

# Hamilton Township

## Active Fire Chiefs' Association

*The members of Hamilton Township Active Fire Chiefs' Association have reviewed the DCA Hamilton Fire Service Study. We offer the following comments:*

Executive Summary: (pages 3-4)

Agree: single command structure, improved accountability, standardized operations, and improved deployment of forces.

Disagree: how can anyone "estimate a \$2.7 million savings" when many sections within this Study recommend "needs assessments and evaluations." These evaluations and long term planning will indicate that there are many areas which clearly require improvements. Any "savings" should be reinvested into the new department to help fund the deficient areas.

Demographics and background: (pages 5-8)

Agree: a single tax rate is needed to create "tax fairness." Each district has been sending apparatus and personnel to every other district to provide assistance for 20+ years; we call that mutual aid. So if everyone is helping each other, why are there 9 different fire districts with 9 different tax rates?

Agree: the TriData report from 1998 stated, "there are more efficient and effective ways to operate...including a consolidated single system..."

Fire Station and Infrastructure: (pages 9-14)

Corrections to chart on page 9: District 5 has no mortgage, District 9 does not have a turnout gear washer, nor an SCBA refill station

Agree: Independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party review Needs Assessment must be completed, examine accommodations for multiple crews, and maintenance costs for each station

Agree: Independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party review Response Times Study from each station (also consider optimum station locations for future growth).

Agree: develop a Station capital plan based on response time study, building evaluations, and current written agreements about use and maintenance of volunteer owned stations/buildings

Apparatus: (page 15-19)

Disagree: LT 17 is NOT out of service

See Appendix A for updated apparatus report

Agree: Independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party review of all apparatus (volunteer owned and District owned)

Agree: Needs assessment must be completed

Agree: Apparatus replacement plan and written agreements about use and maintenance of volunteer owned apparatus

Agree: Apparatus replacement plan "based on the discernable needs of the FD to replace old units and add to the motorized fleet as necessary for the safe and effective operations..." This evaluation and replacement plan MUST include specialty items currently NOT within our inventory, but greatly needed: heavy rescue, tanker, and brush truck

#### Safety and Training: (pages 20-22)

Agree: Review, update, and consolidate all safety and training policies

Agree: division of training with a chief officer and captain, possibly more staff to handle all of the mandatory safety and PEOSH training; and new recruit, driver/operator, EMT, specialized rescue, officer preparatory training, incident command courses, etc.

Agree: training division should be responsible for all training issues: design, develop, provide, oversee and evaluate all training for all personnel for all ranks/levels

#### Office of the Fire Marshal/Local Enforcement Agency: (pages 23-25)

Agree: under the direction of the fire chief, a single inspection bureau (LEA) with one fire official, one fire prevention specialist, and several inspectors based on need

Agree: operating out of a single centrally located office that is easily accessible to all Hamilton residents and business owners

Disagree: the LEA should stay within the fire district, NOT become a part of the Hamilton Twp. Building Dept.

Somewhat agree: in-service inspection by on-duty staff. This is a great training opportunity for all personnel to be more knowledgeable about the Hamilton businesses, schools, etc. and their operations. However personnel who complete inspections must be certified by the NJ DCA Division of Fire Safety as Fire Inspectors. Most fire officers are not certified. There is a cost for this certification program, plus overtime to attend, plus recertification courses annually, which also have overtime costs.

Somewhat disagree: Non-LHU inspection fee, proposed additional income, however this could be considered another "tax" on small businesses. It is our intent to improve services with minimum increases, so adding another fee to businesses may not be the best option.

#### Personnel: Career staff (pages 26-30)

\*Career Staffing Levels chart in the Study is over a year old and is inaccurate. Please see the updated personnel information in Appendix B

Agree: a single Fire District with 5 elected fire commissioners, single structure, and single organization

Agree: Proper span of control

One chief, two deputy chiefs, two on-duty battalion chiefs per platoon (8), one battalion training chief, one training captain

Crew of 4 personnel per apparatus: 1 officer and 3 firefighters

Disagree: Labor to determine their representation *in advance* so contracts and working conditions can be resolved prior to start date.

Disagree with the 24-48 work schedule, an increase of the work week by 14 hours per week (42 hours increased to 56 hours) with ZERO pay adjustment

Disagree with the rank structure of Captains and Lieutenant, prefer all apparatus officers to be captains

Disagree with only 8 units in service. 8 units do not provide enough staffing to handle an escalating fire in a dwelling or commercial building as detailed in the Presentation.

Possible Future expansion of additional emergency services (such as hazardous material response team, medical transport, etc.) require additional training, apparatus, staffing, etc.

Two Mechanic-UFD positions are used as full time firefighters who do minor maintenance on vehicles (oil changes, minor repairs for leaks, minor pump work etc.). There is NOT a full service maintenance facility or garage to work on apparatus. These two positions should be included with the Firefighters, not as additional staff.

*The State of NJ mandated 2% CAP will not allow growth within the FD to add staffing over time. Failure to reach a reasonable staffing level at the start of this new FD, will handicap operations and our effectiveness to handle emergencies.*

Personnel; Volunteers: (page 31-35)

Agree: the current use of available volunteers is "fragmented" and "minimalized."

Agree: "revitalizing the volunteer fire service...will be no easy task."

Agree: ACTIVE volunteer standard must be defined; the number of sets of turnout gear do not represent an active volunteer

Agree: Recruitment and retention plan is required. However the *Length of Service Award Program* (LOSAP) is only used in 2 fire districts according to the DCA Study. It does not seem to have been productive in Hamilton in getting and keeping ACTIVE volunteers. Therefore other plans/strategies must be reviewed, selected, implemented, and then evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

Disagree: using volunteers to cover open shifts due to vacation, sick time, etc. Collective bargaining agreements will have to be established before this suggestion will be implemented. Inconsistency of scheduling, training standards, etc. of volunteers compared to career staff make this suggestion difficult to implement.

\*Volunteer numbers in the Study are over a year old and are inaccurate; some volunteers are counted twice. Please see the updated volunteer personnel information in Appendix C

Recommendations:

Hopefully motivated people will want to join an organization that is disciplined, trained, and community service based. "Raise the bar," to improve standards for training and riding duty crews to establish an esprit de corps.

Reevaluate the list of volunteers to determine TRUE ACTIVE list of volunteers

Determine best use of volunteers: ride as an extra firefighter, volunteer crew of 4 people, assist with public fire safety education projects, fire police, etc.

As a recruitment and retention strategy, use the "active" status for future civil service firefighter testing points as an incentive to join and remain active.

"Farm system" - Having an active volunteer for 2 years or longer will allow the department to monitor their abilities, improve their training, see how they fit into the organization, and then when hiring is required, this volunteer already has a track record within the department.

#### Budget, Financial, and Tax Analysis

Disagree: The proposed savings reported in the Study is premature. The Study recommended in several places to complete a "needs assessment" and "evaluate staffing...apparatus...facilities." How can anyone project savings when these assessments and evaluations have yet to be completed?

Agree: in the Reduction in Commissioners salaries, total \$35,000, for 5 elected officials.

Disagree: with administrative staff calculations- there is only \$70,000 for salary and wages for the 5 projected administrative or clerical staff as suggested within the Study. (3 admin assistants, 1 HR, and 1 IT/communications). These numbers are unrealistic and will create an underfunded item.

Disagree with overtime savings- The Study does not designate what the overtime is for: training, vacation, sick time, etc. How can you determine what to save or cut without defining it first? The Study's suggestion to use volunteers to cover overtime to reduce costs is nearly impossible. The number of hours that volunteers are actually available does not come close to cover the hours required. Not to mention that a REAL evaluation of the true active volunteer staff needs to be done.

Overtime – used to cover an open shift when career staff are on vacation or out sick, also for mandatory training. These hours need to be calculated based on true vacation hours, training hours, and estimated sick time hours (using past history as a guide). To arbitrarily set the "overtime" hours without making these calculations will create an underfunded line item. This will eventually cause open shifts which reduces the staff to 3 per apparatus, which is below designated minimum safe staffing level of 4 per apparatus.

Fringe benefits – The Study does not designate what the fringe benefits are actually for. Research indicates that fringe benefits in the 8 District Budgets represents anything from workers comp insurance, health care, dental coverage, social security tax, NJ unemployment, clothing/uniform allowance, etc. All of these costs cannot be removed. The 10% reduction as shown in the Study still needs to be defined.

Operations and maintenance – reduction in the fleet and stations can save money, but no REAL evaluation has been completed to determine what, if any, apparatus and stations can be reduced. REAL Evaluations may determine, that due to response time requirements, that all stations need to remain or be repurposed, OR new stations need to be added/relocated. Or newer apparatus are maintenance nightmares with higher costs than some older apparatus. Therefore, a REAL apparatus replacement plan and station study needs to be completed BEFORE speculating maintenance cost savings.

Cost savings by “economies of scale” can be realized through mass purchases of turnout gear, gloves, boots, hose, fire apparatus, tools, etc. for better pricing. However a “reduction of \$716,000” (about 20%) is not defined in this Study. What does this represent?

*If there are any savings, that money should be used to make the necessary improvements to the fire district that have been outlined: increase command staff, increase crews (career and/or volunteers), improve training division, increase training hours, third party evaluation of apparatus and buildings, capital plans for apparatus and buildings*

Outstanding Accumulated Pay-Outs – The costs in this section of the report seems to reflect hourly rates for all possible sick and vacation time accumulated to this point for every employee. Some employee contracts do not allow for entire buy out of sick time. Some have limits on those payouts. These costs need to be re-examined, they seem to be extremely high.

Also, employee contract negotiations would determine the possible carry-over of sick and vacation time to the new district or the pay-out amounts.

LOSAP – this program is not productive in the current stations. This is no indication that more money will increase recruitment or retention of volunteer personnel. An increase is shown in this line item from \$65,000 to \$89,700. Perhaps it would be better to buy out those volunteer currently involved, and then reinvest that money into the new department.

Rentals- space leased by the current Boards for fire operations within a volunteer fire station. This would have to be negotiated with each fire company, or purchase the fire station, which will create a long term debt, which requires voter approval for capital purchase

“Other volunteer cost” - This is a new item of \$104,000; this is not defined within the Study; what is this money for?

Conclusions:

There are many items within this Study that are useful and will be implemented within the framework of the new organization.

There are also many items that "may look good on paper," however, they are not defined enough to be useful; and do not really apply to Hamilton based on true accurate information about the real volunteer staffing numbers.

Highly Suggested Items:

ASAP make an educated decision: establish either a new Fire District or a Municipal Fire Department. Without doing so, we have no directional guidance. We need to plan and take serious steps to accomplish improving fire protection services to Hamilton.

Both options below allow the existing Fire Districts to complete 2017 with a clean start on January 1, 2018; allow for studies, reviews, and evaluations of critical items such as response times, personnel, stations, and apparatus; and establish the organization structure and command framework.

If it is to be a new Fire District: Pass a resolution/ordinance to dissolve the current districts effective on December 31, 2017, at 1159pm, with an election in March or April 2017 for a new Board of Fire Commissioners of a newly created fire district to take effect on January 1, 2018, at 12 midnight. Specifying that the new Board will immediately after certifying the election, have the authority to make any and all required preparations to take effect on January 1, 2018, such as: to appoint an attorney and accountant, negotiate employee contracts, work with the Civil Service Commission for all employee issues, work with DCA to establish 1<sup>st</sup> year's budget, etc. (The March or April election will allow the new Board more time to be prepared, instead of waiting until January 1, 2018 to get started.)

Similarly, if it is to be a municipal fire department: Pass a resolution/ordinance to dissolve the current districts effective on December 31, 2017, establishing the new fire department within the Hamilton Township government structure; authorize the response time study, and fire station and apparatus review, negotiate employee contracts, work with the Civil Service Commission for all employee issues, etc.

*Thank you for allowing the Hamilton Township Active Fire Chiefs' Association the opportunity to respond to the DCA "Hamilton Township Fire District Dissolution Study."*

*As always, the Chiefs' Association is ready, willing, and able to work with any committee or group to improve fire services within Hamilton; and to answer any fire service related questions.*

*Thank You.*

# Appendix A

## Vehicle Inventory Hamilton Fire Districts

As of January 1, 2017

*\*Major Fire Apparatus*

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>STATION</b>	<b>TYPE UNIT</b>	<b>MAKE/MODEL</b>	<b>YEAR</b>	
2	12	*Rescue Pumper	KME	2012	
2	12	*Pumper Engine	Spartan 3D	1996	was at Sta 13
2	12	Rehab Unit	Ford F350	2007	
2	12	Utility Vehicle	Ford F350	2016	
2	12	Utility Vehicle	Ford Explorer	2003	
2	12	Command	Ford SUV	2015	
3	13	*Pumper Engine	Pierce Arrow XT	2016	
3	13	*Tractor Drawn Aerial	Pierce Arrow TDA	2016	
3	13	Light Rescue	Ford L8000 Walk-in	1991	Twp Owned
3	13	Foam Unit	660 Gallon	2012	
3	13	Utility Vehicle	Ford F350	1998	
3	13	Marine Unit	Zodiac 50 HP	2008	
3	13	Command	Chev Tahoe	2016	
4	14	*Pumper Engine	Pierce Arrow XT	2016	
4	14	*Elevating Platform	Pierce Arrow Mid Mt	2016	
4	14	Command	Chevy Tahoe	2007	
5	15	*Pumper Engine	Sutphen	2007	
5	15	*Squirt w/54' Boom	Seagrave	1990	
5	15	*Cascade/Lights	Spartan 3D	1996	
5	15	Utility Vehicle/Plow	Ford 350XLT	1993	
5	15	Command Chevy	Tahoe	2011	
6	16	*Rescue Pumper	Sutphen	2005	
6	16	*Pumper Engine	Spartan 3D	1995	
6	16	Utility Vehicle	F350	2000	
6	16	Marine Unit	Defender	2011	
6	16	Marine Unit	LoweLine	1970s	
6	16	Marine Unit	Smoke Craft	1970s	
6	16	Command	Dodge Ram	2011	
6	16	Command	Ford F350	2011	
7	17	*Pumper Engine	Emergency One	2007	
7	17	*Aerial Tower	Emergency One	2005	
7	17	Utility Vehicle	Ford F350XLT	2001	
7	17	Staff/Fire Prevention	Chevy Tahoe	2003	

7	17	Staff/Fire Prevention	Chevy Tahoe	2003
7	17	Staff/Fire Prevention	Ford Explorer	2003
7	17	Staff/Fire Prevention	Ford Tauris	2017
7	17	Staff Vehicle	Crown Victoria	2003
7	17	Command	Ford Expedition	2007
8	18	*Pumper Engine	Sutphen	2004
8	18	*Pumper Engine	Pierce	1990
8	18	*Quint (Aerial-Pumper)	Sutphen	1982
8	18	*Cascade/Lights	Freightliner	1997
8	18	Utility Vehicle	Chevy Van	1991
8	18	Utility Vehicle	Dodge Ram	1998
8	18	Marine Unit	16' Flat Bottom Boat	----
8	18	Command	Ford Expedition	2009
9	19	*Rescue Pumper	Seagrave	2012
9	19	*Rescue Pumper	Seagrave	2001
9	19	Utility Vehicle	Ford F250	2006
9	19	Staff/Fire Prevention	Dodge Durango	2013
9	19	Command	Chevy Tahoe	2011

Major Apparatus Summary:	
Pumper Engine	8
Rescue Pumper	4
Squirt	1
Tractor Drawn Ariel	1
Ladder Tower	3
Cascade/lights	2
Total	19

## Appendix B

### Career Staff List Hamilton Twp. Fire Districts

As of January 1, 2017

District	Company	*Responders	LEA
		Career Staff	Career Staff
2	Mercerville	17	
3	Rusling	18	
4	Hamilton	16	
5	DeCou	8	
6	Whitehorse	13	
7	Nottingham	17	1
8	Colonial	6	
9	Groveville	17	1
	Total	112	2

*\* Includes Chiefs, Capt, Lt, FF, and Mechanic-UFD (Dist 9) who function primarily as firefighters*

updated 2-2-17, MDA

# Appendix C

## Active Volunteer List Hamilton Twp. Fire Companies

As of January 1, 2017

District	Company	ACTIVE SCBA Vol FF	ACTIVE *Non-SCBA Vol FF	ACTIVE Vol Fire Police
2	Mercerville	3	2	5
3	Rustling	3	0	0
4	Hamilton	1	0	3
5	DeCou	13	0	3
6	Whitehorse	8	0	3
7	Nottingham	4	0	0
8	Colonial	17	5	3
9	Groveville	0	1	2
	Total	49	8	19

*\* Non-SCBA volunteers cannot wear a breathing apparatus or enter a hazardous area  
examples: apparatus driver/operator or safety officer*

ACTIVE Volunteer as defined by each district below:

District	Company	ACTIVE Volunteer defined as per fire company/district rules Example: 1 drill per month, 12 hours duty crews per month
2	Mercerville	12 hours on duty a month
3	Rustling	mandatory training: BBP, RTK, FIT TEST and CPR
4	Hamilton	(See above)
5	DeCou	Duty crew- by sign up, but not required. 25% of calls & drills, mandatory drills: Fit test, BBP, RTK, HM:Ops
6	Whitehorse	mandatory training: BBP; RTK; fit test; min. 1 live burn a year
7	Nottingham	one 12 hour duty crew/month plus the mandatory annual training
8	Colonial	pager home response/ 2 duty crews per month 4 and 8 hr shifts, all yearly mandatory training 1 live burn a year
9	Groveville	6 drills/yr., three 4hr duty crews per month

updated 2-2-17, MDA