

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF STAMFORD**

**STUDY
OF
STAMFORD'S
FIREFIGHTING SERVICES**

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Historic Background

Stamford's fire protection services are provided by a combination of the city-controlled and operated Stamford Fire and Rescue Department (SFRD), staffed by paid career firefighters, and five volunteer departments, known as the "Big Five".

The geographic boundaries of today's dual service system are based on city/town boundaries that were eliminated in 1949 when the governments of the city and town were consolidated under a new Charter.

Prior to 1949, there were two separate governmental entities: the City of Stamford, largely the area below Bull's Head; and the Town of Stamford, which included Glenbrook, Springdale, Belltown and North Stamford. The Town of Stamford had its own government with a Board of Selectmen; its own police and fire departments; its own zoning regulations and generally functioned independently of the City of Stamford. In 1947, there was a citywide vote to merge the two governments into one, and that was implemented in 1949 with a new charter.

The City of Stamford has been covered by career fire protection services since the late 1800's, with volunteer departments playing an invaluable role in protecting the lives and property of citizens of both the Town and City of Stamford.

When the now-60-year-old City Charter was created, the jurisdictional boundaries of the city's paid career fire department (SFRD) and volunteer fire departments remained aligned with the old town and city boundaries.

Today, Stamford is divided into six fire districts that were defined by those boundaries: SFRD mans five fire houses in one fire district (within the former city boundaries) and five separate volunteer departments serve five additional districts spread across the former Town of Stamford (See map in Appendix 1).

This delineation is outlined in Section C5-40-c(d) of the city's charter. According to the charter, jurisdictional lines may be changed; however such a change requires a 2/3 vote of the Board of Representatives and the concurrence of the City Fire and Rescue Chief and Volunteer Chief(s).¹

¹ Section C5-40-c(d): The services of the Fire and Rescue Department under the control of the Chief shall be limited to the City Fire Service District, except in the case of an emergency. Nothing in this Charter shall be construed to affect the organization, status or property of the Volunteer Departments of Stamford. The Fire Service Districts are indicated on the map of Fire Service Districts, prepared by the City Engineer, dated January 21, 1977 and on file in the Office of the Town and City Clerk of the City and shall delineate the fire service boundaries of the respective regular and Volunteer Fire Departments.

Stamford Fire Services at a Glance

Population:	Approx. 125,000
Area covered:	39.3 miles
Staffing:	238 paid staff and support personnel; plus volunteers, including certified firefighters and personnel performing other services
Firehouses:	5 city-owned permanent structures, plus 2 temporary city-owned structures, and 7 firehouses owned by volunteer fire companies
Equipment:	City-owned: 7 engine, 3 truck, and 1 rescue company; plus Volunteer-owned engines and trucks.
Calls:	Approx. 4600 fire alarms
City Budget:	\$35 million (97% of which goes toward salaries, benefits, pensions, and utilities)

The volunteer fire departments are partially self-funded and responsible for ensuring adequate on-duty staff to meet 24/7 fire fighting needs in their district. However, they receive additional funding and staffing from the city based on annual management agreements/contracts with the city. Each department negotiates its own contract.

Current Issues

In Stamford, as in other cities across the country, fire protection needs have changed over the decades – even centuries – as the population and composition of the cities themselves have changed. Increasingly, volunteer companies are finding it harder to recruit volunteers and raise the monetary contributions needed to sustain their fire departments and ensure the safety and protection of their citizenry.

Fortunately, transitions to new organizational models (all-paid and combinations of paid and volunteer that are either predominantly paid or predominantly volunteer) have been occurring successfully for decades in communities throughout the country, providing models for resolving conflicts and creating efficiencies across a city's geographically dispersed firefighting operations.

In Stamford, attempts to re-organize and consolidate its disparate fire departments into an integrated model have been complicated by a number of issues, including:

- Its Charter
- Desire for autonomy among volunteer fire departments
- Lack of integrated resource planning
- Ineffective communication between individual volunteer fire departments and City officials
- A litigious climate in which a number of attempts to resolve conflicts have resulted in resource-draining lawsuits
- A failure of the City and volunteer departments to reach agreement on developing new structures
- The City's cutting of funds to the volunteer departments and opening new SFRD stations in the volunteer areas

Organizational Structure

Stamford Fire and Rescue: The Stamford Fire and Rescue Department (SFRD) is a paid career department, with 238 employees, organized as indicated in Figure 1.

The Fire Chief reports to Director of Public, Health, and Welfare, who reports to the Mayor. The City Fire Chief has no authority over the volunteer districts.

The city's paid firefighters are represented by a single bargaining unit, the Professional Fire Fighters Association Local 786.

Changes in Fire Service Districts may be made by ordinance adopted by a two-thirds' vote of the total membership of the Board of Representatives with the advice of the City Fire and Rescue Chief and the respective Chief of the Volunteer Fire Department affected.

The city's fire marshal division is responsible for building plan reviews, code enforcements and

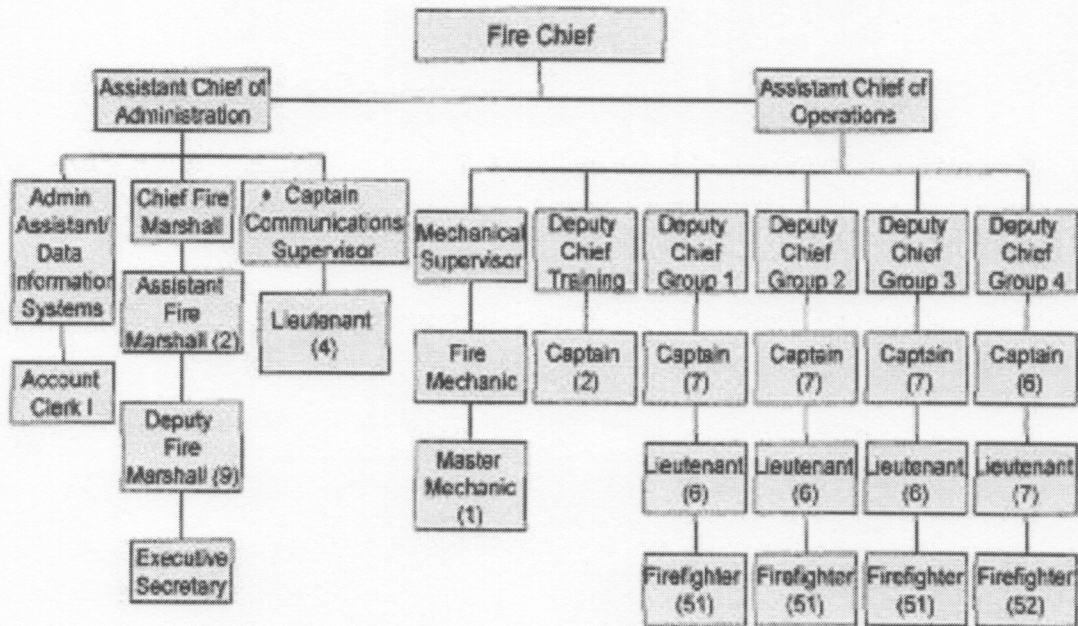


Figure 1

fire investigations within the SFRD fire district, which includes 7,000 parcels that require annual inspections.

Volunteer Fire Departments: The city's five volunteer departments include:

- Belltown Fire Department
- Glenbrook Fire Department
- Long Ridge Fire Department
- Springdale Fire Department
- Turn of River Fire Department

Each department is chartered by the State of Connecticut, elects its own fire chief and other officers, has a board of directors, and recruits its own volunteer members. The chiefs report to the Director of Public, Health and Welfare, who has limited oversight as each fire department operates autonomously. The departments are required, however, to provide annual audits to the Stamford Board of Finance.

Volunteer staff may be supplemented with paid firefighters under separate labor agreements with their employees and are funded according to their management agreements with the city. The agreements detail how the firehouses will be managed, including command and control of career firefighters assigned to their firehouses.

These arrangements vary from fire department to fire department, have shifted over time, work with limited overall success, and been a significant source of conflict.

In the past, for example, paid firefighters in the volunteer fire houses were covered by a separate bargaining agreement with SFRD's Local 786. However, in 2008, some voted to join the SFRD Local 786.

In addition, even though the city funds the salaries of paid firefighters stationed in volunteer firehouses, it does not control their scheduling, which is determined by the volunteer fire chiefs and has often resulted in large overtime expenses to the city.

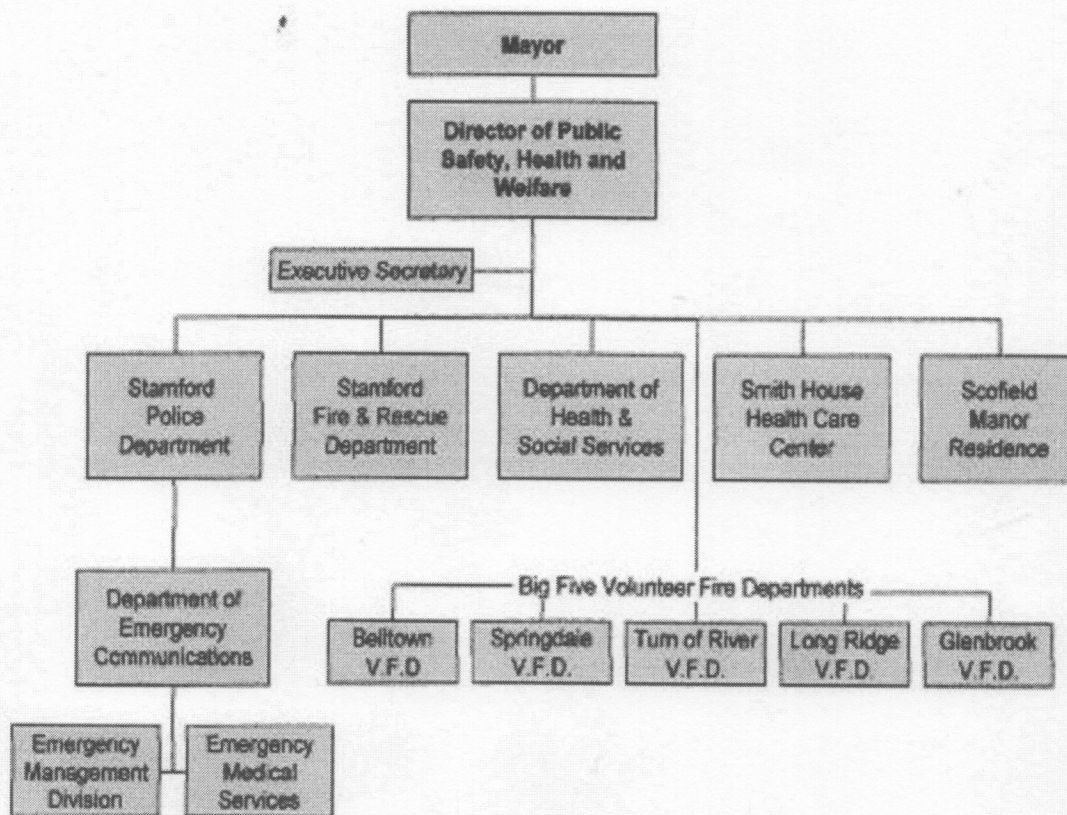


Figure 2

Highlights of current staffing arrangements include:

- **Belltown and Turn of River**– In June 2007, the city introduced a restructuring plan for Belltown, Glenbrook and Turn of River Fire Departments intended to reduce overtime spending for paid firefighter services in the three districts.

Belltown and Turn of River rejected this plan, SFRD firefighters were removed from their firehouses, and the city dramatically reduced its contribution to their operating funds. The two departments subsequently filed lawsuits in an attempt to restore funding (See additional details under Funding, page X.).

The City also established a temporary firehouse facility in the Turn of River district on Vine Road that is manned by SFRD firefighters to ensure fire response service in the district. The City did the same on Long Ridge Road just north of Roxbury Road at the SEMS ambulance site.

- **Glenbrook** – Facing both funding cuts and a diminishing volunteer corps, Glenbrook accepted the restructuring plan and created a combination fire department staffed by volunteer and paid SFRD firefighters. The agreement provides for 24/7, four-person engine coverage by SFRD paid career firefighters and a backup truck company staffed by Glenbrook Fire Department volunteer personnel.

- **Long Ridge** – The Long Ridge Fire Company, which operates two firehouses in North Stamford, has a working management agreement with the city and is funded through the Public Safety, Health and Welfare budget. It is staffed by both volunteer and paid firefighters and has its own fire marshal.
- **Springdale** – Springdale, like Long Ridge, is funded through the Public Safety, Health and Welfare budget. In 1997 it entered into an agreement to have paid SFRD firefighters supplement its volunteer force; however SFRD personnel work from a cordoned off area within the station and maintain minimal interaction with the volunteers. There has been some friction between the two groups.

Dispatch: A centralized fire and rescue dispatch service receives incoming calls and dispatches fire personnel citywide.

Demographics

Demographic and sociological changes have contributed significantly to a change in the culture of volunteer firehouses, in Stamford and across the country.

In Stamford, residential growth, new construction, changes in land use, location within major transportation corridors and a rise in commuter population have all contributed to increases in the volume and types of emergency calls. Today's firefighters must be equipped to respond to emergencies related to hazardous materials, auto accidents, structural and rural fires, and technical rescues, for example.

Stamford's shift to a transient urban center also has diluted much of the historical sense of neighborhood and community. With this, the tradition of family members and neighbors volunteering generation after generation also has decreased dramatically. The rise in two-income families and need to commute outside Stamford for employment makes it harder and harder for volunteers to devote large amounts of time to volunteering. The mandated training for Firefighter 1 certification and/or emergency response certification can take months. Plus, ongoing instruction and training for various emergencies is required throughout the year.

Significant fluctuations in their volunteer ranks have strained the volunteer corps in most of the city's volunteer fire departments. Each department, in addition to responding to emergency calls and recruiting and train new volunteers, is responsible for fundraising and various administrative responsibilities, including budgets, personnel and equipment certifications, and meeting various state reporting requirements.

Budget strains can make recruiting difficult or prohibitive when combined with the added expense of paying for certain training classes and purchasing uniforms/gear for a fluctuating corps of new recruits.

Glenbrook Fire Department cited the low numbers of volunteers and funding shortfalls as key reasons for accepting the City's combination fire department proposal. Glenbrook's Chief says this arrangement serves his community best, ensures that trucks can be dispatched at all times, and provides adequate funding for the department's operations.

Funding: In June 2007, the City introduced a restructuring plan for Belltown, Glenbrook and Turn of River Fire Departments to reduce overtime spending and respond to reductions in the

Department of Public Safety, Health and Welfare budget. The plan called for moving career firefighters into the three firehouses and projected savings of \$500,000.

Belltown and Turn of River Fire Departments rejected the plan. Consequently, SFRD firefighters were removed from these firehouses and their operating funds were dramatically reduced. The City reduced Belltown's operating budget from \$160,000 to \$20,000 and Turn of River's from \$320,000 to \$40,000.

Belltown and Turn of River subsequently filed lawsuits to restore funding and personnel. Turn of River was successful in court.

Mayor Malloy was unsuccessful in eliminating volunteer fire departments' control of career firefighters and funding. In 1996, Long Ridge Fire Department filed a lawsuit against the city after Mayor Malloy threatened to terminate funding. The court ruled in favor of Long Ridge and the funding was restored. Long Ridge continues to receive annual funding from the city and employs its own firefighters.

Communication: Unsuccessful mediation of issues related to autonomy and identity for the volunteer departments, combined with the city's concern for public safety and fiscal responsibility, have created an atmosphere of animosity.

Tensions have been building over time. The majority of the volunteer departments claim that no formal reorganization plan was presented to them and that they received budgetary threats and ultimatums. Thus, several of the fire departments feel the only recourse is lawsuits.

Firefighter Training

Ongoing, formal training is a critical aspect of assuring quality response. All Stamford fire stations, SFRD and volunteer alike, must meet Connecticut performance-based certification standards and perform regular reviews and testing.

However, the nature and frequency of additional training varies among volunteer stations and between the volunteer organizations and the city stations.

The City of Stamford boasts a comprehensive fire training facility, as well as highly qualified instructors and personnel wholly dedicated to the training process. Volunteer and paid firefighters are entitled to train at this facility.

Training in Volunteer Stations: Budget cuts to volunteer stations have limited funds for training. Consequently, many volunteer departments conduct training sessions and drills on-site. Training may be conducted by the chief, or by qualified instructors from SFRD or from other regional training facilities. Sometimes, volunteer stations team up with another volunteer station to keep costs down and share training resources. Some volunteer stations report that it is less expensive to have certified instructors from Bridgeport or New York City conduct classes on site rather than going to the Stamford facility.

Our impression is that most volunteer stations focus on training that is specific to their needs. For example, volunteer stations in primarily residential areas do not train to fight fires in high-rise buildings. Instead, they work on training drills specific to their trucks, tankers and terrain. Record keeping of training and certification is maintained at each individual station.

Without exception, the volunteer chiefs were complimentary of the Regional Training facility. Although many volunteer stations seldom avail themselves of the resources there, they claim that the training staff members are cooperative and helpful when volunteer stations request advanced training at the facility that could not be conducted at their own station. However, some volunteer

chiefs feel that the SFRD does not fully understand the challenges of the areas they serve and are not familiar with the equipment, trucks and tankers that are unique to each station. For example, for fire companies that cover North Stamford, an understanding of how and where to locate fresh water supply is critical in the large area without fire hydrants.

They also pointed out that volunteers often do not have the time to dedicate to extra training. Some claim that volunteers are forced to pay for training out of their own pockets. A concern for some volunteer stations is that with budget shortfalls and volunteer time constraints, training is generally limited to certification-specific training, and less to advanced and specialty training. This can make it difficult for firefighters to advance and also hinders recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Training in City-Operated Stations: Training for city career firefighters is generally conducted at the training facility, although some drills take place at the individual stations. Training records for city firefighters are maintained in one central location at the training facility. Standard training and certification classes, as well as “refresher” courses and specialty classes are held at the training facility.

Stamford Regional Training Center: This facility is one of the best equipped in the Northeast and includes many buildings to simulate a wide variety of fire scenarios. In addition to several multi-story “buildings” for practicing live burns and intense smoke situations, there are mock-ups to provide training for tanker-truck spills, school bus accidents, elevator rescue, and more. All training is provided by skilled instructors, always with safety personnel onsite. Deputy Chief Antonio Conte is head of the training facility and he is assisted by Assistant Deputy Trevor Roach. Together, they have over 60 years of experience.

Budgets for Training: City stations have budget lines dedicated to training career firefighters. Volunteer stations do not have specific funds allotted to training. Rather, they are responsible for paying for training out of their general budgets. However, it should be noted that in most instances, volunteer stations are not charged any fees for training or materials at the SFRD Training Facility. The major exception is for state certification, since the state charges the Training Facility, the Training Facility must pass along those fees.

Positive Aspects

- All stations conduct regular training and/or drills appropriate to the area they serve.
- All firefighters are required to adhere to certification standards for firefighting and medical response.
- Stamford’s state-of-the-art training facility is well equipped and boasts highly trained instructors.
- The training facility offers an extensive range of classes including HAZ-MAT, and specialty search and rescue.
- All stations are informed of exercises to be conducted at the facility and invited to attend.
- Deputy Chief Conte and Assistant Deputy Roach are well respected for their knowledge, attitude and leadership skills among career and volunteer firefighters and chiefs.
- Any chief can request specialized training at the facility, and every effort is made to accommodate requests, including conducting training in the evening so it is more convenient for volunteers to attend.

Areas for Development and Improvement

- Volunteer firefighters need recognition and support for the many unpaid hours they dedicate to training.
- When training is conducted offsite, there is often an issue of inadequate staffing at volunteer stations.
- Training requirements are not standardized or tracked citywide.
- Copies of volunteer training and certification records should be maintained (and monitored) from a central location.
- Some career firefighters, as well as volunteer firefighters, are not cross-trained on Stamford's varied terrain and on the equipment and vehicles used in different stations.
- Giving volunteer firefighters dedicated training "allowances" would allow them to advance, and thus may improve volunteer recruitment and retention. In addition, doing so may enable volunteer firefighters to become career firefighters if they choose to do so.
- Many volunteer firefighters lack the time for additional training, a problem that needs to be resolved through adjustments to scheduling plans or even by providing financial incentives or reimbursement.
- Given today's political climate, and Stamford's proximity to New York City, Stamford volunteer and career firefighters need to be prepared to handle a wide range of emergencies and should be trained accordingly.
- Efforts are underway to assure more consistency in firefighting equipment and vehicles used throughout Stamford. However, all chiefs should be part of the decision-making process and developing a coordinated, citywide plan that ensures equipment is optimally located and readily deployed to meet different needs in different part of the city.

Opinion: Given the risks associated with firefighting, and the unpredictable nature of the emergencies firefighters face, they can never be "over-trained." Whether stationed downtown or in a rural area, ongoing training, and advanced training, is essential for the safety of firefighters as well as the citizens of Stamford.

Given appropriate resources and leadership, it would benefit all volunteers and career firefighters to cross-train together for a variety of scenarios and terrains, and for training practices and standards to be consistent citywide.

Best Practices for Meeting Fire Service Needs and Combining Volunteer and Paid Career Talent

Clarify and communicate. The overwhelming majority of American cities that are similar in size to Stamford operate all career or mostly career fire departments. In fact, a 2007 NFPA study reported that 86.3% of cities with a population of between 100,000 and 250,000 have all career departments and 12% have mostly career departments (career supplemented by volunteer), while only 1.7% operate mostly volunteer services.

Even after discussions with a multitude of stakeholders in Stamford, a critical question remains unanswered: What is the vision for Stamford's fire services: To establish an all career fire department or a mostly career department?

This lack of clarity points to the need for open and better communications, as well as the need to share with various stakeholders and residents at-large a comprehensive fire services plan and associated budget.

Career vs. Volunteer

According to a 2007 National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) study, the breakdown of paid career and volunteer fire protection services for cities between 100,000 and 250,000 in population are:

All career	86.3%
Mostly career	12.0%
All volunteer	1.7%

Create a plan and invite all the right parties to the table. No fire department has moved from volunteer to paid, or some other stage, without conflict. However, conflict can be minimized -- and any combination of services can be successful -- if there is a plan. Creating a plan, however, involves more than simply cobbling together a fire services organization from the pieces of existing fire departments or hiring a consultant to assess a situation.

It involves a coordinated, methodical approach in which all key stakeholders play a part in analyzing needs and mapping them to an operating structure and plan that will best meet the needs of the community.

Together, planners must:

- Define the city fire services mission, values and objectives
- Develop a strategy that:
 - Identifies the roles and guidelines by which the mission, value and objectives will be achieved.
 - Employs a SWOT analysis to identify strengths, identify and resolve weaknesses, identify and exploit opportunities and identify and avoid threats
- Define time-based goals that are quantifiable, consistent, realistic and achievable
- Define the necessary programs and all resources, objectives, timeframes, deadlines, budgets and performance target for implementing the key strategies. (It is during this phase that issues related to volunteer fire departments' community involvement and fund-raising campaigns can be addressed, for example.)
- Establish clear lines of authority and chains of command
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine which model (Combination, All-Paid, or other) will function most efficiently

Avoid a "dual/duel" system. The hazards of a "dual" system are best described in a passage from the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) Red Ribbon Report, "Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments".

Some departments may deem themselves “combination” simply because they utilize both career and volunteer personnel, but closer examination may show they are organizations in which paid firefighters are segregated from volunteer firefighters and there is little cooperation and integration between the two. This type of system is best described as “dual” rather than combination. While some dual departments function successfully in the short term, their division makes issues between the two groups stand out even more, and they miss out on many of the advantages a combination system brings. Poorly managed “dual” systems often become “duel” systems that are destined to fail.

Some indicators of a dual system include:

- *Volunteers operating in different quarters than paid staff*
- *Volunteers riding on separate apparatus than paid staff*
- *Separate rules and regulations used*
- *One group receiving better equipment and apparatus than the other*
- *Rank structures and supervision not integrated*
- *No opportunity for social interaction*

Departments should work to ensure system fairness for all parties. Integrating personnel fosters relationships that help to sustain the system.

Ensure tactical equality. Successful combination departments ensure complete integration, at the tactical level, of career and volunteer firefighters. It also recognizes that all firefighters must complete formal training and education to meet performance expectations and provides for paid and volunteer firefighters to train together.

Tactical integration improves operation at the scene of an emergency and increases volunteer longevity.

Resolving conflict in combination fire departments

An International City/County management Association (ICMA) report on managing conflict among complex combination fire departments, such as Stamford, suggests adopting a “confederated” approach where the central authority plays a weaker role than in a “federated” system. In this approach, powers are divided so that most of the power rests with individual fire departments. Equipment purchases, training, and standards monitoring are the only functions controlled by a centralized bureau.

While the bureau’s power may be limited, its de facto influence is greater.

When two parties do not trust each other, they have recourse to a binding contract. For example, they must adhere to certain rules, or terms specified in the contract, which may include meeting certain criteria such as response time, safety, and amount of joint training.

This may provide a good prescription for “managing” conflict; however, this tactic will not necessarily “resolve” conflict.

Model Combination Fire Departments

One solution does **not** fit all when it comes to fire services or any other aspect of ensuring public safety. Every community has unique needs and characteristics that will define its requirements – all of which must be analyzed as part of the fire services planning and organization process.

Model fire departments can be found in a multitude of cities across the country. However, their paid/volunteer ratios and the organizational structure of their fire companies are as varied as the communities themselves.

The characteristics that they all have in common are:

- Open and continuous communication
- Integrated planning and budgeting
- Centralized command and control
- Centralized training

Closer to home, two combination departments that might not consider themselves to be “perfect” fire departments, provide a look at how paid and volunteer companies can join forces under a unified command and control structure to both meet the fire protection needs of their communities and create operational and spending efficiencies.

Case Study: Greenwich, CT

Population: 66,000
Area covered: 48 square miles, including 3.2 miles of shoreline
Staffing: 107 career (96 firefighters and 11 in management, training, administration & fire marshals)
120 volunteer (80 that do structural firefighting; 40 that provide other services)
Calls: 4,000 per year
Equipment: 14 engine companies, 3 ladder companies, and 2 rescue companies
Budget: Approx. \$12 million

The Town of Greenwich is serviced by a combination fire department composed of eight firehouses: two all-volunteer, one all-paid firehouses, and five combination firehouses (combined paid and volunteer in one building). The first selectman of Greenwich also serves as the town’s fire commissioner. The fire chief, who directs and oversees all day-to-day operations of the town’s fire services, reports to the first selectman.

Centralized command and control system: The volunteer houses elect their own officers and, technically, a district chief in one of the volunteer houses could “outrank” in the field a paid fire lieutenant. However, in practice, this is rarely the case. To eliminate the potential conflicts of a bifurcated system, the firehouses operate under a centralized shift commander structure, under which the commander takes command of a scene. The department adheres to the National Incident Management System and supports the concept of Unified Command.

“It involves constant dialog and both sides have to put in large numbers of hours to make things work.”

The two all-volunteer fire companies, which own their buildings, are responsible for most maintenance and operating expenses. However, they receive stipends from the city: \$50,000 for one firehouse and \$132,000 for the other. The town’s vehicle replacement plan is part of a centralized operating plan (to which volunteer chiefs provide input through their participation in regular staff meetings). The firehouses apply for funding to offset the cost of new equipment through the town’s capital expenditure request and approval process.

Centralized recruitment and training: All recruitment and training, for volunteers and paid firefighters alike, is centrally managed by a Training Captain and Volunteer Recruitment Retention Officer. This structure ensures adherence to standard training practices and centralized tracking of the completion of initial and on-going training and certification requirements for all firefighters. It also ensures that all requisite initial training, such as Firefighter 1, Haz-mat and blood borne pathogen training, are completed before new recruits are allowed on a truck.

The training and recruitment departments also screen all volunteer firefighter candidates, perform background checks, and verify that candidates (and active paid and volunteer firefighters) meet physical requirements (All entry-level and annual physicals are managed and documented by this department).

A number of financial incentives are provided to volunteers including a \$7.50/call stipend and a \$1000 property tax abatement once a volunteer has logged 240 hours of service. The town pays for all training and once certain course certifications are completed, a stipend is paid to the volunteer. For those firefighters who need medical insurance, the city makes insurance available to them and pays 33% of the premium.

Conflict resolution: As with all combination fire departments, there are always various conflicts to be managed on a day-to-day basis. "It's a constant managerial issue," according to the fire chief. "It involves constant dialog and both sides have to put in large numbers of hours to make things work." Monthly staff meetings are held for all volunteer and paid staff chiefs, at which all planning and operational issues are addressed. Issues related to recognizing and incenting volunteers also are managed by this body and recently resulted, for example, in holding a recognition ceremony for volunteers. The goal of the group is to ensure that uniformed career and volunteer firefighters work together to preserve lives and protect the property of Greenwich citizens. Toward this end, they work under a central command and control structure arrangement, with volunteers and paid fire fighters riding on the same trucks and operating jointly out of their respective firehouses.

Case Study: Danbury, CT

Population: 80,000
Area covered: 43.5 square miles
Staffing: 120 career firefighters (including 12 staff positions, 6 of which are fire marshals) in five locations and 110 certified volunteer firefighters in 12 companies. There are a total of 17 companies, with multiple companies in some firehouses. There are multiple units in some volunteer houses, but single units in most. Each company has its own house.
Firehouses: 12 fire houses: 6 volunteer owned, 6 city-owned (volunteers in all stations; 6 engine companies and a truck company are fully staffed and manned 24/7 in 5 separate career houses)
Region: Danbury Fire Department also is a keystone of Connecticut's regional response plan
Calls: Approx. 6800 incidents annually: 3100 fire and 3700 EMS
Equipment: 6 engine companies, 1 ladder company, and 1 rescue company (dual with an engine company)
Budget: \$11.5 million (down approx. 4% this year)

In conjunction with a charter revision in the mid-1960s that combined the town and city of Danbury, the ownership of six volunteer fire companies was maintained by the city. Volunteers

retained ownership of five other companies. One company subsequently bought its station from the city.

Over the years there had been deterioration in the volunteer companies' ability to provide timely response. This was due to a reduction in membership rolls and the need to work beyond their neighborhoods.

Centralized command and control: Today, the Danbury's fire department is an organization represented by unity of command and unity of training, in addition to one with a common purpose. The Fire Chief reports directly to the mayor. And while there is no formal reporting structure between volunteer chiefs and the city's Fire Chief, there is an informal and accepted reporting structure in their symbiotic relationship. Crucial here is a sense of mutual respect and cooperation.

"Volunteer council meetings and ongoing communication are key to a healthy working relationship and critical to avoiding conflicts."

A Volunteer Council, whose members represent each of the volunteer companies, meets on a monthly basis with the Fire Chief and representatives of the other departments to discuss and resolve operational and "political" issues. These council meetings and ongoing communication are key to their healthy working relationship and critical to avoiding conflicts, according to Danbury's Fire Chief.

At the scene of a fire, paid firefighters are always in command. Volunteers and paid firefighters are dispatched at the same time based on established run protocols. For example one of two volunteer squad units are sent to every structure fire. There is secondary dispatch as the situation requires based on resource needs.

Centralized training: A training officer of Assistant Chief rank, representing the fire chief, organizes and executes all practical fire fighting instruction for career and volunteer firefighter personnel. This includes instruction in the use of new equipment, modern fire fighting and life saving techniques and all training-related record keeping.

Volunteers and paid firefighter train together, something that the fire chief points out is critical to working together and avoiding conflict.

In fact, the chief attributes much of the Fire Department's overall success to its centralized training structure, the centralized maintenance of training records, and ensuring that all firefighters meet quarterly qualification requirements.

Recruiting and incentives: Individual volunteer companies handle volunteer recruitment and volunteers are not offered any financial incentives for their services.

Budgeting: Volunteer companies conduct their own fund-raising campaigns to pay for operating expenses with the aid of a stipend from the city. Approximately \$425,000, an amount that has not increased in the past 5 years, is divided among the 12 companies. The volunteer companies purchase their own apparatus.

Conclusions

The challenge of preserving a volunteer fire organization, fierce in its independence and pride of service, and yet meet the demands of providing efficient public safety in a rapidly growing city cannot be accomplished through the courts.

If the preferred model is a combination department, *all* stakeholders (the city, volunteer departments, career firefighters and the union) should respectfully preserve the volunteer organization and realize the need for centralized command control. In addition, clearly defined, uniform training standards and operating procedures must be implemented across all departments to ensure the highest level of service throughout the city.

Today, six separate fire districts with six chiefs are devoid of a designated administrator responsible for city-wide fire operations, staffing, training and budgeting. A unified system would ensure that all departments are accountable to the same standards and procedures. It also would ensure integrated, city-wide personnel planning and budgeting practices.

However, the Big 5, with the exception of Glenbrook, would like to remain autonomous with the city providing funding for operations and personnel.

Recommendations:

1. **Institutionalize strategic planning.** Initiate a zero-based strategic planning approach that includes all volunteer and paid fire chiefs in the process
 - Identify key stakeholders and include them in the planning process (elected officials and members of other key organizations, in addition to management of all fire, emergency and disaster recovery services)
 - Clarify optimal structure for the city: All paid career; combination that includes paid career and non-paid volunteers; combination that includes paid career and paid volunteers; or another combination
 - Identify needs, map services/jobs to be performed to resources available (critical tasking), perform gap analysis. Also explore the need for and/or feasibility of shared services with neighboring communities.
 - Create a roadmap for achieving optimal organization and operating structure; define strategy for maximizing strengths and minimizing redundancies.
 - Establish criteria for funding (personnel, training, equipment, public education, fire marshal inspections, recruiting, emergency planning, etc.) that are tied to the plan and measurable goals and performance
 - Standardize operating procedures and training requirements across all fire companies
 - Validate budget requirements and cost-benefit assumptions

2. **Provide clarity and visibility of the strategic plan and budget** for fire (and other emergency and disaster recovery) services– for the short, medium and long-term

- Establish comprehensive, consistent reporting requirements across all fire department and post annual reports on the city's Website
- Make all plans, performance reports, and budgets available to the public on the city's website

3. Re-evaluate the “governing” aspects of fire, emergency and disaster-related services

- Role of the Mayor and Director of Public Safety in harmonizing relations and operations
- Role of the Fire Commission, its relevance, appropriateness of its purpose and mission, and its effectiveness
- Role of the Board of Representatives
 - Recognize the risks in the current system and take actions, within their power, to eliminate them.
 - Address City Charter-related and other legislation that will ensure a framework for adequate city-wide fire, EMS, and disaster-related services, and for measuring the ROI of these services
 - Ensure that funds are allocated **adequately** and **appropriately**. Tie budget allocations to a strategic plan and measurable performance standards (Avoid the temptation to respond to ad hoc emotional pleas)
 - Evaluate legislative options and analyze budgets; measure budgeted and actual spending against a strategic plan and performance reports; benchmark against best practices in other cities and national standards

Key Dates

- 1908 Springdale Fire Company founded
- 1928 Belltown Fire Dept incorporated
- 1928 TOR Fire Dept chartered by State
- 1930 Long Ridge fire Company incorporated
- 1936 Original TOR permanent firehouse (#1) built in TORRoad.
- 1944 Paid staff added to volunteers at TOR
- 1950s New TOR firehouse #2 built on Roxbury Rd
- 1956 Long Ridge present station 1 built
- 1966 New TOR firehouse #1 built on TOR Rd.
- 1980 Long Ridge 2nd station built on High Ridge.
- 1995 Study by Esposito Administration finds “serious public safety issue” in volunteer depts..
- 1996 Mayor Malloy sends 16 city firefighters to staff Long Ridge Fire Co.
- 1997 Springdale agrees to allow a city fire engine to operate from its firehouse.
- 1998 Judge rules City must find Long Ridge drivers; not provide City firefighters.
- 2004 Long Ridge and City settle lawsuit stemming from 1996 staffing changes
- 2007 The City announces merger of three of Stamford’s five volunteer depts.. Only Glenbrook agrees to the plan.
- 2008 Turn of River and Belltown sue the City and City removes paid firefighters. Two City engine companies move into temporary quarters in TOR District.
- 2009 State judge rules in favor of TOR Fire Dept over City. Orders City to pay \$288,000 in withheld funds.

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- City of Stamford:
 - Mayor Dan Malloy
 - Bill Callion, Jr., Director of Public Safety
 - Stamford City Firehouse: Chief Robert McGrath and Assistant Fire Chief John McCabe
 - Turn Of River Department: Aaron Lee, Frank Jacobellis
 - Long Ridge Fire Department: Chief Robert Bennett
 - Springdale Fire Department: Chief Shawn Fahan, Assistant Fire Chief, Brant Kelley, Finance Walter Magalnick
 - Glenbrook Fire Department: Mark Brennan
 - Belltown Fire Department:
- Bill Troup, US Fire Administration, National Fire Data Center
- Nancy Schwartz, National Fire Protection Association Library
- Jeff Morrisette, Connecticut Fire Training Center
- Tim Wall, Chair of the Volunteer and Combination Fire Services Section of the International Association of Fire Chief (IAFC) and Volunteer Chief for North Farms (Wallingford, CT)
- Geoff Herald, Fire Chief, Danbury, CT
- Peter J. Siecienski, Fire Chief, Greenwich, CT

Resources Consulted

Papers and Articles

- “Strategic Fire Study: City of Stamford, prepared by TriData Division, System Planning Corporation, December 2008
- “Have you found a conflict-free combination?” by Ron Coleman, *Fire Chief*, Feb. 1, 2002
- “Combo Chiefs Offer Up Conflict Solutions”, by Mike Chiaramonte”, *Fire Chief*, Feb 1, 2005
- “Consolidations a la carte”, by Alec Jensen and Jack W. Snook, *Fire Chief*, Feb. 1, 2000
- “The Red Ribbon Report: Lighting the Path of Evolution: Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments”, IAFC, Volunteer & Combination Officers Section, November 2005
- “Managing Conflict in Combination Fire Departments, International City/County Management Association (ICMA), IQ Service Report, Vol. 32, No. 7, July 2000

Associations/Organizations

- International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) www.iaff.org
- National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) www.nvfc.org
- International Association of Fire Chiefs, Volunteer and Combination Officers Section (IAFC VCOS) www.vcos.org
- National Fire Academy Resource Center
- www.firehouse.com

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