CHAPTER THREE
STAFFING AND PERSONNEL UTILIZATION

Determination of fire apparatus staffing, firefighter utilization on apparatus generally and primary staffing options are addressed in this Chapter. Further, Lower Merion fire company station and apparatus staffing and volunteer availability is reviewed. And finally, alternative volunteer utilization and records are discussed.

Additionally, current Lower Merion paid staffing is reviewed, alternative sources of funding are outlined and appropriate findings and recommendations are presented.

INPUT FROM FIREFIGHTERS AND OFFICERS

During the interview/survey process, the Study Team elicited comments from officials, firefighters and officers in the fire companies regarding issues and opportunities for improvement. One of the areas where significant feedback was provided relates to apparatus staffing and personnel utilization in the LMFD and the member fire companies.

A number of the responses provided by members and officers of the fire companies are as follows:

1. “At no time should career firefighters be used to supplant the volunteer companies, either actually or perceptively;
2. We need more paid firefighters, on daytime;
3. The primary focus of the Fire Department Office staff should be that of fire prevention, through building inspections and enforcement of the fire code and Life Safety code;
4. Require a Township fire marshal to respond to all calls, even night time alarms;
5. Use paid staff for initial daytime response; 13 on duty;
6. During the weekdays there is a total of 12 paid firefighters working in six fire stations who should be utilized for immediate response of apparatus to fire calls;
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

INPUT FROM FIREFIGHTERS AND OFFICERS (continued)

7. If any career members ever have to be added to the system, their use should be structured to supplement volunteer response, not replace it;
8. There is a large variation in pay scales among the paid firefighters working for the individual fire companies;
9. Some of the fire companies take too long to get initial units out of the fire station on fire calls, especially during the daytime hours;
10. Manpower is a problem during the daytime hours Monday to Friday;
11. There should be better utilization of our paid Township firefighters across the Township;
12. Paid firefighters need to be more firefighter rather than janitors who go to fires;
13. Should add at least one paid person weekday/daytime to Fire Stations 25 and 28 to staff engine and ladder that would respond to all structure fires in the Township with available volunteers in the stations: this would improve response and encourage volunteers to “hang” at these two stations;
14. Currently, the paid firefighters are underused;
15. The Township should take over the paid firefighter staff;
16. More manpower is needed;
17. Paid staff at each fire station work long hours and are underutilized;
18. A regular paid firefighter schedule calls for a total of 3,276 hours per year with an hourly rate of $12.42, including time and one-half for overtime;
19. There is interference on the part of fire marshals at fire calls;
20. Additional manpower is needed with additional apparatus responding;
21. The fire marshals need to understand their place; they are more than welcome at the fire, but not to run the fire ground;
22. There is a lack of manpower, especially during the daytime;
23. Need either increased daytime staffing on apparatus, 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., or more units dispatched;
24. Pay scales of paid firefighters vary substantially between fire companies;
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

INPUT FROM FIREFIGHTERS AND OFFICERS (continued)

25. Paid firefighters are treated as if they 'do not exist' when referring to firefighter staffing in the Township being 'all-volunteer';
26. Paid firefighters in the Township should assist with building inspections in order to better utilize the paid staff;
27. There should be clear and concise guidelines for fire marshals to follow when on the fire scene and the policy should be reviewed by the fire company chiefs;
28. The F.D. should use the career staff within the Township more, i.e. assist calls and special calls; and,
29. Live-in program should be used to improve staffing and response times."

This volunteer member feedback was considered by the Study Team in developing the conclusions and recommendations included in this Chapter.

DETERMINATION OF STAFFING

In a career fire service, the major costs are associated with personnel. 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.

Depending on which of the various fire service philosophies is utilized, staffing has been justified from three individuals per piece of apparatus to as many as six. Through the years, debate has continued over crew size. The focus of this debate has been the effort by firefighting groups to develop nationally recognized standards mandating firefighting crew sizes. Such standards have yet to be established. Crew size remains a local fire department or municipal decision to allow appropriate flexibility in dealing with the local environment.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

DETERMINATION OF STAFFING (continued)

Whether the crew is formed in the fire station and responds to the scene on the apparatus or is formed at the scene as personnel arrive is also a local decision.

Variables in Crew Size Determination

The variables in this crew size decision process involve a number of the following considerations:

A. Demographics of the community;
B. Numbers of fire calls to which the units respond;
C. Location of the fire stations and distance of travel for back-up;
D. Availability of mutual aid;
E. Type and age of buildings in the community;
F. Type of manufacturing and commerce which exists within the community;
G. Funding availability for staffing, if needed;
H. General physical condition of firefighter personnel;
I. Level and type of training provided to the firefighter personnel; and,
J. Operational strategies and procedures utilized by the fire company.

These are some of the key factors that should be considered by a fire company/department or community to determine acceptable crew size. The decision regarding acceptable apparatus crew size is critical because of its direct impact on the level of fire and rescue service provided to the public and the safety of emergency response personnel. The size of the crew determines what life/property saving evolutions (fire attack, search and rescue and/or exposure protection, or life-saving service) can be performed at the emergency incident and how quickly the evolutions can be completed.

A discussion of some examples of firefighter utilization may assist the reader to understand what types of functions they must perform and the impact of the crew size.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

DETERMINATION OF STAFFING (continued)

Firefighter Utilization

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 firefighting operations.

In a real situation, using engine company operations as an example, these are the functions initially performed by a crew of three:

Driver

1. Remains with the pumper and sets and operates the pump;
2. Develops water supply;
3. Provides equipment to part of building;
4. Relays radio communications; and,
5. Guides apparatus placement for incoming units.

Unit Officer

1. Provides initial incident command;
2. Sizes up the incident;
3. Performs circle check of building;
4. Directs crew of one in interior attack;
5. Is part of two-person interior fire attack crew;
6. Handles radio communications for crew; and,
7. Provides interior command as necessary.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

DETERMINATION OF STAFFING (continued)

Third Person

1. Lays out supply line;
2. Pulls and advances hand lines; and,
3. Begins interior fire attack with officer as crew of two.

This example presumes there are no immediate incident complexities, such as entrapment or rescue emergencies. A similar example could be outlined for the staffing of a ladder truck. Raising ladders for rescue requires two to three firefighters, depending upon the length of the ladder. Ground ladders longer than 35 feet, such as those carried on an aerial truck, require as many as four firefighters to raise in place. If a rescue is to be made, ground ladders must be removed from their storage by firefighters, carried to the correct location and raised in place. Without sufficient personnel, this activity can be delayed, resulting in injury or death to civilians.

The purpose of these examples is to point out the justification for the on-scene staffing of engines and ladder trucks with three personnel as the absolute minimum goal. Personnel on units staffed by one or two crew members cannot function as independent crews on the scene of emergencies. The firefighters must join with personnel from other units or await the arrival of volunteer personnel responding in personal vehicles to develop crews for fire attack.

The approach to unit staffing of one or two firefighters can seriously hinder successful fire attack operations, in addition to creating significant safety risks for firefighter injuries and liability exposure. A study conducted by the Johns Hopkins University concluded that there were 38 percent more injuries per 100 alarms on companies (engines and trucks) where fewer than four firefighters are involved as the attack crew—the crew initiating the interior fire attack.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

STAFFING OPTIONS

The Study Team was asked about career staffing, volunteer staffing and combined staffing. To provide the reader with information on which to base opinions, the following information may be useful. There appear to be three basic alternatives for staffing fire and rescue units in the Township of Lower Merion. These are:

A. All paid staffing;
B. Combination of volunteer and paid personnel; and,
C. All volunteer staffing.

**Option A** - Provide all paid staffing of fire and rescue units

The Lower Merion fire companies are staffed largely with volunteer personnel supplemented with 20 paid staff working at the fire company stations. If the fire stations were to become fully paid, the number of fire stations and apparatus would likely be reduced substantially, due to the fact that all apparatus would be constant-staffed and would respond from the fire station immediately upon being dispatched. Today, however, seven pumper, six aerial trucks, two heavy rescue squads and command officer coverage are being deployed. If fully paid, this staffing level would need to be maintained 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To staff one position on a 24-hour basis and allow time off for training, vacations and sick leave, and on-the-job injuries requires 4.8 employees.¹

¹The 4.8 number is calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total hours in a year</td>
<td>8,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firefighters work 48 hours x 52 week</td>
<td>2,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minus average time off</td>
<td>-670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL HOURS AVAILABLE</td>
<td>1,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees</td>
<td>8.760 = 4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,826</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

STAFFING OPTIONS (continued)

The number of paid personnel required for this option—staffing the primary apparatus that is deployed today by the volunteers—would be:

7 pumpers x 3 staff x 4.8 = 100.8 staff
6 ladder trucks x 3 staff x 4.8 = 86.4 staff
2 rescue squads x 3 staff x 4.8 = 28.8 staff
7 chief officers x 4.8 = 100.8 staff
TOTAL = 316.8 staff

If the average cost of paid personnel, including fringe benefits, were $58,000, the annual personnel costs would be approximately $18,374,400.

The significant advantage of an all paid system is that there would be adequate personnel available at all times to immediately respond to an emergency. In addition, because they are available in the station, training could be conducted on a continuing basis, and pre-planning and building inspections could be completed. Officers would be available at all times to supervise the on-duty personnel.

There are two disadvantages to this system. The most obvious is the added cost of providing fire and rescue service. The second disadvantage is that it would most likely eliminate volunteer involvement in the system; these volunteers have provided excellent service.

Option B - Combination of volunteer and paid staffing of units

Under this alternative, some paid firefighting personnel are placed in fire stations to ensure that there is a rapid initial response to fire calls, with the volunteers supplying the remainder of personnel to handle the incident. To ensure continuity of supervision, career officers could be assigned. They would ensure that all station work is
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

STAFFING OPTIONS (continued)

performed, that career personnel would conduct training and the required building inspections, that pre-planning is completed, and that discipline is enforced.

The advantages of this alternative are:

1. Allows for maintaining part of the major cost savings since volunteers are utilized;
2. Ensures a rapid response for some of the emergency fire apparatus;
3. Allows the career personnel to handle small incidents, such as smoke and fire alarm responses, without having to call out the volunteers; and,
4. Allows the career personnel to do the pre-planning, building inspections and assist in training the volunteers.

The disadvantages of this alternative are:

1. Is more costly than an all volunteer system;
2. Offers no assurance that volunteers would be available at any given time to provide minimum staffing;
3. Poses a potential conflict between volunteer and paid personnel in the station; and,
4. Results in a possible reduction in volunteers responding during the day because they assume career personnel will handle it.

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
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

STAFFING OPTIONS (continued)

weekend hours, when volunteers may not be readily available due to work, school or other commitments.

Therefore, considering the current complement of 20 full-time paid firefighter staffing in the calculated number of paid staff (discussed in the previous section) required if the LMFD were an all paid fire department, 296.8 paid staff would be required. They would staff the current primary fire/rescue apparatus as a paid fire department at estimated additional cost to the Township of $17,214,400 for an all-paid fire department.

The Lower Merion fire companies should be commended for their foresight in the past in recognizing the need to supplement their volunteer fire and rescue staffing with paid personnel to ensure timely apparatus response. Based on the experience of other similar jurisdictions and observations of the Study Team, this cost-effective combination volunteer/paid staffing alternative can realistically continue to work in the Township of Lower Merion for the foreseeable future.

Option C - Provide fire protection with an all-volunteer system

This alternative provides fire protection only by volunteers. Sometimes there will be volunteers in the stations when a call is received and the initial apparatus will respond quickly. At other times, firefighters would respond from home or work to staff the apparatus and take it to the scene of the emergency. And other times, particularly during weekday daytime hours, the apparatus may not respond or may respond without adequate staff.

The advantage of this alternative is that the costs are maintained at a very low level and the volunteers maintain their interest in continuing to provide service.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

STAFFING OPTIONS (continued)

Under this alternative, however, there can be a major disadvantage: the inability to rapidly respond to a call. The citizens of the community have no assurance that there will always be a rapid response to a call for help or that sufficient equipment to handle the incident will actually respond.

In summary, the citizens of the Township of Lower Merion are reaping major benefits from its largely volunteer fire and rescue system. Although with a paid-staffed fire operation the number of fire stations and apparatus would likely be reduced significantly, to provide the same number of apparatus as deployed today with all full-time paid personnel in the fire stations would require at least an additional $17 million each fiscal year for personnel salaries and wages: an estimated additional 296.8 full-time firefighters and officers.

The current approach in Lower Merion to staffing apparatus with volunteer staff supplemented with a minimal number of paid firefighter staffing is clearly the most cost effective way to provide apparatus staffing for fire and rescue calls in Lower Merion. When paid staff are utilized effectively to provide minimum staffing of key and initially responding units, minimum response times and appropriate service levels may be maintained in a manner that supports, not supplants, volunteer staffing for the future. The key to the effective implementation of this type of combination volunteer/paid -staffed fire protection system is the effective utilization of the paid staff in a manner that strategically coordinates the effective use of the paid staff while at the same time supporting and encouraging volunteer response and utilization.

VOLUNTEER STATION AND APPARATUS STAFFING

The following sections discuss fire station and apparatus staffing in Lower Merion by the fire companies.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

STATION AND APPARATUS STAFFING (continued)

Station Volunteer Staffing

It appears that most of the Lower Merion fire companies do not place a high priority on volunteer onsite staffing of the fire stations. There are limited records available regarding fire station staffing by volunteers. The emphasis seems to be placed on having the volunteers respond in their personal vehicles to the fire station or the scene of the emergency, with the fire and rescue apparatus being brought to the scene by responding volunteer and paid personnel.

Fire Apparatus Volunteer Staffing

An important measure of the level of fire service being delivered is the staffing on responding apparatus (engines, trucks, heavy rescue squads, etc.). The fire companies apparently do not maintain detailed, consistent records regarding apparatus staffing. The focus seems to be on incident staffing, that is, whether the volunteers are at the station, respond to the scene in personal vehicles or respond from the fire station to the scene of the emergency on fire apparatus.

It has been the Study Team’s experience that most fire companies do not maintain and analyze specific apparatus and incident scene staffing data. Gathering and analyzing these data is essential. Fire company and Township officials need to be aware of the level of service provided, based on unit and incident scene staffing data, for appropriate action to be taken to deal with any actual or perceived staffing shortages. When staffing shortages are identified based on these data, action can then be considered, e.g., recruiting additional volunteer personnel or strategically reassigning paid firefighters.

The LMFD and the fire company chiefs have a substantial amount of detailed apparatus and staffing information available for assessment and planning purposes, including the following:

1. Number of firefighters responding on each piece of fire apparatus;
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

STATION AND APPARATUS STAFFING (continued)

2. Number of officers responding on each piece of fire apparatus;
3. Number and type of personnel responding in personal vehicles, and arrival times; and,
4. Number and type of personnel responding to the fire station during an incident, but remaining in the fire station to staff other apparatus not responding to the incident.

This data is valuable and should be fully utilized. The Township and the LMFD should be commended for having the foresight to implement the Firehouse fire and rescue records management system that maintains this information for use.

In addition, the suggested Emergency Services Board, if created, should consider recommending to the Township Board of Commissioners a Township-wide policy requiring the gathering and periodic analysis of station and apparatus staffing data.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER/OFFICER AVAILABILITY

During the interview process, the Study Team was consistently advised of the limited availability of volunteer staffing during weekday daytime hours, generally 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This apparent significant weekday daytime lack of volunteer staffing is typical in volunteer fire companies serving areas such as Lower Merion.

It is for this reason that most combination volunteer/paid staffed fire services provide increased paid staffing during daytime hours with significantly reduced paid firefighter coverage at night.

ALTERNATIVE UTILIZATION OF VOLUNTEER STAFF

The following sections discuss alternatives available for improvement in the utilization of volunteer fire company staffing.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

STATION AND APPARATUS STAFFING (continued)

In-Station Standby Programs

There are a limited number of organized programs, such as in-station standby programs, in place in the fire company stations to encourage or require volunteers to remain in the fire station. Standby refers to remaining at the fire station, available to respond. A standby can include a sleep-in, which refers to staying at the fire station overnight and responding to alarms that occur during that period.

The fire protection services in the Township of Lower Merion serve both a developed urban/suburban area and developing upscale residential and commercial areas. It is the Study Team’s observation that many volunteer fire companies serving similar communities organize their volunteer apparatus staffing by planning in-station standby programs and relying on the immediate response of volunteers on apparatus to the emergency scene.

The chiefs of the fire companies are encouraged to implement volunteer in-station standby programs to ensure proper and consistent staffing levels.

The establishment of in-station standby programs improves the consistency of fire station staffing and provides the opportunity for volunteer members to plan the use of their available time. Many successful in-station volunteer standby programs require each volunteer to serve on a volunteer crew and remain in the fire station from, for example, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., one night a week. Each of the seven standby crews (Monday night crew, Tuesday night crew, etc.) would cover a weekend day shift (7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on a rotation to cover all weekend hours.

Implementation of volunteer standby programs decreases attrition of volunteer members by reducing “burn-out” which results from excessive time expectations. Expecting a small number of volunteer members to respond to all emergency incidents on a 24-hour basis, every day, places significant pressures on individuals. Over a period of time, this type of demand can result in experienced, trained volunteers leaving the service.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

ALTERNATIVE UTILIZATION OF VOLUNTEERS (continued)

The fire company chiefs should also consider implementing other programs that encourage personnel to remain in the fire stations on a scheduled basis. Some items for consideration include:

1. Offering a standby food program to supplement the cost of meals for volunteers serving on standby crews;
2. Upgrading physical fitness equipment in the fire station;
3. Providing access to computer equipment for study or other uses in the station;
4. Establishing library and study areas in the fire station; and,
5. Upgrading the bunkroom facilities.

The objective of any such programs should be to encourage volunteer fire personnel to remain at the station to provide timely response.

Bunkroom Facilities

There are limited adequate bunkroom facilities in Lower Merion fire stations to support sufficient personnel to staff the primary apparatus operating from each of the fire stations. There are a number of fire station bunkroom facilities for paid firefighters scheduled for the night shift. However, the bunkroom facilities available for volunteer staffing are lacking or inadequate. Lack of bunkroom facilities in fire stations is a deficiency that should be remedied as soon as possible to encourage volunteers to sleep at the stations and thereby improve the current station and apparatus staffing situation.

Planning for and implementing predictable station staffing approaches is critical; therefore, the fire company chiefs should maintain daily and hourly records of the staffing of the stations by active volunteer personnel. In addition, records should be maintained regarding the personnel sleeping at the fire stations. This data should be summarized monthly and yearly to have a more precise picture of fire station volunteer staffing and associated needs.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING

Paid firefighter staffing generally and, more specifically, the need to consider improvements in available paid staffing and the management and utilization of Lower Merion paid staffing are discussed in the following sections. Finally, the indicators of a need for options for change and improvement to be considered in the management and utilization of the paid firefighter staffing are reviewed.

Implementation of Paid Firefighters

The implementation of paid firefighter staffing in a municipality that has historically been served by an all-volunteer service is a sensitive issue. There can be very negative impacts on future levels of volunteer participation, if the decision to start paid staffing is not carefully considered and the approach to implementation is not carefully considered.

In addition, there are significant costs associated with the hiring of additional personnel that must be clearly justified in this time of fiscal constraint. Such a decision needs to be based on the evidence that such a step is essential. And, to ensure success, such a decision should be made with the involvement and support of the volunteer leadership.

Additional Paid Firefighter Staffing

There are three key data elements that are used to help determine the need for additional paid firefighter staffing. Those key data elements are:

A. The number of personnel responding on individual pieces of fire apparatus;
B. The time from fire department dispatch until apparatus is en route and on scene; and,
C. The rate of primary apparatus failure to respond when dispatched.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

The high frequency of response of under-staffed apparatus, long times from dispatch to en route, travel times, and failures of apparatus to respond are strong indicators that additional paid firefighter staffing is needed to maintain a reasonable level of fire service to the public.

The Township of Lower Merion and fire service representatives discussed these areas as important justifications for paid firefighters. As the number of emergency incidents has increased, it has become more difficult for volunteer personnel to meet the service demands, particularly during the daytime hours when many volunteers are at their own full-time jobs.

In the judgment of the Study Team, the key data elements discussed above are apparently either not readily available at this time from County dispatch or the fire companies, or is available but not being fully reviewed and assessed. Additionally, data that is maintained appears insufficient on which to base a paid staffing recommendation—for or against the hiring of paid added firefighters.

In order for the Township and the fire companies to make appropriate fire staffing decisions in the future, a goal should be set to collect, correlate, and analyze basic fire service data.

As indicated previously, criteria should be established to determine the point at which additional paid firefighters should be hired. In essence, these criteria represent the level at which the service to the public is considered to be sufficiently impacted by lack of staffing to justify the hiring of additional paid firefighters. The Study Team suggests that the Township of Lower Merion, the LMFD and fire companies should consider at least the following criteria:

1. Failure of primary pieces of apparatus to respond to emergency calls for a station on more than 10 percent of the incidents to which a station is dispatched;
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

2. Failure of primary pieces of apparatus to respond to emergency calls for a station with fewer than three qualified firefighters/officers on more than 20 percent of the incidents to which a station is dispatched;

3. Response from station times for primary pieces of apparatus that exceed three minutes on more than 20 percent of the incidents to which a station is dispatched; and,

4. Dispatch to on-scene time for first arriving primary apparatus that exceeds five minutes on more than 30 percent of incidents to which a station is dispatched.

The data upon which to monitor and assess staffing needs via this criteria is currently available in the Firehouse records management system.

In addition, the Township should consider a policy that requires the periodic analysis of unit level apparatus staffing data.

Current Paid Firefighter Staffing

The following sections address various aspects relating to the paid firefighter staffing who are currently employed by the Lower Merion fire companies.

The Study Team was advised that employment of a number of paid staff by the fire companies has been the practice for many years. Apparently, more recently, with the exception of the paid staff at Narberth, the funding for the current paid staff working in the fire companies is from the funds provided annually to the fire companies by the Township.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

Utilization of Paid Staff

Reportedly, the Lower Merion fire company-employed firefighters are utilized in various ways by the fire companies. Apparently, some of the paid firefighters have specific regular assignments when on-duty while others do not.

Paid firefighters in a typical combination volunteer/paid fire station setting should perform a number of functions other than responding to emergency incidents. They should perform important functions within the fire service, such as:

1. Maintaining apparatus and equipment;
2. Providing maintenance and upkeep of fire stations;
3. Training, including performing their own training and assisting the volunteers with in-service training programs;
4. Developing building and target hazard pre-plans;
5. Conducting an in-service building inspection program as part of the code enforcement function of the municipality;
6. Responding to routine-type incidents, such as automatic fire alarms, thus allowing the volunteer staffing to concentrate their efforts on the more serious emergency incidents;
7. Providing basic life support first responders and additional staffing on life threatening emergency medical incidents when they are the closest fire and rescue personnel; and,
8. Supporting and coordinating other projects as determined by management.

The Study Team was advised that none of the paid firefighters are involved in conducting in-service building inspections in their fire company district or any part of the Township. Reportedly, the suggestion to utilize the fire company-employed paid firefighters for in-service building inspections was offered/suggested a number of years ago by the LMFD chief fire officer, but turned down by the fire company chiefs at that time.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

Further, reportedly, very few building and target hazard pre-plans are conducted by the paid firefighters. Both of these important functions are typically performed by paid firefighters and are important tasks conducted by fire protection agencies as part of fire prevention programs and training and preparation for handling of fire emergencies in the community.

Training and Physical Requirements

As discussed in the Training Chapter of this report, the provision of training to paid and volunteer firefighters is essential to the delivery of consistent quality fire protection services to a community. As to the hiring of paid firefighting staff, utilizing training, certification and experience criteria in the selection and hiring of paid personnel is essential and a key to the hiring of the best qualified staff. Further, ongoing training and advancement in training/certification levels are essential to the continued development and growth of the paid staff during the course of employment.

The entry level training requirements for hiring of paid firefighters seem to vary significantly among the fire companies. The Study Team was advised that the entry-level training/certification requirements are minimal or non-existent and may vary from one hiring process to the next. Some do not require firefighter II, hazmat, emergency vehicle operator and/or CPR. Other fire companies have fairly stringent hiring requirements.

The Study Team was advised that ongoing post-hiring training requirements vary among the fire companies, and in a number of cases, the fire companies have not established any ongoing training or certification requirements for the paid firefighters. Therefore, in essence, there is no formal or informal career development effort or program for the paid fire staff of the fire companies.

Entry-level and subsequent periodic (annual, etc.) physical examination/testing requirements also varies amongst the fire companies: some fire companies apparently have physical/testing requirements while others may not.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

Supervision and Rules

Reportedly, the individual/s responsible for supervising each fire company’s paid fire staff differ in that some paid firefighters report to a committee (Houseman’s Committee, House Committee, etc.) while others report to one or more individuals. Of course, on emergency incidents the fire company chief or other senior officer would supervise the paid fire company staff as part of any incident command procedures in effect.

As with other aspects relating to paid staffing, the extent of policies, procedures, rules or employee manuals varies substantially among the fire companies. Of course, every fire company determines the governing rules, etc., for its paid staff. And, these rules may change from one time to the next as elections occur and new officers/members become in charge of the paid firefighters. There is very limited consistency among the fire companies in the policies and procedures that apply to the paid staff.

Several of the fire companies have provided written employee handbooks/manuals. The Study Team was provided a copy of four of those documents. All differ from fire company to fire company in content and comprehensiveness. A number are fairly comprehensive and all-encompassing, such as the employee handbooks provided by the Bryn Mawr Fire Company and the Merion Fire Company of Ardmore.

Pay and Benefits

Pay and benefits for the paid firefighters also vary from one fire company to the next: none are the same, except for pension benefits which may be through the Lower Merion Paid Men’s Pension Plan.

Examples of the varying aspects of pay and benefits for paid 56-hour (or more) per week (averaged over a 28-day period per FLSA) firefighters include:
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

- Entry level pay of $35,500 with a maximum of $48,100 in one fire company and other fire companies with no stated annual salary or maximum salary, but pay stated as an hourly rate, e.g., $8.56 and $9.81 per hour with no maximum stated

  Note: As an interesting point of comparison to at least one current Township salary, as of September, 2007, the Township was advertising a 40-hour per week tree trimmer I position at a starting salary of $21.60 per hour, or an annual salary of $45,111.

- Pay increases occur “as the board sees fit,” “based on a decision of the houseman’s committee,” “every six months for 3 years to maximum” and “yearly”

- Vacation time varies from five days for up to 10 years service, to three weeks for service over five years and three weeks for all

- Bonus options are provided for some fire companies

- Holidays range from 6 to 12 per year

- Overtime pay for work over 40 hours, as required by the Fair Labor Standards Act, seems to vary between the fire companies

- The provision of “personal days” varies among the fire companies

- Medical benefits vary significantly among the fire companies

- Sick leave varies from none to one week per year
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

In summary, the salary and benefits provided by the fire companies vary substantially and range from reasonably fair to very poor for paid firefighters serving the Township of Lower Merion and is funded, to a large extent, by the Township.

Work Schedule and Hours

The established work schedules for the fire company paid firefighters are essentially the same. One such fire company work schedule has the paid firefighters working a total of 3,276 hours per work year when a typical 40-hour work week worker would work 2,080 hours per year, before vacation, sick, etc., time off. Therefore, the typical work year of a paid Lower Merion fire company firefighter would be 1,196 more than a typical Township employee.

Deployment of Current Paid Firefighters

The following sections discuss the general deployment of the paid firefighter staffing on a shift basis and incident response on apparatus.

Shift Deployment of Paid Firefighters

Although not all of the seven fire companies deploy their paid firefighters in exactly the same manner, generally each fire company schedules two paid firefighters to work weekday daytime hours and one to work the night shifts. For weekend days and nights where the fire company determines the need for paid firefighter staff coverage, either a full-time or part-time paid firefighter is scheduled to work.

Where there is a gap in the schedule and one or more paid firefighters are not working (insufficient overall paid staffing to cover vacation, sick and/or holiday, etc., time off), a number of the fire companies have part-time paid firefighters or volunteer members being paid to cover the shift staffing shortage.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

Apparently, there is no coordination between the fire companies as to paid firefighter coverage to ensure any minimal level of paid staffing on-duty at any given time in the Township. Each fire company seems to make its own determination as to when coverage is needed without regard to the number of paid staff working in the rest of the Township. This could result in significant lack of paid firefighter coverage at any given time of day or night, weekday or weekend. This occurs, apparently, despite an agreement between the fire companies and the Township a number of years ago, that there would be constant staffing of two paid positions at each non-Borough fire station during weekday daytime hours.

Incident Response Deployment of Paid Firefighters

The utilization of paid firefighter staff members for fire apparatus staffing for emergency fire calls varies significantly among the fire companies. The variations include:

A. **Immediate response** of an engine, ladder or heavy rescue with paid staffing upon dispatch of the call with any available volunteers in the fire station on the unit/s;

B. **Delayed response** with an engine, ladder or rescue with paid staffing while awaiting the arrival of volunteers to the fire station; and,

C. Response of one paid firefighter on each unit or two firefighters (if on duty) on the same unit.

Reportedly, there seems to be no consistent effective coordination between fire company volunteer decision makers as to the deployment of paid firefighters on apparatus responding to emergency incidents. From one incident to the next and from one fire company to the next, depending on which fire company/s are responding to the call, the actual response time of apparatus may be significantly impacted, in a positive or negative way.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

As an example, at least one fire company chief has a policy to not allow the paid staff to leave on an emergency call without waiting to see if volunteers respond to the fire station before the unit with the paid staff is allowed to respond from the fire station. In effect this policy builds into the response time a potentially substantial time delay in the response of apparatus.

One volunteer chief asserted that if the paid staff were to be allowed to leave the fire station with the apparatus without waiting to see if any volunteers arrive, the result would be detrimental to volunteer activity. In other words, the importance of quick response of fire apparatus was being disregarded in deference to having volunteers on the first unit to respond.

It appears to the Study Team that the importance of immediate response to emergencies in Lower Merion is not uppermost in the mind of a number of fire company leaders. It is a recognized fact among fire service delivery experts nationally that low response times are key to the level and quality of services provided. The amount of time it takes for fire units to arrive on the scene of a fire emergency often makes the difference between life, serious injury or death for those needing fire protection services. Decisions relating to staffing and deployment of fire and rescue apparatus need to be directly influenced by the impact of those decisions on the response time of the responding apparatus, no matter the nature of the apparatus staffing, volunteer or paid.

Current Paid Staffing Issues and Inconsistencies

In summary, it appears to the Study Team that there are substantial differences in many aspects of the management, pay, benefits and utilization of the Lower Merion paid firefighters. These differences and the apparently established fire company practices, policies and procedures with respect to the paid firefighters may be reducing the quality of fire and rescue protection to the Lower Merion customers. Further, there could be a significant
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

reduction in the potential productivity of the paid firefighters funded by the Township. The issues and inconsistencies include the following:

A. Lack of involvement in pre-fire planning of buildings;
B. Lack of involvement in building inspections with fire marshal staff;
C. Limited in-service training requirements;
D. No multi-/inter-fire company training with other paid firefighters or volunteer members;
E. Limited career development training requirements;
F. Inconsistent physical testing requirements;
G. Inconsistent entry level training and certification requirements;
H. Different job titles;
I. Varying duties and responsibilities and oversight;
J. Lack of employment policies and differing employee manuals;
K. Differing approaches to oversight and supervision;
L. Widely varying salaries and wages that are unjustifiably low;
M. Inconsistent vacation policies;
N. Inconsistent holiday policies;
O. Differing medical benefits;
P. Varying policies regarding personal days;
Q. Different sick leave days allowed;
R. Differing overtime pay policies;
S. Differing number of hours worked in a week/year;
T. Inconsistent incident response deployment;
U. Delayed response of apparatus staffed with paid firefighters;
V. Lack of recognition of the importance of response time in resource deployment;
W. Lack of coordination regarding shift deployment; and,
X. Lack of coordination of fire/rescue apparatus and staff incident deployment.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

It appears that there is no coordination and/or consultation among the fire companies or with Township officials or staff in any aspect of the supervision, oversight, pay and benefits, and utilization of the paid firefighters. The Study Team was advised of an informal effort on the part of a number of fire company leaders to establish a committee or work group to discuss opportunities for coordination, teamwork and improved management and oversight of the paid firefighter staff. However, according to those involved, very limited progress has been made in many important areas due, apparently, to the refusal on the part of a number fire companies to participate. Additionally, the feeling that this matter is the sole responsibility of the fire company despite the utilization of Township funds to support the paid staffing and the impact of decisions regarding the paid staff on the quality and level of fire and rescue services provided in Lower Merion.

Reportedly, the paid firefighter turnover rate is high in a number of the fire companies. Moreover, there seems to be a concern on the part of a number of the paid firefighters, as expressed to the Study Team, as to their potential job loss if they express their opinions openly regarding paid firefighter issues and inconsistencies.

It should be noted that each of the six Township funded fire companies, not including the Narberth Fire Company that is funded by the Borough, were appropriated to receive $251,557 in fiscal year 2007. Based on budget documents provided to the Study Team, the fire companies will expend approximately $180,000 to $200,000 in FY2007 for personnel costs, primarily related to full- and part-time paid staffing.

In the opinion of the Study Team, as currently implemented, the Township funds provided to the fire companies and used primarily for paid staffing are not being utilized effectively. Further, the fire and rescue service delivery to the public may be degraded by the lack of teamwork and lack of consistent management and utilization of the paid staff. Action should be taken to assure the effective use of these taxpayer funds.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

Previous Study Conclusions and Recommendations

As previously discussed in Chapter One of this report, a number of studies and plans have been developed through the years relating to the LMFD and opportunities for improvement. One such study was conducted in 1990 by Burkell and Associates. A portion of a chapter of that report addressed issues and concerns regarding the handling of the paid firefighter staff and outlined a number of options and recommendations for implementation by the Township and the LMFD and its member fire companies.

A number of key sections of the Burkell report's conclusions and recommendations related to the paid staff include the following:

“Career or Paid Personnel

“Currently, each Company employs approximately (3) individuals on a full time basis. These individuals are known typically as “housemen” or drivers. The consultant found that in most instances, the duties of these individuals vary from Company to Company, if even slightly.

“The current reality of this situation does in fact create a combination system within the Township, whereby there are both paid [career] and volunteer personnel. The consultant recognizes and supports the value of career personnel working within a combination system, but the actual mechanism and characteristics of the system utilized in the Township of Lower Merion is problematic and poses exposure liability to both the Township and the Companies.

“This arrangement is viewed as problematic because the majority of funds given to each Company by the Township are utilized to compensate the paid personnel. Yet the Township has no control over hiring standards, personnel practices, duties performed, maintenance of proficiency, etc. Even the individual Companies do not
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

have published or accepted practices on such personnel issues, and such personnel serve at the pleasure of the Company. The entire scenario is viewed by the consultant as problematic and a questionable efficiency approach to providing career personnel in what should be a modern fire protection situation. The Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners must decide the future direction of the utility of this system. The query posed is ‘Does the Township desire a combination system with the appropriate management controls, or a defacto one without such controls that poses a lack of efficiency and effectiveness as well as potential legal implications?’

“The consultant recommends the following course of action. The annual payment of funds to each Company should cease [approximately $117,000/yr based on 1989]. This assumes that the Township would fund the other benchmarks for equipment, stations, training, etc. previously discussed.

“Each Company would be given a choice of two alternatives:

Alternative One

“The (Fire) Company would choose not to have paid personnel assigned to their Station. Members would be responsible to perform all duties that normally would be performed by such personnel.

Alternative Two

“The Company would request the assigning of career personnel to the Company. The Township would provide career personnel who in fact would be Township employees. The exact number would be determined by the Township, but it is suggested that coverage be at least equal to what is currently provided by the Companies. The benefit such an alternative would include the following advantages/characteristics:
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

- Personnel would meet physical hiring standards, as well as maintaining annual physical assessment.

- Personnel would meet minimum training standards, as well as maintaining the desired proficiency levels.

- Personnel would be trained to a driver operator level.

- Since they would be Township employees, they would have the option to organize as a labor group.

- The Township would provide a standardized wage and benefit package.

- Personnel would perform a standardized set of duties, Township wide, regardless of the Company, and in fact would rotate from Company to Company on some scheduled basis so as to learn the fire protection characteristics of the total Township.

- Such staffing/personnel would also include weekend/holiday coverage.

“It is recommended that the career personnel have a prescribed reporting procedure, operating within the Company assigned to/chain of command. Additionally, personnel would report to the on-duty shift officer, who would be a ranking member from a Company assigned to Operations.

“It is also recommended that the Township make every attempt to ‘grandfather’ the existing career personnel into the recommended system. However, these individuals must pass a base line physical level (assessment). Personnel unable to immediately comply should be entered into an (18) month medically supervised rehabilitation program which the Township would fund.”
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

The conclusions and recommendations contained in this 1990 study indicate that there have been serious concerns related to the management and utilization of the paid staff for nearly two decades. To a large extent, the issues that existed and were of concern in the early 1990s seem to still exist and may have become more pronounced due to increasing workload and reduced availability of volunteer staffing.

Options for Improvement

Previous sections of this Chapter have reviewed in detail a substantial number of indicators of the need for innovative and comprehensive change relating to paid staffing. This section outlines two options for potential improvement in the organization and management of the paid firefighter staffing in the Township of Lower Merion as alternatives for consideration by the Board of Commissioners.

Emergency Services Board Paid Firefighters Committee

One alternative would be for the Emergency Service Board (ESB) to appoint a Paid Firefighters Committee to coordinate the development and implementation of a number of improvements and consistent programs and policies for the management and utilization of the paid firefighters, including implementation of the following:

1. Pre-fire planning of buildings in their district;
2. Building inspections in their district;
3. Entry-level training requirements;
4. In-service training requirements;
5. Multi-/inter-fire company training of paid and volunteer personnel;
6. Career development training requirements;
7. Entry-level and periodic physical requirements;
8. Consistent job titles;
9. Substantive duties and responsibilities;
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

10. Consistent employment policies and employee manuals;
11. Approaches to oversight and supervision;
12. Consistent equitable salaries and wages and overtime pay;
13. Consistent benefits, including vacation, holiday, sick leave and other time off;
14. Consistent medical benefits;
15. Strategically coordinated incident response deployment of paid staff and apparatus;
16. Consistent work hours and shift deployment; and,
17. Immediate emergency response of fire apparatus with paid and volunteer staff, if available.

Under the auspices of the Emergency Services Board, a Paid Firefighters Committee could be established with, at a minimum, a member from each of the seven fire companies, the LMFD chief fire officer, deputy fire marshal, a Township human resources manager, a Township legal authority and one or more stakeholders.

The Paid Firefighters Committee would be charged by the ESB with developing and recommending programs and policies applicable to all Township-funded paid firefighters. The memoranda of agreement suggested in Chapter Two would include a provision that the fire company would implement the programs and policies developed by the ESB and adopted by the Board of Commissioners

In the opinion of the Study Team, this option would likely be time-consuming and problematic to implement.

Township Employment of Paid Firefighters

As another alternative, paid firefighters funded by the Township would become employees of the Township assigned to the fire companies under the direction of the LMFD chief fire officer (CFO). Under this option, the Township’s CFO would be responsible for developing
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PAID FIREFIGHTER STAFFING (continued)

and implementing improvements and consistent programs and policies for the management and utilization of the paid firefighters. The CFO would handle this responsibility in consultation with the ESB and under the auspices of the Township Manager and Board of Commissioners.

In outlining this Township employment option, the Study Team agrees with the statement made by the 1990 comprehensive study consultant that reads as follows:

"The entire scenario is viewed by the consultant as problematic and a questionable efficiency approach to providing career personnel in what should be a modern fire protection situation. The Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners must decide the future direction of the utility of this system. The query posed is 'Does the Township desire a combination system with the appropriate management controls, or a defacto one without such controls that poses a lack of efficiency and effectiveness as well as potential legal implications?'"

Further, the Study Team agrees with the 1990 consultant that the paid firefighters should be Township employees. The Township should have control over hiring standards, personnel practices, duties performed, maintenance of proficiency and, most importantly, the utilization of the paid firefighters in a way that fully benefits and supports the provision of high quality fire protection in Lower Merion.

In developing these suggested options, the Study Team has carefully considered any possible impact on the recruitment and retention of volunteer staffing in the fire companies. The employment and supervision of paid staffing is a complex and time-consuming process in this day and age of increasing employment requirements, litigation and potential liability exposure. These and other aspects of volunteer fire service delivery and the need to consider innovative means for the Township of Lower Merion to support and facilitate the continuation of its volunteer fire service delivery have been in the forefront of the development of these options for improvement. These options could reduce the workload for
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

UTILIZATION OF LMFD OFFICE STAFF FOR INCIDENT OPERATIONS (continued)

the volunteer staff and bring about more cohesive teamwork while enhancing the quality of
fire protection service delivery.

UTILIZATION OF LMFD OFFICE STAFF FOR INCIDENT OPERATIONS

The job descriptions of the deputy fire marshals in the LMFD Office include the following:

"Supports firefighting operations during the on-duty hours and responds to fires on
an on-call schedule during non-duty hours in order to conduct fire investigations."

Combination volunteer/paid fire departments, such as the LMFD, that function with
predominant volunteer staffing and minimal paid staffing during weekday daytime hours,
typically experience volunteer staffing shortages on an intermittent basis during daytime
hours when an insufficient number of volunteers are otherwise committed when a call is
dispatched. For that reason, municipalities, such as Lower Merion, attempt to make
municipal staff, such as deputy fire marshals, available to respond to assist the volunteers.

The Study Team noted a sensitivity on the part of a number volunteers to this practice. The
issues that may develop relate to a feeling on the part of the volunteers who respond that the
Township deputy fire marshals may be "freelancing," taking charge when not appropriate
and/or not working with the volunteer chain of command on the incident. In the experience
of the Study Team, this is not an unusual concern on the part of volunteers, whether the
perceptions are actual or not.

In such situations, the Township staff needs to be aware and sensitive to the concern, and "go
the extra mile" to make certain that there is no basis for such a perception. The CFO needs
to assure that clear policies and procedures are in place to provide guidance to the fire
marshal staff. Further, the CFO needs to be open and responsive to complaints in this regard.
Finally, the deputy fire marshals need also to be aware of the potential sensitivity on the part

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ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES (continued)

of volunteers and make certain that they work in a true supportive team effort with the on-scene volunteer leadership and personnel.

ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES

There are a number of funding sources that could be considered by the Township Board of Commissioners for funding fire protection services delivery, including paid staffing and the fire companies required for the fire services.

Township Funding Sources

The following are a number of alternative sources of funding for consideration by the Township.

A. General Fund - The fire services staffing and other approved operating and capital expenses could be funded from the Township’s general fund, which currently funds most other departments and agencies of the Township government.

B. Billing for Services - Charging for fire service calls has been attempted on a trial/limited basis by a number of municipalities and fire companies. The concept of charging for actual fire calls has been that the property owner or renter could pass the bill on to the homeowner’s insurance carrier for payment. Expanding the procedure of charging for fire calls was suggested to the Study Team during the interview process.

The Study Team has conducted a number of studies in different parts of the United States to determine potential alternative funding sources for fire and rescue services. Direct billing for calls has not been noted as a successful long-term source of funds for fire services in any other township/city reviewed by
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES (continued)

the Study Team. The success and consistency of this source of funds to finance Lower Merion fire staffing may be questionable.

C. **Fire Tax** - A number of Pennsylvania municipalities have initiated a fire tax approach as the source of funds for their fire and rescue services. The Township Board of Commissioners could consider establishing a fire/rescue tax for purposes of funding the fire and rescue staffing needs. This tax could also support the tax-funded portion of the volunteer fire companies. This tax should be set annually by the Township Board of Commissioners based on the approved budget.

The Study Team is aware of a number of other potential alternate sources of funding that should be considered by the Township. They include:

A. United States Fire Administration (USFA) Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program for grants and funding;
B. U.S. Department of Homeland Security Commercial Equipment Direct Assistance Program for equipment for first responders;
C. USFA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program;
E. Occupational Privilege Tax (OPT);
F. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Governor’s Center for Local Government Services grant funds for assistance to communities with fire merger project planning and assistance;
G. Fire inspection and plans review fees;
H. False alarm charges; and,
I. National Fire Academy Training Assistance funding.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES (continued)

The Study Team is aware of past LMFD and fire company efforts in a number of these funding areas. This aggressive effort should continue in a coordinated grant submission approach between the CFO and fire company officials.

There are a number of potential alternate sources of funding for various aspects of the provision of fire and rescue services. The Township is encouraged to aggressively research and seek out these and other opportunities for funding. Some of these sources have the potential for substantial ongoing sources of revenue and others may be one-time project-specific grants or other funding. Municipalities and fire companies that pursue alternate sources of funding find the revenue beneficial to service delivery and to supplement the normal primary source/s of funding.

The Township Board of Commissioners should consider their funding options and implement the funding mechanism considered appropriate for the Township of Lower Merion and the fire companies.

Given the previously estimated cost of providing an all paid fire force (approximately $17,000,000), the Township should continue to be sensitive to the actual funding needs of the fire companies in all aspects of operating expenses, capital, and salaries and wages to ensure that each of the seven Lower Merion fire companies is adequately funded and are in a financial position to expend their valuable time and effort on training and service delivery rather than extensive fund raising efforts.

Fire Company Funding Sources

The funding sources available to the fire companies, other than Township tax funds, are fairly limited. Further, the fire companies are not legally in a position to require property owners or business owners and operators to pay for services rendered. Generally, fire companies are limited to voluntary donations from their customers.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

The primary past funding efforts of the fire companies have included:

- Annual fund drive mailings
- Hall rentals
- Christmas tree sales
- Special events, e.g., Halloween and 4th of July

Fire company officials advised that, generally, their fund drive efforts are not well supported. Although fund drives may return between $60,000 and $80,000 to each fire company, the level of return compared to the number of businesses and residents is very poor. One fire company reported an annual return of $35,000 to $40,000 each year. For an upscale community such as Lower Merion, such fund drive returns seem very poor. Apparently, only about one out of every five businesses, for example, provide donations in response to fund drive mailing efforts on the part of the fire companies.

Every effort should be made by the fire companies with the support of the Township to “get the word out” regarding the importance of financial support to the fire companies from the customers (residents and business owners).

SUMMARY

Township of Lower Merion fire companies are staffed largely with volunteer personnel, who are supplemented with a number of paid staff; as such, the system is a combination volunteer/paid fire service.

It appears that the fire companies do not place a high priority on volunteer, on-site staffing of the fire stations. There are limited records available regarding fire station staffing by volunteers. The emphasis seems be placed on having the volunteers respond in their personal vehicles to the fire station or the scene of the emergency, with the fire and rescue apparatus being brought to the scene by the paid or responding volunteer drivers and other personnel.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

There appears to be sufficient question and concern regarding the need for additional paid firefighter staffing in fire company stations. Suggestions are made relating to daytime staffing to attain improved service levels and safer minimal paid staffing levels for initially-responding fire apparatus. Further, in order for the Township and fire companies to make appropriate fire staffing decisions in the future, a goal should be set to collect, correlate, and analyze basic fire service apparatus and station staffing data.

The current paid firefighters are employees of the fire companies although, to a large extent, the funding of the salaries, wages and benefits related to the paid staff is the annual Township tax fund allocation provided to the fire companies. To a large extent, the management, employment policies, and utilization of the paid staff by the fire companies are inconsistent and not coordinated for the benefit of the provision of quality service in Lower Merion. The issue areas related to the paid firefighter staff are substantial and the impact on the quality of fire and rescue service in the Township is potentially problematic. Options for improvement, including Township employment of the paid firefighters, was outlined.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The LMFD chief fire officer and the fire company chiefs are encouraged to set a goal of staffing engines, ladders and heavy rescues with at least three volunteer/paid firefighters and officers.

3.2 The fire company chiefs should immediately begin a detailed monitoring and assessment of firefighter incident staffing response data to include the following:

A. Number of firefighters responding on each fire and rescue unit;
B. Number of officers responding on each fire and rescue unit;
C. Number and type of personnel responding in their personal vehicles; and,
D. Number and type of personnel responding to the fire station on the incident, but remaining in the fire station to staff other apparatus not responding on the incident.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

3.3 The Emergency Services Board should consider the establishment of a Township-wide policy requiring the gathering and periodic analysis of this apparatus staffing data.

3.4 The Township, LMFD and fire companies should maintain, encourage and strengthen the current LMFD combination volunteer/paid staffing approach for the long term as a cost-effective approach to service delivery staffing.

3.5 The Township, LMFD and fire companies should encourage the recognition of the LMFD as a fire services delivery agency staffed by volunteers supplemented by a core of full- and part-time paid firefighter staffing: a combination volunteer/paid fire department.

3.6 The chiefs of the fire companies should provide the proposed Emergency Services Board and the Township Board of Commissioners with quarterly and annual volunteer activity information, in summary form, to identify any trends in the levels of activity.

3.7 The chiefs of the fire companies are encouraged to implement volunteer standby programs to ensure that a minimum level of personnel are available in the station and the first-due district.

3.8 The Township, LMFD and fire companies should perform a bunkroom assessment survey and proceed to implement capital projects to provide appropriate state-of-the-art bunkrooms in the fire stations to support volunteer and paid bunkroom needs.

3.9 The fire company chiefs should maintain daily and hourly records of the staffing of the stations by active volunteer personnel, including records regarding personnel sleeping at the fire stations. The data should be summarized monthly and yearly to have a more precise picture of fire station volunteer staffing and associated needs.
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

3.10 The Township, LMFD and fire companies are encouraged to title the paid fire staff as "firefighters" in recognition of the vital role fulfilled by these staff members in support and teamwork with the volunteer firefighters and officers.

3.11 To assist the proposed Emergency Services Board, the Township and fire companies in setting criteria to determine the point at which additional paid firefighters should be hired, the following should be considered as criteria:

A. Failure of primary pieces of apparatus to respond on emergency calls for a station on more than 10 percent of the incidents to which a station is dispatched;
B. Failure of primary pieces of apparatus to respond on emergency calls for a station with less than three qualified personnel on more than 30 percent of the incidents to which a station is dispatched;
C. Response from station times for primary pieces of apparatus that exceed three minutes on more than 20 percent of the incidents to which a station is dispatched; and,
D. Dispatch to on-scene time for first arriving primary apparatus that exceeds five minutes on more than 30 percent of incidents to which a station is dispatched.

3.12 The aggressive grant submission effort should continue in a coordinated grant submission approach between the CFO and fire company officials.

3.13 The Board of Commissioners should consider taking action/s leading to the employment of the paid firefighters as Township employees.

3.14 If the Board of Commissioners chooses not to employ the paid firefighters the proposed Emergency Service Board should appoint a Paid Firefighters Committee to coordinate the development and implementation of a number of improvements and
PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

consistent programs and policies for the management and utilization of the paid firefighters.

3.15 The chief fire officer should remain sensitive to the potential concern on the part of volunteers that the deputy fire marshals may over-step their operational role on incidents by ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures are in place and followed, and that there is no basis for such a concern.

3.16 The Emergency Services Board and the LMFD should consider establishing a requirement for all officers take an arson for the first responder course in order to be knowledgeable of basic fire cause and origin matters and the need to maintain the fire scene for further fire investigation as required.
CHAPTER FOUR: FIRE & RESCUE STATIONS