

Town of Pomfret, Vermont

FINAL REPORT

2016

Fire Services Evaluation for the Pomfret-Teago Volunteer Fire Department

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Purpose, Scope, and Methodology

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to evaluate how to improve the private fire department's relationship with the Select Board, look to apply best practices and apply industry standards to the Pomfret-Teago Volunteer Fire Department where needed, perform a comparison of similar size communities to include, budgets, equipment, training, types of responses, and response times.

SCOPE

The following is the scope of this project as defined by the Town of Pomfret.

- Analyze the relationship among the Town and fire department and make recommendations on ways to improve this relationship.
- Analyze finances, including whether the total level of spending for fire service's is appropriate and if the Town's contribution is in line with similar towns of the same size.
- Analyze call volumes and the nature of the calls.
- Analyze equipment needs.
- Analyze training and skill capabilities.

METHODOLOGY

This project has been accomplished through interviews with numerous individuals connected with the Town of Pomfret, the Pomfret-Teago Fire Department, and citizens of the community. Records of meetings at the town hall, and the fire department were reviewed. Reports conducted for other communities on similar topics were reviewed. A comparison of the statistics and practices of the fire department were made against national standards.

PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Fire departments of similar size communities were contacted for information and a comparison was made of those departments to the Pomfret-Teago Fire Department. An internet research was also conducted looking for relevant fire service information for small departments.

This report is a summary of the research conducted for this evaluation. The report includes relevant sections of this evaluation. Recommendations are made within each section of this report and summarized in attachment A.

Fire Services

Fire, rescue incidents and the fire department's ability to respond, manage, and diminish incidents or any threats to public safety, effectively and safely, are critical components in delivering emergency services to the community. *It is critically important that the department be operationally prepared; have proper equipment in place that is tested, inspected, and maintained; have personnel that are trained to the proper level of response and that the department meet or exceed National and State standards*. All Federal and State laws must be met by the Pomfret -Teago Fire Departments. All fire personnel must have the proper training that will ensure effective skill sets are in place during incidents.

In order to meet the core mission requirements of a fire department appropriate funding must be in place. In most cases this would be a responsibility of the municipality, but in this case it is the responsibility of the volunteer fire department, which is a 501c3 non-profit organization, which is independent of the town government.

Prior to 2012 there were two separate volunteer fire departments in the community. The Teago Volunteer Fire Department in South Pomfret, and the Pomfret Volunteer Fire Department in North Pomfret. The fire departments merged in 2012 under the current Fire Chief/Emergency Management Director, Kevin Rice. The fire department was renamed to its current name at that time.

To help the fire department meet their budget goals the Town provides the fire department with funds, the fire department submits a budget to the Town using the Town's budget process. The Town provides a portion of the funding for the daily operations of the department. The Town also has three different capital improvement plans in place, one for replacement of fire

apparatus, another for non-motorize equipment, and the third which is shared with other departments is the communications reserve fund. The Town processes all expenses for the fire department and pays all invoices. The Town provides the financial accounting processes for the fire department. The fire department reimburses the Town with their own funds when appropriate.

The fire department is insured by a private insurer not connected or part of the Town government. The Fast Squad is also covered by the fire department's insurance. The policy covers the fire department and fast squad for worker's comp, vehicle and liability insurance. The department and the Town share a responsibility for liability should there be a legal challenge. This same policy includes the Town for liability only.

In addition to structural and other kinds of firefighting operations, the fire department responds to other types of emergencies such as vehicle crashes, building collapses, water rescues, ice rescues, natural disasters, hazardous material spills, and technical rescues. These incidents require specialized equipment and training. In small departments these types of incidents are normally handled by regional response teams or State teams. In most cases they are handled by a larger neighboring fire department within the mutual aid system. The Hartford Fire Department has the equipment and training for all of the above incidents and is the leader for technical rescue response in the area and is part of the mutual aid system, which is available to Pomfret-Teago Fire Department.

During all emergency responses the Incident Command System (ICS) should be used and needs to meet the National Incident Management System (NIMS) guidelines. These guidelines have been promulgated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and is required to be used by law during some incidents.

The fire department is required to report all incidents using the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). The fire department has received federal grants in the past. One of the requirements for receiving federal money is that they report all incidents through NFIRS. No reports have been submitted for two years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ The fire department should use the VT Fire Academy Firefighter I outline to train and work to meet the basic fire prevention and suppression needs of the community. Training beyond the awareness level for building collapses, water rescues, ice rescues, natural disasters, hazardous material spills, and technical rescues is beyond the department's capabilities at this time.

- ✓ The fire department should work with the State Fire Marshal's Office to submit the incident reports to NFIRS for the past two years in order to meet the obligation of the federal grant.

Fire and Ambulance Coverage for Pomfret

Emergency medical care and patient transport are provided by other communities and paid for by contract services. Pomfret has a Fast Squad that responds to all medical emergencies working to stabilize the patient prior to the arrival of the ambulance. The Fast Squad uses space in the North Pomfret Fire Department where they train, meet, and store their equipment. The building is owned and maintained by the private non-profit Pomfret-Teago Fire Department.

Fire protection for the Town of Pomfret is provided by Pomfret-Teago Fire Department which is an independent non-profit volunteer department. This fire department has two stations and owns its fire equipment. One station is in North Pomfret the other in South Pomfret known as Teago. Both stations respond simultaneously to all incidents within the Town. The fire department has its own by-laws and governing body for association business and operations of the department.

I met with the fire chief and seven members of the department. I found them to be dedicated, passionate, and proud of their department. They receive no pay for any of the time they spend on department business or emergency response, they are totally volunteer. They take time from their family, work, and social life to attend select board meetings, fire department association meetings, trainings, fund raising efforts, and emergency response calls. The members expressed overall concerned for their fire department and the members that serve. They are also concerned with the challenges of getting new volunteers while trying to determine how to retain those members that are currently on the department. The difficulty of getting members to participate in trainings and meetings because of personal time constraints is perplexing for the chief and officers.

FIRE AND AMBULANCE COVERAGE FOR POMFRET

The Town of Pomfret does not have a contract, or any other obligation with the Pomfret-Teago Fire Department to provide fire protection to the community. However, the taxpayers contribute to the operation of the fire department through an appropriation in support of the daily operations, and include funds within the capital budget for equipment and fire apparatus. The town policies and town budget process are utilized by the fire department. Equipment purchased with Town funding is owned by the non-profit fire department. Although there has been some discussion that the purchase of a new fire truck would be owned by the Town and operated by the fire department.

Town of Pomfret and Recommendations

The Town is governed by a five-member Select Board. It's land area is 39.5 miles; population is approximately 997. It is a rural community with approximately 544 buildings. It ranks 159th in the State for population. Its population density is 25.3.

The Select Board hired a consultant to study the fire department (see scope and purpose pg,2). The Town has no contract or agreement with the non-profit fire department, however the Town has provided funding to the fire department for many years. The budget has increased considerably over the past few years causing concern for the taxpayers and board. For a while the Town provided a lump sum check to the fire department each year without any accountability of the money. Initially the town funds went towards expenses for operation and equipment to help fund the fire department. The fire department also raised money through fund raising efforts, which when partnered with the Town monies provided the necessary funds to operate the department. However, there is a perception that less fund raising is being done by the fire department thus relying more on the Town general fund to support operations. This seems to be creating a disproportionate funding relationship. In more recent time the fire department has submitted a line item budget and must explain what the money is used for. The fire chief finds this to be an arduous task and feels the explanations he provides are not accepted by the board.

At one time the fire department reported its revenue from fund raising and expenses in the Annual Town Report allowing the taxpayers and Select Board to see the cost sharing experiences of the Town and the non-profit fire department. The fire department does not report that information any longer in the Town Report or share it with the Select Board. This has created some

of the hard feelings with the Board and the distrust between the two. It leaves a perception that the Town taxpayers are now the sole revenue source for the fire department yet they have no operational oversight of the department. The fire department wants to keep its autonomy and feels it should not have to explain their expenses because they are a non-profit private department. Bottom line is that autonomy fades when the taxpayers start paying all the bills, or at least it is the perception.

The Board of Selectmen have no direct supervision over the fire chief or the officers of the fire department. However, the Select Board is responsible by law for appointing the Emergency Management Director (EMD) Statue (Title 20 V.S.A. Chapter 1, § 6). The Select Board also has supervision and authority over that position. The Board has appointed the fire chief to be the Emergency Management Director, but only has authority to manage the emergency management functions of the Director.

The fire chief is voted in by the membership of the Association, which is governed by the Association by-laws. The Select Board can and does require the fire chief to follow town policies and procedures when community funding is provided. On a recent vote by the voters to purchase a fire truck the Select Board required the fire chief to follow the purchasing policy of the town. The fire chief was surprised by the requirement, was not happy with it, but did follow it.

The town also provides money for a capital fund and recently established a non-motorized reserve fund, in addition they have a communication reserve fund, which is used by emergency management, highway department, fast squad, and fire department, as mentioned earlier in this report.

The fire department operating budget became a line item budget in 2012. Also in the fire department budget is the insurance policy that the fire

department purchased for itself and the fast squad to cover its buildings, members, equipment, and errors and omissions liability, which the town is named for liability only. The budget numbers below came from working with the Town Treasurer. The Town Treasurer was very helpful in breaking down the fire department budget and separating it from non-fire department expenses. The following is a summary of the fire department operating and capital budget starting with 2012 through 2017.

	2012	2013	2014*	2015**	2016***	2017
Operating	$ 36,980	$ 32,024	$ 22,262	$ 57,800	$ 54,158	$ 35,570
Insurance	$ 15,623	$ 3,188	$ 10,182	$ 13,893	$ 17,327	$ 17,000
Capital	$ 35,000	$ 42,500	$ -	$ 35,000	$ -	$ 48,000
Reserve Non-Motorized Equipment					$ 10,660	
Total	$ 89,615	$ 79,725	$ 32,444	$ 106,693	$ 82,145	$ 100,570

The average over six years is 81,258, which does not include capital funding for a two-year period.

The 2017 operating budget is a proposed budget not the actual and is more in line with pre self-contained breathing apparatus purchases. Insurance has increased considerably over the past couple of years.

*2014 was a split year changing from a calendar year to a fiscal year budget. Some items where paid for in the 2013 budget, the insurance payment overlapped that time frame and other line items did as well. Without getting to detailed it looks like the 2013 actual and the 2014 six-month budgets are the actual for the fire department budget.

**2015 is increased because of the onetime expenses of self-contained breathing apparatus which roles into 2016.

***2016 the fire department made a payment to the town for breathing apparatus reducing the actual budget for the fire department, although it will show a higher amount in the Town Report.

There is a perception that the fire department does not have fund raising events to the level that it could. In the past a letter was sent out to the residences of Pomfret asking for donations. The letter has not been drafted or used for raising donations for approximately two years. As mentioned earlier in this report a perception exists that the fire department in recent years has become dependent on the Town funding, and is not raising money for equipment and other purchases, or for the maintenance of the two buildings. The chief has reported that the private fire department does use the money in their accounts for purchases of equipment. Most recently the fire department used their funds for the purchase of self-contained breathing apparatus, and for finishing off the second floor of the Teago Station.

More than one person interviewed reported that the fire department will not communicate or discuss how much money they have or how they spend the funds. The annual report had an accounting of the non-profit private fire department accounts up to 2013, expenses were included in the 2015 annual report but no accounting of fund raising like previous years.

The Pomfret-Teago Fire department may be a non-profit fire department but once the department starts to depend on taxpayer's money to operate and purchase the majority of their equipment it becomes subject to accountability for the use of those funds to the community. As a result, the fire department becomes more like a municipal fire department under the control of local government, than a non-profit private department. The community shares a significant role in liability of the fire department's actions.

The Select Board and citizens of the community want to do their diligence in making the private fire department accountable for their budget requests and responsible for their spending. The private fire department is not accustomed to explaining or justifying their needs nor do they want to have to justify their budget expenses to anyone other than department members. One reason for this attitude may be that they are not trained or have experience in performing these budget management duties in a public forum. This has contributed to the dislike and mistrust by both parties. The chief does not think the Select Board should question him about why he needs equipment and what the equipment does, he is the expert on these issues and feels the board should just approve the funding. For many years there have been issues with the fire department, or departments prior to 2011, mistrust has been building for many years. The most recent issue is the bid process for the new fire truck that has taken 15 months to complete. The end of the process resulted in the Select Board rejecting all bids on May 2, 2016. The purchase of the fire truck is on hold at the request of the fire chief see Attachment B.

Many of the issues between the Fire Chief and the Select Board are over the budget, and the purchase of the fire truck. This has created friction, dislike, mistrust, and tension to the point that some individuals call each other out in public meetings; showing a disrespect for one another.

After reviewing the minutes of March 3, 2015 Annual Town Meeting, Article 12, the motion approved by the taxpayers is to purchase a pumper/tanker to be used by the fire department. I listened to recordings of board meetings regarding the purchase of the fire truck, the recording indicates that the board in their effort to ensure a fair bid process had transitioned their discussions from the bid process to what type of fire apparatus is needed for the fire department, that decision was made on March 3, 2015 by the voters.

Any discussion about the best types of apparatus for the fire department serves only to confuse the process and other board members. Creates unnecessary stress and tension between the fire officers and the board. It undermines the chief and his officers' authority and the work they have put into presenting the proposal to the taxpayers and citizens of the community.

The other issue is the lack of transparency concerning the fire departments fund raising revenue and expenses. Also contributing to the problem is the perception that the Select Board wants to take control of the fire department. The fire department and board members have had good and bad experiences with one another over the years which has also affected working relationships. Communications between the two are strained resulting in poor morale at the fire department, and leaving citizens confused about the issues.

The fire department is a great asset to the community. The people who volunteer do so to help their neighbors and serve the community. It is paramount that a good working relationship between the department and the Select Board be maintained. The chief must advocate for his members and the department. In order for the fire department to be successful and respected the Chief needs to advocate for the department in a way that is respectful of the budget process and policies of the Town. He must understand the need for transparency and accountability and provide information that will create an understanding of the department's needs. He and the board must realize they are working toward the same goals of providing the best affordable fire protection to the citizens of the community.

The following recommendations are being made to help better the relationship between the parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ The board should consider the appointment of EMD to coincide with the election of the fire chief, which is every two years and subject to change. This would keep the rotation on the same time frame should the fire chief change.

- ✓ The Select Board should consider appointing a neutral individual, possibly the assistant to the board to be the coordinator between the fire chief and the board. It would allow the fire chief to advocate without having to attend board meetings. In the future consider appointing this position the emergency management/fire coordinator/director to work with the fire department, ambulance service, fast squad, and county sheriff for coordination of all emergency services.

- ✓ For budget purposes consider a set amount the Town will contribute towards the fire department budget continuing to use the line item budget approach. Instead of debating line items for justification of purchases either increase or decrease the budget by a percentage and let the fire department determine what they want to apply the money to, or where to get the funding if there is a short fall. During the budget process require a written justification of new expenses. It eliminates the need to know what the private fire department is doing with their money, the explanations of equipment, the uncertainty of the explanations, and the perception by the fire department that the Select Board is trying to take over control. This written justification should follow a clear and universally applied policy on budget justifications.

- ✓ The Town should consider entering into a contract with the Pomfret-Teago Fire Department for the purposes of providing fire protection to the community. One of the benefits of this contractual arrangement would be a potential reduction in insurance costs.

- ✓ Follow and enforce the Town bid policy for the purchase of the fire truck. Be thoughtful about conflict of interest issues with Select Board members that are current and former fire department members.

- ✓ There is a recommendation regarding the purchase of the fire truck in the fire department section of the report on page 25.

Fire Department Budget Comparisons

When making a comparison for the Town portion of the budget for the Pomfret-Teago Fire Department to other volunteer fire department budgets of comparable community size the following was obtained;

- Royalton Fire District; responds to 100 fire calls, population 2600, square miles 40, budget is $70,000, includes 35,000 capital budget, daily operation, building, and maintains for four apparatus, 17 members. Fund raising money is used for equipment purchases.

- Barnard Volunteer Fire Department; responds to 80 fire calls, population 958, square miles 48.5, budget is $42,000 from the community, actual budget is $75-$80,000, the other money is funded by the fire department using money earned by fund raising. Two fire apparatus, one mini pumper, one forestry truck, and 27 members.

- Marlboro Volunteer Fire Department; responds to 140 fire calls, 40 are EMS responses, population is 978, square miles 40, budget is 10,000, fund raising/donation are used for additional funding of equipment. Obtained a Fire Act Grants for equipment, and has automatic aid from mutual aid fire departments for the one or two structure fires a year. Two fire apparatus, 14-16 firefighters.

- Reading Volunteer Fire Department, responses to 81 fire calls, 20 are EMS responses, population 707, square miles 41, community budget is

$31,350, fire department fund raising pays for additional equipment and helps with apparatus purchases. Two fire apparatus, one rescue/utility, one forestry, and 20 members.

- In a study dated April 15 prepared by Municipal Resources, Inc. of Meredith, NH, they reported that, Monkton Fire Department, responded to 51 calls, population 1980, square miles 36, budget of $55,000, three fire apparatus, one brush unit.

The average spending of the 6 communities used in this evaluation using taxpayer funds is $41,670. Pomfret-Teago Fire Department's average for 6 years has been $81, 258, almost double the average costs of the other departments. It appears the big difference between the comparable communities used in this evaluation and the Pomfret-Teago Fire Department is the fund raising efforts and the use of those funds towards the fire department equipment purchases. The other departments seem to raise more funds and not rely so heavily on taxpayer dollars. Most of the departments set aside monies each year for future expenses. Another contributing factor to this cost difference is the cost of insurance. Insurance costs for Pomfret is considerable higher than other fire departments in this comparison. Most of these volunteer fire departments are getting their insurance through the Town membership with VLTC. It appears the other fire departments are asking for town funding for day to day operations only, they do not include the costs for equipment replacement in their request for town funding.

Pomfret-Teago Fire Department and Recommendations

As mention earlier the fire department is a private non-profit 501c3 organization. It is a volunteer fire department currently being led by Fire Chief Kevin Rice, who has also been appointed by the Select Board as the Emergency Management Director. Chief Rice has been serving as the fire chief since 2009. The chief serves a two-year term with elections being held in December by the Association membership. The department is governed by the Association's Board of Directors. The Chief of the Department, once elected, is the President of the Corporation and Chair of the Board.

Chief/EMD Rice has been cooperative and helpful with this evaluation, the department membership agreed to participate in the evaluation with the objective of learning how they can improve, while feeling a little apprehensive about the results. Anytime there is a peer review evaluation it causes concern because of the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the report. The strengths and weakness identified in any evaluation and how those are seen by others always carries some apprehension amongst the department members who are being evaluated. Chief Rice has made some very good accomplishments during his tenure. Recruiting and retaining volunteers is a major issue with volunteer fire departments in Vermont yet Chief Rice has been able to increase the membership of the department. He has provided a certified Firefighter I class certifying 10 members, he was able to combine the two separate fire departments in Town into one department, and upgraded the equipment in the department.

The fire department is well equipped and maintained. As of August 2016 the department has a membership of 15 individuals, of which 10 members respond from the Teago station and 5 from the North Pomfret station. Currently there are 3 Firefighters certified at Firefighter I, and two (2)

certified at Firefighter II. One of the 15 members is a rookie/probation member. There are approximately 7 members that are active with the department the other members either show up on occasion, or show up at what is known as the "big one" which are structure fires. Of the 15 there are 7 who once were certified Firefighter I, but have not recertified for 2-3 years.

In comparison to other volunteer fire departments the number of certified members is slightly below average. Considering that just a few years ago 13 of the 15 members where certified demonstrates the commitment they once displayed. This lack of commitment is not a reflection on the chief as he continues to have monthly training drills attempting to provide training to the members. However, he cannot get members to attend them. Recertification requires only 24 hours of continuing education each year performed by the department and authorized by the fire chief. Therefore, if members attended the monthly training drills they could have maintained their certifications. Family commitments are often cited as the reason why participation at monthly drills has diminished. The other reason is the lack of activity (calls for service) and/or structure fires within the Town. The department is not used for interior fire attack when responding to mutual aid calls, they are used for water supply only, so the level of activity for a member who trained close to 200 hours to obtain Firefighter I is very low making it difficult to keep their interest. Nonetheless, it is still important for members to train and keep their skills levels up for safety reasons; to protect themselves, the person on the left and right of them, and for their families during the emergencies. The firefighters who come to the "big ones" can become a liability if they do not train or follow standard procedures and safety practices. Basic fire training must take place monthly and mandated for the safety of the responders. The fire department organization chart is depicted in chart 1.

The department responds to approximately 40 incidents a year. The number of incidents vary slightly each year. The type of incidents the department responds to are; private fire alarm activations, motor vehicle accidents, wires down, car fires, grass and brush fires, mutual aid, an occasional structural fire

Chart 1 - Organizational Chart

1 Fire Chief/EMD

2 Assistant Chiefs (one in each station)

2 Captains (one in each station)

2 Lieutenants (one in each station)

8 Firefighters

to mention a few. There are long response times with the average being 10 minutes from time of dispatch to response to the station, and then travel time to the incident which ranges from a few minutes to 30 minutes on good weather days. There are times that only one member arrives at the station and takes a fire truck by themselves. Incident reports reviewed indicated low turnout for responses depending on the type of call. Normally not more than 2-5 members respond. This is not unusual as most small rural communities and some larger communities have a difficult time getting members to respond during the day. Most members work outside the community and are not available. However, evening fire calls also have low turnout of members, which is unusual because that is when you see more participation from members.

Having both stations respond simultaneously to fire calls in Pomfret is necessary and should continue. Particularly where there are only 5 members in North Pomfret. In addition to having the two stations respond the

department may want to consider mutual aid response to assist for major incidents.

Because of the response times and the number of trained personnel responding the department has a difficult time meeting the standard set by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1720, (Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations), when responding to the public by Volunteer Fire Departments. More concerning is the VOSHA Respiratory Protection Standard "Two in – Two out" rule. This rule requires that a team of four (4) certified firefighters must be assembled before an interior fire attack can be made when the fire has progressed beyond the incipient stage. The exception to this rule is when an imminent life threatening situation exists requiring immediate action and this action needs to be taken before the 4-person team is assembled. This rule applies to any operation that involves an atmosphere that is potentially "Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health" (IDLH) which includes carbon monoxide (CO) incidents. This regulation affords personnel a level of safety not provided with two-person crew.

Chief/EMD Rice has stated that the department is not an interior fire operations department, although if life is endangered the crew would make every effort to rescue those people they could save. *With long response times and few responding members, the department is an outside fire attack and exposure protection force.* However, there are no standard operating guidelines that indicate or informs the members of this department position.

EQUIPMENT

The department has two engines, one forestry truck, and a rescue. They have

Chart 2 – Summary of Equipment

- *2003 Emergency One, pumper/tanker with a 1250gpm pump, and 1500 gallons of water.*
- *1993 Central States, 100gpm pump and 1000 gallons of water.*
- *1987 Dodge forestry truck, 350gpm pump, with 300 gallons of water.*
- *Horton Rescue for carrying equipment to motor vehicle accidents*

one tanker that is out of service.

Other than the tanker the apparatus appears to be in good condition, well maintained, has the proper equipment and meets national standards. The tanker should not be put back in service. The apparatus appears to be adequate for the needs of the department and the community. A private contractor does the maintenance on the apparatus. The department does not perform pump testing, and hose testing annually, but should for a number of reasons, most important for the safety of the members of the department or mutual aid members working at the scene of a fire, the other reason is liability issues, not so important would be to help with ISO ratings.

When taking into consideration response times, members responding to incidents, and the department being primarily an outside operation department, and when doing a comparison with similar type and size communities the equipment meets the need for Pomfret. Other communities responding from one station seem to have two (2) apparatus; one

pumper/tanker, and one tanker. Pomfret responding from two stations is a little different because they need the capability of a tanker/pumper to attack the fire and protect exposures from either end of Town. But the need for water supply is very important, so both apparatus should have a minimum of 1500 gallons. Taking into account the response times and the number of personnel responding no more than two fire apparatus are needed for the community. With automatic mutual aid in place it gives time for mutual aid to arrive on scene for major incidents at the same time or close to the same time as a Pomfret trucks. Smaller communities with volunteer fire departments and low incident responses are moving the 20-year replacement plan to 30 years when the apparatus continues to be safe for travel. Taking into account the number of responses and the low use of fire apparatus contributes to this change.

> "When doing a comparison with similar type and size communities the equipment meets the need for Pomfret"

It is my understanding that the fire chief has initiated work on a few of these recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Recruitment and retention should be a focus of the department. With only 5 members in North Pomfret it could become difficult to get a response from that station if members are out of service for any reason. If it drops much lower the officers should consider consolidating the equipment and have members respond from one station. Teago has a few more members but often times does not have many members responding to calls.

- ✓ Strongly recommend getting an agreement with the mutual aid fire departments from each end of Town to have automatic response to all IDLH atmospheres. This is becoming much more acceptable to mutual aid departments to meet the safety requirements mentioned earlier. There are fewer of these type calls that would require automatic aid. Possibly 2-3 incidents.

- ✓ Strongly recommend that no fire apparatus respond to emergencies with only one firefighter. There are too many distractions for one person, to drive the truck with water sloping around, talking on the radio, running the red lights and siren, and then trying to size up the scene on arrival. At least two firefighters should be in the front seat before responding, the exception may be to drive with traffic no lights or sirens if there are others on scene already. Safer to call for mutual aid to take the call.

- ✓ Use the State Fire Academy driver training program for the training of all drivers.

- ✓ Continue with scheduled training nights, but have a make-up night or weekend day, require members to participate in training and set a minimum of 24 hours of training per year. Make it easier for members to attend training, and make it fun by including fire attack competition, and other competitive drills with equipment. Include SCBA, incident command levels 100 and 200, pump operations and hose testing etc. The budget had $4000.00 for training in 2016 it was not used. Encourage members to take outside schools and credit them toward monthly training. Use the same funds for recruitment and retention programs.

- ✓ After checking with the State Fire Academy the members who were certified could be recertified by taking the exam. Prepare those members that want to be recertified for the examine as part of the retention program, include some incentives.

- ✓ Develop standard operating guidelines and procedures, rules and regulations and enforce them. Enforce the by-laws that have been approved and accepted. Phase in enforcement and procedures so members can catch up and feel comfortable with the change. Safety is the objective.

- ✓ Recommend a safety inspection of the 1993 fire truck up for replacement, it has very low road miles and hours. The body and motor appear fine and road ready. I did not review the frame of the truck; the inspection should include the frame. If it passes inspection, then hold off purchasing a new fire truck.

- ✓ Recommend hiring a contractor to test the fire pumps annually and possibly learn the procedure to include it in the monthly training program.

- ✓ Strongly recommend record keeping for the following subjects, training, incident reports, personnel records, and finances. There are citizens who are willing to help with this part of the fire department

business. I would recommend that the chief seek out a person willing to work with him to assist with this project. I would estimate once it was all set up and training was complete it would take just a few hours a month to keep up with it.

- ✓ Recommend the fire department be more transparent with their operations and finances. Go back to the time when it was being reported in the annual report. I found no harm to the department because of the financial accounting of the fund raising and expenses in the annual report. If the department wants to keep its autonomy they must share expenses and demonstrate they have some ownership, it will help to build trust and respect.

- ✓ The Pomfret-Teago Fire Department should convene a strategic planning meeting with all of their member's present. The focus of this meeting is to determine what the future of the fire department will look like taking into considerations the comments and recommendation in this report. Special attention should be given to member's participation in training, and response.

Insurance Services Office (ISO) and Recommendation

The community has a rating of 8B/10. This is better than most rural communities of this size. There are and have been many discussions, emails, and presentations regarding the ISO rating. The fire department can meet the ISO rating using mutual aid fire departments from the surrounding area for water supply, eliminating the need for purchasing a tanker. Most fire departments if not all use mutual aid to meet the standard for rural water supply requirements, it is difficult meeting the standard without mutual aid assistance. In addition, the rating considers training, response times to incidents, and the number of firefighters responding, standard operating procedures, dispatching, maintenance of equipment and record keeping.

Record keeping is not a strong point for the department and it seems no one wants to be the bookkeeper for fire department business, however, the department has a very good records management system that they are paying approximately 1500.00 a year for. Information is not being provided, and it is not being used to its full potential. It is compatible with the NFIRS, but the information that is entered needs to be complete. At the current time most of the information in the system does not match up with NFIRS, which would mean that incident reports would now have to be entered individually. As mentioned earlier there are two years that have not been entered. Approximately 80 reports from the previous years and those incidents from this year, which would take a few hours for someone who is trained to enter. The State will do the training.

Conclusion

The Town of Pomfret is pursuing a responsible course of action by having the fire service system evaluated. The Town of Pomfret in considering how to improve the relationship between the fire service and the board, while evaluating the needs of the fire department and how the department provides the most effective and efficient level of fire protection to the community shows the town is committed to providing quality fire protection to the community. There will be difficult decisions for the Town, as well as the fire department in the future. The fire department will have significant decisions to make regarding their future. Those involved need to consider the big and long range picture and jointly determine a vision for the future while they consider the correct way to proceed.

It appears the Town has become the sole source of revenue for the fire department. They are funding the department more like a municipal department than supporting the non-profit private department with a contribution or donation. The community should continue to support the fire department in its current mission for fire protection. The Town should be concerned with the operations of the fire department as they share liability issues should there be a lawsuit. The fire department needs to improve its training for members enabling them to become certified, they need to improve their record keeping, and improve maintenance of their equipment. These are all items that are routine operational functions for fire departments. The Town should put aside the funding for the new fire truck for a few years while the fire department makes these improvements. The Town needs to acknowledge and recognize that the fire protection within the Town of Pomfret is being performed by dedicated, non-paid personnel who give up their time to serve. The Town needs to recognize the department may need help in performing some of the accountability procedures and

administrative functions demanded of them. Therefore, the Town should consider having a neutral person help the department achieve the departments goals and liaison with the Select Board.

The fire department has some difficult decisions to make about their membership, autonomy, fund raising efforts, transparency, and operations. The membership expressed in a meeting that they need to get their house in order with training, SOG's, rules and regulations, and record keeping. This acknowledgment is a positive step in advancing the fire service within the Town of Pomfret.

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Appendix A – Summary of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS - FIRE SERVICE

- ✓ The fire department should train and work to meet the basic fire prevention and suppression needs of the community. Training beyond the awareness level for building collapses, water rescues, ice rescues, natural disasters, hazardous material spills, and technical rescues is beyond the department's capabilities at this time.

- ✓ The fire department should work with the State Fire Marshal's Office to submit the incident reports to NFIRS for the past two years in order to meet the obligation of the federal grant.

RECOMMENDATIONS - TOWN OF POMFRET

- ✓ The board should consider the appointment of EMD to coincide with the election of the fire chief, which is every two years and subject to change. This would keep the rotation on the same time frame should the fire chief change.

- ✓ The Select Board should consider appointing a neutral individual to be the coordinator between the fire chief and the board. It would allow the fire chief to advocate without having to attend board meetings. The board should consider getting input from fire department officers for this position. In the future consider appointing this position the emergency management coordinator/director to work with the fire department, ambulance service, fast squad, and county sheriff for coordination of all emergency services.

- ✓ For budget purposes consider a set amount the Town will contribute towards the fire department budget continuing to use the line item budget approach. Instead of debating line items for justification of purchases either increase or decrease the budget by a percentage and let the fire department determine what they want to apply the money to, or where to get the funding if there is a short fall. Require a written justification of new expenses. It eliminates the need to know what the private fire department is doing with their money, the explanations of equipment, the uncertainty of the explanations, and the perception by the fire department that the Select Board is trying to take over control. This written justification should follow a clear and universally applied policy on budget justifications.

RECOMMENDATIONS - PROMFRET-TEAGO FIRE DEPARTMENT

- ✓ Recruitment and retention should be a focus of the department. With only 5 members in North Pomfret it could become difficult to get a response from that station if members are out of service for any reason. If it drops much lower the officers should consider consolidating the equipment and have members respond from one station. Teago has a few more members but often times does not have many members responding to calls.

- ✓ Strongly recommend getting an agreement with the mutual aid fire departments from each end of Town to have automatic response to all IDLH atmospheres. This is becoming much more acceptable to mutual aid departments to meet the safety requirements mentioned earlier. There are fewer of these type calls that would require automatic aid. Possibly 2-3 incidents.

APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Strongly recommend that no fire apparatus respond to emergencies with only one firefighter. There are too many distractions for one person, to drive the truck with water sloping around, talking on the radio, running the red lights and siren, and then trying to size up the scene on arrival. At least two firefighters should be in the front seat before responding, the exception may be to drive with traffic no lights or sirens if there are others on scene already. Better to call for mutual aid if need be.

- ✓ Use the State Fire Academy driver training program for the training of all drivers.

- ✓ Continue with scheduled training nights, but have a make-up night or weekend day. Make it easier for members to attend training to include fire attack competition, and other competitive drills with equipment. Include SCBA, incident command levels 100 and 200, pump operations and hose testing etc. The budget had $4000.00 for training in 2016 it was not used. Encourage members to take outside schools and credit them toward monthly training. Use the same funds for recruitment and retention programs.

- ✓ After checking with the State Fire Academy the members who were certified could be recertified by taking the exam. Prepare those members that want to be recertified for the examine as part of the retention program, include some incentives.

APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Develop standard operating guidelines and procedures, rules and regulations and enforce them. Enforce the by-laws that have been approved and accepted. Phase in enforcement and procedures so members can catch up and feel comfortable with the change. Safety is the objective.

- ✓ Recommend a safety inspection of the 1993 fire truck up for replacement, it has very low road miles and hours. The body and motor appear fine and road ready. I did not review the frame of the truck; the inspection should include the frame. If it passes inspection, then hold off purchasing a new fire truck.

- ✓ Recommend hiring a contractor to test the fire pumps annually and possibly learn the procedure to include it in the training program.

- ✓ Strongly recommend record keeping for the following subjects, training, incident reports, personnel records, and finances. There are citizens who are willing to help with this part of the fire department business. I would recommend that the chief seek out a person willing to work with him to assist with this project. I would estimate once it was all set up and training was complete it would take just a few hours a month to keep up with it.

- ✓ Recommend the fire department be more transparent with their operations and finances. Go back to the time when it was being reported in the annual report. I found no harm to the department because of the financial accounting of the fund raising and expenses in the annual report. If the department wants to keep its autonomy they must share expenses and demonstrate they have some ownership, it will help to build trust and respect.

- ✓ The Pomfret-Teago Fire Department should convene a strategic planning meeting. The focus of this meeting is to determine what the future of the fire department will look like taking into considerations the comments and recommendation in this report.

Appendix B – Fire Truck Bid Information

The following letter was read to the Pomfret Select Board and public in attendance at the May 18th SB meeting by Pomfret-Teago Fire Chief Kevin Rice

As most everyone is aware, the 15-month process of purchasing a fire truck resulted in all potential bids being rejected by the Pomfret Select Board. The Fire Department acknowledges and respects the authority of the Board and its decisions, but is concerned with the process and oversight it has exhibited during the bidding process. From our perspective, the Board has usurped the expertise and experience of the Fire Department with politics and unnecessary complications, leading to a stressful, time consuming and unsuccessful outcome. If the Board had cooperated with the Fire Department in understanding our request and specifications for a new truck, the end result could have been a win for all concerned rather than a restart.

On Tuesday May 10th, during our monthly business meeting, the Pomfret-Teago Volunteer Fire Department unanimously voted to inform the Board to place on hold our request to purchase a new fire truck until further notice. It is our opinion that we need to step back and reassess the direction of our Fire Department, which is a private volunteer nonprofit organization. The Fire Department intends to reassess the apparatus we need and review the options and alternatives to fund those needs. It is essential in moving forward that the Board respect our position. The Fire Department wishes to develop a cooperative and agreeable relationship with the Board while remaining a private organization that can fully respond to the needs of the community. Our time is much better spent training and responding to emergencies than attempting to reengage with another process like we just went through.

As individual volunteers, we want to reassure the citizens of Pomfret that we truly want what is best for our town and our Fire Department and we feel those things do not need to be different. We will keep the Board and the public informed in the months ahead as we make these decisions.

If you have any questions please feel free to call Fire Chief, Kevin Rice at 802-457-2364

Chief Kevin Rice

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