

# Williamstown Mass Fire Department



## Williamstown Fire District Organizational Assessment Presentation

to

## Williamstown Fire District Prudential Committee December 11, 2019

MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC.



1

## MRI Scope of Work

The Williamstown Fire District contracted with Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI) to provide an organizational assessment and review of the manner in which fire and rescue services are provided within the community.

This study required intensive involvement within the Fire District leadership, community included interviews with the Town Manager, elected officials (Prudential Committee), the Fire Chief, personnel, Police Chief, and other stakeholders including Williams College Staff.

The study focused on an assessment to determine whether the existing organizational model staffing, facilities, apparatus, and equipment of the Williamstown Fire District are in line with generally accepted standards and benchmarks, and commensurate with communities of like character. MRI reviewed the background information that impacts the Fire District and performed a comparative analysis of similar communities.

MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC.



2

2

# MRI Scope of Work

Items that were considered as part of this evaluation included:

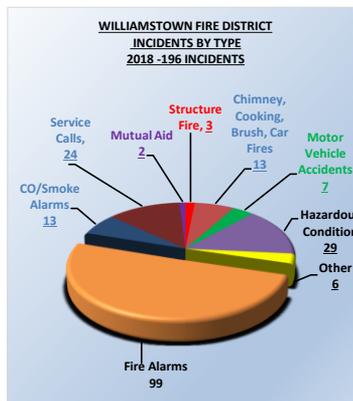
- Policies that determine staffing levels and types of staffing used
- Community population and demographics
- Target fire hazards (residential, industrial, educational, and municipal)
- Property values
- Services provided
- Special hazards and risks (i.e., nursing homes, assisted living facilities, lakes, rivers and waterfronts, Williams College, industrial facilities, hotels, road network, and multi-story buildings)
- Budgets
- Deployment strategy of manpower and apparatus by type of incident



3

# Services and Staffing

- Calls for Service
  - ❖ Year ending 2018 the Fire District Responded to 196 Calls for service
  - ❖ 3 Structure fires and 13 other types of fires (car, appliance fires)
  - ❖ Largest classification of calls was 99 calls for fire alarms
  - ❖ WFD provides fire suppression, provides basic rescue services including vehicle extrication, water rescue, and hazardous materials response
  - ❖ On occasion when requested the Williamstown Fire Department will assist Berkshire EMS
  - ❖ WFD also conducts plans review, fire inspections, fire prevention and safety education, fire investigations and community risk reduction. This is a very time consuming task. Time Spent equals fewer calls.



4

## Services

- *The community and the Governing Body of the Williamstown Fire District ultimately determines the level of emergency service delivery that is desired. This is often accomplished through the efforts of the Fire Chief and Prudential Committee expressing their needs, and in turn the taxpayers express their expectations during public meetings and also through the approval of the Districts Operating Budget.*
- *A review of the service levels provided by the Williamstown Fire Department revealed that the residents of the Town of Williamstown expect an initial timely response of **fire suppression and rescue resources on a 24/7 basis**. The current serviced provided by the WFD currently needs to continue into the future. How those services are delivered will be decided by the community.*

### Services Recommendations Summary

- **II-2 The Fire District has a moderate to high level of risk based on the cursory review and assessment of the community. MRI recommends the Fire District focus its future planning goals towards that risk and develop staffing, facility, and apparatus needs based on that assessment. To further define and identify definitive risks within the community the District will need to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment and incorporate the findings into a strategic plan for the future.**

## Services

### Services Recommendations Summary

- **IV-6 MRI recommends that the Fire District review and update all run cards which specifically details which apparatus should respond to specific incidents. Current dispatch documents reveals they have not been reviewed recently. Once reviewed and updated the run cards should be presented to the dispatch center for input and implementation.**
- **IV-7 MRI recommends that the Fire Department and Police Department meet to develop a joint incident scene “operations” protocol to minimize blocking the flow of traffic while also being able to provide appropriate safety for personnel working at an incident. These protocols should also address protocols for first responders who respond to incident scenes in private vehicles. The protocol should detail parking at incident scenes for fire apparatus and private first responder vehicles. This will help to alleviate the Police Department’s concerns of congested emergency scenes.**

## Services

***The building of strategic alliances between fire departments is not only a way to cope with the current environment, but is a way to provide an efficient and effective means to deliver service quicker, better and possibly even cheaper.***

- IX-1 Williamstown Fire Department and Town of Williamstown should enter into discussions with the municipal administrations, governing bodies, and fire department leadership of its adjacent communities, for the purposes of identifying possible future opportunities for shared services, economies of scale, and explore the feasibility of a more regional approach to fire protection and EMS delivery systems.
- Examples of benefits includes sharing of apparatus (i.e., Ladder truck, tankers, engines), sharing of personnel, purchasing of protective clothing or SCBA units in large quantities for cost savings.
- Challenges to shared services is overcoming territorial boundaries, providing and receiving equal services, changing the perceptions that regionalization does not work.
- Building an effective shared services agreement between public safety organizations requires strategic planning and time to implement.
- In many ways regionalization is taking already taking place through mutual aid agreements. Defining the specific shared services beyond current mutual aid agreements is what drives regionalization.



**Figure 37**  
**Massachusetts Fire District Map**

7

## Staffing

- Recruitment and retention will need to be a priority now and in the future. The decline in the number of on call firefighters is likely to continue and may change the operational structure currently in place at the Williamstown Fire Department.
- Like many communities across the United States, the growth in population, an increase in the aging population requiring emergency medical services, and a decline in the recruitment, retention, and availability of paid on-call first responders is not sustainable.
- The once always available, effective group of paid-on-call first responders has been in a steady decline in recent years. Fulltime work mandates, family commitments, stringent training requirements and certifications, and other competing interests has diminished the availability of responders that is affecting a timely response to emergencies.



***Williamstown is not immune to this dilemma and is part of a nationwide problem in the part-time fire service.***

8

## Staffing Challenges



- At the time of this study WFD had a roster of 22 Firefighters
- Only ¼ to ½ of Firefighters respond to calls due to life commitments and conflicting family responsibilities.
- Response to emergencies during the day is limited to a small group of individuals. (Williams College allows four personnel to respond to emergencies during their working hours).
- Other reasons for difficulty in recruiting and retaining members include:
  - An overall reduction in leisure time
  - Employment obligations and the need to maintain more than one job
  - Increased family demands
  - Generational differences
  - Increasing training requirements
  - The cost of housing in many affluent communities
  - Organizational culture
  - Internal respect
  - Recognition of personnel
  - Internal communication
  - Department leadership styles and commitment



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. 9

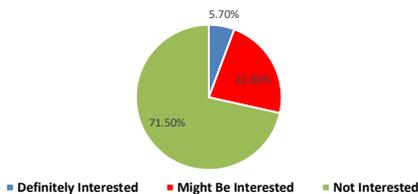
9

## Staffing Challenges

- Decline in available people for Volunteer and/or Paid On Call Firefighters will continue.
- A nationwide dilemma.
- Competition between Towns and Municipalities to recruit part-time Firefighters is increasing.
- In the larger picture overall interest is declining.



Interest in operational volunteer firefighter opportunities



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. 10

10

## Staffing Challenges



- The project team believes a continued decline in personnel available to provide coverage for fire emergencies during the day and evening hours will continue to be a challenge, and recommends the transition into a staffing model which would meet current and future needs.
- The staffing model to consider should consist of either fulltime Firefighter or part-time assigned per-diem Firefighter(s). The specific classification of employee (fulltime or per-diem) is a decision that should be determined by the recommendation of the Fire Chief and Prudential Committee and may require voter approval.
- MRI also recommends that paid on-call personnel currently on the Williamstown Fire Department roster, who meet the qualifications of positions for fulltime or per diem positions, be given consideration first before offering positions outside of the organization.



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. Municipal Resources, Inc. 11

11

## Staffing Challenges



MRI has created some staffing models for consideration. These staffing models would provide part-time coverage or per diem coverage, supplemented by the paid-on-call firefighters. Paid on-call Firefighters would also continue to respond during daytime hours when available. These are some examples and would be dependent on available funding and could require implementation over different budgeting cycles:

1. Hire 2 part-time firefighter/EMTs (assigned shifts) or per-diem firefighter (open day shifts) to work Monday through Friday to provide fire coverage from 6 am to 4 pm. The call firefighters would continue to respond when available including nights and weekends.
2. Increase budget funding to provide on-call personnel standby coverage during weekday hours, weekends, special events, or during peak emergency call periods. This provides needed coverage while at the same time keeping personnel costs low, due to not having to include benefits cost such as medical and other typical benefits.



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. Municipal Resources, Inc. 12

12

## Staffing Recommendations



*IV-3 MRI recommends that the Prudential Committee and the Fire Chief consider the creation of daytime hourly positions for per diem Firefighters, or increase funding for on-call firefighters to provide standby coverage during weekdays and weekends in order to assure adequate response to emergencies is maintained. Initiation of this staffing alternative can be implemented over future budget cycles in order to reduce tax impact on Fire District taxpayers.*

*This staffing change will assure the initial response to requests for emergency services is maintained into the future without changes to the current on-call staffing model in place.*

*The staffing model change also prepares the Fire District to meet the community's expectations should recruitment and retention efforts decline.*



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. Municipal Resources, Inc. 13

13

## Recruitment Recommendations



IV-9 MRI recommends that Williamstown Fire District convene a focus group, to determine what concepts and recruitment and retention strategies are feasible and most attractive to potential candidates. The group should also bring forth recommendations on incentives and strategies to recommend to the Prudential Committee.

IV-10 MRI recommends that the Williamstown Fire District should make it a priority to develop an active on-call recruitment team led by a company officer. At a minimum, this program should consist of:

- Developing a recruitment brochure and mailing it to all residents
- Holding periodic open houses at the fire station
- Performing public out-reach through the local media
- Contacting community and service groups including Williams College resources
- Developing an eye-catching banner on the Town's and Fire Department's websites and conducting radio and media advertisements
- Placing signs recruiting call/volunteer personnel at the main entrances to town
- Placing signs for call/recruiting volunteers in local businesses, particularly high volume locations
- Implementing or enhancing a fire explorer program



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. Municipal Resources, Inc. 14

14

## Recruitment Recommendations

**IV-4 The Williamstown Fire District should apply for a federal SAFER grant for funding positions for per diem or paid on-call members, and for paid on-call recruitment and retention.**

**This grant should be utilized to develop a comprehensive marketing program to attract new members and provide incentives for the retention of those personnel currently in the Fire Department.**

**The grant also may be used for equipment and personnel costs related to the hiring of new members.**



**FEMA**



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. Municipal Resources, Inc. 15

15

## Fire Station Recommendations

**MRI Reviewed the current facilities and the Maguire Group Feasibility Study in order to evaluate and make recommendations for the Replacement of the fire station.**

**Fire Station Facilities support the overall mission of the organization in providing public services.**

**Current Fire Station constructed in the 1950's as a three bay station, single story, with a partial basement. Building is 5,060 Square FT) (First Floor 4,325 SQ FT).**

**Only modification since built was the expansion of bay doors.**

**The Water Street Fire Headquarters no longer provides efficient and effective shelter for fire apparatus and equipment.**

**Modernization and modifications are required in order to accommodate decontamination equipment for protective clothing.**



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. Municipal Resources, Inc. 16

16

**Fire Station Recommendations**

- **Current Facility has no room for expansion, not energy efficient, lacks space on apparatus floors and throughout the facility.**
- **Heating, Electrical, and Plumbing Systems are outdated and out of building codes.**
- **Kitchen facilities old and obsolete**
- **Insufficient Meeting Room Space**



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC.  17

17

**Fire Station Recommendations**



**V-1 MRI recommends that the Fire District continue to move forward with their efforts for the replacement of the Water Street Fire Station. MRI believes that the Maguire Group Feasibility Study dated December 22, 2008 still contains valid assessments and recommendations for a new fire station. Consideration for future needs beyond 10 years should be included in any future planning for a new facility. An example of this would be including dormitory rooms and office space should the district change over to a different staffing scenario.**

**V-2 Given the eleven years since the Maguire Study, MRI recommends that a review and update of the study be conducted in order to affirm the space needs that were proposed in 2008, determine if there are any fire and life safety codes, building codes, safety systems, and technology that has been updated, improved, or replaced. An updated cost estimate should also be obtained again for the changes in construction costs from 2012 (last update to costs from 2008 estimate) until now.**

**V-3 MRI recommends that in anticipation of the potential for a new facility to be constructed and as a stop gap measure to improve safety, accessibility, and mobility around the current fire station apparatus bays, that any obsolete hose, gear, firefighting appliances, SCBA, or other items no longer in use be disposed of.**

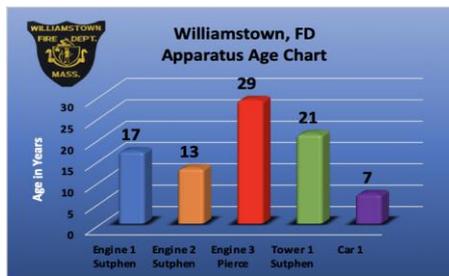
MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC.  18

18

## Fire Apparatus and Equipment

Overall, the Williamstown Fire District fleet appears to be reasonably well-maintained and in serviceable condition despite its *increasing age*. However, one of the departments engines is 29 years old and probably nearing the end of its serviceable life span.

Comparative to other similar size on-call fire service agencies, Williamstown appears to have an older and more utilitarian fleet than apparatus sets in other similar communities. Moving forward the community will need to invest and replace aging apparatus with more capable vehicles that better support the response effort.



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. 19

## Fire Apparatus and Equipment

As noted previously, MRI believes that an Apparatus Replacement Plan should be developed and followed by the Fire District relative to the Fire District's apparatus fleet.

An apparatus replacement plan that forecasts out as far as 20 years will help in determining long term capital financing needs as well as maintaining stable tax rates for the taxpayer rather than spikes in the taxes every few years due to the need to replace apparatus.

Vehicles/Apparatus	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
Car 1 / 2004 Tahoe									Car 1			
Car 2 / 2004 Tahoe (Road)									Car 2			
Car 3 / 2000 Crown Vic					Car 3							
Engine 1 / 1997 Emergency One							Engine 1					
Engine 2 / 1992 KME		Engine 2										
Engine 3 / 1999 Emergency One										Engine 3		
Engine 4 / 1990 KME	Engine 4											
Tanker 1 / 1987			Tanker 1									
Tanker 2 / 1989						Tanker 2						
Ambulance 1 / 2004 Road Rescue									Amb 1			
Ambulance 2 / 1998 Road Rescue		Amb 2										
Ambulance 3 / 2000 Road Rescue				Amb 3								
Rescue 1 / 1989				Rescue 1								
Ladder 2 / 1995 Seecal					Ladder 2							
Forestry 1 / 1965												
Forestry 2 / 2006										Forestry 2		
Forestry 4 / 2002												Forestry 4
Fire Alarm Truck / 1970			Fire Alarm Truck									
Fire Prevention Van / 1996				Fire Van								
Utility Pickup / 1983	Utility Pickup											Utility Pickup

## Fire Apparatus and Equipment Recommendations

- VI-1 MRI recommends the Williamstown Fire District should develop a comprehensive apparatus replacement plan that spans a 20-year period. The plan should include detailed specifications, cost, projected replacement date and any other information that will provide a cyclical road map of the replacement schedule.
- VI-2 MRI recommends that Williamstown Fire District consider the continued replacement of the engine with a “quint” (Figure 48). Fire Departments that have limited manpower to operate apparatus are considering replacing their Engine, Ladders, and Towers with “Quint” fire apparatus.
- VI-3 The Williamstown Fire District should ensure that all fire apparatus pumps are serviced, inspected, and tested at intervals no greater than 12 months apart, in accordance with NFPA Standards.



21

21

## Fire Apparatus and Equipment



### Current Williamstown FD Apparatus Schedule

<u>Apparatus</u>	<u>Model</u>	<u>Delivery Year</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Mileage</u>	<u>Hours on Diesel Engine</u>
Engine 1	Sutphen	2002	17	17,390	1,734
Engine 2	Sutphen	2006	13	19,911	1,694
Engine 3	Pierce	1990	29	10,577	N/A
Tower 1	Sutphen	1998	21	14,109	7,628
Fire Chief's Car	Ford	2012	7	71,375	N/A
		Average Age	17.4	N/A	N/A



Photo by John Gallia www.firenews.org

22

22

## Fire Apparatus and Equipment

A white paper developed by the Fire Apparatus Manufacturer's Association (FAMA) suggests that the front-line lifespan of active duty fire apparatus in a suburban setting ranges from 16 to 19 years, with the possibility of an additional 9 to 10 years in a reserve, or spare status.

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) suggests that the lifespan of a fire pumper should be 20 years, and the lifespan of an aerial ladder should be 25 years. T

The National Fire Protection Association suggests 15 years in front line service with an additional 5 in reserve status.



Engine 1 – 2002  
17 yrs.

Engine 2 – 2006  
13 yrs.

Engine 3 – 1990  
29 yrs.

23

23

## Fire Equipment Recommendations

**VII-8 The Williamstown Fire District should establish a formal replacement plan for equipment.**

**The regular replacement of large cost items such as hose, ladders, PPE, portable radios, AEDs, and even SCBA on an incremental basis will avoid major one-time increases in the annual operating budget where such purchases should be funded. For instance, the hose and ladders on one vehicle can be replaced in one fiscal year, another the following year, etc.**

**The life expectancy of these items can be estimated based on usage and manufacturer's recommendations. Items such as hose and ladders can remain in service indefinitely, provided they continue to successfully pass their annual tests.**



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC.



24

24

## Funding Recommendations

The Williamstown Fire District generates revenue each year which is derived from tax revenue, inspection and permit fees, other income, donations and interest income.

Williamstown Fire District Budget	Revenue
Tax Revenue	\$528,151.00
Other Income	\$ 28,500.00
Interest Income	\$9,600.00
Inspection and Permit Fees	\$6,000.00
Donations	\$500.00
Williamstown Fire District FY2019	\$ 572,751.00

There are several other sources of potential revenue for the Fire Department that the Williamstown Fire District may want to explore and consider implementing.

Among these are increased fire prevention business registration, inspection, and permit fees; billing insurance companies for response to motor vehicle accidents; registration fees for fire alarm systems; and the issuance of penalties for those whose systems generate repeat false alarms.

There are numerous state and federal grant opportunities such as SAFER, Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program, and emergency services related grants also available.

## Summary and Conclusions

**IV-1 The Fire District organizational rank structure utilizes Assistant Chief Engineers as part of the command staff of the Williamstown Fire Department. There are not any other officer ranks below that level, as detailed in the organizational chart. MRI recommends that a review of the current organizational rank structure of the Williamstown Fire Department be conducted in order to assess the need to add to the current rank structure within the Fire District by creating mid-level Company Fire Officer positions at the rank level of Captain and Lieutenant.**

**IV-2 MRI observed that within the group of the Assistant Fire Chief Engineers that there is a long history of service to the Williamstown Fire District and a majority of the Assistant Fire Chief Engineers will soon consider retiring from the Williamstown Fire District.**

**The Assistant Fire Chief Engineer positions provide the Fire Chief with his leadership team in the operation of the Fire District. In interviews with firefighters it was identified as a concern for them also having a potential leadership gap in the near future.**

**MRI recommends that the District develop an officer training program or sponsor individuals at the Massachusetts Fire Academy Fire Officer Courses for those who are interested in becoming a Fire Officer in the future. Concurrent with the development of interested personnel the Fire District should establish qualifications and job descriptions for the Fire Officer positions. This planning should also include succession planning for the Fire Chief's position.**



## Summary and Conclusions



**MRI recognizes and is aware that some of the identified challenges identified in this report are being addressed (or resolved). This management letter serves as a document that can be used in the future to provide a record of past history and therefore those areas are identified within.**

**THANK YOU  
QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?**

MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC.



29