

Review of Smart Practice application and  
guidance for a youth fire service program  
in the Town of Coventry

# Final Report

Town of Coventry

Fire and Emergency Medical  
Services

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## Introduction

The Town of Coventry entered into a professional services agreement with the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) to evaluate elements of the Town's fire departments and to provide assistance with strategic planning for the two fire departments in Coventry: the Coventry Volunteer Fire Association (CVFA) commonly referred to as South Coventry; and the North Coventry Volunteer Fire Department (NCVFD).

The project team for CRCOG consisted of three individuals: the CRCOG Public Safety and Homeland Security Planner, the CRCOG Regional Training Coordinator, and the CRCOG Training and Project Coordinator. Combined, the team has extensive public safety experience including executive level fire service officer, national/state/local code compliance management, Emergency Management Program administration, EMS program management, fire service training, and special operations program management. Within CRCOG all three maintain collateral duties for managing aspects of emergency preparedness in the Capitol Region – Metropolitan Medical Response System, the Urban Area Security Initiative, and the Capitol Region Natural Hazards Mitigation Planning program.

It should be noted with emphasis that this project is the third such fire department study conducted for the Town of Coventry in less than twenty (20) years. This is unusual given the size of the community. Fire departments, in conjunction with municipal leadership, traditionally have third parties undertake this type of review when there has been a paradigm change or to establish a baseline service assessment in developing a 25 year capital investment program. Paradigm change would include, but not be limited to the following examples:

- Establishing a new program or service such as an EMS/Ambulance division
- Department consolidation – contracting multiple departments into one
- Department expansion – creating a new department
- Technology / science advances dictating department / program review leading to service adjustments
- Moving from a volunteer department to a career, or combination department
- Service needs review leading to deployment adjustments

The type of study summarized herein would not normally be considered as the annual review or plan update or the vehicle for tracking and monitoring a strategic plan. Its purpose is rather to set the baseline – the initial program direction and milestones against which progress is measured via periodic reviews (traditionally at 1, 3, 5 and 10 year periods) and to identify the financial commitments needed.

The two (2) previous studies were reviewed as part of this project and provide excellent insight for a strategic plan:

- Town of Coventry Fire-Rescue & Emergency Medical Service Study  
*A.N. Patrizz, Associates-December 1995*
- Fire Department Strategic Plan – Town of Coventry, Connecticut  
*Matrix Consulting Group –February, 2008*

A primary impetus for conducting this third study arose from allegations of inappropriate conduct leading to the arrest of two CVFA fire company officers. There is no study that can prevent the bad actions of others. The first intent of this study is to identify standards: processes and procedures to be implemented that should be understood and adhered to by all. The second intent is to define a process

to effectively address issues, or actions of an individual, in those instances where standards have not been met, or procedures have not been followed.

The Scope of Work for this project is as follows:

Document research may include but not be limited to:

1. Review Matrix Consulting Group Fire Department Strategic Plan (2008)<sup>1</sup>
  - a. Budget documents from the Town, CVFA, and NCVFD, procurement processes and financial requirements Town ordinances, contracts with or for the CVFA, and the NCVFD. Review Town finance documents as it pertains to the operations of the CVFA, and the NCVFD.
2. By-Laws for CVFA and NCVFD, any documents serving as a charter, rules of practice, code of ethics, and member requirements; e.g.
  - a. EMS service delivery
  - b. Volunteer remuneration
3. Review any other appropriate strategic planning documents for the CVFA, and the NCVFD
4. Any surviving letters/memorandum of agreement, or oral understandings pertaining to delivery of fire, EMS and other associated services

Personnel interviews may include but not be limited to:

1. End state desires with core management teams for both the CVFA, the NCVFD, and the Town
  - a. Could include civilian representatives
  - b. One on One if necessary and as appropriate
2. Conduction of a SWOT, (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) for CVFA, and NCFD leadership
  - a. If necessary SWOT validation with fire department members
3. Appropriate Subject Matter Experts as necessary

Standards and practice reviews will include but not be limited to:

1. Accepted standards and practices detailed within appropriate National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) documents
2. CT Commission Fire Prevention and Control
3. Applicable Connecticut General Statutes and regulations
4. Validated fire service management best practices
5. Leadership development

Project documentation will include:

1. Report of findings
  - a. SWOT and SWOT analysis
2. Development of a “system wide” Strategic Plan
  - a. Recommendations for enhancing specific and quantified strengths, and corrective actions for improvement areas, including identifying potential impacts on the CVFA, the NCVFD, and the Town
  - b. Develop an Improvement Actions Plan with timeline and responsible party assignment
  - c. Uniform By-Law applications
    - i. Volunteer pay – system of equity

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<sup>1</sup> The CRCOG project team also used the *Patrizz report for reference purposes*

## ii. Strengthened Code of Conduct/Ethics

To date, the following project reports have been submitted to the Town:

- SWOT – May 2013<sup>2</sup>
- Interim Report – Junior Fire Fighter Program – May 2013<sup>3</sup>

### Town Demographics

Coventry is located in the South Central portion of Tolland County, Connecticut, approximately 20 miles west of Hartford, the state's capitol. It has a population in July 2013 of 12,573, representing a 25% growth since 1990 and a 9% growth since 2000. Coventry would be considered on the edge of a rural / suburban community with a commute time of 25 to 40 minutes to the larger community employment locations. The Town is 37.7 square miles with a population density of 335 per square mile, considered to be very low in accordance with US Census Bureau data. Almost 98% of current residents have a high school education or higher, with 28% having an Undergraduate Degree and 12% holding a Graduate or Professional Degree. The Town's population is expected to average an approximate 0.9% growth through 2016 (Connecticut Economic Resource Center, 2012).

There is nothing in the Town's demographics that would suggest the need for any significant change in the Town's approach to public safety planning as it pertains to needs of its residents. In order to accomplish this, the Town has to have the ability to perform internal or facilitated evaluations and to acquire adequate resources to implement its strategic plan over the next 25 years. The median age of 34 to 35 years indicates that Coventry will not face significant aging population needs any of which can be addressed through normal program review and adjustments. The unknowns include effects of crime and commercial growth within the Town if it experiences urban creep into the community. All of these are important factors as a community re-evaluates its needs and how to address them.

The Town is served by two (2) volunteer fire departments with members committed and dedicated to their respective volunteer departments. Additionally, the Coventry Volunteer Fire Association, Inc. provides ambulance service to the community and both departments maintain Emergency Medical Responders who respond to Emergency Medical Service needs in Coventry.

### Executive Summary

Approximately 69% of firefighters in the United States are volunteers<sup>4</sup> (756,450 out of 1,100,450). Further, of the 30,145 fire departments in the US, 20,200 are all volunteer; 5,530 are mostly volunteer; 1,865 are mostly career; and 2,550 are all career. The cost effectiveness of a volunteer fire service for small rural or suburban communities such as Coventry cannot be overlooked. However, regardless of the size of a community, all residents expect public safety to be of paramount importance to the Town's leadership, right along with maintaining low property taxes. As diverse and unique as volunteer fire departments may be, the approaches to managing a fire department in today's world do follow a

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<sup>2</sup> Included as Attachment 1

<sup>3</sup> Updated and incorporated into Final Report – Junior Fire Fighter Program Section

<sup>4</sup> National Volunteer Fire Council – Volunteer Fire Service Fact Sheet

common theme, most of which is driven by standards. These standards and/or regulations may be promulgated by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), or Federal or State Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). They cover all aspects of fire department operations, training, certifications, and requirements which apply to the fire service, whether career, combination or volunteer departments. These standards create the environment for how fire personnel are trained and what they must do to maintain qualifications/certifications, as well as providing management principles for the fire service. It is these same standards which serve as the basis for recommendations in this report.

A SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats<sup>5</sup>) analysis was conducted with the Executive Boards of the CVFD and the NCVFD. The Executive Boards are made up of the department's fire officers, and the corporation officers of the Coventry Volunteer Fire Association, Inc., and the North Coventry Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. Each department SWOT was conducted separately and the final SWOT was disseminated as one document (May 2013).

The Town's administration must recognize that the two fire departments represent a corps of proud and dedicated service providers. Volunteers provide great value to their community, both financially and by inspiration. Currently the Town's expenditures for fire and EMS are in line, and in some cases represent a lower per taxpayer cost, when compared to similar sized communities in CT.

In the process of developing this report and its recommendations, the project team met with CVFA and NCVFD officers on six (6) occasions to conduct the SWOT or to solicit information regarding specific requirements. They also met with the Coventry Town Council and had a number of meetings with the Town Manager and designated staff. The project team reviewed material as described in the Scope of Work, as well as comparable community data. Comparable communities included municipalities that have volunteer Fire-EMS departments, are facing or have faced the same challenges, and manage a Junior Fire Fighter/Cadet Program.

In the formation of its recommendations, the project team researched what it terms "Smart" Practices, meaning those program applications from other fire departments that have been successful for their communities not only in CT but throughout the US. They also researched standards and regulations promulgated by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and applicable Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations. Further, resource material included studies and reports published by or for the fire service, as well as subject matter expert findings. It will be up to the Town of Coventry to review the findings of this study and determine what is "best" for its Fire and EMS services, as it builds a solid foundation for the future.

Change is inevitable, and the only real progress comes through that change. It is just a matter of when and in what form the needed change is manifested. If maintaining the status quo is the objective then no, or minimal, substantive changes will be made. If the Town seeks to set a foundation for the future, then the Town will need to assert itself and leverage the need of the many vs. the interests of individual departments.

Managing any fire department requires good leaders, along with that singular chain of command that is respected by all department members and by the policy/decision makers who make up the community's leadership. Strong leaders - well qualified not only in fire ground operations but also in department management practices - are not easily found in smaller volunteer fire services. The time, energy and knowledge required for today's fire and EMS services make it harder and harder to

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<sup>5</sup> Attachment 1

effectively fill the roles of department Chief and all Chief Officers extending down through the rank of Company Officer.

A crucial issue which has created the need for Coventry to assess the its Fire and EMS delivery is the lack of consistent, reliable leadership practices with Town participation in the management of the fire departments and in the selection process of its fire company officers. Volunteer does not mean “free” when applied to volunteer fire departments. Towns appropriate funds to fire department operations and also maintain Capital Investment programs for apparatus and facilities. Further, volunteer fire fighters are considered agents, or employees, of the town in their official fire department capacity for workers compensation purposes. As such Towns cannot simply stand back and abdicate their responsibilities when it comes to the management of so valuable a resource.

**Recommended courses of action for the Town and Fire Department strategic plan are as follows:**

- Include the two previous Fire Department studies/reports when assessing this report
- Create an Administrative Chief Fire Official to manage town wide Fire-EMS services (Meets a minimum of NFPA 1021 Level II)
  - Review current CVFD, NCVFD Standard Operating Guidelines and develop one set of Fire Department operations guidelines/procedures for both departments
- Implement a single/unified Fire Department command structure
  - Enhance town wide Fire Department Officer minimum qualifications (Meets a minimum of NFPA 1021 Level I)
    - Cease “election” of Fire Department Officers by popular vote
    - Implement testing/assessment center and appointing process for Fire Department Officers with Town oversight
    - Implement development program for Fire Department Officers – following NFPA 1021
- Implement a single training program for CVFA and NCVFD
  - Work with CT Fire Academy for development to include Fire Training Officer-NFPA 1041 Level I
- Refine budget and procurement processes for fire departments to include:
  - Single budget for Fire Department operations
  - Single contract for apparatus and facility maintenance
  - Approved purchase requisitions by Town prior to issuance of purchase order
- Improve current process for processing fire fighter discipline issues and grievances
- Consolidate both Junior Fire Fighter Programs into a single town wide program
  - Strengthen Town oversight of Junior Fire Fighter Program to include participation by the Towns Board of Education/School Department
- Implement standard town-wide payment system for calls, training, and drill activities
  - Eliminate current Fire Fighter point system
- Establish / enhance health and safety committee for OSHA compliance issues
- Implement an “All Call” response system
  - Eliminate separate tone system for the two departments
  - Implement EMS call system utilizing resources from both departments
- Enhance Code of Conduct/Ethics for Fire Department(s)
- CVFA, Inc. relinquish financial management and revenue recovery of CVFA ambulance service to the Town
  - Establish dedicated Town budget line item from revenue recovery for Fire-EMS use only

Although not indicated above as a recommendation, it is obvious that all but one of the recommendations would be either accomplished directly or made easier with the operational consolidation of both the CVFA and the NCVFD into a single fire department. To this point the Volunteer Fireman's Insurance Services, Inc. (VFIS) concludes that *"Consolidation can be a viable option which should be looked upon as a beneficial alternative to enable improved use of scarce resources, flexibility of staff, equipment and dollars, stronger internal programs , and increased opportunities to expand services, and/or expand"*<sup>6</sup>. Each department can maintain its autonomy through its respective department corporations for any and all purposes that do not impact on the management, training, response, and maintenance of "fire department operations". This means that functionally, as emergency response entities, they are managed as a single organization. The consolidation of the two fire departments should focus on service provision and the economy of having one program versus two or more, and not on the politics of who is better at what.

During personnel interviews there was no disputing the fact that there were feelings of distrust and superiority, as well as reports of past confrontations at the scenes of emergencies. Although the project team did not seek to find or determine explicit proof of the claims of confrontations, those claims were made by individuals from not only both departments but from non-department members as well. Although there are no findings of fact in this report pointing to specific incidents, just the fact that some found it important to mention the tension which exists/existed between the two departments is telling. It should be noted that when the respective Executive Officers of both CVFA, and NCVFD were queried regarding past confrontations, the confrontations were either denied as outright misrepresentations, or described as minor comments blown out of proportion which have been addressed. But, there can be no ignoring the fact that certain members of the respective departments feel they are being watched for the next mistake to be exploited. The project team noticed that the recent change in the fire department leadership seems to have yielded a higher level of communication and cooperation between the two departments.

Finally, it was the original intent of this process to include facilitated strategic planning sessions to assist Coventry in developing objectives and setting critical tasks. However, the final nature of the review and recommendations, along with a limited budget, made this impractical to accomplish at a meaningful level. With that in mind this report also contains steps to assist the Town in building a strategic plan to meet accepted recommendations. If requested, CRCOG and the team for this project can discuss assisting with the process going forward.

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<sup>6</sup> Volunteer Fire Company Planning Processes - VFIS

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## **Review and Report Recommendations**

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# 1. Review of Matrix and Patrizz Reports

## I. Summary

The Town of Coventry contracted in 1995 with An. Patrizz, Associates, and again in February 2008 with the Matrix Consulting Group, to conduct studies of the Town's fire and EMS service needs, fire departments operations, and how fire and EMS services are delivered in the Town. Both reports are comprehensive and well detailed, and either report could serve as the document by which to set the priorities and strategic plan for the Town and its Fire Departments. The question arises then; "What is the objective or intent of the third review?"

**Recommendation: When assessing the recommendations of the "CROCOG Report," re-examine the Matrix and Patrizz reports for elements either not acted upon or only partially addressed.**

## II. Issue Review

The project team reviewed the previous studies done for the Town of Coventry regarding the Fire-EMS services and found them to be quite comprehensive and well detailed. As stated, either report could serve as the document to build for the future. In fact, as reported by Coventry staff and Fire Department leadership, a majority of what is contained in those reports has been implemented or acted on to one extent or another, especially as it pertained to Capital Investments and funding allocations. However those recommendations regarding consolidation and apparatus/service re-deployment were not acted upon, at least not substantially as outlined in the reports. Both reports are straightforward and honest in their statements that these issues present political- or personality- driven complications and state that it is up to the Town to make the determination regarding consolidation and re-deployment of services. Further, both reports provided a formulaic approach; that is, they provided the science of the recommendations where this report provides the logic and theory beyond just the science. As stated previously in the reports, after review of the current two-department system, recommendations were made to increase efficiencies and standards applications to a dual department system and the reports postulated about the benefits or disadvantages when addressing a consolidation from two fire departments to one. The Patrizz report in particular addresses the issue of merged departments quite well on pages 49 through 51. This CROCOG report relies upon an application of recommendations from all three reviews, and then includes what a Smart or Better Practice affords the Town and the population it serves.

The project team recognizes the quality of both earlier reports. Yet the two reviews and associated recommendations for capital investments, in conjunction with minor corrections to instill more robust fire service management practices, have not yielded a satisfactory result for the Town. This CROCOG Report will not attempt to "plow the same ground" regarding overall service needs, but focuses more on those management practices. The previous reports serve as a reference source for certain conditions which either have not changed or have only been partially addressed.

The direct circumstances which brought about this current engagement, although not easily foreseen specifically, may have been recognized and acted upon sooner if the Town had more direct oversight of fire department management, including the department's Junior Fire Fighter Program. No report can prevent wrong doing by irresponsible personnel, but the application of professional management practices would assist greatly in mitigation and risk management in personnel processes.

It is easy to postulate that if the departments had merged after either of the two previous reports, to include a formalized Fire Officer selection process with Town oversight, then the recent troubles would have been avoided. While it is impossible to know what would have happened in that hypothetical situation it is clear to the project team that the full breadth of the inappropriate and illegal activities could have been addressed sooner if the Town had more control in the process, especially as it pertains to the Junior Fire Fighter Program which is addressed later in this report.

## Anticipated Recommendation Costs

Costs associated with this recommendation would be minimal and should only include the time or level of effort Town staff may be required to contribute to an expanded review and assessment of not only this report but the previous two.

### *Objectives and Planning Tasks*

Objective 1. Include a re-examination of previous studies with this report

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Establish appoint review board to review CROG Report
- 1.1 Provide all three (3) Fire Service reports for review and recommendation assessment
- 1.2 Facilitate review sessions/process
- 1.3 Develop appropriate Improvement Action Plan based on review
  - 1.3.1 Assign responsible person(s) for implementation
  - 1.3.2 Set timeframe for milestones or issue resolution

## 2. Create an Administrative Chief Fire Official

### I. Summary

Both the Patrizz and the Matrix reports recommended the creation of some type of position within the Town system<sup>7</sup> to assist in the management of Fire-EMS services. This report echoes that recommendation.

**Recommendation: Establish a paid Town position for the management of the Fire-Rescue Services in Coventry.**

Since the publication of the Matrix report in 2008, the Town has assigned some administrative duties to the Town Fire Marshal. That individual is also the Town's Emergency Management Director (EMD). Irrespective of the call volume for a community the size of Coventry, the Fire Marshal's Office more often than not maintains a steady workload and demand for service. Add to that the ever-growing complexities of a modern EMD, and even part-time fire department administration becomes a burden on a full time work week.

The overall fire department budgets, combined with revenue recovery for ambulance services and a capital investment program, translate to management responsibility of almost one million dollars currently spread

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<sup>7</sup> Patrizz report pge-44, Matrix report pge-34

across various Town staff and volunteers. There is no better time than now for the creation of a “Director/Administrator” of Fire-Rescue Services. The final job description, title, hours of work, and compensation package would be determined by the Town, but position responsibilities would include, but may not be limited to:

- Budget administration
  - Purchases and acquisitions
- Establishing a single standardized training for the two fire departments
- Compliance with NFPA, OSHA, and CT state statutes and regulations
- Management of EMS
  - Revenue recovery program
  - 24/7 staffing schedules
- Management of all contracts with outside vendors or service providers
- Provide oversight of the Junior Fire Fighter Program
- Fire Department PIO

This position would not carry any fire department operational authority at the scene of an emergency but would be in the Chain of Command for administrative and training purposes. This individual should not be a member of either the CVFA, or the NCVFD. Additionally, this position would report directly to the Town Manager, as would any other department head. It is recommended that the individual in this position have public administration training and experience, as well as some executive level fire department background. Even though this person would not be a line Fire Company Officer, it is recommended he/she either have or will obtain Fire Officer III certification within a reasonable amount of time. This assures a sufficient level of understanding of fire service management practices and builds confidence with the fire departments themselves.

Once in place, this individual should conduct a review of all fire department Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG’s) and revise or consolidate them into one set of SOG’s to apply to both fire departments. Having two sets of guidelines, although similar in nature and intent, does not allow for any substantive consistency among the two departments. In a review of guidelines for the two departments, there are common themes for some functions where specific NFPA standards or OSHA regulations must be addressed, but SOG formatting, structure and overall functional areas are not aligned. Further, the CVFA SOG’s are apparently stored on the computer of the former Fire Chief which is now in the custody of law enforcement, and the CVFA does not have access to electronic files other than scanned images. This is, therefore, an appropriate opportunity to review and revise/rewrite SOG’s, and it makes sense to make this a town wide review, where the end result is having all fire fighters operating under the same SOG’s.

As to training, again the Fire Administrator would be responsible for developing a single training program to be utilized by the two departments. The actual training would be conducted by current department training officers and/or the Fire Administrator, depending on training/course needs. The two department system in Coventry currently employs areas of “specialties” for certain response/operations such as EMS, rescue activities, et cetera. With that, each department maintains a department training program to not only meet standards and regulatory requirements but those specialty areas as well. As an example, until very recently it was only CVFA EMT’s/EMR are who were allowed to “ride the ambulance,” and only NCVFD personnel who were trained to operate specialized rescue tools. It seems only logical that active members of both departments receive the same training on ALL apparatus and equipment as well as standardized processes and procedures to enhance response capabilities for the Town.

The approach with this newly created position could be incremental if the Town is unsure of workload and service demands, and the Town may want to even consider an individual with Fire Marshal training and

experience to assist the Town's Fire Marshal Office. In the end the Town has many options with a position such as this and a full review of the potential for this position can take place over time.

If the Town chooses to create a position with overall Fire Department management to include full authority at emergency scenes, then that is more in line with a Fire Chief. That individual would have the same requirements as listed previously, but would also serve as the Town's Fire Chief. The move to a paid Fire Chief would involve further examination as to the defined areas of responsibilities and lines of authority, given the fact that the Fire Chief traditionally supervises the work of the Fire Marshal's Office. This approach would require due diligence with clear, well-defined lines of authority, vs. hiring someone and "giving" them the title of Fire Chief.

Regardless of model chosen, this new position allows for professional management in a growingly complex public service industry and relieves the burden currently placed on volunteer fire department/association members.

## **Anticipated Recommendation Costs**

The cost to hire a Town Fire Administrator/Official for a full time position matching the size and demands of a smaller fire department, with added responsibilities of managing an Ambulance service, could reasonably be expected to start at \$70,000 – \$75,000, based on the established work and job description. With the addition of a fringe benefit package valued at 35 to 40% of salary, the total expected compensation package might start at \$94,500 to \$105,000 per year. This salary could be offset through the Ambulance revenue recovery program funds. If a less than full time position is considered, then it is a matter of assigning an hourly pay rate to the anticipated work week and adjusting the associated fringe benefits package.

## **Objectives and Planning Tasks**

Objective 1. Establish position, and hire a Town Fire "Administrator" to manage Fire-Rescue/EMS business operations

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Develop a job description
  - 1.1 Match job description with appropriate Department Head salary pay grade
  - 1.2 Establish/appoint review board
  - 1.3 Set testing / evaluation process
  - 1.4 Advertise position locally and in fire service periodicals
  - 1.5 Evaluate/test applicants
  - 1.6 Develop list of finalists
  - 1.7 Interview finalists
  - 1.8 Offer position to best candidate

### 3. Single / Unified Fire Department Command Structure

#### I. Summary

More and more, communities across the US with multiple fire departments are consolidating, or moving to a single command structure for their fire departments. Moving to a single command structure in essence provides the same net result of merging departments, but in some instances, it has been an easier, more accommodating road to resolving fire department management issues. In this case, only fire department operational functions are unified, but the department associations or corporations remain intact as separate and distinct organizations. Additionally, departments often maintain their “station” identification.

Within that unified command structure, a Fire Company Officer needs to be the right person, not the most popular. Once Fire Officer minimum qualifications are set, the Town and the Department need to have a program in place detailing the path to be followed by officer candidates or individuals wishing to progress within the department. This will ultimately benefit all community and department stakeholders.

**Recommendation: Implement a single or unified Fire Department command structure; Abandon Officer Selection by Popular Vote; Establish a Fire Officer Development Program**

#### II. Issue Review

##### Unified Command Structure

Although the Town has spent significant amounts in the recent past on fire department infrastructure and apparatus improvement, it has not been able to successfully address those management issues it feels are critical as a municipality when it comes to installing and maintaining professional fire department management practices. This can be an extremely difficult endeavor when addressing volunteer fire departments and their autonomy, especially if there is no consensus among the parties at the outset. The Town has a right to expect to be part of the selection process for Fire Department Officers, if not the outright appointing authority.

Installing a single command structure within the two departments is a logical next step in addressing service delivery improvements. This report will be the third in eighteen years where the stated value<sup>8</sup> of some type of department consolidation or unification of department command structure outweighs the disadvantages of such a move. Fire Department management conditions and concerns remain the same, and any progress made with recent changes in leadership can slip away as quickly as they came with the next fire department election or sense that the “spotlight is off us.” As the steward for public safety, the Town cannot allow that to happen

Differing with the previous studies, the CRCOG project team is not restrained in making this particular recommendation and fully endorses the fact that the benefits far outweigh any claimed disadvantages. Further, a committee should be appointed at the earliest possible opportunity to begin the process of unifying the departments into a single command structure.

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<sup>8</sup> Patrizz report pgs 38-51; Matrix report pgs 32-34

There is nothing punitive in the process of moving to a unified fire department command structure; it is done for the benefit of the public and the Town. The Town cannot afford to be held hostage to the current system with threats of political repercussions or volunteer disengagement; however these may be the reality and need to be considered during report deliberations.

Implementing this recommendation facilitates other report recommendations for staffing and deployment, fire officer development, consistent command and procedure application, and town wide training. This results in an overall increase in emergency response capabilities and cost effectiveness for the Town, when done in conjunction with deployment of apparatus to meet service/response needs vs. equipping two separate departments.<sup>9</sup>

In examining comparable communities for Smart Practice applications, the Town of Canton is aptly suited for citation. In 1996 the “Town of Canton Volunteer Fire and EMS” was formed from three fire departments<sup>10</sup> in town. This consolidation merged not only the three Fire Departments but the Collinsville Memorial Ambulance and the Canton Fire-Police all into that single entity. Each station retains its previous identity, but the management of the departments is now held within that single organization with one appointed town wide Fire Chief. The comparison for Coventry is appropriate because it was a multi-department community which included a separate EMS/Ambulance response (important when considering the revenue recovery program), a separate organization for its Fire-Police, and three sets of Fire Chiefs. Statistically the towns are also comparable: Canton has a population of a little over 10,000 and covers 24.6 square miles, with fire department call volume / service requests being slightly higher in Canton. Canton had more obstacles to overcome with the number of organizations being merged into a single town wide department, but they met the challenge and have not looked back since.

Operating efficiencies can be exponentially enhanced with the implementation of a single budget, management of the stations as a single department for service delivery, and honest consideration given to previous detailed recommendations for effective service deployment.

Addressing department leadership, the duplication required for both departments to meet minimum Fire Officer qualifications has become a hardship. This is admitted by both the CVFA and the NCVFD, recognizing that the pool to draw upon for officer candidates willing and able to commit more time to a volunteer department is shrinking. In reviewing models for an appropriate chain of command, the project team offers a sample organizational chart for consideration or illustration in Figure 1 at the end of this section.

#### **Fire Officer Qualifications and Selection Process**

The fire service has experienced a tremendous evolution in the last 3 decades, yet the “volunteer” fire service remains one of the most traditionally bound discipline-oriented workgroups when compared to other public safety or service-oriented industries. This is especially true as it pertains to the selection process and minimum requirements for its Chief Executive Officer. Even though the fire service has benefitted from advances in technology and a more scientific and business model application to modern firefighting, a majority of the volunteer fire services have not moved beyond centuries old leadership selection processes.

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<sup>9</sup> Matrix report pge 30

<sup>10</sup> Collinsville Volunteer FD, Canton Volunteer FD, & North Canton Volunteer FD

The traditional responsibility of the fire service was fire suppression and for many departments that was the only responsibility. The emergence of Emergency Medical Response has become a significant part of the fire service today, along with a number of other responsibilities. Hazardous Materials, fire prevention, fire investigation and the management of a myriad of human-caused & natural disasters have all emerged as challenges to the fire service. A variety of rescue venues have added to the challenges faced by fire officers, including but not limited to confined space, high angle, swift water and vehicle rescues.

As the fire service evolves from the traditions of the past to the challenges of the future, a new, progressive level of leadership needs to be instituted to meet those challenges. The fire officer of today may not always be the toughest or most experienced on the fire ground, or the most popular, or the most senior department member. The fire officer of today not only has to excel in the traditional fire service attributes, but also has to have proficiency in human resource management, budget planning, customer service and multi-agency cooperation. Irrespective of the number of calls for service, or “call volume,” without these qualities in fire service leadership, the Town of Coventry and its fire-rescue service will experience difficulties in fire department operation and management.

Both the Coventry Volunteer Fire Association (CVFA) and the North Coventry Volunteer Fire Department (NCVFD) are proud departments steeped in the tradition and dedication of providing fire protection to the citizens of the Town of Coventry. After reviewing each department’s by-laws and standard operating procedures, the project team has concluded that both have identified the duties and qualifications they feel are required to hold a position of authority. In the same light neither has written guidance on how the future leaders of the department will be trained to handle the challenges of the present and future. More importantly, the qualifications that both departments have accepted are not fully in line with current standards and smart practices. What follows will suggest areas for improvement based on applicable standards and smart practices.

The town of Coventry, like many other communities across our nation, is growing; in the time from the 1990 to 2010 its population has grown by 23.6%<sup>11</sup>. This is important for the fact that as the community grows, so does the responsibility of the fire-EMS service. The following discussion and associated implementation recommendations for officer development, training, and promotions were developed after researching all of the listed references, and based on the project team’s combined experience in these areas. Both departments have adopted and/or are attempting to implement minimum officer qualifications in accordance with NFPA standards. They should be applauded for this, but more is required.

The one document that addresses and emphasizes the importance and the need for change in the methods used by the fire services in Coventry, CT is the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer research project written by Chief Scott Burnette. Many of the results found as part of this research project are referenced here, as it speaks directly to the promotional processes used by both departments currently.

The NFPA **1021 Standard for Fire Officer Qualifications** (ed. 2008) is the recognized fire service standard for Fire Officer Qualifications, not only for requisite duties, training and knowledge, but also for Fire Officer selection. Whether career or volunteer, whether objective testing or election by popular vote, there must be minimum qualifications set for Fire Officers which separates them from line Fire Fighting personnel. It does not matter if NFPA 1021 is not readily accepted among smaller rural or suburban fire departments; it is the municipality that is at risk, and as such it is the municipality that **MUST** endorse NFPA 1021 as setting the qualifications of all fire department officers. Volunteer or not, all emergency response personnel are agents of the Town when acting in their official or respective departmental capacities.

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<sup>11</sup> 2010 census data

The question then becomes, "How do we implement NFPA 1021 in our department?" Short answer is, "JUST DO IT." As straightforward as this may sound, change is never easy, and this change significantly alters the level of commitment required to achieve Fire Officer Qualification/Certification for departments such as CVFA and NCVFD. But without change there can be no progress; maintaining status quo is just that - the STATUS QUO. Never mind community expectations; fire fighters' lives and safety are at stake. If a community is to make any investment in its public safety, it must start with organization leadership.

Fire Service studies and literature done over thirty years ago pointed to the inadequacies of electing Fire Officers by popular vote, yet over 51% of volunteer departments surveyed still use the popular vote, 32% have department officers appointed, and only 16% reported using an objective testing process as the sole process to determine department leadership. In a project for the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer (NFA/EFO) Program, *Analysis of electing volunteer fire officers by popular vote - 2003*, Fire Chief Scott Burnette conducted a literature review to explore the works of others as part of his research to gain insight into fire department selection processes for Fire Officers. At the time that he wrote the paper for his Executive Development course at the NFA, he was with the Mills River Fire Department in North Carolina. Mills River North Carolina is a community of approximately 6,900 covering 22 square miles, with a fire department that operates out of three fire stations. He is now the Fire Chief in Asheville, NC and one of the most respected fire officials in his state.

Chief Burnette asked four questions during his literature review. First, what are the advantages and disadvantages of electing volunteer fire officers by popular vote? Second, what other means of selecting volunteer fire officers are currently practiced? Third, which method would serve his department? Finally, how would Mills River implement an objective testing process?

The disadvantage of electing officers by popular vote is documented in the literature. One major disadvantage is the liability incurred by a department that uses a very subjective selection system. A system with no objective components has the potential to place officers with little or no formal training in supervisory positions. Goodson and Sneed (1999) highlighted the importance of ensuring officers are qualified by stating "*in our increasingly litigious society, company officers are more vulnerable than ever before to being held personally liable for their actions or inactions*" (pg.31). Hogan (2002) adds:

In the *City of Canton (Ohio) v. Harris* case (489 U.S. 378) the Supreme Court held that local government can be held liable under section 1983 of the Civil Right Act for failure to adequately train or supervise its employees if that failure leads to a deprivation of a person's constitutional rights. (pg.77)

If an officer's fire ground decisions are called into question, there is very little doubt that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) **1021 (2008) Standard for Fire Officer Qualifications** will be used as a standard to measure a department's officer qualification and selection process. L. J. Hogan in his book explains, "*Consensus standards such as those of the NFPA 1500 may be used as the yardstick against which your department's performance will be measured*" (pg.80). Even though he specifically cites NFPA 1500, the point is that the NFPA has been imbued with the status of being that organization considered as THE source of recognized fire service standards.

Both the Town of Coventry and the fire departments have potential liability if the officer in question does not meet these standards, as explained by Marinucci (1995): "*Promotions based on voting also can expose the department to liability problems if qualifications are not used as part of the promotion process*" (pg.917). Popular vote also has a greater potential to place unqualified officers into positions due to favoritism, as documented by Marinucci (1995): "*Voting can easily make officer selection a popularity contest, restricting officers when tough decisions need to be made*" (pg. 917). Alexander (1998) identifies that popular vote could be unfair and that "*objective tests are more impartial and therefore fairer*" (pg.7).

Alexander also writes, *“When candidates must compete for a position only those genuinely interested will invest the time and energy to prepare themselves”* (pg. 7).

The only advantage to the popular vote that could be found in the literature was from Marinucci (1995): *“elected officers may receive more support from Membership”* (pg. 917). However, this statement is countered by Maloney (2001) when he brings up the point that *“these obstacles are clearly defined by Colella (1988) and Stewart (1988) noting that individuals not qualified to be officers may NOT have the respect of the followers and compromise safety of the unit”* (pg. 10). This is an especially telling statement, proven valid given the movement of personnel from CVFA to NCVFD after the election of the most recent former Fire Chief of CVFA.

The following table illustrates the three methods identified by the research used for officer selection.

| <b>Selection Process</b> | <b>Description</b>   | <b>Advantages</b>   | <b>Disadvantages</b>   |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Popular Vote</b>      | Candidates are selected by minimum qualifications and majority of popular vote   | The only advantage to the popular vote that could be found in the literature was <i>“elected officers may receive more support from Membership”</i>   | *One major disadvantage is the liability incurred by a department that uses a very subjective selection system<br>* Can expose the department to liability problems if qualifications are not used as part of the promotion process.<br>* Popular vote also has a greater potential to place unqualified officers into positions due to favoritism |
| <b>Objective Testing</b> | A test consisting of factual questions requiring extremely short answers that can be quickly and unambiguously scored by anyone with an answer key, thus minimizing subjective judgments by both the person taking the test and the person scoring it. | * To identify those applicants who possess or are likely to possess the highest degree of training and leadership ability.<br>* The testing can be developed around the functions and goals of your department and the position.<br>* Objective testing is far easier to defend than subjective popular vote. | No disadvantages were identified   |
| <b>Appointment</b>       | The act of choosing a person for a position or the process of giving the person that position  | When appointments are made after an objective testing process candidates that would best fit the position can be chosen without compromising the integrity of the position  | Depending on the type of objective testing chosen the process may have a monetary cost. This process may take longer than just administering a written and oral test   |

The Fire Officer selection process that would best suit the Town is the testing process with set minimum *“officer”* qualifications. Not only does this address the issue of being fair and impartial, it also produces a company officer who understands the job and its responsibilities, and it provides some indication the Officer Candidate has prepared him/herself to handle the job. Further, the Town should have the right or responsibility to appoint/confirm those Officer candidates selected for promotion. This could be codified as a Town ordinance or personnel practice, whichever is the appropriate mechanism for the Town.

This represents a significant change, thus producing one of its biggest challenges. The fire departments obviously have to be part of this process of change and must understand the positive impact it has not only for their fire departments, but also for the personal growth of those who choose a leadership path. A Fire Department leadership development program should be one of the first steps in meeting this new dynamic, and the process in all likelihood will have to be phased in as individuals take the time to “commit more time” to the department. But this commitment is not just to the fire department, it is primarily to the Town of Coventry itself. As such the Town should diligently examine a program which rewards those who make this commitment.

Examples of what might be considered recompense are as follows:

- Up-front payment to an officer candidate if there are out of pocket expenses to attend a required class
- A financial stipend for passing and maintaining Fire Officer certifications
- An establishment/enhancement of property tax abatement to enter the “Coventry Fire Officer Development Program” and achieve Fire Officer certification
- An enhanced pension program for being part of the Coventry Fire Officer Program and maintaining Fire Officer certification

These are options and do not necessarily serve as the definitive process. Whatever path is chosen it should be fair to both the officer candidate and the Town. Further, a potential officer candidate should be able to look at the program and map out the time and process to achieve Fire Officer, and should understand the testing process used by the department and the Town to be considered for appointment, or selected to be a Fire Officer in Coventry.

In addressing the particulars of what constitutes a Coventry Fire Officer Development Program, the project team endorses the requirements found in NFPA 1021 to guide the Town in building such a program. The Connecticut Fire Academy (CFA) is the primary source for achieving Fire Officer Certification in CT, and the CT Commission of Fire Prevention and Control provides the third party independent testing source or assessment center, if so chosen. Attachment 2 is included to diagram the process and certification levels from a new recruit all the way to Fire Officer IV as the Senior Executive level through the CFA.

Once a unified fire department command structure is established in Coventry, it should not be a problem to implement and maintain Fire Officer I certification for all its officers, given the move in that direction already over the recent past. If this is not fully met already, a review might indicate final implementation within the next two years.

In the ideal situation, the department Chief Fire Officers should be no less than Fire Officer III certified. But that may be too great a leap at this time. It is a great goal to set, but one which will take years to achieve. A reasonable alternative is a development program which allows for an officer candidate to reach Fire Officer II, and to use that as the minimum qualification for the Fire Chief.

Using minimum qualifications again is just the beginning in the selection process. With assistance the Town can provide some type of objective testing process where the candidates can be evaluated, and then based on that evaluation, the Fire Officers can be appointed by the Town.

There are numerous models for fire officer selection/appointment processes to include consecutive term limits, appointment of the Fire Chief by the Town, with the Chief then appointing the eligible officer candidates based on testing, to the Town appointing all fire officers.

One of the disadvantages may prove to be a long tenured Fire Chief, thus precluding the traditional advancement up through the ranks and becoming the Chief for those officer candidates. This is no different than a career fire department, however, and the “tradition” of being able to be voted into the Chief’s position should have long past become part of the history of the fire service and not a modern practice or expectation.

The move from volunteer management by popular vote to something more structured is one that should be made - for accountability, responsibility and overall return on investment for the Town. In the out years there may be value in moving from a Director/Administrator of Fire Rescue Services to some type of combination of Fire Chief/Fire Marshal/Emergency Management Director based on overall workload and service demands.

## Anticipated Recommendation Costs

Establishing a single unified fire department command structure in and of itself would not have a cost and should result in savings depending on the degree of consolidation of services. However there should be some compensation for Fire Officers due to the required level of commitment to the Town and the department. Initially, individuals may maintain the position that as volunteers they do not want, nor do they need, any compensation for being an officer. Eventually, though, that next generation will become the current generation, and a program should be in place to provide for some, if minimal, compensation in some form.

Objective deliberations may find that a “Fire Officer Stipend” is appropriate, and a tiered level of compensation seen in other fire departments could be considered. An example of an annual compensation plan follows: *(This compensation is in addition to the per call stipend recommended within this report).*

- Fire Chief – \$4,000 to \$6,000
- Dep. Chief – \$3,000 to \$4,000
- Asst. Chief – \$2,000 to \$3,000
- Captain – \$1,500 to \$2,000
- Lieutenant – \$1,000 to \$1,500

Compensation for the Fire Chief depending on full range of responsibilities, if a Director of Fire-Rescue Services is not hired, might include a Town supplied vehicle.

Implementing a Fire Officer Development Program will have some costs associated with it if that program offers a program “grant” to officer candidates who sign a letter of commitment to the program and Town. Such a program could provide a small stipend to officer candidates starting at a one-time payment of \$500 per certification level achieved, as an example.

### Objectives and Planning Tasks

Objective 1. Implement a single/unified Fire Department command structure

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Establish / appoint a committee to implement recommendation and monitor progress
- 1.1 Set milestones and time frame for implementation
- 1.2 Develop job descriptions / Fire Company Officer duties and responsibilities
- 1.3 Develop organizational chart (see example-Figure 1; pg 19)
- 1.4 Develop a single set of fire operation guidelines
- 1.5 Set single budget for fire department operations

1.6 Appoint Fire Officers in accordance with selected process

Objective 2. Implement Fire Officer Development Program

Planning Tasks:

- 2.0 Establish program goals and objectives
- 2.1 Implement minimum Fire Officer Standards based on NFPA 1021
- 2.2 Open program to Officer candidates

Objective 3. Establish process for Fire Officer selection based on objective testing

Planning Tasks:

- 3.0 Cease election by popular vote for Fire Company Officers by 2015
- 3.1 Develop testing process with CT Fire Academy and Commission on Fire Prevention and Control
- 3.2 Evaluate/test applicants

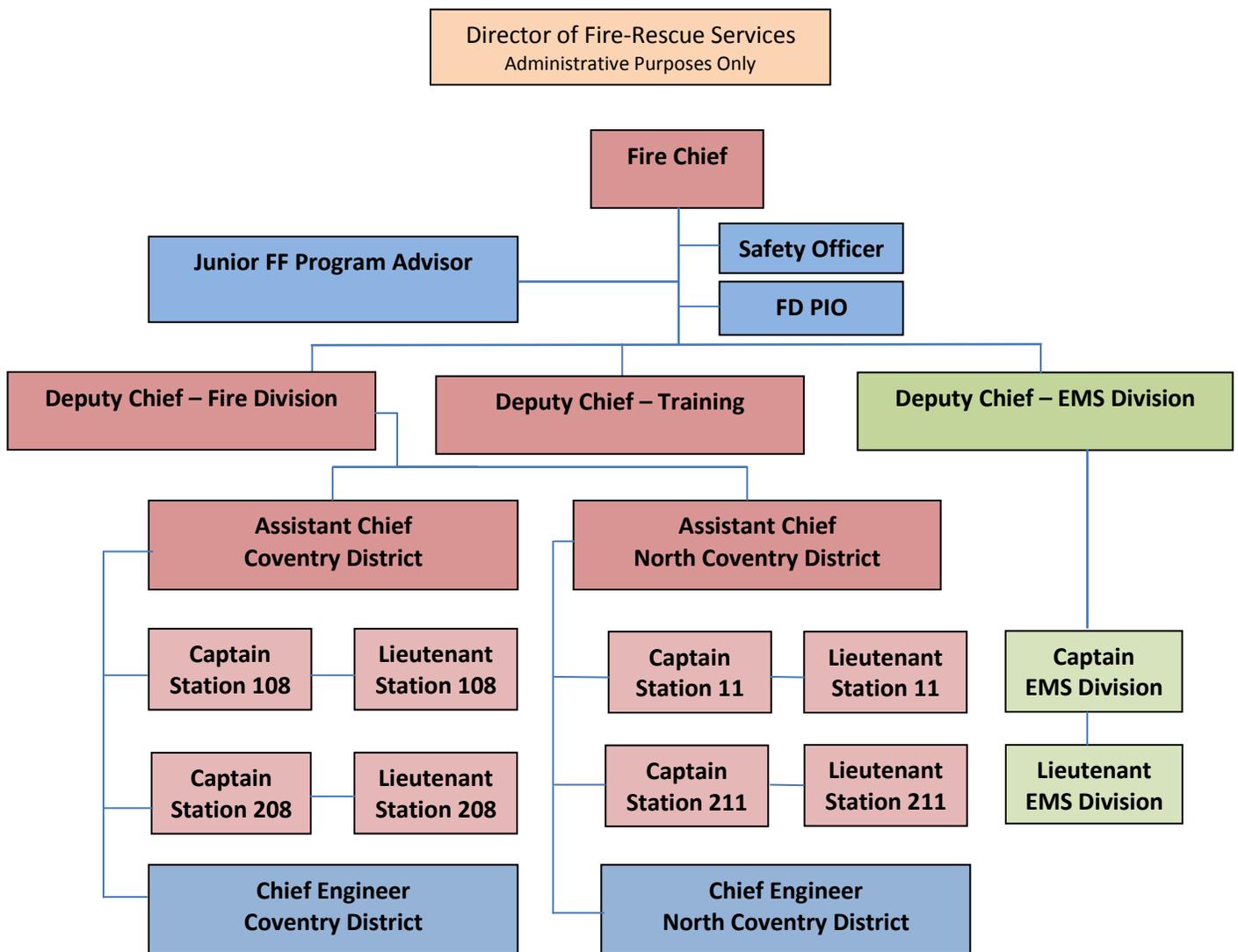


Figure 1. Sample Unified Fire Department Command  
Certain duties such as training / PIO could be managed by Director/Administrator position

## 4. Fire Department Training

### I. Summary

In 2008, the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) adopted a policy position that all volunteer fire departments should establish a goal to train all personnel to a level consistent with the mission of the fire department, based on the job performance requirements outlined in NFPA 1001: Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications<sup>12</sup>. Regardless of whether fire department functions/command structures are consolidated, a unified training program makes the utmost sense for standardizing training and increasing overall enhanced response capabilities.

### **Recommendation: Establish a Singular or Unified Training Program**

### II. Issue Review

Currently both departments have training programs independent of each other. This is not a smart practice with regard to coordination in content or subject matter. This presents an issue in response, when each department has a different way of approaching the training of their respective firefighters. This disconnect can lead to the following:

- Breakdown in emergency services response and effectiveness
- Injuries/Death
- Damage to equipment
- Disagreements /arguments
- Loss of confidence in fire service
- Not effectively training/utilizing scarce volunteer resources

Insufficient training can have negative economic impacts on both the departments and the Town. Liability issues can be a serious problem for departments. A lack of training or in this case a lack of consistent training between departments, including a lack of cross training in all functional areas, could be perceived as negligence. In 1989, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the *City of Canton V. Harris* that the city can be held liable for failing to train its employees. An inclusive singular training program is essential in protecting the departments and town from potential litigation<sup>13</sup>. Firefighter injury or death also creates an economic burden when jurisdictions are expected to absorb the direct cost resulting from the death or injury of a firefighter. These costs include loss of work time, disability payments, and higher insurance premiums.

An overarching benefit for merging the individual training programs is a continuity of training. This is important as it assures all fire service personnel receive the same compliant training, lessening the possibility of one department being used against the other in litigation. Also, having all firefighters cross-

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<sup>12</sup> White Paper on Volunteer Firefighter Training; National Volunteer Fire Council 2010

<sup>13</sup> Ross, David; "Training to Decrease Liability" Health and Safety for Fire and Emergency Service Personnel July 1992, Volume 3, Number 7.

trained on each other's equipment improves the capacity to supply a sufficient equally-trained work force at an incident. A single training program can be implemented to be delivered in each department on different days. This could provide the opportunity for firefighters to "catch up" on training they may have missed in their station, as opposed to having to wait until the next year or the next training cycle to repeat.

Program development and ongoing management and delivery should be the responsibility of a singular training committee or division that meets to determine training needs, delivery method, and schedule. If a Director of Fire Rescue Services or paid Fire Chief is established, the work of the committee would be managed by this individual.

## Anticipated Recommendation Costs

Costs associated with this recommendation would be minimal and could even provide cost savings by eliminating the need for redundancy. There is greater potential for savings in addressing the above mentioned disconnects by minimizing the town's litigation, worker's compensation, and the cost to replace equipment.

### Objectives and Planning Tasks

Objective 1. Develop and implement a single training program for fire department use

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Appoint a qualified training officer or utilize Director position
- 1.1 Create a training committee using qualified personnel
  - 1.1.1 Assign office space for record development and retention
- 1.2 Develop a training plan that addresses all standards, statutes, regulations and mission of department
  - 1.2.1 Fire Division components
  - 1.2.2 EMS Division components
- 1.3 Incorporate/integrate where appropriate with Fire Officer Development program
- 1.5 Establish Fire Service Instructor training program
- 1.6 Create a yearly training calendar for fire and EMS

## 5. Refine Budget and Procurement Processes for Fire Departments

### I. Summary

The Town has implemented more financial controls in the recent past. However some confusion regarding "who's money it is" has led to false expectations. This is easily remedied with a well-defined and understood process.

**Recommendation: Establish clear rules for management of Town funds appropriated for Fire Department operations to include:**

- **Single budget for Fire Department operations**
- **Single contract for apparatus and facility maintenance**
- **Approved purchase requisitions prior to issuance of purchase order**

## II. Issue Review

This is a straight forward recommendation to establish a financial management policy for Town funds appropriated for Fire Department operations. It starts with implementing a single Town budget based on the application of recommendations from both the Patrizz and Matrix reports for service delivery. Once the budget process has been established, the current practice of using multiple vendors for like services, e.g. certain maintenance programs, service acquisition, etc., should be consolidated to use a single vendor matching the need.

Where appropriate, and depending on Town purchases policy, a Request For Proposal should be issued, and the vendor most qualified and cost effective chosen for the required service. In the instance of a fleet maintenance program, this standardizes maintenance for all apparatus/vehicles covered, and may afford savings for the Town both directly and indirectly. A maintenance program in accordance with NFPA 1911 *Standard for the Inspections, Maintenance, Testing and Retirement of In-Service Automotive Fire Apparatus* is critical to the safety and response capabilities of fire personnel, and could provide for longer service life of apparatus, saving money in the long run.

No purchase should be made by fire department personnel using Town appropriated Fire Department budgeted funds until a purchase requisition has been approved and a purchase order issued. The format or process used by Coventry should be strictly adhered to unless there are exigent circumstances. The process is linear and follows a path where a purchase request or requisition form is sent to the “Director” of Fire-Rescue Services or his/her designee for approval. Upon approval a purchase order number is assigned and either the appropriate or designated fire department individual proceeds with the purchase or the purchase is assigned to designated Town staff.

Fire Department officials should not be of the mind that the money is “theirs” and it is just a formality to have a purchase approved. Purchase procedures should be well understood by all, including the process of acquiring approval prior to purchase. The how’s and why’s of purchase approval or disapproval must be clear to all involved in the process.

Additionally, the current budget system for the two Fire Departments is more “complex” than it needs to be with five separate budgets for functional/response areas. As a start, it could be simplified to a single budget broken down by three line items for: Fire (includes all functional operation costs and maintenance except EMS); EMS (includes costs for EMS operations); and Training (includes all costs associated with training and OSHA compliance).

Part of this process should include emergency spending powers for the appropriate Fire Department personnel or Town staff for Fire Department operations. The emergency powers should at the very least reflect the intent, if not the same process, as utilized by the Town during emergencies, and would be for those services critical to maintaining fire service capabilities. Definitions should be developed as to what constitutes an emergency in term of fire service operation, and a spending limit should be set. This type of process is already in place in both the CVFA and NCVFD by laws.

### **Anticipated Recommendation Costs**

Costs associated with this recommendation should be minimal, to include the time and level of effort costs of Town staff assigned to the Fire Department procurement process.

### *Objectives and Planning Tasks*

Objective 1. Reinforce procurement process for fire service operations conforming to Town policy and procedures.

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Review current procurement process
- 1.1 Work with fire officials to determine needs which may not align with Town procedures
- 1.2 Set final process with approval of Town Manager and/or Finance Department
- 1.3 Ensure all appropriate Town staff and fire officials understand procurement process

## **6. Fire Department Discipline and Grievances**

### I. Summary

Maintaining order in any organization relies upon rules and regulations applied within the organization. Everyone faces rules in their everyday lives, and any organization is only as good as its rules and regulations and how they are administered. Just because a fire department is “volunteer” does not mean it is free from traditional human resource and personnel practices when it comes to its rules and regulations. A fire department, especially a volunteer fire department, must have a fair and robust process for resolving personnel issues that is understood by all and consistently applied through strong leadership and oversight.

**Recommendation: Enhance a discipline and grievance process which includes internal Fire Department review as well as Town review, either through a Town Fire Administrator or the Town’s Human Resource personnel/Town Manager.**

### II. Issue Review

Fire Department SOG’s and organization By-Laws indicate there are processes in place for discipline and appeal. The NCVFD, in particular, has a well-defined appeal process. The two sets of by-laws and SOG’s are not aligned, nor are the discipline and grievance procedures. It is understood that associations/organizations will have separate and distinct by-laws addressing the rules and regulations of the organization. However, when a fire department is incorporated into a larger association, it can be problematic when trying to make the distinction between violations or complaints of actions as a fire fighter vs. as a member of the organization. On its face, this may just seem to be a matter of semantics or a difference without a difference, but in reality, the appeal or grievance procedure is where this blurring of the line can create issues. As an organization, the association should be free to discipline members as it sees fit. As fire fighters, those same “members” are considered agents of the Town and, as such, the project team asserts they are afforded rights of due process which may not necessarily have to be part of “association” practice. This is not saying the processes in place in the CVFA and the NCVFD are not appropriate; it may be that they do not go far enough.

In general, fire departments are no place for a “wink and a nod” approach to administering department policy, where the rules are there but the feeling is that they do not really have to be followed. There is no

room for inconsistent application of rules and regulations, which can be perceived as favoritism, or trying to be the “good guy/gal” to remain in office.

The issue of discipline, along with an inconsistent approach from department leadership, can create a divide in the department. To that point, the election of the most recent former CVFA Fire Chief created such a divide, resulting in members of the CVFA leaving the department and joining the NCVFD. So the question arises as to whether there was a lack of rule(s) or process in place addressing individuals with prior felony convictions or if in place not adhered to, especially once the former conviction would have been reasonably “discoverable” to not only CVFA members, but to any fire or Town official.

That specific issue aside, the approach is uncomplicated. Rules, regulations, SOP’s etc. are set, all department members are educated and trained to them, and a progressive discipline process is in place for those who do not meet the standards or adhere to the rules. It is unfair to department members if the administration of a discipline and grievance process is not consistent and just, even when they are the target of the complaint or rules violation. The expectation MUST be that bad or inappropriate actions will ALWAYS bear consequences. Everyone knows going in what the rules and expectations are and what his or her right of due process is.

The project team offers the following concept of a Discipline/ Grievance Committee along with the processes and authorities assigned to such a committee. These provide a framework to manage certain personnel issues within the Fire Department which may be different than rules and regulations for individuals not considered to be active firefighters. It is recommended a Discipline/ Grievance Committee be the next vehicle for internal review for violations of Fire Department rules/SOG’s, and after a review by the appropriate company officer. Their review would either affirm any discipline recommended or enacted by the Fire Officer, set aside recommended discipline, or set in place higher discipline. Regardless of their decision, either the aggrieved or the Fire Officer can appeal the committee decision, which would then go in front of the Town itself, either through the Fire Administrator, or the Town Human Resources, or whatever is deemed appropriate in accordance with Town policy. Fire Department Executive Boards can be part of the process by assigning either an Assistant or Deputy Fire Chief to the Discipline/Grievance Committee. The value of this process is the department has a stated mechanism for discipline, and the aggrieved has a method to be heard. This process alleviates the potential for the perception of “taking it easy” on a friend, or unfairly targeting an individual.

In the most recent incident of inappropriate actions, there were implications made by various fire department members of the awareness of a certain level of questionable behavior, but an uncertainty about what should be done about it. There was no direct admission as to knowing the exact nature of the alleged wrong doing, but it is apparent to the project team that “someone” should have said “something” to “somebody”. Having the ability to bring forward information for proper investigation is essential to assuring the public that, regardless of the title of volunteer, there are professional standards for ethics and a code of conduct strictly enforced for the good of the department, the Town and the ultimately the individual.

On more than one occasion during this review, the question was asked by fire department representatives, “How do we avoid this in the future?” The answer not only lies in having a process in place to address personnel discipline, it also requires personal integrity and courage to bring forth charges or concerns about another’s actions. When discussing fire departments and firefighters, terms like family and

brotherhood are used to demonstrate loyalty and solidarity, but this lexicon should not imbue any sense of protecting the bad acts of irresponsible members. All department personnel should understand what the rules are and their responsibility to the Town and the department.

With that said, part of the discipline and grievance process must include penalties for bringing patently false claims or charges against another department member. This is not meant to mute those with legitimate claims or concerns, but more to recognize the seriousness of bringing charges without evidence to support those claims. If there is no evidence, or claims are based on hearsay alone, then no member should be allowed to openly charge another member in a public forum such as a department meeting, or through department distributed emails. Acts such as these could be considered slanderous in any other venue, and members should be protected from such actions. This does not mean, however, that concerns or charges cannot or should not be objectively investigated, whether there is evidence up front or not.

Investigations or findings of fact are just that, and this process will either produce evidence whereby a department member may be disciplined, or will clear the individual. The process should protect both the individual making the claim/charge and the individual who is the target of the claim/charge. Any claim or charge made in good faith should be addressed by the assigned process privately, as would any personnel matter in any other venue. Once that process has yielded facts and a course of action is recommended, then those findings and actions can be brought forward as needed and appropriate. What must not be allowed to happen is for unsubstantiated claims or charges to be made to embarrass an individual or to inflame a situation or department. When an individual knowingly makes a false claim/charge, the response should be some type of warning or discipline for the claimant, and department members should be made aware that those claims/charges are in fact false or maliciously made.

When people are involved there will always be rumors and innuendo. It is up to the organization's leadership to effectively deal with them and move the organization past it all.

## **Anticipated Recommendation Costs**

There are no direct cost to implementing this recommendation, however there will be costs associated with the time and level of effort required by any Town staff assigned to dealing with fire department personnel matters.

### ***Objectives and Planning Tasks***

Objective 1. Establish/reinforce fire personnel discipline and grievance processes

#### **Planning Tasks:**

- 1.0 Review current rules/regulations dealing with fire personnel discipline and grievance resolution
  - 1.1 Establish Discipline and Grievance committee (can also be a Membership Committee)
  - 1.2 Train all fire department members to all rules, regulations and requirements
  - 1.3 Establish grievance review process outside of the fire department to be considered an external step in grievance review

## 7. Junior Fire Fighter Program

### I. Summary

At the request of the Coventry Town Council the CRCOG project team submitted an Interim Report for the Junior Fire Fighter Program after a concentrated review in May of this year (2013). The Interim Report was drafted without receiving program guideline documents from the fire department despite three separate requests from the project team. It is true that the CVFA Junior Fire Fighter Program has received national program recognition from the National Volunteer Fire Council, as well as individual awards for National Volunteer Fire Council Junior Fire Fighter of the Year. It is also true that insufficient policy guidelines and adult oversight made it easier for two former CVFA members to allegedly take sexual advantage of Junior Fire Fighters. The full Interim Report is included in this final report with comment and revision based on fire department feedback after the report was issued.

**Recommendation: Consolidate the two Junior Fire Fighter Program into a single town wide program**

### II. Issue Review

As diverse and unique as volunteer fire departments are, so are approaches to youth programs within the fire service. There are no national standards, but there is an abundance of guidance and overall recommendations for building good fire service youth programs. This Interim Report highlights key points and assertions from the Volunteer & Combination Officers Section of the IAFC which can be downloaded from the CRCOG website at:

[http://www.crcog.org/publications/Public\\_SafetyDocs/pdfs/Youth\\_Fire\\_Service\\_Programs.pdf](http://www.crcog.org/publications/Public_SafetyDocs/pdfs/Youth_Fire_Service_Programs.pdf)

The cornerstones to an effective Youth Program in the fire service are:

- Strong adult governance and oversight
- Explicit program policy/direction
- Solid fire department leadership
- Committed youth

All of these are critical to the primary mission of any fire department youth program, which is to ensure the safety and protection of program members in a healthy learning environment. Even though the fire service is inherently dangerous, guarantees must be in place so as not to put youth members in harm's way beyond their training and comfort. Adult governance models vary but could include a small oversight board made up of a fire department chief, school board representative and civilian or parent participation, as an example. Each program needs to have its governance or guidance documents in place before any recruiting is attempted. This is where the purpose and mission are defined, as well as the processes and procedures that will apply to all program and fire department members. Fire department officers associated with the program and any department youth advisors should receive training and guidance specific to youth service programs, which include basic teaching concepts. Finally, once the first three cornerstones are in place, the "system" is ready, willing and able to attract and recruit youth committed to learning and giving back to the communities they live in.

This review team makes the following recommendations:

- The Town seek legal counsel regarding youth programs in the fire departments

- The Town and fire departments work with the local Board of Education to examine requirements for youth members to receive credit towards graduation for participating in the Junior Firefighter programs.
- Consolidate the two Junior Firefighter Programs into one with youth members assigned to either South Coventry or North Coventry stations

### Program Administration

Each program must have the objectives clearly defined and guidelines explicitly laid out in plain language before the program accepts its first recruit. Strong adult oversight and properly trained department officers and youth program advisors in the fire department will ultimately determine if the program is successful. Further, all members should be familiar with program guidelines as a safety net, helping to ensure adherence to the number one priority of program member safety and protection. The CT Commission on Fire Prevention and Control should be consulted as to training program guidance for adult leadership and youth program courses. The course offering and training from the CT Fire Academy for Junior Counselors for youth service programs is attached to this report (Attachment 3).

Program administration starts with adult leadership. Before assuming a leadership role in the program, potential leaders should be familiar and have access to:

- Department policies, procedures, and bylaws governing the youth program
- Youth protection training
- Emergency and non-emergency training opportunities
- Mentor/coaching training
- Department's performance management, code of ethics, and discipline process

The program application must be more than just a paper form. The application packet should contain the program guidelines or bylaws, along with expectations of program members, such as time commitments, acceptable behavior, school/grade requirements, etc. Once completed, the packet is returned to the fire department along with all required signatures from the applicant and parent/guardian. The packet should include liability and medical waivers and appropriate release forms. It is best to consult with your attorney and risk management personnel for specific guidance.

The acceptance process should be well detailed and easily understood to avoid confusion and frustration, which can lead to youth member withdrawal. Prospective youth members should be allowed and encouraged to attend two meetings or events along with an assigned advisor/mentor, to answer questions youth member may have. As a matter of good practice, it is encouraged that both prospective youth members and their parents/guardians participate in a brief orientation to the youth program. This could be used to explain requirements and expectations, program objectives and safety measures and give the parents/guardians the opportunity to ask questions based on what they learned.

The acceptance process should include:

- Interview – emphasize expectations, gauge commitment and attitude
- General written aptitude test – gauges learning ability to assist in training and comprehension (precludes testing those with learning disabilities)
- Background check – helps department members build trust in program and individuals
- Physical ability test – helps department build an understanding of members strengths and weaknesses – aids in determining training needs
- Medical clearance – member physician input on any restrictions or limitations

Once accepted the youth member will need to serve a probationary period. During the probationary period it is useful to have a check list, making it easier for the department and youth member to track progress

during probation. This report contains a policy/directive as a program template for a youth program in the fire service, using the Town of Farmington Fire Department Cadet Program department directive. See Attachment 4.

### **Legal Issues**

If not already addressed, the Town and both fire departments should consult with their respective legal counsel to outline any program applicability to State statute and regulations, liability and insurance issues, training requirements for both youth members and department program leaders, allowed and non-allowed activities, and hours of participation. This report includes information from the Wage and Workplace Standards Division of the Connecticut Department of Labor which can be downloaded from the CRCOG website at: [http://www.crcog.org/publications/Public\\_SafetyDocs/pdfs/CadetGuidelines.pdf](http://www.crcog.org/publications/Public_SafetyDocs/pdfs/CadetGuidelines.pdf)

Program leaders must understand their legal responsibilities, and choosing those leaders in a small volunteer department may be difficult. But it is important to realize that if the Town or the departments cannot guarantee a protected and safe environment for youth members, then all due consideration must be given to suspending or disbanding the Junior Firefighter program(s) in town.

Under no circumstances should anyone convicted of criminal sexual assault/indecent behavior, or physical abuse be allowed to participate to any degree with the youth program. Youths are extremely vulnerable to being manipulated by adults with ill intentions, and often find it difficult to voice discomfort when faced with questionable or inappropriate behavior. Youth members should never be left on their own, whether at the fire station or scene of an emergency. Further, no individual youth member should be left alone with an individual department member.

### **Recruitment, Retention, and Program Marketing**

There are numerous resources for volunteer fire departments addressing best practices to market and attract not only youth programs, but adult recruiting as well. It all starts with building partnerships in the community. If not already part of the program, the local Board of Education should be approached to discern requirements they may have for fire department youth members to receive credit toward graduation, school outreach programs, and work study applications.

Additionally the school board has resources which can help educate fire department and Town leaders and give better insight into the current generation - what motivates them and how they learn.

### **Interim Report Process and Recommendation Review**

As previously stated, the project team did not receive any Junior Fire Fighter Program guidance documents until after the Interim Report was submitted despite more than one direct request to the two Fire Chiefs. During a subsequent meeting with CVFA and NCVFD Executive Boards on other matters, the Interim Report was addressed and the process leading to the drafting of the report itself. At that time the two Executive Board Presidents made it clear that, in fact, there were program guidance documents, and the project team should include the Presidents in correspondence with the Fire Chiefs. The project team explained that the Chain of Command was being followed, under which the Fire Chiefs hold ultimate responsibility, and traditionally external requests go through the Chiefs until such time others are designated for correspondence copy or as the Point of Contact(s).

The NCVFD Executive Board invited the CRCOG project team to meet with the NCVFD Board and Fire Department Officers to review the Interim Report. The NCVFD Board questioned the validity of a report that only offered one recommended course of action which ignored the current two department system. As detailed quite adequately, the reference material used to form the basis of the Interim Report and its recommendations offer not only a Smart Practice but a true BEST Practice application. The project team has no hesitation whatsoever in affirming its original position as to the overall effectiveness of managing

one program rather than two, especially if the Town steps forward and provides a higher level of stewardship in conjunction with external adult program oversight.

A review of the supplied guidance documents finds that both sets are inadequate in established oversight and program management when held against what is seen as the standard (Volunteer and Combination Section of the International Assoc. of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) *Guidelines and Best Practices for a Successful Youth Fire Service Program - 2009*.) At the barest of minimums, if the departments do not endorse using the full guidance/recommendations, there should be restrictions on individual fire personnel being alone with Junior Fire Fighters (does not necessarily include emergency response) and forbids any individual convicted of criminal sexual assault/indecent behavior or physical abuse from participating to any degree with the youth program, if not the Town should demand the program(s) be discontinued.

The project team holds that the Town is ultimately responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the Junior Fire Fighters, and the courses of action available to the Town are separate and distinct:

- Maintain the status quo and do nothing
- Encourage Fire Departments to make changes in program in accordance with IAFC report
- Accept the recommendations in this report for Junior Fire Fighter Program

There is no need to expend excessive amounts of time and energy investigating what other communities do. The decision is quite simple, in that either the decision is made to apply the Best Practice or maintain the current program practices. The included program guidance comes from the Town of Farmington, which currently has three departments in Town, but yet has one fire service youth program. They got to that point after they had a fire department member convicted of the same conduct as alleged in Coventry. The project team can be viewed as being overly strident in its assertions in this matter, but it has nothing to do with what a community or department wants; it is based solely on what any Junior Fire Fighter, or potential member, needs and deserves.

## Anticipated Recommendation Costs

The costs associated with this recommendation includes whatever direct or indirect costs there are in establishing proper program management and oversight to include:

- Fire personnel training for Junior Program Advisor
  - minimal, but if included as part of the Fire Officer Develop Program and Certification process an annual stipend of \$1,500 – \$2,000 per position
- Legal review – estimated \$250 per hour based on CRCOG attorney fees for outside review
- Recruiting and marketing material – \$500 annually

## Objectives and Planning Tasks

Objective 1. Establish single town wide Junior Fire Fighter Program

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Establish/appoint committee to review recommendation and determine course of action
  - 1.1 Determine program needs
  - 1.2 Set project milestones and time frame depending on chosen course of action
  - 1.3 The Town seek legal counsel regarding youth programs in the fire departments

*The issues regarding liability and proper governance are key, and all parties need to be assured of protections and responsibilities associated with a fire department youth program. This includes training requirements for adult supervision and leadership in the program.*

- 1.4 The Town and fire departments work with the local Board of Education to examine requirements for youth members to receive credit towards graduation for participating in the Junior Firefighter programs.

*Building a partnership with the local Board of Education makes immense sense as a tool for building an effective curriculum and training program. Through a school's work study program or community outreach, the Junior Firefighter Program can be a meaningful experience, giving young individuals an opportunity to examine the fire service as a possible career and earn credits towards high school graduation. A strong multifaceted program with community partners not only seeds the pool for perspective members for the fire department, but also builds essential life skills not readily available to high school students in a classroom.*

- 1.5 Ultimately consolidate the two Junior Firefighter Programs into one, with youth members assigned to either to Coventry or North Coventry.

*Given the complexity of administering a fire department youth program, trying to do so under two different and separate entities does not appear to be the most efficient model, especially if there is an opportunity to work with the Board of Education. One training program is easier to administer and track by a single governance body however it is constituted. This allows for training and acclimation across both departments, building a sense of community that extends to the Town of Coventry and not to a single fire department. The Town itself would have a greater sense of comfort by being part of the "team" that develops the training program and tries to develop proper adult supervision and leadership from both departments, instead of an individual department trying to meet common sense standards and practices associated with a youth program.*

There should be no equivocation when it comes to the requirements of a fire department youth program. If the safety and protection of youth members cannot be properly addressed, then there is no question that there should not be a program until appropriate and prudent measures are in place.

## **8. Fire Fighter Stipends**

### **I. Summary**

Currently both departments utilize a point system to track fire fighter participation for emergency response, and for training and meeting attendance. At the end of the year the points are given a specific monetary value, and fire personnel receive a stipend for their commitment to the department based on the total number of points they earned during the year. Although both departments use a point system, the application of how the points are awarded and the end of the year value for each point differ sufficiently to indicate inequality to the disadvantage of NCVFD fire personnel compared to CVFA.

**Recommendation: The Town adopts a fixed flat rate per "event" stipend and develops a standard policy on how the stipend is applied used town wide.**

## II. Issue Review

Implied or explicitly stated throughout this report is the fact that “volunteer” does not mean free or at no cost. The changes in the science of firefighting, EMS, and special operations response are not just for career fire departments. The standards and regulations for emergency response may make some slight accommodations for the volunteer fire service or industrial fire brigades, but fire fighter certifications are the same regardless of whether an individual is career or volunteer. The time and level of commitment required to achieve and maintain response capabilities is a testament to how dedicated the members of the Coventry Volunteer Fire Association and the North Coventry Volunteer Fire Department truly are. Dedication such as this must be recognized by the Town and the community of Coventry, and the standard for such recognition usually equates to money in the form of funds for fire department operations and, in a vast majority of volunteer services, some type of direct or deferred compensation.

In Coventry, not only do volunteers receive a minimal stipend for event response, but they are also awarded a small pension of less than \$200 dollars a month after a specified number of years of service to the department. The practice for those Towns reviewed for this study indicated a range of compensation, from those similar to Coventry’s to those community that include stipends for Fire Company Officers, tax abatements for department members, and education grants or incentives.

A point system is not necessarily overly complicated, but it was clear that the system for one of the departments was not easily explained, and we had to be referred back to written guidance. As a system becomes more complex so does the opportunity for exploitation, error, and misappropriation/misapplication. Questions were raised about the appropriateness of point application by both fire department members and Town staff. For these reasons the recommendation for policy and program changes is made. Further inequality is seen in Coventry with the formula application from year to year based on a fixed budget line item for the stipend, where the variables of number of responses/attendance in conjunction with the fixed line item mean the point value will change from year to year for the individuals.

Investigating what other communities do for direct compensation or stipend shows a payment range of \$5.00 to \$10.00 per incident/event or at a certain number of hours. Incidents are invariably defined to mean emergency response, and events cover training, required meeting attendance, and fire department standbys. The semantics are not as important as developing a standardized policy that is equally applied. The policy should have the definitions of what constitutes a compensable activity and may include tiered payments for on scene emergency operations vs. meetings and standbys. In any case, the policy should be clear and easily understood. The policy should also address common occurrence circumstance such as simultaneous calls, cancellations prior to response, extended operations, et cetera.

## Anticipated Recommendation Costs

A fixed flat rate compensation system obviously has an associated cost; that final cost is determined by the collective stipends paid to all fighters, where each stipend is the dollar amount assigned to a compensable activity multiplied by the number of activities in which the individual participated. It will be variable from year to year, in contrast to using a fixed line item budget process, most likely to the future benefit of the individual. As an example if the fixed budget was \$20,000 then regardless of call volume the department knows the fire fighter stipends will be calculated to match said line item; under a fixed rate application there may be years where the stipend program is less than that fixed line item, and there may be years where the stipend program exceeds that fixed line item. Like any other budget determination process a fire fighter stipend line item would be set as “proposed” by looking at the previous year’s response numbers and applying percentage increases based on what the history shows.

### Objectives and Planning Tasks

Objective 1. Revise policy for Town wide fire fighter stipend program

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Establish/appoint committee to revise fire fighter stipend policy
- 1.1 Establish budget for program
- 1.2 Educate fire fighters and staff to program requirements
- 1.3 Implement program

## 9. Staffing, Deployment and Health & Safety

### I. Summary

When considering staffing and deployment requirements, “adequate” staffing must consider not just the number of members a volunteer fire department has, but the number that are certified to operate in hazardous atmospheres in compliance with OSHA regulations and NFPA standards. The CVFA and NCVFD have stated processes for monitoring these compliance issues. The project team has concerns as to how the Town of Coventry itself is able to accurately monitor and track fire personnel for OSHA and NFPA compliance, as well as for general health and safety issues. This is important because it is the municipality that is ultimately responsible for ensuring someone is there to answer the 911 call.

**Recommendation: The Town of Coventry mandates the development of an occupational safety and health program for the CVFA and NCVFD; Town conducts a comprehensive risk management, or uses previously supplied material from Patrizz and Matrix addressing service needs.**

### II. Issue Review

#### Health and Safety

Both departments strive to assure they have a sufficient number of fire fighters to respond in the Town and meet the mission of the Fire Departments, but the project team could not find any specific information which adequately addresses the issue of proactive health and safety. The project team makes this

recommendation with the hope that, when combined with implementation of other report recommendations, the Town eventually is able to maintain a high quality of response regardless of time of day.

The United States Fire Service, both career and volunteer, has consistently heralded the rigors and dangers of the profession. These “cultural” attitudes, fostered by television and past practices, have been the bane of the fire service in attaining the status of a real profession. While many would harken back to the day of these heroics, the risks and hazards of the profession make many if not all risks unacceptable. The typical risk versus benefit analysis shows that unless there is a “savable life” many, if not all, other risks are unacceptable in today’s fire service.

In 1982 the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) assembled a technical committee of subject matter experts and practitioners and tasked them with the development of a standard that addressed occupational health and safety for the fire service. This committee developed a foundational document, *NFPA 1500 Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program, 2013 edition*. This standard provides a planned program outlining all the components of a fire department occupational safety and health program. This planned program is a consensus process between the town and the fire departments. The standard does not differentiate between career, volunteer, paid on call, auxiliary, reserve or other designations that would identify someone as a firefighter.

This standard, along with its companion documents<sup>14</sup>, follow the typical 3-5 year revision process within the NFPA Standards making process, open to all to participate with the submissions of proposals and comments. Firefighting and the delivery of other emergency services continue to be a hazardous job. However, the poor medical condition or physical fitness of some members, as well as problems with a lack of a program for vehicle operator training and operation, use of an incident management system, and communication capability continue to further erode the safe delivery of emergency services.

This edition of the standard continues to emphasize a holistic approach to health and safety in the fire service. For the 2013 edition, the committee has updated many of the references and referenced sections of other standards within this document to ensure consistency between this document and other NFPA Technical Committee projects. Some of those other projects are Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), fire department apparatus, and respiratory protection.

The technical committee has included new requirements for the training, use, and limitations of PPE. The committee has also developed new requirements to include not only the ensemble but also ensemble elements, which would include anything that has been added to the ensemble as part of the requirements. The cleaning and care of PPE as well as station/work uniforms has also been addressed with new or updated requirements. When it comes to fire department apparatus, the committee has brought the related requirements within this document in line with those requirements contained within the respective projects. Some issues that have been addressed are the inclusion of a vehicle data recorder (VDR) and a driver training program and requirements, as well as requirements for the wearing of helmets within an enclosed cab. Another issue that has been cropping up due to some recent events was that of unintentional hose deployments while the fire department apparatus was driving on roadways. The committee has developed text to ensure that the fire department takes the steps to ensure that this will not happen. The committee has also looked at the issue of buddy breathing as it relates to SCBA (Self

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<sup>14</sup> Called out for specific review - NFPA 1582 Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments; NFPA 1583 Standard on Health Related Fitness Programs for Fire Department Members; NFPA 1584 Standard on the Rehabilitation Process for Members During Emergency Operations and Training Exercises

Contained Breathing Apparatus) use and has developed cleaner text around the use of a buddy breathing system.

The committee included new requirements stressing the need for a risk assessment to be conducted at each and every incident based on the nature of the incident and to also recognize the need for specialized crew members based on that incident. Another important update made in this edition is the use of the term “mayday” as a requirement when a fire department member finds him- or herself in an emergency situation requiring immediate assistance. Lastly, the committee has rewritten Chapters 11 and 12, both of which revolve around fire fighter health and wellness and exposure to atypical stressful events.

The Town of Coventry needs assurances that health and safety requirements are being met. The Town is therefore within its rights to mandate the development of an occupational safety and health program, utilizing personnel from both departments, with the training and assignment of an occupational safety professional to oversee the committee. The Occupational Safety and Health Committee, working with members from each department, will present to the Town Manager and Town Council an implementation plan with benchmarks and budgetary recommendations for the next fiscal year. Mr. Foley from the project team is available, on a defined basis, to lay out the foundation for this process. Mr. Foley has served on this technical committee and chaired the Incident Management Committee (NFPA 1561), since its inception until he retired in 2012.

### **Staff and Service Deployment**

A major component of the Fire Service Occupational Safety and Health Program involves how and what types and levels of service are provided by the fire department. While many departments in the past have attempted to provide all services to a community, that cannot be the case in today’s fire service.

NFPA 1720, *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments, 2010 Edition* was developed to provide a discussion and decision criteria regarding what levels and types of services are expected by citizens what level and types of services are to be provided. Unfortunately, many times the uneducated public assumes that the fire department provides any and all services. In today’s world, the number of personnel required the type and level of training and certification, and the frequency of that service need to be addressed in a comprehensive risk management process. Sometimes this process is driven by budgetary constraints, regardless of how monies are appropriated or raised.

The diversity of the volunteer fire service, its configurations, its oversight, and administration provide a myriad of organizations that befuddle the citizenry and administrations of many towns. Rather than trying to outline each type of organization, the technical committee looked at service delivery criteria based on firefighter health and safety, survivability of medical patients based on American Heart and American Medical Association standards, as well as other requirements needed for technical rescue and special operations. Research work and empirical studies in North America were used by the Committee as a basis for developing response times and resource capabilities for those services, as identified by the fire department.

The work done by the Committee provides the user with a template for developing an implementation plan on the standard. Most important, it provides the body politic and the citizens a true picture of the risks in their community and the fire department’s capabilities to respond to and manage those risks.

To meet this objective, the Town Manager and Town Council should appoint a combined committee from both departments that would also include citizens from both districts and town government to conduct a comprehensive risk management deployment strategy utilizing Annex B of NFPA 1720. This process should include public education forums, surveys and other inputs as the committee would deem necessary.

This model is used as an example of how a communitywide risk management plan can be utilized to protect both citizens and property. While the scope of NFPA 1720 strictly focuses on deployment, staffing, and service levels, the realization is that this is one component of a total community fire protection planning process. An Authority Having Jurisdiction can determine that other components could reduce the risks of fire, and therefore adopt stronger building and fire prevention codes, enforce those more vigorously, and enhance their public life safety education components. These models are included for that purpose in the standard (NFPA 1720) Annex B.

## **Anticipated Recommendation Costs**

Costs associated with these recommendations would primarily be contained within the process of conducting a risk management/service needs assessment. As mentioned previously in this report both the Patrizz and Matrix studies supplied an assessment which deserves reconsideration. If the Town is able to determine that the same or similar conditions exist such that another assessment is not necessary, that information should be sufficient to address NFPA 1720. This project was not tasked with making those same assessments specifically, however the project team believes there is sufficient information within the two reports to provide the proper guidance for the Town.

Fundamentally, consideration of the proper deployment needs includes the size and location of the apparatus fleet. A town wide assessment most likely will reinforce the recommendations from the previous reports on apparatus deployment and avoiding duplication of unnecessary units, eventually saving the Town money.

### ***Objectives and Planning Tasks***

Objective 1. Develop a Town wide Health and Safety program for town fire personnel

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Establish/appoint a single Health and Safety Committee
- 1.1 Review appropriate standards and regulations to determine program components
- 1.2 Develop a Health and Safety program to meet applicable regulations and standards
- 1.3 Implement Health and Safety program
- 1.4 Train all fire personnel in program components

Objective 2. Determine staffing and deployment service requirements

Planning Tasks:

- 2.0 Establish/appoint a committee to review previous fire department service studies
- 2.1 Validate if information in reports for appropriate action
- 2.2 Determine how best to apply valid information in accordance with NFPA 1720
- 2.3 Determine appropriate staffing levels and apparatus deployment locations

## **10. Fire Department Dispatching**

I. Summary

Currently the two departments are dispatched/"toned out" as the separate departments they are. The current system has specific department dispatch requirements where either both departments or a single department is dispatched, depending on the incident. Additionally, EMS response for ambulance service is

also dispatched as a separate organization; that is, not all the members of the fire department are “toned out” for an EMS/ambulance call unless there is a rescue or special response need. Given the inability to assure an appropriate level of response, it makes sense to have both departments dispatched to ALL service calls at the same time, and then some personnel, if not needed, can be turned back by the appropriate Fire Officer or Incident Commander. For EMS dispatch ALL emergency medical personnel willing to be part of medical response should be toned regardless of incident location.

**Recommendation: Implement a single “All Call” town wide dispatch/tone system for fire response; Implement a single town wide EMS dispatch/tone system.**

## II. Issue Review

When faced with the unknowns of the volunteer fire service, there is never any guarantee as to who will show up when. Some communities have moved to an all-call system where all fire personnel are dispatched regardless of how many departments are in town. This affords them a little more comfort in the fact that it is better to have to cancel units than have to go through multiple dispatches to get an adequate response. Others have moved to duty crews where volunteers commit to being available during known periods of coverage/response problems or peak service demands for both EMS and fire.

For fire response alone, a duty crew is still not easily achieved, given the numbers required to provide a sufficient level of response and the standard of “Two In – Two Out” (no interior operations can begin until such time staff is available/on-scent to perform rapid extrication for fire fighter safety). So it makes sense to have mechanisms in place which attempt to meet response objectives. In this instance notifying as many personnel as possible as quickly as possible is the first step in a volunteer response plan where the assumption is all members will not be able to respond. There are certain volunteer departments which have little or no problem with response levels, and it is easy to build response assumptions into their respective dispatch systems where single units or stations can be dispatched to meet the service need. That is not the case in Coventry.

An “All Call” system streamlines dispatch and response protocols for both fire and EMS incidents. Concerns about excessive responders in this instance are not as much a concern as not having an adequate response. If there is an indication that too many responders are showing up, creating a safety concern, then the system can be reviewed for adjustments where appropriate.

Currently both department SOGs are clear about response and about allowing non-Fire Company Officers taking personal vehicles to the scene only under certain conditions or circumstance (most commonly having to drive by an incident location on the way to the fire station). It is not anticipated, therefore, that an All Call system would become unwieldy.

When considering EMS/medical calls, (which can be over two thirds of total requests for service), there is also the same concern about having sufficient staff on scene in a timely fashion to render aid and assistance. Most recently, Emergency Medical Technicians and Responders from NCVFD have been cleared to “ride” the CVFA ambulance. This should improve the Towns overall response capability, which becomes even more effective if all EMS members in CVFA and NCVFD are toned out regardless of incident location. Again, once sufficient levels for an adequate response are met, others can be cancelled or returned. Further, moving one of the three CVFA ambulances into the North Coventry fire district can improve response capability, cutting down on response times, and should be reconsidered in accordance with the previous fire department studies; the CRCOG project team is in concurrence with that recommendation.

## Anticipated Recommendation Costs

Depending on the final outcome of revisions to the fire fighter stipend program this recommendation does have a direct cost. That cost would be seen in the increase in number of responders that may receive an initial dispatch beyond the current system. The cost of more members being dispatched to more incidents could be as much as \$10,000 to maybe even \$20,000 per year (based on a flat rate of \$6.50 per fire fighter per incident) above current stipend costs. When compared with an increased response capability, it should be considered a worthy minimal cost increase.

When aligned with an appropriate deployment strategy, this cost could be absorbed within the potential long term savings associated with right sizing of currently duplicative services and apparatus.

### *Objectives and Planning Tasks*

Objective 1. Implement a streamlined dispatch system

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Establish workgroup to review and revise current dispatch system
- 1.1 Develop milestones and project timeframe
- 1.2 Determine system needs matched to dispatch capabilities of TN
- 1.3 Implement streamlined dispatching

## 11. Code of Conduct and Ethics

### I. Summary

Like it or not, both career and volunteer fire personnel find themselves held to higher standards of conduct. Policy or guidelines need to be in place to address what constitutes inappropriate or questionable conduct.

**Recommendation: Fire Department personnel work with the Town to develop or strengthen current policies dealing with fire personnel Code of Conduct and Ethics.**

### II. Issue Review

A review of the documents submitted to the CRCOG project team found that conduct and ethics are addressed in a cursory or summary fashion. Given the recent incidents of inappropriate and questionable behaviors, the current policies and/or guidelines addressing fire personnel conducts and ethics should be revised. Both sets of bylaws or Standard Operating Guidelines do not adequately address some of the finer detail seen in Code of Conduct statements in other fire departments. A statement that members shall conduct themselves in such a way so as not to bring embarrassment or discredit to the department does not go far enough, and can be subject to claims of ignorance in the broadest terms unless there is more definition included in the standard.

The Town should work with the CVFA and NCVFD to assist in establishing and implementing a well thought out policy which can be easily understood by all. Not every act of possible violation can be easily identified,

but the fire departments should have a list of what are considered serious offenses or violations. This would include but not be limited to<sup>15</sup>:

- Alcohol consumption
- Bribes
- Conduct unbecoming of a member
- Confidentiality of information
- Disorderly Conduct
- Falsification – Intentional falsification of or omission of information from reports
- Harassment
- Illegal Drugs
- Insubordination
- Loss or Damage – failure to report
- Prescription medication – personal impairment
- Theft
- Unauthorized entry – station, office/desk, storage space
- Violence

Once the policy is implemented, ALL fire personal must be educated to what the standard means, and any associated discipline that might result from a violation. Further, ALL fire personnel should understand their individual roles and responsibilities to help ensure that all personnel are abiding by the policy.

## **Anticipated Recommendation Costs**

The only cost associated with this recommendation should be the time and level of effort required by Town staff to assist in the development and implementation of a Code of Conduct/Ethics for all fire personnel.

### ***Objectives and Planning Tasks***

Objective 1. Implement a comprehensive Code of Conduct/Ethics Policy

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Utilize workgroup reviewing Discipline and Grievance Procedures (recommendation 6)
- 1.1 Determine areas to be defined within Violations
- 1.2 Develop and Implement Policy
- 1.3 Train all fire personnel to Policy

## **12. CVFA Ambulance Revenue Recovery – Financial Management**

### **I. Summary**

Since the CVFA implemented a revenue recovery program (billing for ambulance service), it has generated hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in revenue for the organization. Currently the program is managed by CVFA, Inc., with the actual patient billing and revenue collection contracted to a third party that

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<sup>15</sup> Reference – Town of Plainville, CT – Division of Fire

specializes in ambulance billing. The amount of funds generated and the previous management of those funds has been a matter of contention, and questions about expenditures have been raised.

**Recommendation: The CVFA, Inc., relinquishes its control and management of the patient billing process, and management of those associated funds.**

## II. Issue Review

The CRCOG project team does not have an accountant assigned to it, but all three members have held executive level positions in the fire service, including budget development and management. Additionally, two of the team were the Chief Executive Officers for their fire departments revenue recovery programs for a specialized mobile intensive care system. The team has sufficient experience in fire-emergency service budgets and revenue recovery to substantiate this specific recommendation. One does not need to fully understand the complexities of a revenue recovery program to understand this recommendation, but one should be familiar with the basics how ambulances bill for service.

Connecticut is one of the states where the State sets ambulance and EMS service rates in accordance with C.G.S. 19a-177 (9) (C). Once rates are set, a “service” can either accept the established annual rate schedule or petition CT-Department of Public Health – Office of Emergency Medical Services for a review to establish higher rates where a need can be demonstrated. The vast majority of the times, EMS-Ambulance services accept the CT-DPH rate schedule. For the actual collection of associated ambulance fees, very few volunteer EMS organizations have the in-house expertise to provide an effective program to: negotiate with insurance carriers when needed; bill insurance companies for ambulance fees; be current with regulations for Medicaid and Medicare billing and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS); bundle billing practices for Advanced Life Support (ALS) intercepts; and understand “balance” billing or direct patient billing requirements and processes. Given the complexities of ambulance billing, volunteer services usually contract with a third party company to manage the entire process. The service collects a percentage of funds recovered and issues payment to the EMS organization monthly, bi-weekly, or as determined by their contract. The funds recovered for the EMS organization are normally used to sustain EMS operations or to offset Town appropriated funds for operations.

In this instance CVFA receives the revenue and manages the funds within CVFA itself. CVFA, Inc. has volunteer Corporation Officers who do receive compensation from CVFA, reported as either IRS W-2 or 1099 MISC income per their 2011 IRS 990 filing. The 2011 990 indicates an income of \$607,815dollars of which \$427,623 is attributed to “AMBULANCE SERVICE”. The remaining income is listed as Government Grants; \$148,431, inferred to be Town funds for CVFA “fire department” operations, and \$26,785 as contribution, gifts, etc. Total functional expenditures were reported as \$730,275 with fourteen separate lines item expenses attributed to the operation. This produced a net loss of \$122,460. For 2010 filings CVFA, Inc. reported a net loss of \$113,670. The project team is not making any claims of impropriety, but it is concerned as to how the funds may have been managed in the past, and only ask if financial management practices are being reviewed by the Town for both CVFA and NCVFD, given the amount of investment the Town has in the two organizations. The project team did not seek any IRS filings from NCVFD because their funding is limited to Town appropriations, associated NCVFD fund raising activities, and any grants, gifts or contributions. Town appropriated funds are now managed by Town staff for both organizations, and beyond that the departments are free to do as they see fit with other funds, as may be determined by internal rules, or specific grant guidance.

This recommendation is made not to take anything away from CVFA, Inc., but to actually free them from the burden of managing a revenue recovery program worth hundreds of thousands of dollars and from the constant questioning of where all the money is going. A review of other municipalities with non-

commercial ambulance services indicates a variety of different models utilized, but prominently represented by one of the following:

- Department retention of funds used to maintain operations – no supporting municipal appropriation for EMS
- Department retention of funds used for operations – with supporting municipal appropriation to cover any financial gaps between revenue and actual response/operational costs
- Municipal retention of funds with a specific municipal appropriation for EMS operations
- Municipal retention of funds with EMS operations covered within municipal appropriation for the fire department

Both organizations are managed by volunteers elected to corporation offices. In the instance of the CVFA, Inc., the 2011 IRS 990 filing indicates the CVFA, Inc., Treasurer averaged forty hours per week related to her duties for which she received \$4,838 as compensation. That is startling and further bolsters the recommendation to have the revenue recovery program managed by the Town, as that represents the largest portion of the CVFA finances. In discussions with the Town Manager, he stated the Town would create an enterprise fund or similar line item within the Town budget to be used for EMS operations. The project team recommends something beyond that; it recommends that the Town accept all responsibility for funding fire department operations, including a Town Administrator/Director for Fire and EMS (or Fire Chief), Fire Fighter compensation program (both direct and deferred), and any other non “Association” related expenses, and that the town use the funds from the EMS revenue recovery program to offset those expenses. Further, if there is a surplus at the end of the fiscal year, it is recommended that those funds be used for either a Fire Department Capital Investment program or to offset/enhance future fighter benefits.

Finally, Connecticut state statute currently assigns certain response authorities designated as Primary Service Area (PSA) to the providers of emergency medical services and not the municipality itself (C.G.S. 19a-177). This makes it almost impossible for a municipality to determine who in fact will deliver EMS in its community. The municipality has to petition the CT Department of Public Health (C.G.S. 19a-181c *Removal of a Responder*) and prove the health and safety of the public is at risk due to poor performance;

*“as determined based on the local emergency medical services plan established by the municipality pursuant to section 19a-181b and associated agreements or contracts.”*

For a number of years various attempts have been made by municipalities to have this legislation changed to name the municipality as holder of the PSA thus having the power to decide who will provide EMS in its city or town. In this past legislative session an outright change was not enacted. However through CT Public Act 13-306 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PERSONNEL AND ESTABLISHING AN EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PRIMARY AREA TASK FORCE, a taskforce has been established to comprehensively address this issue. The taskforce report is due to be submitted to the CT Legislature in February 2014. A reasonable expectation is that municipalities, if not granted absolute authority in this matter, will find it much easier to request reassignment of the PSA for its city or town.

This is important for CVFA to consider, because the Town of Coventry may become the direct holder of the PSA or be the final determining body in having the PSA assigned to an EMS provider. If the anticipated legislative changes are made then this will be a paradigm shift in how EMS is provided in CT and CVFA can either be part of the future for EMS in Coventry, or find itself “out of business.” Based on conversations during this review the project team inferred that the Town is not interested in putting the CVFA ambulance out of business, but will exert its full rights and authorities as a municipality to ensure that a consistent and reliable EMS response capability is in place in Coventry regardless of who the service provider is.

The best outcome for Coventry is for CVFA, Inc., to remain intact as the EMS provider, but for the Town to be the fiduciary for managing ambulance service revenue recovery funds as described in this issue review.

## Anticipated Recommendation Costs

This recommendation represents a cost to the Town only if the full recommendation is implemented and there is a significant gap in revenues recovered versus total expenditure for fire department operations. As is, Coventry's budget included a total of \$377,725 appropriated for various fire department operation expenses. Simple math indicates the Town would have a surplus in this account of approximately \$50,000. However, that would most likely not be the case if the Town hires a professional to manage fire department administration and if there is an increase in the overall fire personnel stipend program. But (with emphasis) savings would be realized in that the Town would actually be spending less overall than it currently does. Add to that anticipated savings by elimination of duplicated apparatus, and some increase in response capability with more personnel available for ambulance coverage (resulting in a slight increase in EMS calls which are not passed to other services) and the savings could be significant. The Town would be in the position to possibly negotiate a better deal with EMS intercept services, where the service receives a percentage of revenue received for a call in contrast to the flat rate currently paid regardless of fees actually collected from a call. Finally, the current practice for CVFA is not to "go to collection" to recover fees directly from an individual based on any gap in balance billing; the Town could reconsider this practice if it were the fiduciary. This could represent a six figure increase in revenue recovery. This collection process would represent a financial burden to some people, so it requires careful consideration before implementation.

Either as part of this recommendation or as part of a review of the Fire Fighter Stipend program, the Town should review how EMS ambulance crews are compensated. Given the volume of calls, this is a huge commitment of time when the entirety of the call is examined; this goes beyond just the response to the scene. An ambulance run for the Town, from initial dispatch to the crew going home, can be in excess of two hours. If the crew is going out two to three times a day, it is easy to see the time this takes away home and family. Yes, they volunteer (as all volunteers do), and yes, they know what the sacrifice is going in. However, the fact that Coventry is lucky to have a workforce of volunteers should not mean that their sacrifices should go unrewarded, as small as the reward may be. Sacrifice means different things to different people, but eventually the sacrifice may become too much. So careful deliberation and honest dialogue with the stakeholders is warranted.

The project team offers the following example to illustrate what a revised stipend program might look like for EMS and the associated costs.

EMS duty crews are needed to cover week day business hours from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. each duty shift requires a minimum of an EMT patient attendant and an EMR ambulance driver; each member of the assigned duty crew would receive \$30.00 per shift. The annual cost of each duty shift (2 people for 12 hours per day) would be \$15,600 ( $\$60/\text{day} * 5 \text{ days per week} * 52 \text{ weeks per year}$ ). Additionally, the duty crew is eligible for the per call stipend. Review of the past three years of service calls and revenue recovered indicate that these costs are easily absorbed.

## Objectives and Planning Tasks

Objective 1. The Town of Coventry assumes responsibility of ambulance revenue recovery

Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 Establish/appoint a workgroup to review and implement recommendation

- 1.1 Set milestones and project timeframes
- 1.2 Establish budget and finance requirements
  - 1.2.1 Determine appropriate volunteer compensation
- 1.3 Review/amend Town ordinance(s) as necessary
- 1.4 Coventry assumes EMS financial responsibilities (July 2014)

## **Reputation Repair and Management**

Although not included in this report as specific recommendations, the project team reviewed research regarding fire service reputation management practices and offers the following for consideration in conjunction with any recruitment or retention activities for the fire rescue services in Coventry.

The fire service and those volunteers who selflessly dedicate themselves to their communities are held to very high regard in this country. Fire fighters have always been seen as staunch heroic figures, never flinching in the face of danger. In this regard fire personnel in Coventry are no different. However, it does not take much in the way of inappropriate activity by irresponsible fire fighters to undermine this centuries old idolization. There is no amount of “good press” that can withstand the detrimental impact when fire personnel engage in criminal, immoral, inappropriate, or unethical activities.

There can be no sense of entitlement among fire personnel which makes it ok to act improperly because they are admired and respected by the general public. In fact as fire personnel they will always be held to a higher standard when it comes to ethical behavior. In the specific set of circumstance which led to this review, both departments were harmed to varying degrees by the actions of two individuals and by the inaction of others. Before either department can truly benefit from any type of campaign to recruit volunteers and to retain the ones they have, fire department management must be successfully addressed. This includes strong financial and ethical foundations.

As addressed earlier in this report an enhanced discipline and grievance process will be crucial to rebuilding any damage to department reputations. After an Improvement Plan is put in place a campaign to effectively address whatever remaining public concerns regarding fire department operations should be considered.

### **Recruitment and Retention**

As obvious as it is, it always bears repeating: “Volunteer fire departments need people to volunteer.” Reviewing the number of department members in the Town of Coventry can logically lead one to believe the Town is well “staffed,” with over one hundred volunteer fire fighters. This is not the case however. Presently the Town has approximately thirty fire personnel who are cleared to operate in a hazardous environment. As mentioned previously, this creates an issue for day time fire service coverage in Coventry.

The Town would benefit from a well-coordinated volunteer recruitment program. Additionally, volunteer retention may become easier with enhancements in fire department management and fire fighter stipend practices. The partnership and support of Town leadership is critically important when trying to determine how best to implement a town wide recruitment program which not only draws upon the residents of Coventry but may also include non-residents who live within a one to three mile radius of the town as well as town employees who do not live in Coventry.

Changes in sociological conditions which drive that sense of community and wanting to help are evolving and will remain a concern for the volunteer fire service going forward. Research has shown that homeowners who work outside of their town of residence have very little time or interest in volunteering as highlighted in survey conducted by St. Joseph’s University in 2004 (figure page 43). Add to that recent scandals or the politics of a volunteer fire department and it is easy to understand why individual choose not to volunteer, or leave out right.

An effective recruitment program springboards off of the reputation of the organization; reputation management should be a part of a recruitment program. Both can be viewed as one ongoing project. Most individuals who will be spending time away from their homes and families will not want to face the drama of having to take sides in an “Us against Them” dynamic. Further, it is incumbent on the Town and its fire service leaders to ensure that everyone understands the impact of effective interpersonal communications and breaking down the walls that have been built up over the years.

There are a number of organizations which can provide guidance in building an effective recruitment and retention program, including the National Volunteer Fire Council, the US Fire Administration, the International Association of Fire Chiefs / Volunteer and Combination Section, and FEMA. All should be researched and studied to determine what might make sense for the Town of Coventry.

| <u>WHAT MAKES YOUR MEMBERS LEAVE YOUR ORGANIZATION?</u>                              |       |
|--|-------|
| No time to volunteer.....  | 92.3% |
| Conflicts within the organization.....   | 47.8% |
| Organizational leadership created adverse atmosphere....                             | 46.7% |
| Too much training.....   | 45.6% |
| Attitude of existing personnel on new comers.....                                    | 39.1% |
| Criticism received from officers / older members.....                                | 38.0% |
| Lack of camaraderie.....   | 19.5% |
| <i>*many respondents indicated more than one reason for leaving the organization</i> |       |

### ***Objectives and Planning Tasks***

Objective 1. Repair damage to fire department reputations

Planning Tasks:

- a. Establish/appoint workgroup to address fire department reputation issues
  - 1.0.1 Workgroup composition to include fire personnel, Town and public members
- b. Set goals and objectives for workgroup
- c. Review Smart Practice applications
  - i. Determine degree of Crisis Management needs
- d. Implement public / media campaign in conjunction with recruiting campaign

## Objective 2. Establish an ongoing volunteer recruitment and retention program

### Planning Tasks:

- 1.0 The workgroup established for fire department reputation can be utilized to address recruitment and retention
  - 1.0.1 Add local business and Town staff knowledgeable in marketing and media
- 1.1 Research appropriate guidance documents
- 1.2 Determine program design
- 1.3 Implement program with public “kick-off”

## Conclusions

It was not an easy task to construct this report the way the project team chose to. This report looked at the science of fire service management and determined it was best to attempt to present its findings as one would a thesis on what constitutes significant opportunities for Coventry and its Fire-EMS organizations. As stated in the opening of this report, the two previous studies provided excellent research and application of that research into a traditional study report. This report is crafted to address not only some of the findings of the two reports, but what the CRCOG team found to be Smart Practices currently utilized in Connecticut and the U.S., and the team’s own professional experience. Some will argue that current practices work just fine. Others will choose to use the recommendations in this report to move forward. In either case dialogue should be encouraged and is healthy.

Change is never easy; without change there is no progress, no change no gain, etc., etc. These are not just clichés; they are the lifeblood of success, as exhibited by the growing industry of “Managing Change.” From the fire department’s perspective, they cannot forget that ultimately it is the Town that is responsible for providing for the public’s safety and well-being, and the Town must have a determining role in how fire and EMS is provided in Coventry. And from the Town’s perspective, it cannot forget it is the volunteers that are needed in order for the Town to be successful in keeping the public safe.

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**ATTACHMENT 1**  
**Fire Department SWOT Analyses**

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## Coventry Volunteer Fire Association - SWOT

04/15/13 Meeting with Coventry VFA Coventry VFA Station

1800-2100

CRCOG Personnel: Carmine Centrella, and Stephen Foley

Meeting opened with introductions, and overview of previous meetings with the Town's Safety Committee, Town Emergency Services Director, and the North Coventry VFD. An open discussion from those in attendance was facilitated by Carmine, and emphasized that CRCOG was not the decision maker and that we (CRCOG personnel) were there at the request of the Town. Notes, etc. and the final report to the Town would not contain any attributions.

A review of the Matrix Report, done in 2008 included a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat narrative. Based on that SWOT narrative, CRCOG personnel utilized that document as a foundation for discussion.

**Note:** The same process was utilized with discussions with North Coventry Volunteer Fire Department.

What follows: Is a review of the SWOT narrative with comments provided by members of the CVFD-

### Strengths:

- Volunteer participation; they claim to have approximately 90 personnel
  - 2/3 personnel for EMS response during the day
  - *(Cannot always cover the 29 CFR 1910.120 (2 in/2out OSHA regulations)- rely on automatic response from surrounding communities See WEAKNESSES)*
  - Working to establish an EMS duty roster for coverage; ALS response is accounted for
- Enhanced their technical rescue capabilities with swift water and ice rescue
- Dispatch from Tolland works well and includes EMD

### Additional Strengths

- More trained EMT's than NCVFD
- Jr Program at about 30% in restoring
- EMT & EMR training done in-house; approximately 95%
  - **(Note: i.e. the Association Treasurer who is an EMSI conducts EMS classes and is paid directly by individuals, department members then get reimbursed for attendance by the Association and she writes them a check from ambulance funds? – Need further review??)**

### Weaknesses

- Lack of transparency for financial/budgeting system; budget is established by the CVFD, approved through the Town process, and monies are appropriated by the Town
  - Bills not being paid on time
  - Bills not being paid/or rejected by EMD after approval through the CVFD process (CVFD internal review process in place)
  - There is no monthly/quarterly reconciliation of the budgets; Town v CVFD

- There is no external review/auditing process for the revenue/billing for EMS services; they do balance bill but no collection process
- Cannot always cover the 29 CFR 1910.120 (2 in/2out OSHA regulations)- rely on automatic response from surrounding communities
- Fire/EMS Funding Stream (**SNF Note: this will be one of the main issues**)
  - Town pays for NCVFD EMS training and Jr FF Program; CVFD pays for their own (**Note: CVFD collects and keeps the billable ambulance monies and hence pays for EMS training**)
  - As noted above ambulance budget is internal to CVFD, no Town oversight; it was noted that they do pay for NCVFD oxygen cylinders' to be refilled
- **Joint Training- Work in progress**
  - CVFD would like rescue tool training from NCVFD
  - Past personalities inhibited joint training
  - Fire operations equipment is compatible; SCBA, hose, etc.
- **Standards for Fire Officers**
  - Covered in new by-laws but there is still the link to the past as the officers are elected, so even if "qualified" under the by-laws "it is popularity contest". Nothing to validate someone's "qualifications/ability" to be an officer in an operational setting
  - No succession planning

### Opportunities

- **Geographic positioning of the (3) ambulances**
  - It was stated the majority of the call for EMS services are in the CVFD district and hence it would only confuse personnel if an ambulance was relocated to NCVFD; however if personnel who are currently trained as EMT's in NCVFD could they then staff an ambulance if re-located? There are times of redundant calls for service and they can't get the 2<sup>nd</sup> ambulance out the door (something to explore further, would need response data and location, also response times) Police do not typically do first response EMS
  - Communications- limited number of portable radios, all officers have one, and apparatus are equipped with radios
- **Town Services Director/EMD**
  - Also has FM responsibilities
  - Reviews and processes bill for the fire service operations component of the budget not EMS
- **Contract for Services- in place between Town and CVFD**
- **Other Opportunities**
  - Develop training opportunities
    - EMS
    - Rescue
    - Others
- Set-up meeting for Town Council to interact and meet with CVFD members; educate the Council to what time and effort is required to provide a level of service to the Town

- Develop a Public Relations/Public Awareness campaign for the citizens on what services are provided by CVFD (another way to restore confidence in the department)

### **Threats**

- Loss of volunteers; begs the question why town employees cannot respond as needed during work hours? Also why do people join the FD- it was stated that opportunities exist for those to volunteer who do not wish to be operational
  - Jr Program seen as a plus for recruiting future volunteers
- Loss of public confidence- how to regain that (short term and long term) **See opportunities above**
- Apathy within the department, is there a need to provide some level of Crisis Intervention counseling for those who would wish to access that?

### **Additional Items**

- Lack of knowledge by citizens regarding how the department operates and what services are provide (**See note regarding opportunities**)
- What attributes make up the CVFA?
- Value added to require EEO and Sexual Harassment training for all members, and ongoing for officers?
- Mandatory driver license check?
- Reconciliation of the by-laws between the two departments; i.e. disciplinary procedures, payment for responses and training, etc.

## North Coventry Volunteer Fire Department - SWOT

04/08/13 Meeting with North Coventry VFD NCVFD Headquarters

1900-2100

CRCOG Personnel: Carmine Centrella, William Perkins, and Stephen Foley

Meeting opened with introductions, and overview of previous meetings with the Town's Safety Committee, Town Emergency Services Director. An open discussion from those in attendance was facilitated by Carmine, and emphasized that CRCOG was not the decision maker and that we (CRCOG personnel) were there at the request of the Town. Notes, etc. and the final report to the Town would not contain any attributions. A review of the Matrix Report, done in 2008 included a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat narrative. Based on that SWOT narrative, CRCOG personnel utilized that document as a foundation for discussion.

What follows: Is a review of the SWOT narrative with comments provided by members of the NCVFD-

### Strengths:

- Volunteer participation; membership has increased
- Personnel target of 50 F/F's currently have 38 on the roster
- Junior Firefighter program / ages 14-17
- Good fire-ground management
- Good training programs
- Training plan in place for core competencies
- If gap is identified through real world event within 2 months dept. will receive training addressing the gap
- Department adheres to strong financial management practices
- Technical rescue - town wide
- Dispatch from Tolland works well and includes EMD
- Town / DPW employee's trained as firefighters
  - Difficulty w/releasing for calls though (see opportunity)

### Weaknesses

- Dispatch errors / either through fire district contract / or "run" cards
- Station 211 – (garage) needs expansion
- CVFD leadership – cautious trepidation
- Lack of combined training with between 2 departments
  - Leads to trust issues
- Town does not adhere to contract
- Inconsistency in town funds for FD budgets
- Town owned FD vehicles:
  - CVFA – 2
  - NCVFD - 7
- Not allowing NCVFD EMTs to ride the ambulance as assigned Duty Crew
- Standards for Fire Officers
- Covered in new by-laws but there is still the link to the past as the officers are elected, so even if "qualified" under the by-laws "it is popularity contest". Nothing to validate someone's "qualifications/ability" to be an officer in an operational setting

### Opportunities

- Geographic positioning of the (3) ambulances
- With use of NCVFD EMTs – station one ambulance in North district.
- Town Services Director/EMD
- Include admin for EMS activities
- Increase flexibility for town employees who are fire department members to respond to calls
- Develop training opportunities
- NCVFD EMTs – Cleared to participate in R-2 activities
- Develop a Public Relations/Public Awareness campaign for the citizens on what services are provided by CVFD (another way to restore confidence in the department)

### Threats

- Public perception that both departments are one in the same
- Being blamed for someone else's sins
- Future bad acts
- Loss of support
- Loss of public confidence- how to regain that (short term and long term) See opportunities above

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## **ATTACHMENT 2**

### **Connecticut Commission on Fire Prevention & Control Certification Flow Chart**

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## **ATTACHMENT 3**

### **Introduction to the Fire Service Through Youth Service Programs**

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**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES AND PUBLIC PROTECTION**  
**Connecticut Fire Academy**

The Connecticut Fire Academy has been providing a venue to engage, educate, mentor and inspire youth in the Fire Service for years. Many alumni of the Introduction to the Fire Service (ITTFS) program currently serve as active volunteer and career Firefighters throughout the state. Over the years, the program has expanded to encompass three, six-day deliveries per summer.

Due to the excellent performance of the 2011 and 2012 Junior Counselors, the ITTFS Program is continuing to seek interested and qualified candidates for the Junior Counselor role. We are expanding the number of positions to include two Junior Counselors for the Advanced Skills And Concepts (ASAC) Session in August. Any successful alumni of ITTFS may apply to be a Junior Counselor for June or July; applicants for the ASAC Session must be a graduate of the ASAC Program.

Successful candidates will participate in the following:

1. ITTFS Junior Counselor Training.
2. Planning and preparation for the ITTFS session to which they are assigned.
3. Assisting in establishing Daily Operational Plans for each day of the ITTFS session.
4. Assisting in Physical Training (PT) sessions.
5. Assisting in setting up training rotations.
6. Assisting in the delivery of a training rotation under the supervision of an Adjunct Instructor.
7. Assisting in maintaining the safety, accountability and efficiency of the ITTFS session.
8. Assisting in guiding students, under the supervision of an Adjunct Instructor, as they operate as fire companies during scenarios and the Graduation Demonstration.
9. Other duties as assigned.

ITTFS Junior Counselors will receive the following benefits:

1. Uniforms
2. Room and Board
3. A Letter of Recommendation upon successful completion of the ITTFS session
4. The opportunity to work with and be mentored by Adjunct Instructors
5. The opportunity to engage, educate, mentor and inspire the next generation of the Fire Service!

For more information, please contact Program Coordinator Ian Tenney at: [ian.tenney@ct.gov](mailto:ian.tenney@ct.gov).

Ian K. Tenney  
Program Coordinator  
Introduction To The Fire Service Programs  
Connecticut Fire Academy

*Commission on Fire Prevention and Control*  
*34 Perimeter Road*  
*Windsor Locks, CT 06096-1069*  
*Phone: (860) 627-6363/Fax: (860) 654-1889*  
*An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer ct.gov/cfpc*

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**ATTACHMENT 4**

**Junior Firefighter Program Template For Illustration Purposes**

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**Purpose:**

To establish minimum standards for a Town of Coventry Junior Firefighter Program. To encourage residents between 14 and 17 years of age to become familiar with the responsibilities of volunteer fire fighters. To demonstrate to young people the importance of service to the community through involvement in the volunteer fire department. To develop a working knowledge of First Aid, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, and the Safe Working Practices associated with the Fire Service.

**Directive:**

There is hereby established the Town of Coventry Junior Firefighter Program, which is open to students between 14 and 17 years of age who live in the Town of Coventry or, if a resident of a neighboring town, live within three driving miles of the Town of Coventry Fire Station to which the member will regularly respond. The Director of Fire & Rescue Services will consider extensions of this distance, not to exceed 5 driving miles, upon recommendation of the Fire Chief of the station to which the member will regularly respond.

The goal of the Junior Firefighter Program is to attract high school students to the Volunteer Fire Service by providing them with quality training and increasingly responsible duties in the Fire Service.

**Junior Firefighter Program Oversight**

The Chain of Command for the Junior Firefighter Program shall be that the Junior Firefighter s report to the Junior Firefighter Staff, the Junior Firefighter Advisors, the Junior Firefighter Coordinator, the Fire Chiefs and ultimately the Director of Fire & Rescue Services.

All fire fighters serving in the roles of Junior Firefighter Support Staff, Junior Firefighter Advisors and Junior Firefighter Coordinators shall be subject to background checks by the Town Manager's Office annually.

Additionally, all fire fighters within the Town of Coventry fire departments will have interaction and occasional supervisory responsibilities involving the Junior Firefighter s during calls and Fire Department Events.

All Fire Fighters shall take steps to assure that, at no time during any Fire Department sanctioned activity is there a situation where one Fire Fighter is alone in a building or on a trip with one Junior Firefighter. Fire Fighters shall take steps to assure that, whenever possible, they are not alone with a single Junior Firefighter before or after such activities when Junior Firefighter s are dropped off or picked up at the fire station.

Junior Firefighter Support Staff: All members of the fire departments in the Town of Coventry are encouraged to assist with the Town of Coventry Junior Firefighter Program. Junior Firefighter Support Staff Members are encouraged to be Certified Fire Fighter I or "Grandfathered" and shall preferably have served as a fire fighter for not less than two years. Any fire fighter who wishes to work with the Junior Firefighter Program shall be recommended by his or her respective Fire Chief and approved, in writing, by the Director of Fire & Rescue Services prior to attending Junior Firefighter activities. Junior Firefighter Support Staff shall report to the Junior Firefighter Advisors.

Junior Firefighter Advisors: There shall be two Junior Firefighter Advisors, one from each station, to be appointed by the respective Fire Chief of each station and approved, in writing, by the Director of Fire & Rescue Services. Each Fire Chief shall have the authority to change the Junior Firefighter Advisor representing his or her station, as he or she deems necessary. Such changes shall also be approved in writing by the Director of Fire & Rescue Services prior to taking effect. Each Fire Chief shall be responsible for assuring that his or her Junior Firefighter Advisor is active with the program. Junior Firefighter Advisors shall be Certified Fire Fighter I or "Grandfathered" and shall have served as a fire fighter for not less than two years. Junior Firefighter Advisors shall report to the Junior Firefighter Coordinator.

Junior Firefighter Coordinator: The Junior Firefighter Coordinator shall be appointed by the Director of Fire & Rescue Services who will solicit input from the Fire Chief(s) on the selection of such individual. The Director of Fire & Rescue Services shall have the authority to change the Junior Firefighter Coordinator, as he or she deems necessary. The Junior Firefighter Coordinator shall be Certified Fire Fighter I or "Grandfathered" and shall have served as a fire fighter for not less than two years. The Junior Firefighter Coordinator shall report directly to the Fire Chiefs equally and then ultimately the Director of Fire & Rescue Services.

### **Application Process**

Each Junior Firefighter and his or her parents / legal guardians shall be given an orientation before being invited to become members of the Junior Firefighter Program.

A person who is interested in becoming a member of the Junior Firefighter Program shall complete the attached application and have his or her Parent / Legal Guardian sign the Permission Form and the Membership Drug Testing Authorization Form.

In order to become a Junior Firefighter in the Town of Coventry, the application must then be approved by the Junior Firefighter Coordinator and the Chief of Station to which the Junior Firefighter will most likely respond.

The completed application, as well as the Parental Permission and Drug Testing Authorization forms, shall be sent to the Director of Fire & Rescue Services and will then be processed by the Coventry Town Manager's Office. All Junior Firefighters shall be subject to mandatory drug testing.

### **Academic Requirements**

Consistent with Coventry High School's eligibility requirement for athletics, Junior Firefighters must maintain an academic average of 60% or higher and cannot have more than one "F".

To remain eligible for participation, each junior member shall remain enrolled in school until graduation from the twelfth grade.

Fire Junior Firefighter s may earn a quarter of a credit per year toward graduation through Coventry High School's "Reach Out" Program so long as they fulfill the requirements set forth by Coventry High School.

### **Conduct of Junior Firefighters**

1. Junior Firefighters shall be responsible for following all policies, laws, regulations and directives that govern all fire fighters in a Town of Coventry fire department including but not limited to Department Directives, OSHA regulations, and other Town, State and Federal Laws. Junior Firefighters who are found to be in violation of any such Laws, Regulations or Directives shall be subjected to progressive discipline by the Junior Firefighter Coordinator, Fire Chiefs, Director of Fire & Rescue Services and Town Manager up to and including termination from the Town of Coventry Junior Firefighter Program. Progressive Discipline, as defined by the Coventry Employee Manual which does apply to Junior Firefighter s for this purpose is "...As a general rule, punitive action is progressive in nature, beginning with the least possible sanction required to correct the conduct in question, followed by increasingly severe action if conduct does not improve. Disciplinary action includes...oral warning...written reprimand...suspension...dismissal or demotion..."
2. No Junior Firefighter shall, while on department property including apparatus (regardless of location), attending a meeting, drill or other activity, be under the influence of, consume, or be in possession of alcoholic beverages, drugs, drug paraphernalia, tobacco, or other controlled substances.
3. Junior Firefighters shall not be in any of the of Coventry's Fire Stations unless they are supervised by a Coventry Fire Fighter.
4. While at a given fire station, Junior Firefighter s shall follow the rules and procedures of that station as established by the Chief and Volunteer Fire Company.
5. Junior Firefighter s may attend sanctioned Fire Department Activities that do not interfere with school and do not violate the below listed time requirements as long as they have permission from a parent or legal guardian AND the Fire Officer in charge of the activity or detail.
6. Violation of any Law, Statute, or Ordinance resulting in criminal arrest of a Junior Firefighter shall be reported by the Junior Firefighter to the Junior Firefighter Coordinator, in detail, within five days of issuance but prior to attendance at any Fire Department Activity. The Junior Firefighter Coordinator shall advise the appropriate Fire Chief who is responsible for notifying the Director of Fire & Rescue Services not more than seven days after the issuance of such infraction.
7. Any Junior Firefighter suspended or expelled from school must report this to the Junior Firefighter Coordinator within five days of such action but prior to attendance at any Fire Department Activity. The Junior Firefighter shall be on mandatory leave for the duration of the action. The Junior Firefighter Coordinator shall advise the appropriate Fire Chief who is responsible for notifying the Director of Fire & Rescue Services not more than seven days after the issuance of the suspension or expulsion.
8. Each Junior Firefighter shall at all times, on or off of fire department property, on or off of official fire department business, conduct themselves in a respectable and professional manner so as not to bring discredit to themselves, the Junior Firefighter Program or the Town of Coventry fire departments.

## **Trips, Events and Activities**

1. The Junior Firefighter Coordinator shall assure that a schedule, including all Junior Firefighter Activities, Events, Trips, Training, or other functions, is created at least annually. Such schedule shall be sent to the Fire Chiefs and the Director of Fire and Rescue Services in advance of the first event on the schedule and shall include the date, time, location and the name of the Junior Firefighter Advisor or the Junior Firefighter Coordinator who is responsible for supervising the event. Any changes, modifications or deviations from the schedule shall be submitted in writing to the Fire Chiefs and the Director of Fire and Rescue Services for approval prior to the event.
2. There shall be at least two members from the Fire Department present at all Junior Firefighter Activities, Events, Trips, Training or other functions. This shall include at least one Junior Firefighter Advisor or the Junior Firefighter Coordinator. The other member may any member in good standing with a Town of Coventry fire department. Any event that does not have two such authorized members of a Town of Coventry fire department present must be rescheduled or cancelled.
3. The attached permission slip shall be completed and filed with the Director of Fire & Rescue Services prior to the scheduled event for any Activity, Event, Trip, Training or other function that involves the Junior Firefighter s traveling out of town.
4. Junior Firefighter Activities, Events, Trips, Training or other functions shall not include any overnight travel with the exception of Junior Firefighter s attending the Connecticut Fire Academy Junior Firefighter Camp where such Junior Firefighter s stay at the Connecticut Fire Academy under the supervision of Connecticut Fire Academy Staff.

## **Apparatus, Equipment and Response to Calls**

The Incident Commander or any fire fighter at any scene always reserves the right to send a Junior Firefighter to sit in the fire apparatus if he or she deems it to be in the best interest of the Junior Firefighter or Public Safety.

At all emergency and service calls, and all drills where personal protective equipment (PPE) is required, Junior Firefighter s shall be properly attired in PPE except that a Junior Firefighter shall not wear SCBA or an N95 Hepa Mask.

Junior Firefighters are required to wear seatbelts while fire apparatus is moving.

Junior Firefighter s shall always give up their seat for a fire fighter if there are not enough seats on the apparatus for everyone.

**The following activities are PROHIBITED by the State of Connecticut  
Department of Labor and / or the Town of Coventry for ALL Junior  
Firefighters:**

1. Driving any department vehicles.
2. Performing interior fire suppression involving structures, vehicles, or wild land fires, except grass fires.
3. Operating a personal vehicle with blue lights and / or in emergency mode.
4. Performing firefighting overhaul duties.
5. Responding to hazardous materials fires, spills or other events which may expose the minor to toxic and/or hazardous materials exceeding a threshold limit value listed in the tables of section 1910.1000 of subpart Z of 29 CFR 1910 (allows for small motor vehicle fuel leaks).
6. Performing any activity involving donning and / or breathing from Self Contained Breathing Apparatus.
7. Entering a confined space as defined by 29 CFR 1910.146.
8. Performing "off shore" ice rescue activities.
9. Performing any duty that involves the risk of falling a distance of 6 feet or more (including the use of ladders and aerial ladders).
10. Filling air bottles.
11. Using cutting torches.
12. Operating aerial ladders.
13. Performing any duty involving the use of lines greater than 1 ¾", except 5-6" suction lines during drafting operations.
14. Junior Firefighter s shall not respond to any calls while school is in session.
15. Junior Firefighter s shall not ride in the open cabs of any fire apparatus.
16. Junior Firefighter s shall not drive personal vehicles to any emergency scene.
17. Junior Firefighters may respond to Medical Calls if they are age 16 or 17 and hold a current, valid, State of Connecticut certification as either a Medical Response Technician or an Emergency Medical Technician and are approved in to respond to medical calls by the Chief or his designee of the station for the calls to which they will be responding. In the event that a non-medical certified a Junior Firefighter is riding in an apparatus to a fire call and the apparatus is directed to respond to a Medical Call, the Junior Firefighter shall stay inside of the apparatus for the duration of the call.
18. Junior Firefighters shall not respond out of town to mutual aid requests unless such request by the surrounding town is specifically for Junior Firefighter s. In such case, the Junior Firefighter s shall assemble at the Fire Station and leave as a group under the supervision of a Chief Officer or Fire Fighter so designated by a Chief Officer.

The following may be performed by Junior Firefighters ages 14 and 15 between the hours of 7AM and 10PM only

1. Attend meetings that conclude no later than 10PM throughout the year.
2. Respond to incidents no later than 7PM and may remain on scene no later than 10PM.
3. Wear personal protective equipment that readily identifies them as Junior Firefighter s.
4. Receive instruction and engage in training that does not involve fire, smoke (except latex / theatrical smoke), toxic or noxious gas, or hazardous materials or substances.
5. May respond to emergencies on fire department apparatus after receiving proper training and clearance AFTER the age of 15.
6. Observe exterior firefighting activities while under supervision.
7. Clean up service at the scene of a fire but only outside of the structure and only after the scene has been declared safe by the Incident Commander.
8. Participate in functions within the rehabilitation sector.

The following may be performed by Junior Firefighters ages 16 and 17 between the hours of 6AM and 12AM only

1. Attend and take part in supervised training.
2. Wear personal protective equipment that readily identifies them as a Junior Firefighter.
3. May respond to emergencies on fire department apparatus after receiving proper training and clearances.
4. Participate in functions within the rehabilitation sector.
5. Pick up hose and clean up at the fire scene after the incident commander has declared the area as safe.
6. Fight grass fires after receiving proper training and clearance.
7. Perform search and rescue operations NOT including structural firefighting.
8. Use pneumatic / power driven saws, shears, Hurst Type tools or other power tools DURING TRAINING EVOLUTIONS ONLY.
9. Enter the interior of a fire structure after the fire is extinguished and the incident commander has declared the structure safe.
10. Set up uncharged attack lines exterior to the structure.
11. Change SCBA bottles at emergency scenes.
12. Perform traffic control duties after receiving proper training and clearance.
13. Operate pumps, less than 300 GPM, at an emergency scene.
14. Handle charged hose lines up to and including 1 3/4" diameter.



**FIRE JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER PROGRAM PARENT / LEGAL GUARDIAN  
PERMISSION FORM**

*This form must be completed and submitted with all Junior Firefighter Applications.*

I hereby certify that I am the Parent or Legal Guardian of the named individual and that the date of birth listed for the named individual is correct. I have attended a Junior Firefighter Orientation Program and understand, as a member of the Junior Firefighter Program, my child will be trained in the techniques of firefighting, may participate in the social and parade activities of the department, and in such other duties as directed by the fire fighters and officers.

I further understand that as a member of the Junior Firefighter Program, my child shall comply with requirements set forth in the attached Town of Coventry Junior Firefighter Program Policy document, as well as all other policies and procedures governing the operations of the Fire Department.

I fully understand the nature of the activities in which Junior Firefighter s will be engaged and the individual has my permission to engage therein, including that, in rare instances, Junior Firefighter s may be requested to assist with situations in other towns. I hereby agree to hold harmless the Town of Coventry and the (Fire Department), and their officers with respect to any injury to property or self-sustained by such individual.

---

Name of Junior Firefighter Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last) (First) (Middle)

Fire Junior Firefighter Applicant Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Month) (Day) (Year)

Name of Parent or Legal Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Parent or Legal Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number of Parent or Legal Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address of Parent or Legal Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent or Legal  
Guardian)

## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AS A JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER WITH THE TOWN OF COVENTRY

The fire departments in the Town of Coventry are dedicated to a policy of nondiscrimination in employment and volunteer membership on any basis prohibited by law. Volunteer membership in the Town of Coventry Fire Department is available without regard to race, color, religion, creed, gender, national origin, age, disability, marital or veteran status, sexual orientation or any other legally protected status.

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

|   |                  |                      |                  |
|---|------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| <i>Applicant's name (last, first, middle)</i> |                  |                      |                  |
| <b>STREET ADDRESS</b>                         | <b>CITY/TOWN</b> | <b>STATE/ZIP</b>     | <b>HOW LONG?</b> |
| <b>TELEPHONE NUMBER (HOME)</b>                |                  | <b>Email Address</b> |                  |

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Station applied to: \_\_\_\_\_

Are there any days or times you would be unavailable to participate as a volunteer firefighter Junior Firefighter?

Place an X over days you are not available (M) – (T) – (W) – (Th) – (F) – (Sa) – (Su)

List times you are not available \_\_\_\_\_

On what date would you be available to start? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you related by blood or marriage to any employee or elected official of the Town of Coventry? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please name: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been denied membership to an Emergency Service, either paid or volunteer? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

–

### EDUCATION

| LEVEL       | SCHOOL NAME AND ADDRESS | YEARS COMPLETED | DIPLOMA/ DEGREE? |
|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Junior High |                         | 6 7 8           |                  |
| High School |                         | 9 10 11 12      |                  |

Have you previously been a member of a fire department? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, complete the following:

Name of Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Chief: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Reason for Leaving: \_\_\_\_\_

List all certifications (including First Aid, CPR, and EMT with expiration dates), trainings, licenses, special skills, courses of study or any additional information that you feel may be helpful to us in considering your application. Use additional pages if necessary.

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## REFERENCES

Give the names of three persons not related to you whom you have known at least one year.

| Name | Address | Phone | Relationship |
|------|---------|-------|--------------|
|------|---------|-------|--------------|

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|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|

### IN CASE OF EMERGENCY PLEASE NOTIFY:

| Name | Address | Phone | Relationship |
|------|---------|-------|--------------|
|------|---------|-------|--------------|

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|

## **NOTICE TO APPLICANTS REGARDING PRE-MEMBERSHIP DRUG TESTING**

*Any individual applying for Junior Firefighter membership in the Town of Coventry (the "Town") shall submit to a urinalysis drug test as a mandatory part of the application process. This notice serves as a written statement of the Town's intention to conduct such testing as part of the application process. The testing will be conducted by a certified laboratory/testing service selected by the Town, in accordance with the procedures required by applicable state and federal regulations.*

The parents or legal guardians of tested applicants will be given a copy of any positive test result. All test results shall be considered confidential by the Town and shall not be disclosed to the employees of the Town, or any other person, other than to those persons for whom such disclosure is necessary. Positive test results, or a refusal to sign this consent form and participate in pre-employment drug testing, shall be grounds for denial of membership. Arrangements for testing will be made by a representative of the Town, in consultation with each applicant. Cooperation in scheduling the testing is important for processing an application.

By signing below, the parent or legal guardian of the applicant consents for their child to be drug tested and acknowledges that they have thoroughly read the foregoing notice and policy, and that they understand and agree that in order to be considered for membership in a Town of Coventry fire department, they will comply in full with the Town's drug testing policy.

---

Junior Firefighter Applicant Signature

Date

---

Parent or Legal Guardian Signature

Date

**TOWN OF COVENTRY**  
**VOLUNTEER JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER APPLICANT CHECKLIST**

Items 1-9 shall be attached and / or verified by the Junior Firefighter Coordinator and Fire Chief before an application is sent to the Director of Fire & Rescue Services.

**NAME OF FIRE FIGHTER JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER APPLICANT:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FIRE STATION:**                      **CVFA STATION (    )**                      **NCVFD STATION (    )**

| INITIAL WHEN<br>VERIFIED OR<br>ATTACHED                  | REQUIREMENT   | COMMENTS |
|--|---|----------|
| <b>FOR JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER COORDINATOR AND FIRE CHIEF</b> |   |          |
|  | 1. 14-17 years of age.  |          |
|  | 2. Enrolled in school.  |          |
|  | 3. Lives in town or within 5 miles of the fire station to which the Junior Firefighter will respond.                                      |          |
|  | 4. Parent and Junior Firefighter completed Orientation  |          |
|  | 5. Signed Parent Permission Form  |          |
|  | 6. Completed application  |          |
|  | 7. Completed Pre-Membership Drug Testing Authorization  |          |
|  | 8. Application approved by the Junior Firefighter Coordinator   |          |
|  | 9. Application signed and dated by the Fire Chief.  |          |
| <b>FOR USE BY DIRECTOR OF FIRE &amp; RESCUE SERVICES</b> |   |          |
|  | 10. Application reviewed by the Director of Fire & Rescue Services for items 1-9 and approved for processing by the Town Manager's Office |          |
| <b>FOR TOWN MANAGER'S OFFICE USE</b>                     |   |          |
|  | 11. Drug Test scheduled   |          |
|  | 12. Appointment Letter sent   |          |

## FIRE JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER APPARATUS CLEARANCE FORM

|   |             |             |  |                             |                         |
|---|-------------|-------------|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Junior Firefighter :</b>                                     |             |             |  |                             |                         |
| <b>Apparatus:</b>   |             |             |  |                             |                         |
| <b>Date:</b>  | <i>Pass</i> | <i>Fail</i> |  |                             | <i>Pass</i> <i>Fail</i> |
| <b>Hand Tools:</b>  |             |             |  | <b>Fire Extinguishers:</b>  |                         |
| Halligan Bar:   |             |             |  | Dry Chemical:               |                         |
| Flat Head Axe:  |             |             |  | Water:                      |                         |
| Pick Head Axe:  |             |             |  | Carbon Dioxide:             |                         |
| Pike Pole:  |             |             |  | Class D (Metal X, etc.):    |                         |
| Pry Bar:  |             |             |  | Other:                      |                         |
| Closet Hook:  |             |             |  |                             |                         |
| Glass Master:   |             |             |  | <b>Miscellaneous:</b>       |                         |
| Shovel:   |             |             |  | Speedi-Dri:                 |                         |
| Bolt Cutters:   |             |             |  | Cribbing:                   |                         |
| Tool Box:   |             |             |  | First Aid Equipment:        |                         |
| "K"-tool:   |             |             |  | Portable Lighting:          |                         |
|   |             |             |  | Electrical Cords/Cord Reel: |                         |
| <b>Power Tools: (Identify only – not permitted to operate!)</b> | <i>Pass</i> | <i>Fail</i> |  | Flashlights:                |                         |
| Reciprocating Saw:  |             |             |  | Chimney Chain:              |                         |
| Chain Saw:  |             |             |  | Ash Can:                    |                         |
| Ventilation Saws:   |             |             |  | Blanket:                    |                         |
| Hydraulic Extrication Tools:                                    |             |             |  | Salvage Covers/Tarps:       |                         |
| Water Evacuation Equipment:                                     |             |             |  | Ventilation Fans:           |                         |
| Thermal Imaging Camera:   |             |             |  | Ropes:                      |                         |
| Gas Meter:  |             |             |  | Foam Applicators:           |                         |
| Heat Detector:  |             |             |  | Spare Air Bottles:          |                         |
| Generator:  |             |             |  | Lifestar Landing Strobe:    |                         |
| Fuel cans for applicable tools:                                 |             |             |  |                             |                         |



## FIRE JUNIOR FIREFIGHTER ACTIVITY PERMISSION SLIP

In consideration for participation with a Town of Coventry fire department Junior Firefighter Program, I (Name of Junior Firefighter) and (Name of Parent or Legal Guardian) Do hereby release and forever discharge the (Fire Department), the Town of Coventry, Connecticut, and all employees and members of each of the foregoing, acting officially or otherwise, from any and all claims, demands, action, or accusations of action on account of the death or injury to any Junior Firefighter which may occur by action or omission by said Junior Firefighter , the (Fire Department), the Town of Coventry, Connecticut, and any employees or members.

The above listed Junior Firefighter has my permission to attend:

| Name of Junior | Junior | Date (s) of |
|----------------|--------|-------------|
| 1.             |        |             |
| 2.             |        |             |
| 3.             |        |             |
| 4.             |        |             |
| 5.             |        |             |
| 6.             |        |             |
| 7.             |        |             |
| 8.             |        |             |
| 9.             |        |             |
| 10.            |        |             |

Signed (Parent or Legal Guardian) \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Printed) of Parent or Legal Guardian : \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## PRE-EMPLOYMENT CHECKS AND TESTING

Equal Opportunity Employer

*TOWN OF COVENTRY*  
**TOWN MANAGER'S OFFICE**  
1712 Main St  
COVENTRY, CT

### **Background Check: Fire Fighters Involved with the Junior Firefighter Program**

By signing below, I do hereby give my permission and authorization for the Town of Coventry to conduct a background check. The information obtained will be used to determine whether I will be authorized to be involved with the Town of Coventry Junior Firefighter Program. This release and authorization shall remain in effect during the term of my involvement with the Town of Coventry Junior Firefighter Program. The Town of Coventry reserves the right to run subsequent checks on an as needed basis.

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Full Name

Date of Birth

---

Driver's License Number  
Issue

State of

---

Current Resident Address

---

Signature

Date