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Options Report for Fire Service in Schodack, NY

Possible Solutions for Future of Fire Service

May 2, 2019

Agenda for Evening

- Introductions
- Pathway of Report
- Review of Key Findings of Baseline
- What is important for picking the future direction of the fire service?
- Options Report Discussion
- Next Steps

Pathway of Project

- Years of collaboration at department and district level
- Project Began in March 2018
- Site Visits in April 2018
- Baseline Report shared in September 2018
- Options Report (draft) being presented in November 2018
- Public meeting May 2, 2019
- Community considers path forward

Key Findings

- Fire service costs are relatively low in the town of Schodack
 - Average of \$0.99 per thousand for fire taxes
 - \$4.63 per thousand for the Town share
 - \$6.88 for the County services
 - \$23.63 for the Schodack Schools
 - The village rates are \$5.04 for Castleton (which includes fire services) and \$5.08 for Nassau, which excludes fire.
- Relatively stable finances and strong community support for fundraising,
- Long-term fiscal concerns, including increased costs for capital expenses, workers compensation, liabilities and cancer insurance.
- There is little debt among the six participating departments. Only Nassau and South Schodack carried debt over 10% of their budget and both are on track to retire it within two years.

Key Findings

- The fire companies have adequate apparatus and equipment to respond to the emergencies in the town. Some redundancy in equip.
- Sufficient personnel to handle emergencies in a timely manner on evenings, overnights and weekends.
- Personnel not always available in a timely manner during the day.
- The number volunteer fire fighters has declined in the last decade
- There is a relative scarcity of younger members. Only `13% of survey respondents are under 30 while 32% are over 60.

Key Findings

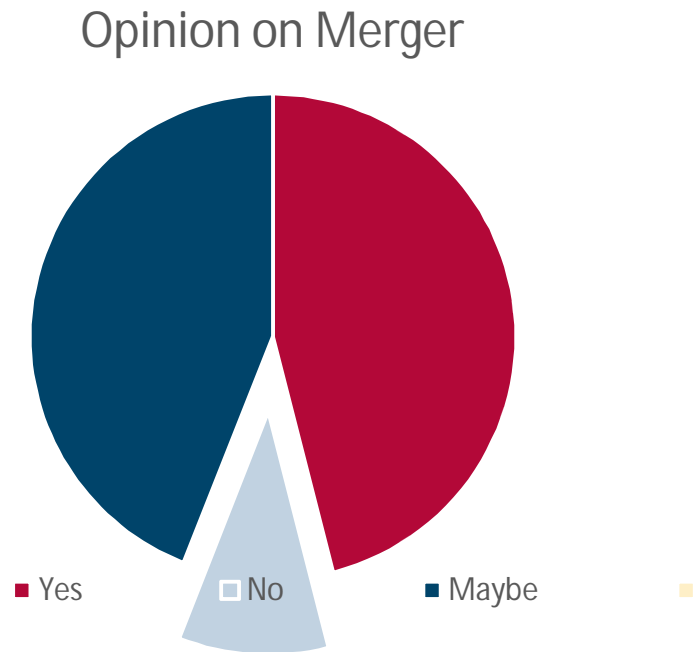
- Rescue & EMS calls make up the vast majority of emergency calls for fire service in the town. None of the departments is responsible for EMS transport.
- Significant portions of the town lack fire hydrants, which makes fire departments reliant on hose lays and tankers relays
- While most departments report relatively stable finances and strong community support for fundraising, a number have long-term fiscal concerns, including increased costs for capital expenses, workers compensation, liabilities and cancer insurance.

Key Findings

- Recruiting and retaining trained volunteers is a major challenge for most departments in Schodack
- Overall call volume has remained consistent for the past few years. East Schodack FD received 24% of total alarms from 2013-2016, followed by South Schodack and Schodack Valley, at 20% and 19%, respectively.
- Call volume tends to increase in late afternoons and evenings, and on weekends.
- Overall, local fire departments typically respond to fire calls within 14 minutes 90% of the time. The NFPA standard to have an effective firefighting force on scene is 10 minutes.

Key Findings

- An informal survey of current and retired department members found strong concern about manpower and retaining new members, as well as support or openness for a potential town-wide department merger.



How to pick the best options?

- **Factors to consider**

- Response Time
- Effectiveness of response
- Cost
- Sustainability
- Likelihood of success
- Legality
- Other Options

- **Decision Makers**

- Commissions
- Town Board(s)
- Village Board(s)
- Fire Companies
- Public

- **Timelines**

- Budget cycles
- Legal Actions

Potential Options

- Status Quo
- Expanding Sharing of Services
 - Administrative Support
 - Commons SOGs/Policies
 - Training and Safety Officer
 - Information Technology
- Consolidated District
 - Single Fire Company
 - Multiple Fire Companies
- Career Staffing Models
 - Daytime Only
 - 24/7

Status Quo

- Manpower during daytimes will remain challenging
- Recruitment and retention will continue to need significant support
- Costs will continue to rise to operate the fire departments
- Mandates will stress the existing operations

Increase Shared Services

- **Administrative Support**
 - Departments and districts are facing increased demands in administrative area
 - Paid assistance could help reduce the load on the existing staff
 - Could cost \$ 90k a year (salary and benefits) to have a full time person shared between several departments
- **Common SOGs/Policies**
 - Intense demand on agencies to keep them up to date and accurate
 - A shared set could help reduce the workload for volunteer leadership
 - Bring the agencies closer together
- **Training and Safety Officer**
 - Scheduling training and keeping records is difficult for the departments
 - Full time person to support town-wide efforts
 - Could cost \$83,000 for a full time position, shared between several departments
- **Information Technology**
 - Use of a single platform and group purchasing could reduce costs and improve operations
- **Gear Decontamination**
 - Gear library and shared gear cleaning protocol

Creating One District From Several

- Use Article 17-A of General Municipal Law for Consolidation
- Create a Joint Consolidation Agreement
 - Each interested local gov't begins the planning process
 - Develop a plan that covers governance, asset transfer, operations and timeline
 - A referendum is not needed for combining fire districts
- Public Engagement
 - Hearings are mandated after the adoption of the plan
 - Agreement can be modified after hearing
- Tax Impact
 - Model current expenses across the assessed value
 - Also, projected a 15% increase to account for administrative staff and capital improvements
 - Percentage terms are large. Real dollar terms could be palatable

Impact to Tax Rates of Levy Structure

	Increase (Decrease) Rate - Current Costs	Annual Cost Change for Median Home	Increase (Decrease) Rate – Potential 15% increased costs	Annual Change 15% Increase
EAST SCHODACK FIRE	\$0.17	\$37	\$0.35	\$75
SCHODACK F.P. DIST	\$0.18	\$38	\$0.36	\$77
NASSAU LAKE WEST FPD	\$(0.08)	\$(17)	\$0.10	\$21
SCHODACK VALLEY	\$0.21	\$44	\$0.39	\$83
SOUTH SCHODACK	\$0.02	\$4	\$0.20	\$43
SCHODACK LANDING	\$(0.91)	\$(196)	\$(0.73)	\$(157)
NASSAU FIRE DIST (Schodack)				
	\$0.12	\$27	\$0.30	\$65
NASSAU FPD (Nassau)	\$(0.89)	\$(191)	\$(0.71)	\$(152)
NASSAU FIRE DISTRICT (Nassau)				
	\$(0.10)	\$(22)	\$0.08	\$16
CASTLETON (estimated village share)				
	\$0.22	\$47	\$0.40	\$85

Benefits Of Creating A Single District From Several

- Single leadership board planning financial and operational aspects of the fire service
- One common tax rate for all in the district
- Larger assessed valuation and levy allows for needed expenses to be spread across the whole community
- Reflects the reality that the fire service already plans and operates together
- Reduces the demand for volunteer leadership
- Minimal financial impact of a consolidation
- Currently, the fire districts carry little debt

Drawbacks of Creating a Single District

- Reduced representation from the community as five fire commissions and a village board would consolidate their decision-making authority into one board.
- There would be a shift, albeit relatively small, in the tax burden with the consolidation.
- The transition could lead to one-time costs associated with developing a new joint fire district.
- Areas of the town might lose their elected representation to a fire district.
- Substantial work for existing leadership to get to new operating and governance model

Operational Choices with a Single District

- Separate Companies
 - Keeping existing identities
 - Simplifies the process of a merger
 - Leadership would be drawn from several companies for a town chief
 - Discussion of transfer of assets would be important, particularly the stations
 - Tradition can be powerful factor
- Single Fire Company
 - Complete transition to a single company
 - Unified command
 - Stations would still be important and need leadership
 - Potential for increased esprit de corps with new organization

Career Staffing

- Median salary of current career range is \$50,000 in Albany area
 - Plus about 70% of salary for retirement, health, payroll taxes, etc.
- Daytime Only
 - 5 full time would yield 5 day a week, 10 hour per day coverage
 - Base cost would be about \$485,000
 - If done with a single district, the rate would increase about \$0.43 cents/1000 and cost about \$92 a year for a median home
- Full Time Operations
 - 12 full time firefighters plus 4 full time LTs and backfill costs.
 - Cost would be about \$1.8 million per year
 - Increase about \$1.60 per 1000 and cost about \$340 per year additional.

Option	Description	Projected Cost for Median Home
1 – Status Quo	Multiple fire districts and a village each operating their own departments independently but coordinating on some planning and large events. All volunteer staff	\$150 to 380, avg. \$214
2A – Administrative Support	Several fire districts/departments hire a full time administrator at estimated \$90,000 salary and benefits to assist in recordkeeping, planning, purchasing and similar support tasks.	10 to 15% increase
2B Training Officer	Several fire districts/departments hire a full time training coordinator at estimated \$82,500 salary and benefits to assist in performing, planning and recordkeeping for training.	8 to 18% increase
3 – Consolidated Fire District	Single joint fire district operating in study area with similar operations as today	\$190
3 – Consolidated Fire District with 15% increased costs	Single joint fire district operating with similar operations plus adding some of Option 2	\$230
4A – Day Time Fire Staffing	4 FF on duty 50 hours per week with full weekday coverage. Estimated annual cost of \$485,000	\$280
4B – Full Time Fire Staffing	4 FF on duty 24/7 with coverage in whole district. Estimated annual cost of \$1.8 million.	\$530

Next Steps

- Decisions inside districts/departments
- Community Discussions
- Districts interested in implementation begin drafting consolidation plan and seeking grant/expert support to move forward