EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Setting

The Township of Lower Merion is located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, north and west of the City of Philadelphia. The Township of Lower Merion dates back to 1682 when it was first settled. Today, Lower Merion consists of 23.64 square miles and is recognized as an attractive and affluent residential community located along Philadelphia’s Main Line in the Delaware Valley area.

It is surrounded by the City of Philadelphia and the following municipalities in both Montgomery and Delaware Counties:

- Upper Merion Township
- Whitemarsh Township
- Borough of West Conshohocken
- Borough of Conshohocken
- Haverford Township
- Radnor Township

According to the County website, the population of the Township was 59,520 in 2005.

The Township

The Township of Lower Merion operates under the council-manager form of government. The Township is governed by a fourteen-member Board of Commissioners. The commissioners are elected by ward to serve overlapping four-year terms. The board is the responsible legislative body and provides overall policy and direction to the Township. As a Township of the First Class, the Township’s board enacts ordinances and resolutions, as required. The Township Manager is appointed by the Board of Commissioners to serve as the chief executive officer who oversees the day-to-day operation of the Township.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

Fire Services Providers

Fire protection and related services are provided to the Township by the Lower Merion Fire Department, which is headed by the chief fire officer. The primary operational fire services are provided through the seven-member, largely volunteer-staffed, fire companies. Each of the fire companies is headed by a chief of that fire company district.

The fire companies include:

- Belmont Hills Fire Company
- Bryn Mawr Fire Company
- Gladwyne Fire Company
- Merion Fire Company of Ardmore
- Narberth Fire Company
- Penn Wynne/Overbrook Hills Fire Company
- Union Fire Association of Lower Merion

EMS Provider Agency

Pre-hospital emergency medical service in Lower Merion is provided by the Narberth Community Ambulance, also known as the Volunteer Medical Service Corps of Lower Merion and Narberth. The Narberth Community Ambulance headquarters location of operations is within Lower Merion, at 121 Sibley Avenue, in the Ardmore section of Lower Merion.

Changes Impacting Fire Services Providers

The fire services providers in Lower Merion are being impacted by a number of requirements relating to training, safety, health, and the environment. In addition, the service providers are increasingly faced with the requirement to raise a portion of their capital and operating funds.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

As incident workload and training requirements increase, there is less time available to raise funds to support their individual companies. Volunteer recruitment and retention has become more challenging as service demands increase.

Fire Service Organization

Developing and organizing fire services within a community to provide the most efficient and cost-effective delivery of quality service is one of the most important functions of local government. Historically, many fire agencies were developed and organized on the basis of local neighborhood need and initiative. However, as communities have become increasingly urban, calls for service have increased with a resulting need for increased coordination, consistency, and direction of fire and rescue services and resources.

It is understood that a key fire organizational principle relates to the basic responsibility for public safety within the community. It is widely accepted that fire services provision is considered to be a local government responsibility in most areas of the United States. Local government is broadly interpreted to include municipalities, such as counties, cities, towns, villages, and townships.

Each of the fire companies was incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, operates under a set of adopted authorizations, including a constitution, bylaws and other rules and guidelines, and elects and/or appoints a set of administrative and operational officers pursuant to their bylaws.

Two firefighters’ relief associations, the Lower Merion Township and Narberth Volunteer Firefighters’ Relief Associations, were established under the Pennsylvania Volunteer Firemen’s Relief Association Act, commonly referred to as Act 84. A volunteer firemen’s relief association is defined as an organization formed primarily for the purpose of affording financial protection to volunteer firemen against the consequences of misfortune suffered as a result of their participation in the fire service.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

Despite the existence of the Lower Merion Fire Department and their key role in that organization under Township Code, operationally, the fire companies appear to focus their service needs assessments, decision making and strategies for staffing, apparatus and equipment on their own first-due response area. They often attempt to provide all necessary services to the response area without full regard for resources available from surrounding LMFD fire and rescue companies. Each appears to focus on its own response area and attempts to provide the full range of services considered necessary without regard to the capability of the whole fire service in the Township. In summary, the fire companies continue to appear parochial in nature.

There is an advisory Board of Directors of the LMFD whose membership includes both the chief and president of each of the fire companies (14 volunteer members).

According to Township Code, the LMFD includes a chief fire officer and deputy chief fire officer.

The Lower Merion township is being served by seven fire companies, operating with autonomous approaches to the following important aspects of the fire and rescue service management:

1. Chain of command;
2. Budgeting and accounting for tax funds;
3. Operational policies and procedures;
4. Apparatus and personnel utilization on emergency incidents;
5. Public fire education;
6. Officer promotions and requirements;
7. Training requirements;
8. Firefighter supervision and discipline;
9. Payroll processing;
10. Station staffing;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

11. Apparatus staffing;
12. Apparatus maintenance;
13. Services provided;
14. Accountability for actions and the quality of services rendered;
15. Service expansion/improvement planning; and,

In summary, there are seven fire and rescue service teams in the Township rather than a one-team approach, as apparently intended by Township Code. Each of the teams focuses essentially on its own organization and response area. Each feels a responsibility and is attempting to provide as full a range of services as possible and largely attempts to ignore the existence of the LMFD and its chief fire officer and deputy chief fire officer.

The organization recommendations include:

A. Restructuring the current Board of Directors of the Fire Department and providing it with Township-wide fire and rescue coordination and oversight responsibilities;

B. Tasking the restructured Emergency Services Board with the responsibility of monitoring and reporting on the progress of implementing the recommendations of this Study;

C. Tasking the staff of the Office of Chief Fire Officer to provide staffing and support for the Emergency Services Board;

D. Establishing the requirement for a memorandum of agreement with each of the fire companies to clarify roles and responsibilities;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

E. Creating the divisions of Fire Prevention, Operations and Training within the LMFD; and,

F. Adopting an operational rank structure within the fire companies that is consistent and includes the ranks of district chief, deputy chief, assistant chief, captain and lieutenant.

Fire and Rescue Staffing

In the Township of Lower Merion, firefighting services are performed by a combination of volunteer and paid personnel. In this combination system, the major costs relate to salaries, apparatus, equipment, and stations, with the staffing accomplished largely by volunteers with a few full-time paid personnel. Notwithstanding the consideration of salaries, there is a need to fully and properly staff fire and rescue apparatus to ensure that an incident can be handled safely and effectively, with both paid and volunteer staffing.

One might assume that if there are three personnel on an engine or truck, all three of those personnel are available for interior fire attack when they arrive on the scene of a working fire. That perception is not accurate. Most often, the unit driver/firefighter remains with the unit to operate the pump or the aerial ladder and set up equipment to support fire fighting operations. Therefore, with only three firefighter staff on major fire units, there are typically only two personnel from the unit that are available for fire attack or other equally important tasks. For that reason it is important to make every effort to staff fire and rescue apparatus with a minimum of three personnel: driver, officer and firefighter.

There are three basic alternatives for staffing of fire departments: paid, volunteer and combination paid/volunteer. Due to having both paid and volunteer staffing, the Lower Merion fire protection services are considered to be a “combination” fire service. In the opinion of the Study Team, the citizens of the Township of Lower Merion are reaping major benefits from its largely volunteer fire and rescue system. To provide the same level of
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

service with full-time paid personnel in the fire stations would require at least an additional $17 million each fiscal year for personnel wages.

Fire protection and related services have been provided in the Township of Lower Merion with a combination of volunteer and paid staff employed by the fire companies. The Lower Merion Fire Department and its seven fire companies have been a combination volunteer/paid fire department for many years. The fire companies have been employing a total of 20 full-time and a number of part-time firefighters for supplemental staffing support during potentially problematic times of the day and week, generally weekday daytime hours and some evening/night and weekend hours, when volunteers may not be readily available due to work, school or other commitments.

The staffing recommendations include:

A. Setting a goal of staffing engines, ladders and heavy rescue units with at least three volunteer/paid firefighters and officers;

B. Monitoring and assessing the incident staffing records systems to include on-unit, in personal vehicle, on scene and at station incident staffing;

C. Maintaining, encouraging and strengthening the current combination volunteer/paid staffing approach;

D. With the existing Firehouse software gathering, maintaining and assessing hourly and daily records of active volunteer station staffing, by the fire company chiefs, to identify trends and opportunities for improvement;

E. Reviewing and assessing quarterly and annual volunteer activity information, by the fire companies and the Emergency Services Board, to identify trends and opportunities for improvement;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

F. Developing in-station standby programs for operational volunteer members;

G. Recommending, by the Emergency Services Board, consistent approaches to pay and benefits, hours of work, training goals and requirements and disciplinary procedures for paid staffing;

H. Considering taking action leading to the employment of the paid firefighters by the Township, or, establishing a Paid Firefighters Committee leading to improvements and consistent programs and policies for the management and utilization of the paid firefighters; and,

I. Establishing criteria to determine a point at which additional paid staffing should be hired, if any.

Fire and Rescue Workload

The most predominant type of incident to which the LMFD units respond relates to faulty alarms. In 2006 nearly one-half of all call types run by the LMFD related to faulty alarms: an extremely high percentage of overall calls. The second most frequently occurring fire service-related incident that occur in Lower Merion was good intent calls with actual fire-related calls (building, vehicle and brush, etc.) being the third most frequent type of call. In the view of the Study Team, the Township and the LMFD should take aggressive action to reduce the number of faulty alarm calls. The impact on volunteerism relating to responding to such a high number of faulty calls, particularly in the middle of the night, may be negative.

The busiest times of the day are 10:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Not surprising, the least busy time of the day for fire service-related calls was the early hours of the morning, between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

The Merion Fire Company of Ardmore was the busiest (322 calls) and Bryn Mawr Fire Company was the second busiest (301 calls) in 2006. In 2006 the Penn Wynne Fire Company ran the least number of total calls (137), likely due to the small size and location of their first response district.

Over the last 30-year period, there has been a long-term trend of continual decline in the number of building fires occurring. Reportedly, 104 building fires occurred in 1977 and, according to the LMFD’s 2006 annual report, only 13 building fires occurred in 2006.

Response Times

A key performance measurement in the delivery of fire and rescue is the response time. In the delivery of fire services, response time is a critical factor. Most fire departments known to the Study Team utilize response times to fires and rescue calls as performance measurements. The Study Team's experience, supported by various studies, has shown that the time from ignition to flashover in a structural fire will vary from six to nine minutes. A fire that has reached flashover means it is generally too late to save anyone in the room of origin, and a higher level of staffing is required to handle the larger hose streams needed to extinguish the fire. A post-flashover fire burns hotter and moves faster, compounding the search and rescue problems in the remainder of the structure. Further, additional firefighters are needed for fire attack.

For these reasons, it is critical that fire suppression forces reach a fire structure and initiate effective suppression efforts prior to flashover. The Lower Merion fire companies have not been routinely assessing response times to fire calls. This lack of analysis is not unique to Lower Merion.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

The response time recommendations include:

A. Establishing five minutes as the response time (travel and turnout time) goal for the delivery of fire and emergency medical services in Lower Merion; and,

B. Continuing to gather and analyze response time data to determine opportunities for reducing response times.

Fire and Rescue Stations

The location of fire and ambulance stations is a key element in assessing the level of fire protection service. However, the decision to locate a new fire and/or rescue station or relocate an existing station has many components other than its siting. While computerized programs can assist officials in determining station locations, the final determinations require-human based consideration of many factors.

Fire and rescue services in Lower Merion have been provided from seven fire stations. A review of these facilities indicates varying degrees of condition, ranging from good condition to excellent.

Current fire and rescue services in the Township of Lower Merion have been provided from seven fire stations:

Fire Stations

A. Fire Station 22 - Belmont Hills Fire Company
   4 S. Washington Avenue, Belmont Hills

B. Fire Station 23 - Bryn Mawr Fire Company
   901 Lancaster Avenue, Bryn Mawr
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

C. **Fire Station 24** - Gladwyne Fire Company
   1044 Black Rock Road, Gladwyne

D. **Fire Station 25** - Merion Fire Company of Ardmore
   35 Greenfield Avenue, Ardmore

E. **Fire Station 26** - Narberth Fire Company
   100 Conway Avenue, Narberth

F. **Fire Station 21** - Penn Wynne/Overbrook Hills Fire Company
   Manoa and Rock Roads, Wynnewood

G. **Fire Station 28** - Union Fire Association of Lower Merion
   149 Montgomery Avenue, Bala Cynwyd

The fire and rescue station recommendations include:

A. Maintaining the current location of fire stations in Lower Merion, if the active volunteer membership of the fire companies is maintained;

B. Providing upgraded bunkroom space to support volunteer staff in all fire stations to enhance nighttime staffing of apparatus;

C. Continuing to fund justified fire station facility needs on a priority basis; and,

D. Considering, in the future, fire station facility needs if the volunteer availability declines substantially and further paid staff are required to maintain quality of service levels.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

Fire and Rescue Apparatus

The primary fire and rescue apparatus fleet utilized by the Lower Merion fire companies includes thirteen pumpers, seven aerial ladder devices, two heavy rescues an air/light unit and two utility/pickup trucks. In the judgment of the Study Team, considering a number of factors including fire and rescue risks, current and future emergency workload, and fiscal issues, the current fleet of emergency fire and rescue apparatus could be reduced and realigned, considering units on order as well as currently in service.

The fire and rescue apparatus recommendations include:

A. Adopting the suggested apparatus replacement criteria;

B. Appointing an Apparatus Specifications Committee to develop fire and rescue apparatus specifications that facilitate and support cross utilization of apparatus by fire company members and cost effective maintenance;

C. Considering, by the Township and fire companies, having Fleet Maintenance assist in fire and rescue apparatus maintenance effort; and,

D. Reducing, for the future, the number of ladder trucks from seven to four and the number of heavy rescue squads by one.

Training

The main objective of the fire service is to prevent injury and loss of life and to protect property and the environment. Training is a key element to successful emergency scene operations and organizational effectiveness. Training in the fire and rescue disciplines is also a career-long venture, for paid and volunteer personnel, starting with recruit and basic training programs and working up to more sophisticated, advanced training and participation
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

in higher education opportunities. Between formal training programs and educational courses, there has to be continuing reinforcement of knowledge and skills that applies to all ranks.

It is apparent from speaking with the members and officers of all seven fire companies in Lower Merion that the organizations are committed to providing quality services to their customers. It is also important for the organizations to note that its members and employees are its customers as well. Like many other fire departments across the United States, there are some serious shortfalls in training at a number of the fire companies. The three critical areas of concern to the Study Team are the lack of training certifications, the absence of a formal probationary member training program and the absence of a formal driver training program.

The training recommendations include:

A. Implementing and enforcing the existing LMFD SOP No. 22, related to minimum officer qualifications, with no further grandfathering;

B. Upgrading/updating SOP No. 22 to current-day industry standard;

C. Implementing volunteer and paid probationary new member training standards;

D. Implementing NIMS ICS incident command training levels;

E. Establishing minimum attendance levels for active members at drill night training sessions;

F. Conducting regular multi-company and mutual aid training drills;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

G. Implementing pumper/driver operator training/certification requirements for current and future engine driver/operators;

H. Utilizing and upgrading/repairing the current fire training building facility;

I. Establishing a dedicated fire and rescue training officer position to coordinate and deliver certification-based and drill type training for all volunteer and paid personnel;

J. Establishing a Training Committee to serve in a related advisory capacity; and,

K. Requiring that all current and future pumper drivers complete the pumper/driver operator certification program.

Pre-Fire Planning

One of the major job responsibilities of firefighting personnel is to conduct pre-fire planning programs for target hazards within their first-due response area. Pre-planning is knowing in advance what obstacles you may face.

To remedy this situation, firefighters should visit the target hazards in their area, tour each facility, prepare drawings and lists of hazards, and develop the tactics and strategies for handling incidents at each particular facility. All stations that may respond to an incident should share the drawings and information. The officer should have the information readily available to refer to while en-route to the incident. In addition, the officers should conduct regular station refresher drills utilizing this material.

Lower Merion and fire company officials advised the Study Team that fire units and personnel may be involved in building familiarization as part of fire company drills and related activities Apparently, there is no formalized Township-wide pre-fire planning
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

program utilized by the fire companies and the Township. There is no Township-wide written
procedure for such a program and the Study Team was provided with limited documentation
relating to pre-fire planning accomplished by the fire companies. The existing Firehouse
software reportedly could be used to document pre-fire preplans that are developed

The pre-fire planning recommendations include:

A. Implementing a comprehensive pre-fire planning program, including the paid
   firefighters, coordinated by the Fire Prevention Division.

Mutual Aid

The Lower Merion fire companies and adjacent fire agencies reportedly use mutual aid
generally, either automatically or upon "special request" from the officer-in-charge. In a
number of cases, the closest units are not dispatched and more favored units are instructed
to be dispatched. Most of the Lower Merion fire companies do not utilize the mutual aid
option to its fullest. There is no LMFD mutual aid agreement or SOP.

Automatic mutual aid is a progressive practice in the delivery of fire and rescue in the United
States and has been a trend in the fire service for two decades. The practices vary by state and
municipality. It is unrealistic for all local governments, especially those adjoining other
municipalities and their fire agencies, to be self-sufficient in the delivery of fire and rescue
services.

The most effective utilization of mutual aid that provides the shortest travel times for
emergency apparatus is automatic closest available mutual aid.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

The mutual aid recommendations include:

A. Implementing automatic closest available mutual aid with appropriate surrounding municipalities and fire companies.

Incident Command System

The Incident Command System (ICS) provides an organized technique for handling various emergencies, including hazardous material incidents, and ensures that the incident commander's decision-making process can be initiated quickly and efficiently. The establishment of this system is required under the OSHA regulations of the Superfund Authorization and Re-authorization Act (SARA) of 1986 and the National Fire Protection Association Standard 1500, paragraph 6-1.2.

The ICS utilized in the Township of Lower Merion is inconsistent between the fire companies. There is an ICS in the LMFD SOP manual. It is not clear to what extent that department-wide policy is actually utilized by the fire companies. A number of the fire company chiefs have adopted fire company ICS SOPs that duplicate and/or contradict the Township-wide LMFD policy on ICS.

The incident command system recommendations include:

A. Utilizing a consistent nationally recognized incident command system in Lower Merion for all fire and rescue services; and,

B. Utilizing the LMFD ICS policy and assuring that the fire company chiefs do not adopt individual ICS policies.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

Integrated Emergency Command Structure

Each volunteer fire company has an operational chain of command established in its bylaws or as determined by the chief of the company by operational guideline. The fire companies have differing chains of command utilizing different rank structures that may include some of the following ranks and titles:

- District chief
- Deputy chief
- Battalion chief
- Captain
- Lieutenant
- Chief engineer
- Engineer

There is no Township-wide policy giving operational authority to any officer leaving his/her station's first due area. In theory, an officer leaving his/her first due area would only have operational authority over the crews and units responding from the home station.

The integrated command structure recommendations include:

A. Implementing a Township-wide integrated emergency command structure that provides, on a rank by rank basis, that the more senior experienced and trained/certified officers provide command and oversight at emergency incidents;

B. Implementing a Township-wide (including the Borough) policy that all chief officers must complete the National Incident Management System (NIMS) Incident Command System (ICS) 300;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

C. Implementing a Township-wide (including the Borough) policy that all captains and lieutenants must complete the NIMS ICS 200 course; and,

D. Implementing a Township-wide (including the Borough) policy that Lower Merion chief officers having completed NIMS ICS 300 will be in command of building fire incidents occurring in the Township of Lower Merion.

Fire and Rescue Operations

There is no time at the scene of fire emergencies to make decisions by committee. Although some appropriate quick consultation can take place to assure that facts ground the decisions, there is limited time for deliberation. Potentially irreversible decisions made at the emergency scene may lead to disastrous consequences. Errors can lead to further property loss as well as injury or death to civilians and firefighters. The fire officer has to make a decision on the basis of information often gathered hastily.

The fire and rescue operations recommendations include:

A. Adopting and implementing a Township-wide post-incident critique policy and procedure;

B. Establishing, by the Emergency Services Board, all Township-wide operational policies and procedures (SOPs) with the fire company chiefs not issuing any operational SOPs that conflict, duplicate or conflict with Township-wide SOPs;

C. Implementing appropriate technical/special services operations recommendations;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

D. Considering the implementation of EMS quick response first responder units by fire companies in cooperation and support of Narberth Ambulance;

E. Assessing fire district boundaries and making related changes in order to reduce apparatus response time; and,

F. Implementing a policy of immediate response of fire apparatus from fire stations with paid and available in-station volunteer staffing.

Radio System

In the delivery of fire and rescue services, the ability for officers and firefighters to be able to communicate via radio has become THE primary means of communications, other than face-to-face at the emergency scene. For example, emergency incidents are dispatched by the dispatch center to personnel and fire stations via radio, units advise the dispatch center that they are responding via radio and command officers issue most instructions to personnel on the scene and request additional resource via radio.

In the past radio systems used to be very simple fire department/company-specific, providing dispatch center to dispatch center, dispatch center to unit and unit-to-unit communications. Today, computer controlled region-wide systems provide easy to use, interoperable communications among regional systems. This transition to high-tech radio systems has occurred based on federal encouragement, available funding and lessons learned during the 9/11 disaster.

Today’s fire service environment places a very high priority on quality of service delivery and the safety of the service providers. The radio system has become a key to the efficient and effective delivery of fire protection services. It has become imperative that radio systems be easy to use while at the same time are precise and very reliable.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

The current fire radio system is a complex and unique mixture of various frequencies on three different bands involving low, VHF and UHF frequencies all tied together into what seems to be a one-of-a-kind, hybrid radio system. It is the most complex and unique radio system observed by the Study Team, who have been involved in the design, management and operation of radio systems for more than 30 years, and have assessed and made recommendations for the improvement of more than 80 emergency communications and dispatch systems.

The radio system recommendations include:

A. Pursuing, aggressively, the transition of fire and rescue to the County’s 800MHz radio system and teaming with the County to identify and resolve any poor coverage areas in Lower Merion;

B. Implementing an appropriate voice pager solution;

C. Issuing a voice pager on the selected system to all operationally active members who attain an appropriate percentage of calls; and,

D. Phasing out the use of house sirens.

Safety and Health

The health and safety of firefighters personnel should be a major concern of those delivering the services, those receiving the services, and those helping to pay for the services. Individuals working in public safety, particularly firefighting personnel, perform one of the most physically demanding, and mentally stressful occupations. Quite often, fire and emergency medical personnel are subjected to environments that require rapid physical and mental response with a minimum of preparation.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

In the past there has been little attention paid to the wellness and fitness of firefighters. However, over the past decade, the safety and health of all emergency services providers has come to the forefront of discussion. Fire and rescue departments nationwide are implementing programs that help improve and support the health and wellness of their workforce.

The fire companies in the Township of Lower Merion lack a comprehensive safety and health program and fall short in many areas of compliance with NFPA 1500. Many professionals in the fire service say that safety is an attitude that must be believed in, that must be communicated, and most importantly, must be enacted.

The safety and health recommendations include:

A.  Creating, by action of the Emergency Services Board, a Joint Health and Safety Committee with volunteer, paid and Township insurance department representatives;

B.  Creating a written risk management plan for the fire services with the goal of applicable NFPA 1500 compliance;

C.  Appointing an official health and safety officer;

D.  Establishing a clear and consistent incident management policy and procedures manual;

E.  Developing and implementing a FAST SOP that is used consistently and transitions to FAST implementation;

F.  Implementing a standardized Township-wide accountability system for incident scenes; and,
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

G. Developing and implementing a comprehensive written wellness program.

Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

Currently, the fire and rescue services in Lower Merion are provided largely by volunteer staffing. This volunteer staffing model appears to have provided a very cost effective service to the residents and businesses of Lower Merion in the past. At least an additional $17 million would be required for personnel wages for a fully paid service, assuming staffing of the currently deployed units, each fiscal year. However, the viability of this volunteer staffing approach in the future will, to a large extent, depend upon the level of effort placed on volunteer recruitment and retention by the Township and the fire companies.

Nationally, a number of very successful volunteer recruitment and retention programs in local governments continue to assist in providing the essential volunteer personnel for the provision of all or part of their fire service.

The volunteer recruitment and retention recommendations include:

A. Supporting, financially, the volunteer recruitment and retention needs of the Lower Merion fire companies;

B. Implementing a full or part-time paid volunteer coordinator to provide a focus within Lower Merion for the recruitment and retention of volunteer staffing;

C. Implementing an exit interview process to identify opportunities to implement programs that would retain volunteers;

D. Implementing a comprehensive volunteer recruitment and retention program, based on Study recommendations;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

E. Establishing a fire and rescue student live-in program;

F. Establishing a volunteer mentor program for new fire company volunteer members;

G. Continuing to regularly/annually recognize the service and heroic deeds of volunteer and paid service providers;

H. Establishing a fire and rescue high school cadet program; and,

I. Taking aggressive action to find solutions to provide volunteer firefighters and officers Lower Merion housing.

Services Provided by the Fire Companies

The Study Team was asked to identify and suggest a designation of services to be provided by each individual fire company. That designation was apparently intended to be in the context of a comprehensive response policy to the community as a whole with an attempt to reduce any redundancies in service and equipment.

The fire companies provide many services that are typical of similar fire protection organizations in other communities. In considering the designation of services question, the Study Team reviewed a number issues including, the needs of Lower Merion in light of the notable fire and rescue risks, the cost of service provision and the ability of volunteers to become and remain trained and certified to provide various services in an efficient and effective manner.

The recommended designation of services to be provided by the seven fire companies includes:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

A. Fire fighting: all fire companies;
B. Pumper services: all fire companies;
C. Heavy rescue/vehicle extrication: Belmont Hills & Penn Wynne, phasing out to one in future;
D. Squad/pumper services: Bryn Mawr and Belmont Hills, eventually Bryn Mawr and Penn Wynne fire companies;
E. Ladder truck services: all fire companies, phasing out to four (Bryn Mawr, Gladwyne, Ardmore and Union) in the future;
F. Light/Air unit services: Gladwyne;
G. Hazmat response first responder operations: all fire companies;
H. Decon support services: Bryn Mawr & Penn Wynne;
I. Confined space first responders: all fire companies;
J. Trench rescue first responders: all fire companies;
K. Confined space operational level: Belmont Hills & Penn Wynne;
L. Structural collapse first responders: all fire companies;
M. Water rescue response: Gladwyne Fire Company;
N. EMS first responder QRS: all fire companies;
O. Fire public education: all fire companies; and,
P. Evidence protection for fire cause and origin: all fire companies.

To be prepared to carry out these various functions and responsibilities, it is essential that appropriate fire company officers and firefighters complete the necessary initial training and certification/recertification training, as appropriate.

Fire Prevention

A fire prevention program, as part of a fire services delivery effort, is an integral part of a municipality’s responsibility to provide for the welfare of the township and its citizens. It is through an effective life and fire safety education, investigation, code administration,
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

application and enforcement effort that a municipality will realize the greatest protection from fire and accident.

No number of firefighters, fire/rescue stations, apparatus and/or equipment will save the number of lives or reduce the loss of property from fire as well as an educated public. Complement the fire prevention function with an effective suppression force and a municipality has the basis for a proactive, efficient, cost-effective, municipal life and fire safety program.

In a fire services delivery system that relies heavily on volunteer staffing for the delivery of fire and rescue services, an aggressive and effective fire prevention program is essential to the safety of the customers (property owners, residents, business operators and owners). The goal of a municipal fire prevention program is to stop fires before they occur and prepare customers to play an important part in the prevention effort through becoming well-educated in what to do in the event of fire. An aggressive fire prevention program goes hand-in-hand with fire and rescue services provision via volunteer staffing and organizations, in that it should reduce the incidence and magnitude of fires.

For Lower Merion, Township Code places the responsibility for fire prevention, fire building inspections, public fire education and enforcement of all fire prevention and protection regulations with the LMFD.

The fire prevention recommendations include:

A. Conducting fire building inspections of all commercial and industrial properties on a priority basis;

B. Implementing a comprehensive three-tier building inspections program;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

C. Implementing a component of the building inspections program with paid firefighters;

D. Initiating a Township-wide pre-fire planning program coordinated by the Fire Prevention Division staff;

E. Implementing a comprehensive public fire education program;

F. Delivering a portion of the public fire education program with a volunteer corps;

G. Realigning the organization structure and staffing of the Township’s various fire prevention program areas into a Division of Fire Prevention, headed by a deputy fire marshal; and,

H. Staffing the Fire Prevention Division with the deputy fire marshal, two assistant fire marshals, two inspectors and an administrative secretary, dedicated to fire prevention functions.

Emergency Management

Emergency management programs and plans are very important municipal public safety-related program area, particularly in this post 9/11 era. Communities must work with county, state and federal agencies and officials in protecting their citizens from natural, technological and manmade disasters. Effective mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery programs are not only federal and state mandates but are crucial to the well-being of residents and businesses in the community.

Within the Township of Lower Merion the emergency management function is the responsibility of the Superintendent of Police. A number of areas for fire and rescue
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

Improvements in Lower Merion emergency management programs are identified and recommendations are made to meet state mandates and related community needs.

The emergency management recommendations include:

A. Reviewing and updating the emergency plan;

B. Reviewing and updating the resource list;

C. Planning, scheduling and conducting training regarding the revised emergency plan;

D. Planning, scheduling and conducting emergency management drills, both tabletop and full scale drills;

E. Attaining NIMS compliance;

F. Training a deputy emergency management director, for depth of oversight and mutual support; and,

G. Conducting a Township emergency management assessment.

Fiscal Impacts

The fiscal impacts will depend on which, if any, recommendations are implemented by the Township of Lower Merion and/or the fire and rescue companies. The primary areas related to costs and savings (cost avoidance) include:

A. Maintaining four ladder trucks and one heavy rescue squad serving the Township;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

B. Providing additional fire inspector staffing to conduct commercial and industrial fire building inspections;

C. Providing comprehensive public fire education;

D. Participating as a key component of the emergency management function;

E. Providing an administrative secretary for support of the fire prevention functions;

F. Implementing a comprehensive volunteer recruitment and retention plan; and,

G. Providing a professional part-time volunteer recruitment and retention coordinator.

Once the Township and/or the fire and rescue companies decide on a specific course, finance personnel should be requested to assess the fiscal impacts of any changes.

Returns on Investment

In upgrading the personnel, operations, management and administration of a fire and rescue service it is not possible to delineate all the positive outcomes. Improving the quality of life and saving lives in a community does not necessarily involve quantitative analysis.

A number of the anticipated returns on investment for the operations and management recommendations in this Study include:

A. Improved management of the Lower Merion fire and rescue services through restructuring the Emergency Services Board;
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

B. Improved coordination and oversight of emergency incident operations through an enhanced team effort among the various components of the LMFD;

C. Improved response times and fire services delivery through upgrading the utilization of the paid staffing of the fire stations;

D. Reduced potential for major fires and other incidents through commercial and industrial fire building inspections;

E. Improved response time through monitoring and evaluating fire and rescue response time data;

F. Improved cost effective service through automatic mutual aid;

G. Improved firefighter effectiveness and safety through upgraded training;

H. Reduced mortality from cardiac arrest and other EMS emergencies through implementation of QRS programs;

I. Improved safety of firefighters and customers resulting from implementation of safety programs;

J. Increased awareness, planning for major fire incidents, and improved effective use of firefighters through implementation of pre-fire planning by firefighters and officers in the fire stations; and,

K. Upgraded incident management through implementation of ICS and post-incident critiques.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

Implementation

One concept remained uppermost in the Study Team's considerations as this Study was conducted: Any decisions to be made should be made on the basis of what is best for the customer—the resident, business owner, patient and visitor in the Township of Lower Merion.

Although day-to-day issues consume a great deal of energy, fire and rescue personnel everywhere need to guard against losing sight of organizational purpose, which is to provide the most effective and efficient quality service to the customer. The customer is, of course, the public. Decisions on what the members want or like are important. However, many times when that approach is the basis for decision making, the decisions may not result in the highest quality of service.

The Study Team was impressed with the strong commitment and attitudes of the fire personnel in Lower Merion. While there is no evidence that the current fire service providers do not have the customer at heart, the Study Team encourages the Township of Lower Merion and the fire providers to assure that the customer is uppermost when making implementation decisions for the system. What is traditional or most liked by the members of a particular organization should be secondary to the level of service provided to the public. Of course, in making decisions relative to quantitative and qualitative public safety services (fire/rescue), the safety of service providers should always be considered in any final decision.

Before deciding on a future course of action based on this Study, Township and fire officials are encouraged to gain input from stakeholders, firefighters, officers and other service providers.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (continued)

Timing

This Lower Merion Fire and Rescue Services Study should be considered as a strategic planning tool for use over the next three to five years. Additional issues may need consideration in the future; this plan should be used as a flexible guide for decisions relative to the organization, management and the provision of fire and rescue services.

Updating the Plan

The Township of Lower Merion is encouraged to update this plan each year with internal staff and the Emergency Services Board. The update should include progress, obstacles, fiscal impacts, workload analysis, and anticipated outcomes.

Quality of Lower Merion Fire Personnel

In the conduct of comprehensive fire department studies, it is not unusual for fire department personnel to resent a study and/or fail to participate in the study. In the Township of Lower Merion, the Study Team was most impressed with the attitudes and quality of Township fire company personnel. Township staff, firefighters, rescue personnel and fire and rescue officers were very candid and open about their services. They expressed pride in a number of the very progressive programs and initiatives, particularly in the volunteer nature of many of the services. This pride and accomplishment are well deserved.

In the judgment of the Study Team, the stakeholders in the Township of Lower Merion (residents, business leaders, public officials and visitors) can be very proud of the Lower Merion volunteers and employees. It was a pleasure for the Study Team to work with members on the current model programs and those that may be considered for the future.