

120 Daniel Webster Highway  
Meredith, NH 03253



Telephone: (603) 279-0352  
Toll Free: (866) 501-0352  
Fax: (603) 279-2548

[www.municipalresources.com](http://www.municipalresources.com)

March 2, 2019

Ryan J. Aylesworth, Town Manager  
Town of Enfield  
Town Managers Office  
23 Main Street  
Enfield, NH 03748

**Sent Via E-mail**

Dear Ryan:

The Town of Enfield engaged our firm to provide an external, practitioner-based perspective on two issues that are currently being considered by the community. This letter provides a professional perspective and addresses the two questions which are listed below:

1. Should the Town of Enfield transition from the current governance model where firewards elected at large, appoint the Fire Chief and provide some level of oversight to the Enfield Fire Department?
2. Should the Town merge Enfield Fire and Enfield Emergency Medical services into a single fire rescue organization?

**Methodology**

To provide an appropriate evaluation of these issues, I employed eleven methods which are listed below:

- Industry based research on the issues presented;
- Comparative analysis with seven other communities;
- A review of the most recent NFPA Fire Department Profile;
- Met with the Town Manager;
- Met with the Police Chief/Emergency Manager;
- Toured the community of Enfield;
- Toured each fire facility;
- Reviewed fire apparatus;
- Met with two of three fire wards;

- Developed a series of questions and provided an opportunity for members of the Enfield Fire Department and FAST Squad to provide a written response to my research questions;
- Conducted a series of individual interviews with command staff, fire officers and firefighters.

It should be noted that approximately 30 members of the fire department and FAST Squad were provided an opportunity to develop an individual written response to my focused questions. In addition, approximately 18 members of the fire department participated in brief individual interpersonal interviews.

### **Comparative Analysis**

As this project progressed, I worked with the Town to identify and address these issues by looking at the current practice within seven New Hampshire communities. The table below provides the result of this survey:

New Hampshire Community	Population	Form of Governance	Provides EMS through Fire Department
Hillsborough	5,945	Municipal – Board of Selectmen	Yes
Hopkinton	5,668	Municipal – Board of Selectmen	Yes
Jaffrey	5,259	Municipal – Town Manager	Yes
New London	4,403	Firewards - Appointed by Board of Selectmen	No
Newport	6,367	Municipal – Town Manager	Yes
Sunapee	3,450	Firewards – Appointed by Board of Selectmen	No
Wakefield	5,033	Municipal – Board of Selectmen	Yes
Enfield	4,542		No
Average	5,161	Municipal – Board of Selectmen  71% Municipal (BOS or TM)  29% Firewards 100% appointed by BOS	Yes  Yes 71%, No 29%

This analysis revealed the following information:

- 71% of the communities listed utilize a municipal governance model where the fire department reports to either the Board of Selectmen or to the Town Manager.
- 29% of the communities listed utilize a fireward based governance model. In these communities, the firewards are appointed by the Board of Selectmen.
- None of the seven communities listed utilize a system of firewards that are elected by the community at large.

### **Fire Service Governance Model**

#### **Pertinent Observations**

The following observations were obtained from the interviews and review of written response that were submitted during my February 25, 2019 field visit. In an effort to provide an atmosphere free from any potential group or political influences all interviews were conducted on an individual basis.

- The majority of the fire department members that participated in the interview process were concerned with a perceived lack of communication from the firewards.
- There was a general concern over the structure, quality and overall lack of training within the Enfield Fire Department over the past several years.
- The majority of interview participants were concerned over what is perceived as ***“relationship-based decision making”***. This was explained that personnel are often selected for advancement through relationships rather than by qualification.
- A minority of interview participants indicated concern that a transition to a municipal governance model might produce micromanagement of the Department.
- Less than half of interview participants felt that the firewards understood the fire department and its needs better than the Town Manager.
- Interview participants universally expressed the opinion that the conflict/turmoil within the department is currently as high as it has ever been. Many members believed that this high level of turmoil reflected the recent short-term tenure of a Fire Chief and the internal division caused by the issue of governance. Based on written responses, conflict averaged at 6.5 (on a 1-10 scale). My experience would indicate that a conflict level of 4 is normal in fire service organizations.

- Many indicated that the department had been divided by multiple factions. These factions included the trained/certified vs. the uncertified and those on each side of the issue of fireward vs. municipal governance.
- Two of the three firewards attended a meeting, they presented a genuine concern for the department and were worn down by recent events. Both indicated that they are trying hard to “do the right thing”.
- At least one fireward indicated that the Town should transition to a municipal governance model but also indicated that this was not the right time.
- Approximately 70% of fire department members interviewed indicated that the fire ward model of governance should be replaced. Many felt the model was outdated and as it involves members of the fire department it is too internally and externally political.
- Some officers presented a concern that a fireward who serves as a firefighter presents an internal conflict as their subordinate on the fire scene become their boss back at the station.
- Many interview participants indicated that they had a concern relative to transparency and did not feel that the firewards had a clear understanding of their role or responsibility. Some of this may be based on the selection of role under the RSA.
- All participants indicated that there has been a reduction in membership. Many believe that at least some part of that reduction is based on internal conflict.
- When asked how the department could be improved the following three responses were the most common:
  - Enhance teamwork
  - Increase and improve training
  - Reduce drama and turmoil

## **Discussion**

Over the previous two decades, the American Fire Service has experienced a dramatic shift in role and response experience. Most fire service organizations have experienced a significant reduction in the response to actual fires and an increase in the scope of services expected by the community. Through this transition, fire services have emerged as all hazard life safety agencies. Currently, most organizations report 80% of emergency response includes some aspect of emergency medical services (EMS). As a result, many fire service agencies have become fire/rescue organizations. An example of this changing role can be found in the responsibilities assigned to the Enfield Fire Department during an active shooter situation.

Dating back to colonial times, volunteer fire departments have always been community centered organizations that frequently elected leaders from within. In the majority of communities, this internal governance and selection of leadership has given way to municipal selection based on qualification.

Fire service best practice shows a large transition toward municipal governance models over the last fifty years. This change allows organizations to have stronger ties to the fiscal and operational goals of the community they serve. In our experience most Fire Chiefs prefer to report a professional Town Manager as they feel that the manager provides a political buffer.

Although as with any organization there was a wide variety of opinion, the general organizational consensus of Enfield Fire Department members that spoke with me stated a concern over a reduction in membership, noted an increase in conflict and felt that it is time to transition to a municipal governance model. Many of the personnel interviewed indicated that factions exist in the organization. One member summarized this concern by stating that ***“the department has been divided by bad decisions”***. Based on best practice and considering the guidance provided by the majority of participating members of the fire department, I believe that it is time for Enfield to transition to a municipal governance model.

## **Recommendations**

***Recommendation I - The Town of Enfield should initiate the process to transition from fire service governance by firewards to a municipal governance model where the department reports to the Town manager.***

***Recommendation II – The interim Fire Chief and command staff should continue to openly address conflict and build internal teamwork.***

***Recommendation III – The interim Fire Chief and command staff should develop high quality, well structured monthly training programs.***

## **Fire/EMS Consolidation**

### **Pertinent Observations**

The following observations were obtained from the interviews and written response that was completed during my February 25, 2019 field visit. In an effort to provide an atmosphere free from any potential group or political influences all interviews were conducted on an individual basis.

- The majority of fire department members (approximately 60%) were in favor of a fire/EMS merger and the development of a single fire/rescue organization. Approximately 20% were concerned relative to cross training expectations, 20% were against a fire/EMS merger.

- 100% of the FAST Squad personnel were in favor of a fire/EMS merger.
- The single largest concern presented was the perception that both fire and EMS personnel would be forced to cross train or that those not interested in cross training would no longer have a place within the organization.
- There was a general concern relative to a decrease in the number of both fire and EMS personnel.
- There was a general concern relative to coverage and missed calls.

## **Discussion**

61% of US Fire Departments provide EMS, 10% have some EMS service involvement and 29% do not. However, the majority of the 29% that do not provide EMS, provide first responder service to provide an immediate response and assist EMS personnel. In a typical modern fire department approximately 80% of responses involve EMS.

In Enfield, there was strong agreement that the change in fire service role has produced more of an operational overlap and joint response with EMS personnel. There was a genuine concern relative to what would be required of personnel not interested in a cross trained role. Most organizations address this concern by encouraging cross training but supporting those that would like to retain a singular operational focus. Based on the current lack of clarity, I would suggest that this concern be immediately addressed through communication from the leaders of each organization. This concern is an example of why this change needs to be carefully planned and paced. In the absence of this planning, additional conflict and turmoil should be expected.

Change is a difficult process and fire/EMS organizations that have found success in consistency are reluctant to embrace change. Based on best practice and considering the guidance provided by the majority of participating first responders, I believe that a fire/EMS merger is an opportunity to build a stronger emergency response team and produce a more efficient and effective coordination of effort.

## **Recommendations**

***Recommendation IV - The Town of Enfield should utilize a paced and planned transition to create a single fire/rescue organization.***

***Recommendation V – The Fire Chief, EMS Director and Town Manager should clarify that cross training is not required and provide reassurance that members that wish to retain a singular focus will continue to be valued and supported members of the organization.***

Ryan Aylesworth, Town Manager

March 2, 2019

Page 7

***Recommendation VI – The Fire Chief, EMS Director and Town Manager encourage cross training of personnel and support cross training in members that are interested in developing skills in both fire and EMS discipline.***

Please contact me with any questions relative to this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BPD", followed by a long horizontal flourish line.

Brian P. Duggan  
Director of Fire Services Group