not limited to, the Public Protection Classification Summary Report of the Insurance Services Office and information supporting their classification system; the report of the SR 60 Commission of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and various codes, standards, and recommended practices of the National Fire Protection Association. Other references are also available and should be considered as necessary.

The report of the SR 6 Commission, successor to the SR 60 Commission, may also contain new information which may be beneficial to the Municipality. This report was released on November 29, 2018 and is available at www.osfc.pa.gov.

Regional Fire Service Overview

The region currently has four (4) fire departments providing fire protection to five (4) communities.

Governance

Consolidation of fire departments requires the abolishment of political subdivision boundaries for fire departments and the unification of existing fire departments into one regional fire department. The distinctive characteristic of this method of fire protection is that the operation of the fire department is outside the direct control of any one municipality. The fire department operates under the guidance of a newly formed regional fire commission consisting of elected officials from each of the participating municipalities.

Section 5 of Article IX of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania serves as the legal and constitutional basis for consolidation of fire departments in the state. Section 5 of Article IX states:

A municipality by act of its governing body may, or upon being required by initiative and referendum in the area affected shall, cooperate or agree in the exercise of any function, power, or responsibility with or delegate or transfer any function, power or responsibility to, one or more other governmental units including other municipalities or districts, the

federal government, any other state or its governmental units, or any newly created governmental unit.

Act 180, as passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor on July 12, 1976, serves as the enabling legislation that makes cooperation of public services in the Commonwealth a legal process. Contained in the Act are the provisions for initiating the cooperation and identification of the necessary contents of the agreement.

Section 1202, clause 34 and 35 of the Borough Code; Section 1502, clause 53 and 54 of the First-Class Township Code; and Section 702, clause 40 of the Second-Class Township Code also bestow authority upon municipal governments to enter into agreements for the purpose of intergovernmental cooperation.

Governing Law

While there has been no decision to date about whether any specific law (such as the Borough Code, Township Code, Civil Service, and/or others) applies, regional fire departments have looked to such acts and codes for guidance and direction in the handling of their affairs.

However, in so doing, they have not been deemed in any fashion to have adopted or become so bound to abide by said acts and codes, by implication or past practice, unless they decide to do so. If such a decision is made, it must be stipulated within the Articles of Agreement or Charter Agreement.

Expressed Authority

The newly created regional fire commission should have the expressed authority to conduct business to include, but not limiting itself to, some or all the following:

- lease, sell, purchase real estate;
- lease, sell, purchase personal property;
- enter contracts for purchase of goods and services, and collective bargaining agreements;
- hire, fire, suspend, promote, demote, discipline, set salaries, and otherwise deal with issues involving its employees;
- serve as a hearing board for employee grievances;
- establish and maintain bank accounts and other financial accounts;
- invest and borrow monies;
- establish and fund employee benefit programs, including the pension fund, and
- delegate any of its powers, expressed or implied, to the Fire Chief or his/her second in command, at the discretion of the Regional Fire Commission.

Advantages of a Regional Fire Department

The general advantages of, and some of the more common arguments for, regional fire departments are described below. Similar issues arise regardless of the manner under which the agencies may be developed, the geographic conditions or the special composition of the area.

Improvement in the Uniformity and Consistency

Fire Department regulations and local law governing fire service practices and performance often vary from community to community. The implementation of the regional fire department requires the establishment of uniformed policies, procedures, and regulations. The resulting standardization of fire service delivery reduces citizen dissatisfaction and improves fire safety.

Improvement in the Coordination of Fire Services

Frequently, fire service delivery activities are limited by jurisdictional boundaries. In a regional fire department, geographic boundaries are extended. Under central leadership and direction, with uniformity of purpose, procedure, records keeping and policy, a regional department eliminates duplication of services and competition between local departments. This results in a more cost effective and efficient use of limited public funds.

Improvement in the Recruitment, Distribution, and Deployment of Fire Service Personnel

Recent statutory requirements regarding the selection, eligibility criteria, initial training, and certifications of firefighters have resulted in increased professionalism in the field. This has consequently resulted in higher wages, increased training costs, and competition between various fire departments in the recruitment of quality personnel.

Smaller departments, offering fewer incentives, are often at a disadvantage in the recruitment and retention of quality firefighters. Consolidation of services across a broader tax base often results in improved recruitment ability.

Fire department services should be distributed and deployed based upon justified demand for services. Small departments do not maintain the staffing levels required to meet demands. Regional departments have greater flexibility in the scheduling and distribution of personnel necessary to meet service demands, due to increased staffing levels. Where municipalities may currently not be able to provide any paid personnel or part-time services at best, consolidation may permit several local governments to employ full-time firefighters through cooperative financing.

Improvement in Training and Personnel Efficiency

Providing suitable and necessary fire service training is significant in the delivery of adequate fire services. Annual in-service training should include a minimum of thirty-two hours of classroom study, annual renewal of CPR and first aid, emergency vehicle drivers training, and training in hazardous materials operations. At the current time, the minimum required time for training is determined by the local fire chief. Small departments find it difficult to meet training

requirements and still maintain appropriate staffing levels. When sending a firefighter for training it often means the reduction in the number of firefighters available to answer calls. Consolidation often means that more personnel will be available to attend needed training. In many cases, local firefighters can be certified as instructors, thereby reducing the need to send firefighters away from the department for training.

Improved Management and Supervision

In many smaller fire departments, the Fire Chief and supervisory officers often function in the capacity of firefighter, with little time remaining for administration and supervision. They are unable to devote the necessary time to develop and maintain sound management systems. Consolidated departments, depending on size, may, permit the Fire Chief to become a full-time manager, improving the overall function of the department. Consolidated departments are generally better able to offer the salaries and benefit packages, which attract high caliber candidates for the position of chief. Increased efficiency in fire administration, management and supervision is only one positive result of fire department consolidation or regionalization.

Reduced Costs

Regionalization of any public-sector service usually results in decreased cost to the individual municipalities involved if the municipality already provided that service. This is nowhere truer than in the area of the fire service. There are established minimum costs involved in the development and continued funding of any fire department. These costs are centered in the fire stations, communications, vehicle fleet, office equipment, records system, and administrative services. There are usually many instances where closely adjoining departments duplicate infrastructure and support services. The duplication of support personnel is also a major consideration. Consolidation results in decreased individual costs by reducing duplication of infrastructure and support requirements within the proposed service area. A study previously conducted by the former Department of Community Affairs, now DCED, has indicated in nine out of ten situations and, if properly managed, *regional departments save an average of 25% when compared to traditional fire departments.*

Disadvantages of a Regional Fire Department

Arguments against consolidation of fire departments are basically the same. Similar issues arise regardless of the way the departments may be developed the geographic conditions or the special composition of the area.

Loss of Local Fire Department Services

Firefighters in Pennsylvania, as well as in every other state in the United States, routinely perform many duties, which are not typically considered to be a fire service function. These duties are generally traditional in many communities and were assigned to the fire department by default - there was basically no one else available at the time. These miscellaneous duties are still very much a part of the everyday job of a local firefighter. Public service details, flood

mitigation, fire code enforcement, and issuing permits and licenses are some of the extra tasks "inherited" by local fire departments. Typically, when consolidation occurs, the fire department discontinues many of these tasks at the local level to allow firefighters to focus on response, training, fire prevention, code enforcement and more fire service-related functions.

Loss of Local Control

In the traditional fire service delivery situation, where each municipality creates and maintains its own fire department, the entire governing body is often directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the fire department. Regional fire departments are governed by a fire commission, which provides broad policy guidance to an administrative fire chief, who is then directly responsible for all day-to-day operations of the department. The fire chief has broad authority and responsibility and is accountable to the commission. The commission consists of an established number of representatives from each participating community. Direct political and personal control over the department is considerably reduced.

Loss of Citizen Contact

Occasionally there is a concern that the citizens of a participating community will not have as close a relationship with the members of a regional fire department as they do with their "own" firefighters. If this situation develops, it will be temporary and will exist only until the firefighters become acquainted with their "new" area. Furthermore, many of the firefighters in a regional fire department will have previously answered calls for service, provided back-up, or participated in community functions in each of the other municipalities. With this being the situation now in these communities, the transition to a regional department should proceed very easily and with no major concerns for the firefighters or the citizens.

Loss of Position

Members of the local fire department, current chiefs and elected officials may initially fear a loss of position if regionalization efforts prevail. While it is certainly true that every current chief can't retain the top position in the consolidated department and that some officers may choose not to participate in the new venture, regionalization is not intended to eliminate individual positions. Such concerns can be addressed through negotiations and discussion.

Fire Department Budget Information

As provided by Aspinwall, Blawnox, O'Hara Township, and Sharpsburg, their combined municipal fire department budget information for the year of 2022 is listed below. Their combined total for the year is $872,336. However, these totals do not include donation and fundraising amounts.

- Aspinwall Borough 2022 Fire Budget $209,388
- Blawnox Borough 2022 Fire Budget $54,000
- O'Hara Township 2022 Fire Budget $472,303
- Sharpsburg Borough 2022 Fire Budget $136,645

Fire Statistics and Data

There are several methods of measuring and evaluating fire service delivery in a community. The most common and universal is participation in the Insurance Services Office (ISO). The ISO establish a standardized method of collecting and categorizing fire service delivery information and assigns a Public Protection Classification (PPC) rating to the community. The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) which is a voluntary reporting standard that fire departments use to uniformly report on the full range of their activities, from fire to emergency medical services to severe weather and natural disasters. In addition, the Pennsylvania Fire Information Reporting System (PennFIRS), is the state system that fire departments use to report and manage the flow of incidents into the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). The primary objectives are to inform the Governor, Legislature, other government officials and the public concerning the fire service-related problems in Pennsylvania and to provide fire department administrators with reliable fire statistics for administrative and operational purposes.

Although not designed to be used to compare one department against another, many fire departments do use the ISO as a benchmarking process and compare their PPC rating with that of other similar communities. An ISO fire rating is a score provided to fire departments and insurance companies by the Insurance Services Office. The score reflects how prepared a community and area is for fires. While it mainly focuses on the local fire departments and water supply, there are other factors that contribute to an area's score. A high or low ISO rating by itself is not a valid tool to measure the effectiveness of a fire department, but it may be used to help determine the number of fire apparatus, firefighters, or fire stations, needed in a community. An ISO score has the power to affect the insurance premium of every homeowner in the area and can even cause an insurer to deny you coverage in some circumstances. The ISO cites several factors that affect the effectiveness of fire service in any municipality. These factors include:

• Population density and the age or degree of infrastructure and buildings.

• The overall health of a fire department is assessed in this category, based on the number of departments in the area. In addition, the ISO looks at firefighter training, number of firefighters and volunteers, and maintenance and testing of pumps and other crucial equipment.

• ISO evaluates each community based on its water supply. During the rating process, the organization looks at certain factors, like the number of fire hydrants in the area, the amount of water available after daily consumption and whether the community has enough water and water access for fire departments to use for fire suppression.

• ISO evaluates how well a fire department receives and responds to emergency calls. Some of the specific factors that contribute to PPC ratings include the number of agents in the emergency call center and the number of computer-aided dispatch (CAD) facilities in the community.

• ISO evaluates community risk reduction and any extra practices a community develops toward fire prevention and response are recognized in this category. It includes fire safety education, fire prevention techniques and fire investigation (ISO considers these points to be bonus points).

• Administrative record keeping of the department.

As of the year 2022 the following PPC scores were assigned to each fire department:

Municipality	Last Rating	PPC
• Aspinwall Borough	2021	4
• Blawnox Borough	2015	6
• O'Hara Township	1994	5
• Sharpsburg Borough	2021	3

Given the current PPC rating the region would have an average rating of 4. However, this rating could become higher with regional focus.

Currently, the fire departments within the region respond to 1,786 incidents in 2022. However, many of these incidents maybe overlapping due to mutual aid response amongst the four departments. However, because of the many variations which always occur when reporting incidents and, more specifically, the many other non-emergency calls for service that occur, this study will instead only use the "Calls for Service" data provided by the departments.

Projected Fire Department Staffing and Service Needs

Fire Department personnel needs are determined by population served. The workload of a fire department is often determined by the population served. It is necessary that appropriate staffing levels be established before making any decision to consolidate fire departments. Once the number of firefighters necessary to adequately serve the area under consideration is established, then it's possible to determine how much it will cost each community to become part of a regional fire department endeavor, how much service is anticipated, and what type of services each can expect to receive from the new regional fire department.

The formula used by the International City Managers Association (ICMA) to determine fire department personnel needs is 1 fulltime firefighter per 1,000 residents. The ICMA formula has been used and applied extensively throughout the nation and found to be very reliable. However, like most situations where an overall standard is applied to a unique and specific set of circumstances, it is subject to error and should not be considered infallible.

In addition, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has established two standards to address the staffing levels of career and volunteer fire departments. NFPA 1710 Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments. NFPA 1710 specifies requirements for effective and efficient organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by career fire departments to protect citizens and the occupational safety and health of fire department employees. NFPA 1710 requires at least four career firefighters per engine or pumper.

NFPA 1720 Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire

Department. NFPA 1720 specifies requirements for effective and efficient organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by volunteer and combination fire departments to protect citizens and the occupational safety and health of fire department employees. NFPA 1720 calls for a minimum of four firefighters on-site before starting an interior attack on a structure fire.

When applied, the calculations derived from the ICMA formula only determines the number of firefighters who would be assigned in the stations and needed to handle calls and incidents. It does not include administrators, supervisors, or any other required specialist positions.

When forming a full service, professional agency, it is wise to consider this fact when deciding on staffing levels and including extra manpower for administrative and supervisory duties is recommended, even when firefighters assigned to these duties must also work in the stations.

Determining Fire Department Manpower Needs

Step 1

Determine the combined population of the region. Based on most recent United States Census data the population for the region is 16,845.

Step 2

Divide the population by 1000 and multiply by 1.

- 16,845/1000 = 16.845 x 1 = 16.845 firefighters

Step 3

Determine firefighter shift schedule. The most common fire department shift schedule is 24 hours on duty followed by 48 hours off duty.

Step 4

Divide the required number of on duty firefighters by the number of shifts.

- 16.845/3 = firefighters per shift = 6 per shift

This does not include administrators, supervisors, or other specialists, only firefighting personnel. However, to create a full-service regional fire department, the staffing analysis in this study includes a recommendation for an eventual total compliment of 18 fulltime firefighters, one full-time fire chief, and one administrative assistant. In addition, the career staffing should be supplemented by paid on call and volunteer personnel to solve multiple future issues.

- Provide a recruitment tool for career staff from within the department.
- Generate interest from younger generations to enter the fire service.
- Provide manpower at large scale incidents that can quickly overwhelm on duty personnel.

However, many regional departments cannot support the cost of adding fulltime firefighters until much later in the process. This is why it is imperative to create a comprehensive recruitment and retention program to maintain a volunteer fire service. There are many federal funding opportunities in the form of grants specific to volunteer recruitment and retention.

The participating municipalities have adopted a fire code. The fire code provides for the safety of the residents and visitors to the region, as well as its firefighters.

The International Fire Code (IFC) is a model code that regulates minimum fire safety requirements for new and existing buildings, facilities, storage, and processes. The code addresses fire prevention, fire protection, life safety, and safe storage and use of hazardous materials in new and existing buildings, facilities, and processes. The IFC provides a total approach in controlling all buildings and sites, regardless of the hazard being indoors or outdoors.

A properly adopted and administered fire code is the foundation for fire and life safety in every jurisdiction. The intent of the fire code is to establish the minimum requirements consistent with nationally recognized good practice for providing a reasonable level of life safety and property protection from the hazards of fire, explosion, or dangerous conditions in new and existing buildings, structures, and premises, and to provide safety to firefighters and emergency responders during emergency operations.

Portions of the above references are furnished from the International Code Council.

Municipal officials should note that the fire code is not a replacement for the building code. Both codes are designed to complement each other. In Pennsylvania, the building code is adopted as part of the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code (UCC). The fire code is not adopted at the state level. Only portions of the fire code are referenced by the UCC and only when it applies to construction.

It is recommended that if the fulltime fire service model is pursued that on duty personnel perform annual fire safety inspections of all commercial buildings and multi-family dwellings within the confines of the region. The implementation of such program will increase safety and generate revenue to supplement the cost of the regional fire department.

An additional recommendation that should be explored in the near future is having the regional fire department establish an emergency medical service division to provide all EMS services to the region. This recommendation would require an additional feasibility study by an EMS provider subject matter expert. However, Parkview EMS (Owned and Operated by Parkview VFD) is already providing EMS service to most of the communities participating in this study.

Proposed Organization of the Regional Fire Department

As previously stated, it is recommended that the regional fire department be developed. A fulltime fire chief, and an administrative assistant. It is also recommended that if a regional department is formed, that it be governed by a five member "Board of Fire Commissioners" and that those be comprised of elected officials from each municipality. The terms of the board, along with the final number of members, should be specified under the "Articles of Agreement" between the municipalities. As mentioned, the new commission members should be chosen only from elected officials. It is also recommended that they be selected for a minimum three-year term on the regional fire commission. Again however, the final numbers and make-up of the Regional Fire Commission should be determined by the participating municipalities.

In reviewing current fire department facilities, the following recommendations have been made.

- Close the current Aspinwall Fire Stations and build a new station located at vacant property located centrally to both Aspinwall and Sharpsburg.
- Close the O'Hara Township Station
- Build an O'Hara Township Station in the Northeastern area of O'Hara Township
- Close Sharpsburg Fire Department and consolidate equipment with Aspinwall in a newly built centralized station.
- Keep Blawnox Fire Station at current location. Explore options to consolidate both Blawnox stations into one.

Current Combined Fire Station Count = 7

Proposed Combined Fire Station Count = 4

The fire chief in a regional fire department has many more administrative duties than his or her counterparts in single agency departments in cities, boroughs, and townships. In addition to planning, directing, and supervising the activities of the department, the Chief of a regional department is also responsible for the financial affairs of the agency. He or she monitors the departments accounts, cash flow and disbursements, and oversees the payroll process. The Chief may also be involved in the administration of the health care plan, department insurances, and the pension plan. Every effort must be made by the Regional Fire Commission to select a Chief with the necessary administrative fire experience, along with the fiscal management skills, to oversee this type of agency. The administrative assistant should also be selected with specific financial skills needed to assist the Chief with many of those administrative functions, including payroll, accounts payable, insurance and budgeting.

Recommended Fire Apparatus (Does not include various support trailers and river rescue equipment)

Current Combined Apparatus Count = 19

Proposed Combined Apparatus Count = 13

Front Line

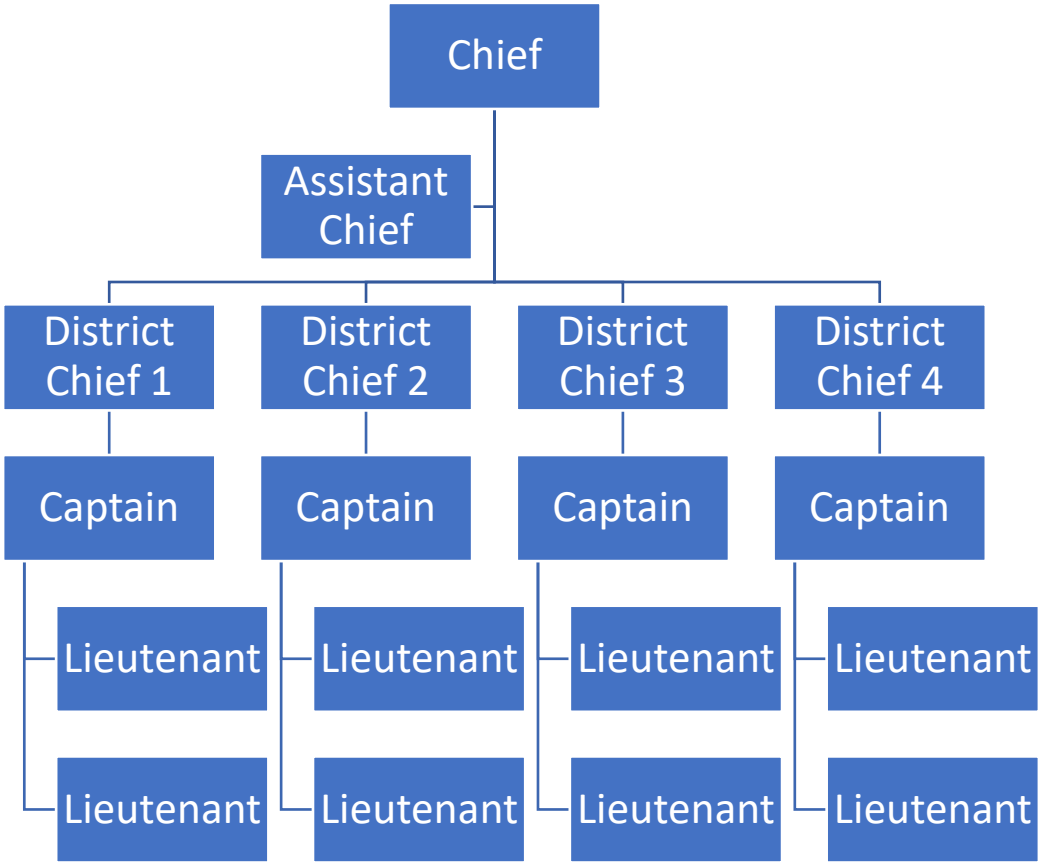
- (4) Engines
- (2) Aerials
- (1) Heavy Rescue
- (4) Squads
- (1) Chief's Unit

Reserve

- (1) Engine

The cost savings in reduction of apparatus, reduction in duplication of equipment, and facilities would equate to fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers while still providing adequate fire protection to the communities.

Regional Fire Department Rank Structure



Funding Options

Typically, services of this type are funded through a system of general fund revenue and appropriations to a designated agency or by means of a line-item budget if the services are provided directly by the municipality.

Additional sources of funding may be available from the provisions of an Emergency and Municipal Services Tax and/or a fire tax.

Close and careful consideration needs to be given to taxing options. Municipalities throughout the state are challenged with the lack of funding options. The Municipal officials may want to consider meeting with elected officials at the state level to discuss and advocate for a wider range of local options for funding emergency services.

User fees, such as those generated from the permitting and inspection process of a Fire Code may provide additional sources of revenue.

Proposed Cost Distribution

There are several methods for the distribution of cost once a budget has been established for a regional fire department. Most often in regional departments where the municipalities are alike, the costs are divided equally or proportionally according to population and the proposed required staffing and service levels. Some other alternative cost distribution methods are described later in this report. Other factors relating to revenue or use may be incorporated into a formula to achieve costs that are shared in the most equitable manner. Some of these other factors that are considered are assessed market valuation of real estate, road mileage, square mileage and total taxes collected. Other formulas, some that have been used by other regional departments, include looking at the average of certain verifiable categories including population, population density, square miles, road miles, and total reported incidents. The municipalities in this study are somewhat different but are also very similar in many other ways.

Therefore, after thorough assessment, the best option for the most equitable cost distribution would be to recommend distributing the costs based on a population percentage basis only. From a strictly financial way, this is a more reasonable method for the cost distribution. However, even though this method seems fair and equitable, it does not consider the geographic size, or the population density of each community which does create somewhat different characteristics and some aspects that may be required for each. Those additional aspects may have a future impact on the amount of fire services required in each community. If future discrepancies do develop, some other formulas, such as the ones previously described, can be implemented to address them at that time.

Nevertheless, the population method, at least initially, does seem to provide a fair and equitable way of cost sharing. By using a common incident reporting system in the new department, this formula can, and should, be examined in the 3rd or 4th quarter of each year to see if these costs would need to be adjusted, up or down, for any of the municipalities. Additional items that could

also be examined may include Earned Income Tax rates (EIT), property assessments, total numbers of calls for service, and specific numbers and types of reported incidents.

As previously discussed, the immediate concern after a budget has been developed, is the method of determining how much of the total cost will be paid by each municipality. Some of the other more common factors which have been used in developing a cost distribution program for other regional departments are as follows:

1. Population

Population is often used as the sole factor for cost distribution. The primary responsibility of any police department is to protect the public and render service. Population is a very reliable factor, especially if the U.S. census figures are current and used. It is important that the source for population figures used to determine cost distribution be reliable.

2. Density and Mileage

Population, when combined with land area and/or road mileage adds another dimension to the impact of people on fire services. The distribution of population over an area (density factor) can directly affect the needs of that area. The miles of road, state or local that must be traveled to serve the residents, also directly impacts upon the department.

3. Property Value

Assessed valuation of real property can be used in conjunction with population as a formula for cost distribution. The combination links two components that are any fire department's primary goal: to protect life and property. Assessed market value is determined at the local level through county assessment.

4. Revenue and Taxes Collected

The percentage of distribution of total municipal revenues and taxes collected reflect the wealth of a community.

With all the above methods of cost distribution, the main point that must be kept in mind is that the levels of service are commensurate to the share of percent of budget being paid by each municipality.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our analysis of the data and information obtained throughout this study strongly supports our recommendation that the municipalities should combine their resources and create a new regional fire department. The consolidation of the fire departments for these municipalities will result in the following major improvements in the delivery of all future fire protection.

- The ability to establish a uniform and consistent fire service delivery program throughout this entire region which includes these four municipalities.
- The ability to utilize fire service personnel more effectively by staffing and deploying firefighters based upon geography, workload, calls for service times, etc.
- The ability to provide more efficient and effective fire protection for all citizens by eliminating the duplication or differences in any services, facilities, and/or items of equipment that may currently exist amongst the municipalities.

The following facts regarding the general consolidation of fire departments reinforces our recommendation for the consolidation of these four departments.

- In 2005, the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee released the HR 148 Report the Feasibility of Regionalizing Pennsylvania's Volunteer Fire Companies. This detailed and informative document provides an overview of volunteer fire services in Pennsylvania, identifies their common problems, and challenges, and analyzes regionalization as a potential solution. Examples and case studies are provided, as well as suggestions for building partnerships designed to increase recruitment, retention, and other operational efficiencies. Through voluntary mergers and consolidations, fire departments and emergency service providers may become more sustainable.
- Declining volunteerism and related recruitment and retention problems plague many of the state's volunteer fire companies. The number of active firefighters in Pennsylvania declined from an estimated 300,000 in 1976 to 152,000 in 1985 and to about 72,000 today (a loss during the period of about 8,000 volunteers annually).
- The Governor's Center for Local Government Services provides a full range of vital programs, training, and services to municipal governments to resolve problems at the local level. The Governor's Center for Local Government Services also offers technical and financial assistance to support regionalization efforts, and continually recognizes successful ventures to encourage more fire departments and emergency service providers to consider regionalization.

We commend the elected officials and firefighters from the participating municipalities for looking into the possibility of consolidation of fire departments. We know that intergovernmental cooperation in municipal fire service is probably more difficult to achieve than any other municipal service due to the political and social pressures linked to the desire for

local self-government offers the most significant barrier to the coordination and consolidation of fire departments.

Similar internal opposition has occurred with nearly every major change in the fire service since the turn of the century. Today, testing and selection policies, fire academy training, and modern telecommunication systems which dispatch fire departments for entire counties are taken for granted as indispensable to a modern fire department, but all these developments were accepted only after long political and economic disputes. If the municipalities continue to be interested in a regional fire department after reviewing this study, then we recommend that public meetings be set up to explain the proposal to all residents and firefighters. This report does not cover all the issues regarding the implementation of a regional fire department but emphasizes that the municipalities can contact the Governors Center for Local Government Services to assist them through this process.

The municipalities will have to address other issues such as the final selection of a fire chief, development of the articles of agreement, future pension matters, facility location and/or any needed improvements, and the negotiating of a new fire department labor contract. However, in our view, enough information has been developed and provided in this report to allow the interested municipalities to make an informed decision on whether to continue with this project.

Recommended Options for Future Fire Protection

Based on the results of this study, the following options and recommendations are made for each municipality regarding their continuing need to provide quality fire protection.

- Establish a new regional fire department between the municipalities as per the general recommendations of this study, or…
- Remain in operation as, at the present time, with each municipality operating its own separate fire department.
- After formation and some initial years of successful operation, consider expanding the regional fire department by combining with additional municipalities with existing fire departments, or…
- Provide coverage to adjoining communities on a contractual, fee for service, or expanded regional basis.

The recommendation within this report is based on best practices for fire service delivery while keeping the impact to taxpayers in mind. Again, the establishment of a combination regional fire department would provide the best possible fire service delivery model to the region. The recommendations contained within should be used as a guide for each community to use towards setting goals to eventually reach regionalization.

Summary

This report is intended to be a tool to help elected officials make informed decisions regarding public fire protection for their municipality and the region.

It is important to remember that each municipality, not the individual fire departments and companies, is responsible for public fire protection.

The focus of fire protection often reflects the ability of the fire departments to respond to and extinguish fires. Comprehensively, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the prevention of fire and injuries. A Community Risk Reduction program incorporates the elements of prevention, emergency response, and the economic impact to the community by a determination of the acceptable level of risk for the community.

Adoption and administration of a fire code is a critical component of a comprehensive community risk reduction program.

Modern fire organizations are often "all hazard" response agencies. Within its scope, this is true for the fire departments serving the Region. These fire departments do much more than respond to fires, although there may be insufficient information to document this.

The biggest challenges for the fire departments appear to be staffing and funding. This is also the case for most fire service organizations across the country.

The existing system of an all-volunteer staff offers an exceptional value to the Region. As volunteers continue to decrease in number, the fire departments and/or the municipalities should be prepared to supplement the existing volunteer staff with paid personnel once an adequate staffing plan is devised.

This should include the employment of a full-time person as the head for a newly created regional fire department, with the title of Fire Chief.

Regional Fire Department Implementation Flow Chart

Consultant Information

Charles J. Miller served as the consultant for this project. In this role, he served as subject matter expert and overall project facilitator.

Mr. Miller has over thirty-two years of combined experience in public safety. He has served as a volunteer technical rescue team chief and has over twenty-two years of experience as a career firefighter, progressing through the ranks from recruit to Captain. He currently works as the Chief Fire Marshal for Penn Hills, Pennsylvania which is the second largest community in Allegheny County.

He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Fire Science from Columbia Southern University, Master's degree in Organizational Leadership with a concentration in Emergency Management from Waldorf University and is completing his Doctorate of Education through Liberty University.

He is a nationally and internationally certified Fire Officer IV and is a court recognized expert in the fields of fire suppression, fire investigation, and fire prevention.

Chief Miller is an instructor for several colleges and an adjunct professor for several universities. He is nationally and internationally certified Fire Instructor III. He has also served as a subject matter expert for curriculum and program development.

In addition to teaching, he provides consulting services to emergency service organizations, government and public agencies, and nonprofit organizations throughout the United States.