



March 30, 2017

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RE: Fire Service Management Letter

Dear Attorney Wermuth:

The Town of Mendon has contracted with Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI) to develop a management letter that provides the community with an overview and perspective on current issues that are impacting the Mendon Fire Department. Specifically, the Board of Selectmen are concerned about the implications of the ongoing leadership transition within the department, and that the current leadership vacuum may be effecting the department and its operations. There is also significant concern regarding the long-term viability of the department's advanced life support (ALS) emergency medical service (EMS). It is the goal of the town to have a reliable response capability, for both fire and medical emergencies, utilizing the current small career staff to supplement a predominantly on-call organizational configuration.

The goal of our review was to perform an analysis of the department to identify current issues and challenges, as well as potential threats that could frustrate the department's success in the years to come. To accomplish that goal, this management letter is divided into eleven sections as detailed below:

I. OVERVIEW

The Town of Mendon covers 18.3 square miles within Worcester County in Central Massachusetts. According to the 2010 census, the town has a resident population of 5,839. With a population density of 319 persons per square mile, the town is classified as a rural community, which is an accurate classification. The implication of this classification from a fire and emergency services perspective, is an acknowledgement that emergency responses may

take longer due to longer travel distances to reach the scene and transporting patients to the hospital. These longer travel distances also translate into longer response times.

The Mendon Fire Department is nominally a full-service fire/rescue organization which provides fire, rescue - such as vehicle extrication, and emergency medical services at the advanced life support level (ALS) to the community. It currently has an Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating of 5/5Y, which is the mid-point of the scale and commendable for a small community with no municipal water supply. From 2014 through 2016, the department has averaged 776 incidents per year of which an average of 459 (59.1%) were EMS related. The fire department's annual operating budget has recently averaged approximately \$645,000, of which about \$200,000 is offset by revenue generated by EMS third party billing for ambulance transports.

The department is authorized a total of five full-time personnel, although as will be discussed later in this report, at the time of our analysis, there were six full-time personnel on the roster. There is one additional recent hire, who is a per diem paramedic, but not a certified firefighter. There is also a total of ten personnel listed as part-time call firefighters. However, as is often the case with call and volunteer fire departments, only about three or four of these personnel are truly active and respond to calls on a regular basis.

The current command staff of the fire department is comprised solely of the police chief who is serving as the acting fire chief. This has been a long-time practice in Mendon, with the previous director of public safety filling the dual roles of both police and fire chief. The current chief is serving in this role for his management skills, not for operational purposes, as he has no fire or EMS training or background. The only other officers in the department are two assistant fire chiefs, both of whom were on long-term injury leave at the time of this assessment. This situation has created a true leadership and management vacuum within the department.

The department operates from a single fire station located in a converted commercial building at 8 Morrison Drive. The station houses two pumpers, one water tender/pumper combination, one rescue truck, two brush units, and one ambulance.

II. SCOPE OF WORK AND METHODOLOGY

MRI conducted a basic service study of the Mendon Fire Department followed by the development of a management letter. The topics that are addressed in the management letter include:

- A. Identification and inventory of significant issues currently facing the Mendon Fire Department;
- B. Identification of issues related to leadership transition;



- C. Development of a recommended organizational chart for the Mendon Fire Department, including recommendations relative to the number of personnel in each rank;
- D. An evaluation of response times and the number of personnel that respond to each request for service;
- E. Evaluation of current mutual and automatic aid practices utilized by the Mendon Fire Department;
- F. Review of the department's facility and apparatus;
- G. Evaluation of the qualifications, training, and selection of officers;
- H. Evaluation of the department's program for recruitment and retention of on-call personnel;
- I. Recommendations on a process to implement change within the department.

To accomplish these tasks, we employed the following ten methodologies:

- 1. Reviewed pertinent service demand data
- 2. Conducted a review of response times
- 3. Toured the community and reviewed target hazards
- 4. Evaluated fire service facilities and equipment
- 5. Interviewed the town administrator
- 6. Interviewed the police chief/acting fire chief
- 7. Interviewed the fire department command staff
- 8. Interviewed several other members of the fire department
- 9. Reviewed various fire department documents
- 10. Developed a management letter

III. SIGNIFICANT ISSUES CURRENTLY FACING THE MENDON FIRE DEPARTMENT

The emergency service expectations of the Mendon Fire Department by the citizens of the Town of Mendon include the provision of basic fire protection, fire suppression, and emergency medical services provided at the advanced life support level, including patient transport. They also expect delivery of basic rescue services, including vehicle extrication and water rescue, and hazardous materials response to the basic operational level.

Unfortunately, MRI's assessment clearly indicates deficiencies in the department's ability to meet the public's expectations as described above. The following summarizes what we believe are the major (and in several cases immediate) issues that are impacting the Mendon Fire Department's ability to meet those expectations.

1. The number one and most significant issue that is facing the Mendon Fire Department is that the department is currently devoid of any officers to provide critical day-to-day supervision, direction, and oversight. This situation has created a near total leadership vacuum in the department, creating what could be described as a rudderless ship. The police chief is serving as the acting fire chief; however, he does not have the time to exert the necessary direct, daily supervision and leadership over the fire department as well. He is, in essence, trying to keep the department afloat until a new professional fire chief is hired. *The chief has contacted the fire chiefs of several neighboring communities to provide necessary incident management assistance for incidents occurring in Mendon.*
2. The Mendon Fire Department has not had a singularly focused fire chief since 2005. The position has been filled for nearly a dozen years by the town's police chief serving in a dual role. We believe that this situation has deprived the fire department of the unique leadership, direction, and vision necessary for a fire and rescue organization to continue to make positive progress. While there are certainly similarities between the duties and skills necessary to be either a police chief or a fire chief, there are also diametrical differences. The result of this mingling of duties is that we find the Mendon Fire Department's operational readiness is marginal at best.
3. Both assistant fire chiefs are on long-term injury leave resulting from injuries sustained in the line of duty. At the time of this assessment their long-term prognosis and likelihood of being able to return to duty is unknown. Their current, injured on-duty status notwithstanding, the duties of the two assistant chiefs are not currently clearly defined, communication between them appears

to be deficient, and they reportedly do not have a good professional relationship.

4. Both assistant chiefs are members of the union with the “senior” assistant chief who is the fire department’s de facto ranking officer simultaneously serving as the union president. We believe this situation creates a clear conflict of interest, and at best, a situation of divided loyalties. However, in reality, it appears that the loyalty is tilted heavily toward the union rather than the best interests of the town and the fire department.
5. There is an ongoing and very contentious relationship between the senior assistant chief and the town that is certainly negatively impacting fire department operations and morale. Competing investigations, one officially authorized by the board of selectmen, the other unauthorized by the then police/fire chief, were conducted regarding the allegations that led to this dysfunctional relationship. Predictably, the two investigations arrived at very different conclusions. However, inexplicably, the unauthorized investigation by the then police/fire chief was used to fully exonerate the member, much to the dismay of the town’s governing body. This situation must be resolved for the department to move forward!
6. Although the department is licensed to provide ALS ambulance service, and operating the ambulance is supposed to be the primary responsibility of the career staff, only three of the six current career personnel are licensed paramedics, and two of those (the two assistant chiefs) are on extended injury leave. Only two of the current call personnel are even certified to the EMT-basic level. The department’s ALS license was recently renewed, but the state inspectors did express concern about several facets of the department’s current staffing levels and operations. The ability to sustain a credible EMS service long-term at either the advanced, or even basic, life support levels with these staffing challenges is a serious concern.
7. A limited number of department personnel have apparently ever completed formal recruit training and are certified at the Firefighter I/II level, the most basic of firefighter certifications. Although other members of the department may have participated in some regionally based basic training, apparently, they either did not complete the training or did not obtain their certification. The lack of certification by personnel serving as firefighters raises serious questions about what actions they are trained and qualified to perform. It also presents serious potential liability to the town.

8. The department has no designated training officer, no real formal in-service training program, and does not conduct any type of periodic basic skills evaluations or assessments.
9. There is no formal testing, assessment, or screening process in place for new members of the department, either career or call. Personnel are not subjected to a medical evaluation, drug screening, or a psychological evaluation before being appointed to the department. By failing to perform the standard Massachusetts Initial Medical Evaluation for public safety officers (firefighters and police officers), and not requiring candidates to submit to the commonwealth's established strength and agility test, the town has assumed that appointees are free from any pre-existing medical condition and that he or she possesses the required strength and agility to perform the essential functions of firefighter. This assumption of risk could become extremely costly to the town should the firefighter (either a call or career employee) claim to be injured or disabled in the performance of his or her duties.
10. There is almost no one currently within the department that possesses the requisite training, certification, and experience to be considered qualified to be an officer.
11. There is a significant difference in the service level provided by the department between 11:00 PM and 7:00 AM. During this time, the station is not normally staffed as it is from 7:00 AM to 11:00 PM. A two-person-duty crew is normally on standby duty and compensated to provide coverage during this time. However, they are not required to stay at the station, so response times are going to be extended significantly. In addition, there is no requirement for a paramedic to be one of the personnel staffing these shifts, which can reduce the EMS level from ALS to BLS (in this case, an ALS unit would also be dispatched from a neighboring community if the nature of the incident dictated it).

IV. LEADERSHIP TRANSITION ISSUES

The leadership transition issues facing the Mendon Fire Department start with the fact that the department has not really had singularly focused leadership for more than a decade. This has created a situation where the department is continuing to function through a perceived or perhaps traditional mission that is a product of the normal sense of duty, responsibility, and service, that is the very hallmark of the fire and emergency services, and a sense of community pride and involvement, both proud traditions, rather than a clear sense of common vision for the future of the Mendon Fire Department.



The Mendon Fire Department does not have a succession plan in place. This fact has contributed to the current leadership vacuum within the department. In addition, with only a handful of members of the department even qualified at the basic Firefighter I/II level, there is very likely no one truly qualified to serve as an officer of any rank, let alone the chief of an organization that needs a strong infusion of technical knowledge, management experience, and leadership skills. The town leadership needs to remain aware of the fact that the impending hire of a new chief can create a heightened level of anxiety and stress among members of the organization.

It is our belief that the Mendon Fire Department requires the installation of strong leadership and new vision from outside of the department. Each day that passes without it makes the climb that the department will need to make more challenging. The lack of direct, in station supervision of the current staff has created a low (or at times even a no) productivity work environment that needs to be reversed. The lack of direct supervision is evidenced in the cleanliness of the station and apparatus, the lack of training, and the general lack of productivity that the team observed among the on-duty career staff.

The Town of Mendon will need to very carefully examine their options for making this transition successful, and selecting the department's next leader. It is our opinion that in addition to the requisite education and experience, the successful candidate will need to have excellent and proven, leadership, management, and communications skills to be able to articulate his/her vision for the department moving forward; ensure that all personnel are working in unison toward common goals to achieve that vision; and in general, to navigate through the choppy waters that major transition brings to any organization. Previous experience managing a combination full-time/call fire department that provides EMS services, particularly during a major transition, will be a definite plus.

In order to stress the fact that the Mendon Fire Department will continue to be primarily a call department, supplemented by a small career staff, the department's number two position should be designated a call position. The problem in Mendon is that there is currently no one qualified to fill this, or any other, officer positions. It is going to take time to develop personnel internally to competently fill these positions. In the interim, call personnel recruitment efforts should perhaps focus on personnel who either live in Mendon or surrounding communities, who can fill some of these key positions.

Finally, there is the toxic, dysfunctional relationship that exists between the Town of Mendon and the senior assistant chief. Regardless of what the root cause of this ongoing dispute is, we strongly believe that it is having an adverse impact on the fire department. It is imperative that we stress that we are not making any value judgements on the merits of the dispute, or are in any way taking sides. We are merely offering an opinion of what we perceive, from a leadership perspective, is in the best interests of the Town of Mendon and the Mendon Fire Department.



This type of situation can often create a divided organization as various “adversaries” seek to increase the number of personnel they perceive as loyal to them and thus against “the enemy”. The longer the situation continues to exist, the more difficult it will be for the new chief to reverse and repair the damage that is probably being done on a daily basis. In addition, we are concerned about the potential for the new chief and his/her authority to possibly be undermined should this situation still exist once they take command of the department. Regrettably, the relationship has deteriorated to the point through competing accusations and a lack of respect and trust, that it is probably irreconcilably destroyed. Thus, unfortunately we fail to envision any scenario where a healthy, productive relationship is restored between the two parties.

V. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organizational structure of any organization or entity, whether public or private, establishes and illustrates the important hierarchical relationships between various personnel and supervisors/subordinates within the organization that allow it to function properly, operate effectively, and efficiently in its daily operations or the pursuit of its mission. It also helps to clearly define the organizational chain of command from top to bottom, an especially important consideration in a quasi-military public safety organization, such as the fire department where everyone from the highest rank to the lowest is subject to receiving orders and, with the exception of the lowest rank, also issues them. Effective communications in any organization, but especially public safety agencies, are essential, and a cohesive chain of command allows everyone to know exactly who they report to and/or who reports to them.

The current Mendon Fire Department’s organizational structure nominally consists of a fire chief, two assistant fire chiefs, and firefighters, both career and on-call. This organizational structure has never been approved, or adopted formally, in any way by the Board of Selectmen, town meeting, or bylaw. For the most part, it apparently just evolved over time.

The position of fire chief was held for many years by the town’s public safety director, who also served concurrently as the police chief. He had no fire service background. The position of acting fire chief is currently being held by the police chief pending recruitment of a new professional fire chief. There is a subtle distinction between the two assistant chiefs with one being designated “senior”. The senior assistant chief is reportedly responsible for operations, while the other is responsible for EMS and administration. However, none of these duties and responsibilities have been formally established or placed into writing. At the time of this assessment, both assistant chiefs were on long-term, job related injury leave. The prognosis for either’s return to active duty is uncertain.

In our opinion, the current organizational structure is not consistent with what would normally be found in an organization such as Mendon, and is not conducive to effective, or efficient,



operations. For a small organization, Mendon has too many chiefs, and at the same time no lower ranking, non-chief level officers (captains and/or lieutenants). There are also no officers at all within the call force, a fact that in all probability, contributes to a sense they may be viewed as second class members of the department.

Traditionally, and in most fire service organizations, company level officers (captains and lieutenants) are working supervisors. They form an integral part of their company, apparatus, or unit, and it is often necessary for them to assume hands-on involvement in operations while simultaneously providing oversight and direction to their personnel. During structure fires and other dangerous technical operations, it is imperative that these officers accompany, and operate with, their crew to monitor conditions, provide situation reports, and assess progress toward incident mitigation. During structure fires, they must be capable of operating inside of the fire building with their crews, the most dangerous place on the incident scene. It is imperative that they are highly qualified and experienced, and can command the confidence of their personnel. It is also important that personnel who are serving as chief level officers fully understand and are experienced at these skills and tasks before assuming greater responsibility. While we are cognizant that any type of organizational hierarchy is not always going to line up perfectly on emergency incidents, we believe that the organizational structure we recommend will provide increased operational effectiveness, safety, and improved accountability.

Recommendation

The Town of Mendon should create a significantly revised organizational table for the Mendon Fire Department to clearly delineate the chain of command and make it more effective and efficient (Figure 1). Bargaining will be necessary to implement many of these changes.

Recommendation

To stress the fact that the Mendon Fire Department remains primarily a call department, supplemented by a small career staff, the department's second tier position, a deputy fire chief, should be designated as a call position.

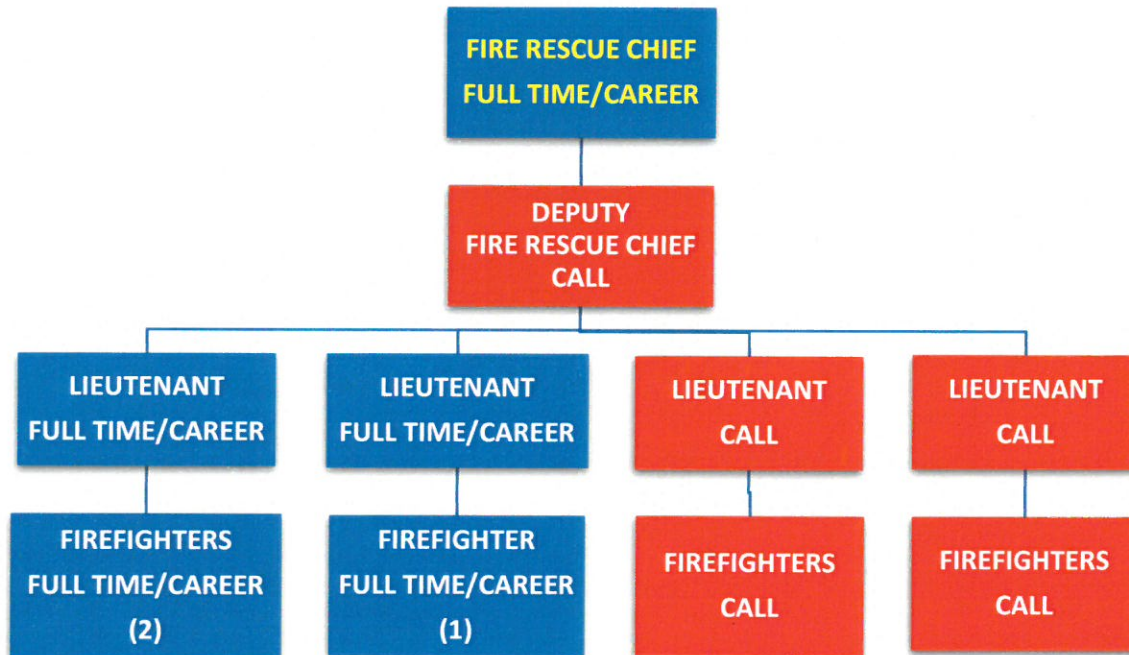
Recommendation

The career personnel who would be responsible for their shifts should be reclassified as lieutenants. The shift schedule should be adjusted so that day each week where there is only a single career member on-duty, supplemented by a call member, should be during the week so the fire chief can fill in as the second member of the crew, from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM, and then be replaced by a call member. The fire chief can also serve as a fill-in when other career personnel are off on various types of leave.

Recommendation

In addition to their normal emergency scene operational duties and station management responsibilities, all officers should have one or more administrative duties/responsibilities to assist the fire chief with the department's overall management.

FIGURE 1: PROPOSED MENDON FIRE DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



Organizational Structure Notes:

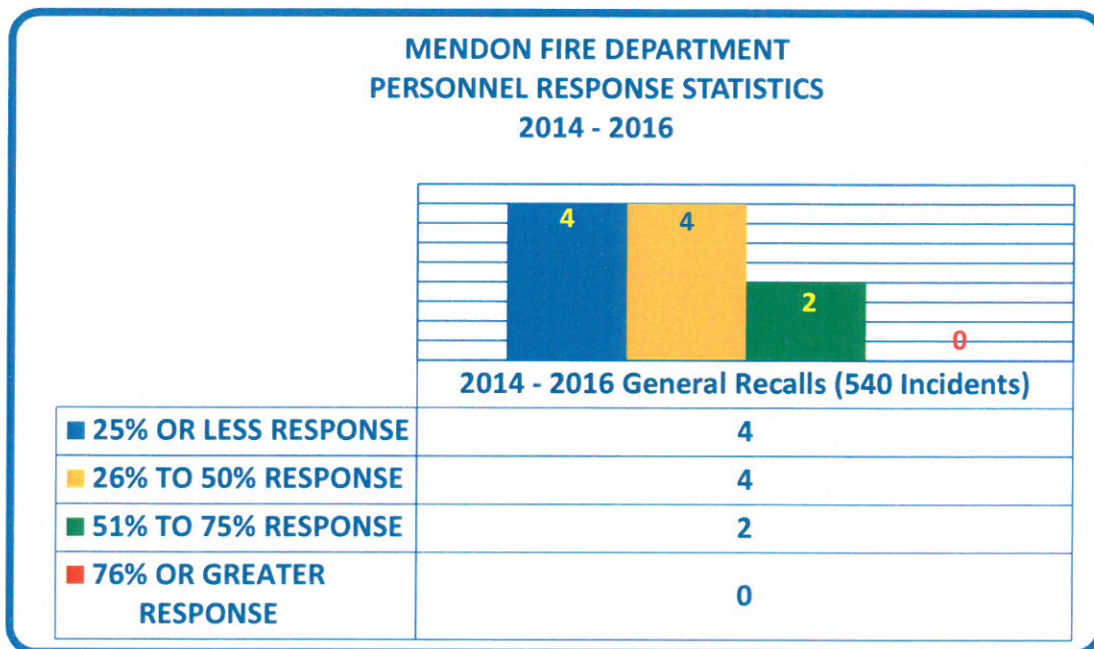
- Fire Rescue Chief (Career) – 1
- Deputy Fire Rescue Chief (Call) – 1
- Fire Rescue Lieutenant (Career) – 2
- Fire Rescue Lieutenant (Call) – 2
 - ✓ The number of call lieutenants should be increased to 3 once the call membership exceeds 20 personnel.
- Firefighter (Career) – 3
- Firefighter (Call) – 25 – 30
 - ✓ Development of a call force of 25 to 30 fully trained, certified, and active members should be the goal over a 3-year period.
- Career staff maintain current work schedule of 16 hour days. However, the day each week when only one career member is scheduled to work along with a call member should be moved from the weekend to during the week so the fire rescue chief can fill the second position during his/her working hours.

VI. INCIDENT RESPONSE TIMES AND PERSONNEL TURNOUT

By definition, the Mendon Fire Department is a combination fire department. The department does utilize a small career staff whose primary responsibility is to provide timely and guaranteed response of the ambulance during their assigned duty hours. However, these personnel are also cross-utilized for fire duty and are designated as firefighters.

At the time that this assessment was completed, the Mendon Fire Department's call firefighter roster listed just ten active personnel. However, two of these personnel had been moved from call to career status, leaving just eight remaining personnel. Even in a small town such as Mendon, the size of the department from a call personnel perspective, is not going to be adequate to handle the expected emergency work load. In addition, in almost any call/volunteer emergency services organization there is going to be a percentage of members whose names still appear on the "active" roster, yet they no longer truly are, or are minimally so, for a variety of reasons. Factor in that most members of the department have a primary job, other than the fire department, that probably limits their availability to respond mostly during normal business hours, and the current staffing picture becomes much more of a concern.

FIGURE 2



Note: Percentages for personnel who were not call members the entire time were prorated.

Of the ten personnel listed on the roster, the highest responder was present at 57% of the general recalls, or 308 of the 540. This equates to about two incidents per week. One other member responded to slightly less, at 302 incidents (55.9%). Four personnel responded to between 26% (140 incidents) and 50% (270 incidents). Two of these personnel responded to excess of 40% (216 incidents). Four personnel responded to less than 25% of the incidents that occurred during their time with the department. These statistics tend to support the idea that the department currently has between four and six truly active members (Figure 2).

In 2016, the Mendon Fire Department dispatched 163 general recalls where all members of the department were paged out for an incident. These incidents can include various fire related incidents, motor vehicle crashes, and serious emergency medical situations. On average, each recall resulted in the response of 6.5 personnel (not including the 2 on-duty members), 3.5 of the responders were off-duty career staff, and 3 responders were on-call members. There were no general recalls that zero personnel responded to. The number of personnel who responded ranged from a low of just one member, to a high of nine personnel. Although the numbers were slightly lower during the day, it did not appear that there was the large fluctuation in the number of personnel who responded between daytime and nights/weekends.

From the perspective of effective emergency response, there are three main factors that are used to help determine the deployment of resources: response time, travel distance, and call volume. For most evaluations, response time is the most critical factor; an important measuring instrument to determine how well a fire department or EMS provider is currently performing, to help identify response trends, and to predict future operational needs. Getting emergency assistance to the scene of a 9-1-1 caller in the quickest time possible may be critical to the survival of the patient and/or successful mitigation of the incident. Achieving the quickest and safest response times possible should be a fundamental goal of every fire department and EMS provider. It is not just a cliché that during critical life threatening situations, minutes and even seconds truly do count.

Structural firefighting has become far more challenging and dangerous in the last thirty years. A fire can easily double in size and intensity every 30 seconds. If firefighters cannot arrive in a timely manner and attack the fire quickly, a strong possibility exists that a dangerous flashover (simultaneous ignition of the all combustible materials in a room) will occur. Flashover can occur within five to seven minutes of fire ignition, and is one of the most dangerous events that a firefighter, or trapped civilians, can face. When a flashover occurs, initial firefighting forces are generally overwhelmed and will require significantly more resources to effect fire control and extinguishment.

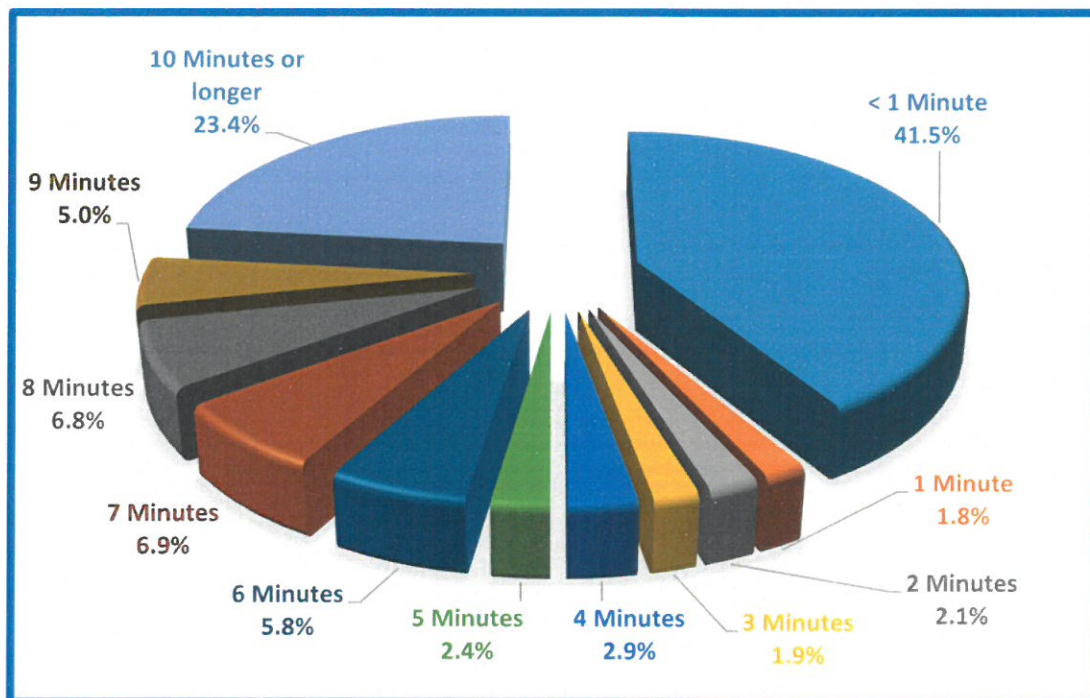
Heart attack and stroke victims require rapid intervention and care, and transport to a medical facility. The longer the time duration without care, the less likely the patient is to fully recover. Numerous studies have shown that irreversible brain damage can occur if the brain is deprived of oxygen for more than four minutes. In addition, the potential for successful resuscitation



during cardiac arrest decreases exponentially with each passing minute that cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or cardiac defibrillation is delayed.

The Mendon Fire Department does not have a formal or established Standard of Cover¹ (SOC) for their district. This is not unusual for a smaller department. An analysis of the Mendon Fire Department's incident response times (based upon data provided to us by the Mendon Police Department) for fire related incidents from 2014 through 2016, indicated that during that three-year period, the department responded to a total of 1,106 fire related incidents, an average of 369 per year. During that time, this data indicates that the first unit arrived on location within five minutes of dispatch 52.6% of the time. However, the data we reviewed indicated that for 459 of the incidents, or 41.5%, the response time from dispatch to arrival on scene was less than one minute. **We question the accuracy of times that would indicate an almost immediate response to such a high percentage of incidents and believe that further investigation into this anomaly should be initiated.** Looked at from the opposite direction, from 2014 through 2016, 23.4% of fire related incidents took longer than ten minutes for the first unit to arrive on location (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: INCIDENT RESPONSE TIMES – FIRE RELATED - 2014 - 2016



¹ The Commission on Fire Accreditation, International defines "Standards of Response Coverage" (SOC) as being those adopted, written policies and procedures that determine the distribution, concentration and reliability of fixed and mobile response forces for fire, emergency medical services, hazardous materials and other forces of technical response including defining baseline emergency response performance standards.

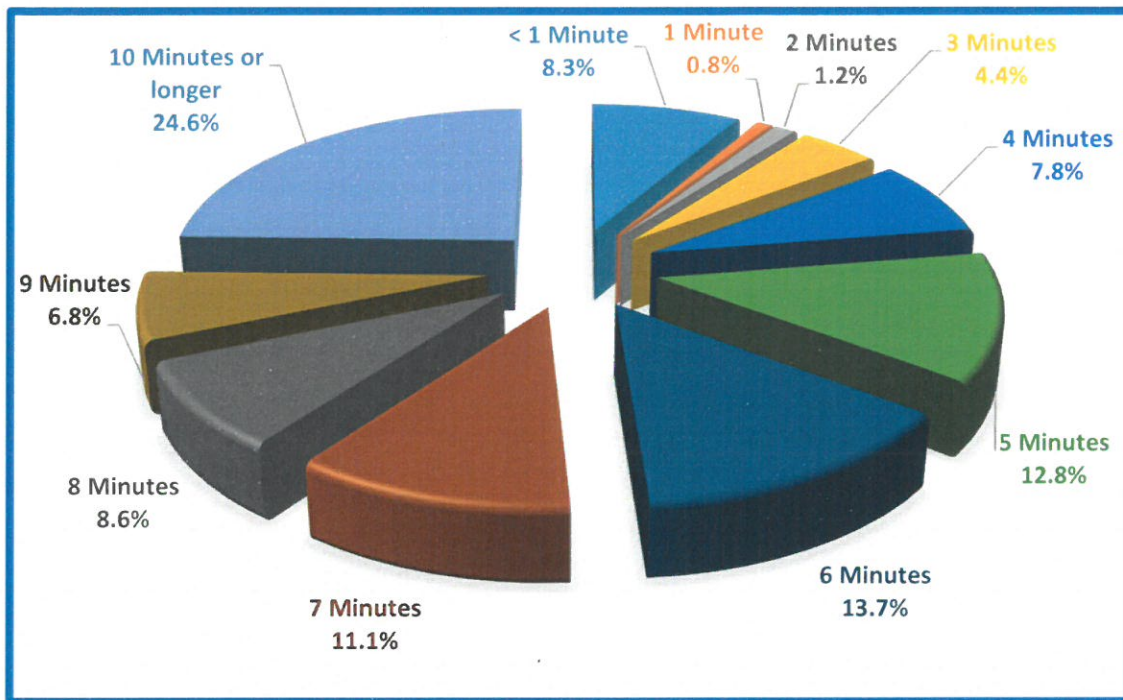
For EMS incidents, nationally the standard of care based on stroke and cardiac arrest protocols is to have a unit on scene at a medical emergency within six minutes from receipt of the 9-1-1 call. Paragraph 4.1.2.1(4) of NFPA 1710², which would be applicable to Mendon Fire Department EMS operations since they are primarily provided by in station, career personnel, recommends that for EMS incidents, a unit with first responder or higher level trained personnel and equipped with an AED, should arrive within four minutes of response (five minutes of dispatch of the call), and an Advanced Life Support (ALS) unit should arrive on scene within eight minutes (ten minutes of call receipt. Paragraph 4.1.2.2 recommends the establishment of a 90% performance objective for these response times. CAAS³ recommends that an ambulance arrive on scene within seven minutes, fifty-nine seconds (00:07:59) of dispatch.

An analysis of the Mendon Fire Department's incident response times (based upon data provided to us by the Mendon Police Department) for EMS related incidents from 2014 through 2016, indicated that during that three-year period, the department responded to a total of 1537 fire related incidents, an average of 512 per year. During that time, this data indicates that the first unit arrived on location within five minutes of dispatch 35.3%% of the time. Looked at from the opposite direction, from 2014 through 2016, 24.6% of EMS related incidents took longer than ten minutes for the first unit to arrive on location (Figure 4).

² NFPA 1710, *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*, 2014 edition (National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA), [outlines organization and deployment of operations by career and primarily career fire departments.](#)

³ *The Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services (CAAS) is an independent commission that established a comprehensive series of standards for the ambulance service industry.*

FIGURE 4: INCIDENT RESPONSE TIMES – EMS RELATED - 2014 - 2016



While based on a much smaller sample, for the period from June 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016, the Mendon Fire Department responded to a total of 342 incidents, with an overall average response time of seven minutes, thirty-five seconds (00:07:35).

An area where we have even greater concern regarding response times is during the hours from 11:00 PM and 7:00 AM when the career staff is not on-duty. During this time, emergency response coverage is provided by a duty crew where two members are compensated for being on-call and available for responses. However, these personnel do not need to be available in the station or even within the borders of Mendon. In addition, there is a lack of any procedures regarding this program that specify duties and responsibilities and/or prohibited activities.

Although the number of incidents during this time is relatively low, constituting between 12.3% and 14.9% of annual incidents, data provided to us by the Mendon Police Department shows that response times are much higher than would be desired (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: AVERAGE RESPONSE TIMES – 11:00 PM – 7:00 AM

YEAR	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	AVERAGE RESPONSE TIME
2014	54	17.6 Minutes
2015	73	14.7 Minutes
2016	64	17 Minutes

From September through December 2016, the Mendon Fire Department responded to 15 EMS incidents during the overnight hours. The elapsed time from when the incident was dispatched to when the ambulance was responding ranged from a low of one minute to a high of thirteen minutes. The average time was about nine minutes, thirty seconds (00:09:30). The time for the unit to actually arrive on location after time of dispatch, ranged from six minutes to nineteen minutes, with the average being fourteen minutes. The Town of Mendon needs to decide if these types of extended response times are acceptable, and if not, consider options for improving them.

The incident reporting system/data base (Pamet) currently utilized by the Mendon Police and Fire Departments apparently does not have the capability to extract certain response data, particularly on the fire and EMS side. This is partially because of the system being very police centric. However, the town has never purchased administrative models that are available for the fire data base that would probably make retrieving and analyzing data easier.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should make it a priority to improve its first unit on scene response times, including the adoption of a SOC, for the town. The SOC should be based upon a hybrid of the NFPA 1710/1720 and CAAS recommendations.

Recommendation

With Mendon covering only 18 square miles, the Mendon Fire Department should adopt standard of cover benchmarks to have the first unit responding to emergency incidents within one minute of dispatch (career/staffed station), and have the first unit on scene within eight minutes after responding to all types of calls, 90% of the time.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department needs to examine and consider all options for providing coverage and significantly improving response times during the overnight hours from 11:00 PM to 7:00 AM. From a realistic perspective, any option that does not have personnel on standby, in the station, is going to significantly increase response times.

Recommendation

The Town of Mendon should purchase the administrative modules that accompany the fire department data base to allow the better extraction and analysis of important response time data and other necessary information.

VII. AUTOMATIC AND MUTUAL AID PRACTICES

Paragraph 4.1, *Fire Suppression Organization* in NFPA 1720⁴ states, fire suppression operations shall be organized to ensure that the fire department's fire suppression capability includes sufficient personnel, equipment, and other resources to deploy fire suppression resources effectively, efficiently, and safely. Paragraph 4.2.2, *Community Risk Management*, states the number and types of units assigned to respond to a reported incident shall be determined by risk analysis and/or pre-fire planning.

At the time of this study, when a call was received reporting any type of a fire/emergency incident in a structure (smoke/fire in the building, interior gas leak, etc.), regardless of size, the Mendon Fire Department is for the most part dispatched alone for the incident. The only automatic aid requested at the time of dispatch is a mutual aid ladder truck since Mendon does not have one.

While Mendon utilizes a five-alarm box alarm/run card system⁵ (after the fourth alarm all further mutual aid requests are handled through Massachusetts Fire District 7 communications in Southbridge) it does not theoretically specify the initial dispatch of a certain number of resources, i.e. engines, ladders, chiefs, etc., at the time of first dispatch. The number of apparatus and personnel who respond initially would be determined solely by the number of call firefighters who were available at that time and who responded. The decision on whether to request additional resources to respond is made on a case by case basis by the highest-ranking officer responding, based upon information they may be receiving while en route and/or upon conditions encountered upon their arrival on the scene. This procedure is a concern in that it results in delays in the dispatch and response of additional needed mutual aid resources who may be faced with limited staffing, travel distance, and response time issues of their own. With a roster of just ten call personnel, about 50% of whom are active, the result is that from a practical operational stand point it can significantly impact the ability of the department to quickly mitigate the incident, resulting in potentially increased fire damage and loss.

⁴ NFPA 1720, *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments*, 2014 edition (National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA) outlines organization and deployment of operations by volunteer/call, and primarily volunteer/call fire departments.

⁵ Mutual aid resources are available throughout the commonwealth through the Massachusetts Fire Service Deployment System.



The operations necessary to successfully extinguish a structure fire, and do so effectively, efficiently, and safely, requires a carefully coordinated, and controlled, plan of action, where certain operations, such as venting ahead of the advancing interior hose line(s), must be carried out with a high degree of precision and timing. Multiple operations, frequently where seconds count, such as search and rescue operations and trying to cut off a rapidly advancing fire, must also be conducted simultaneously. If there are not enough personnel on the incident initially to perform all of the critical tasks, some will, out of necessity, be delayed. This can result in an increased risk of serious injury, or death, to building occupants and firefighters, and increased property damage.

At the time of this assessment Mendon does not have any minimum staffing requirements for their apparatus so vehicles can respond with just one or two personnel rather than a much more desirable minimum of three or the recommended four. It is our opinion that Mendon, with their current personnel resources, will rarely be able to get either sufficient apparatus or firefighters to the scene of a significant incident without turning to their neighboring departments for assistance. Paragraph 4.7.3 of NFPA 1720 states, the fire department shall be allowed to use established automatic aid or mutual aid agreements to comply with the requirements of Section 4.7, *Sustained Firefighting Operations*. Paragraph 4.3.5, *Staffing and Deployment* states, standard response assignments and procedures, including mutual aid response and mutual aid agreements predetermined by the location and nature of the reported incident, shall regulate the dispatch of companies, response groups, and command officers to fires and other emergency incidents.

It is important to note that the acting fire chief has met with neighboring fire chiefs requesting their assistance with incident management during this time of transition. Given the current injury leave status of both assistant chiefs, and the absence of any other officers in the department, asking the neighboring chiefs to provide immediate response and assistance to any serious incident will be of critical importance in providing the proper level of incident management.

Recommendation

In consultation and cooperation with its neighboring departments, the Mendon Fire Department should enter into formal automatic aid agreements that specifies the number and types of resources that should be dispatched immediately to various types of reported emergencies, such as structure fires. These recommendations should be based upon a community-wide risk management process and/or pre-fire/incident plans.

Recommendation

Although more stringent than the requirements found in Table 4.3.2 of NFPA 1720 for rural communities, through the utilization of automatic aid agreements with neighboring communities, the Mendon Fire Department should consider the adoption of an SOC with the goal of attempting to have at least 16 personnel on the scene of any reported structure fire within 14 minutes.



Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should formalize short-term automatic/mutual aid agreements that allow for qualified command staff to assume operational incident control of emergency incidents in Mendon while reporting to the acting fire chief.

VIII. FACILITY AND APPARATUS

FIRE STATION FACILITY

Fire and EMS stations are a critical community asset. The station facilities of a modern fire and EMS department are designed to do much more than simply provide a garage for apparatus and a place for firefighters and EMS personnel to wait for a call. Well-designed fire and EMS facilities enable staff to perform their duties effectively, efficiently, and safely.

The current Mendon Fire Department station is a building that was originally built in the early 1990s as a light industrial or commercial building. The Town of Mendon acquired it in 2008 to convert to a facility for the fire department. The fire department moved into this facility in May 2008. This facility replaced the fire station located on Main Street near the town center, which was part of the municipal complex.

The station is built of Type II, non-combustible construction. It consists of four apparatus bays, three of which are double deep in length. The fourth bay is only single deep, as support and a stairway for a second-floor addition occupies the remainder of the space. The first floor administrative and crew part of the building, consists of a reception area, two offices (one for each assistant fire chief), a large general use office for on-duty personnel, a combination conference/training room/EOC, a small kitchen, one bathroom, and one shower. Neither the bathroom, nor the shower, is gender specific.

A single stairway leads up to the second floor of the building, which was converted from a tool cage used by a previous tenant. The second-floor area consists of a small day room for on-duty personnel, and two bunkrooms, each with two bunks. Despite the single exit condition, the study team was informed that the work was apparently completed with permits being issued and inspections being performed.

The building is equipped with an emergency generator. It is also outfitted with a source capture vehicle exhaust extraction system.

Although the MRI team believes that the current facility does, and can continue, to meet the needs of the department, we do have a number of concerns about this building. These range in severity from significant to minor, and include, but are not limited to:



1. The station is not equipped with an automatic fire suppression (sprinkler) system. It is equipped with a limited automatic fire alarm system. However, the system is not monitored, so it only sounds in the station itself. It does not transmit an alarm to either the dispatch center, or a central monitoring station, meaning that a fire that starts when the building is unoccupied, will not be reported until someone physically discovers it.
 - ✓ The smoke detectors in the second-floor bunk rooms were observed to be hanging down from the ceiling.
 - ✓ It could not be determined if the alarm system had been tested and inspected, or was even in working order.
2. There is only one stairway from the first floor to the second-floor day room and bunk area, and consequently there is only one means of egress for personnel who may be relaxing or sleeping in this area in the event of a fire or other emergency. This maybe a life safety or fire code issue. The study team was also informed that concern over this issue is a major reason why duty crew personnel do not staff/sleep in the station during the overnight hours.
3. The facility is not in compliance with the requirements and recommendations of **NFPA 1500: Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program** (National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA, 2013 edition), which provides requirements for facility safety, maintenance, and inspections.
4. The facility is not in compliance with the requirements and recommendations of **NFPA 1581: Standard on Fire Department Infection Control Program** (National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA), which has requirements to provide minimum criteria for infection control in the fire station.
5. Evidence of significant roof leaks was observed over the second-floor day and bunk rooms areas.
6. Although the apparatus bays are adequate in size for a modern fire station, they were very cluttered with disorganized storage. It did not look like they had been swept or cleaned in a considerable period of time.

7. The station sits in a dead-end cul-de-sac in a small industrial park. The location of the station is not identified in any way on the streets leading into it, making it virtually impossible for anyone to find. In addition, the building itself is not identified in front as a fire station. There is no sign in front of the building that identifies it as such. The only indication it is a station is found on the side, over the apparatus doors, but to see this identification a person would need to actually be in the fire department parking lot.

Recommendation

In consultation with the town's building code official, a second approved means of egress from the second-floor crew quarters of the station should be installed/constructed (such as a code-compliant exterior fire escape) to provide protection for second floor occupants in the event of a fire or other emergency on the first floor.

Recommendation

The single enclosed stairway in the station should be inspected by the town's building code official to ensure that it possess an appropriate fire rating for a means of egress.

Recommendation

The existing automatic fire alarm system should be upgraded to include appropriate heat and smoke detection devices throughout the entire station. This system should not only be equipped with both audible and visible warning devices, it should automatically transmit an alarm to either the police dispatch center, or an approved central monitoring station.

Recommendation

Long-term consideration should be given to equipping the station with a complete, automatic fire sprinkler system for the protection of the occupants, buildings, and equipment.

Recommendation

The facility roof should be inspected for leaks and repairs made as necessary.

Recommendation

A proper decontamination area should be constructed for both personnel and equipment.

Recommendation

The station requires significant housekeeping and storage attention. While storage space is admittedly at a premium, the study team noted significant amounts of tools and equipment laying haphazardly throughout the station, particularly the apparatus bays. Equipment that is obsolete, broken, or no longer used, should be properly disposed of, which will free additional storage space. Arranging storage in an orderly manner rather than haphazard will also maximize the use of available space.

Recommendation

The front of the station should be outfitted with a sign, visible upon approach, that prominently identifies the building as a fire and rescue facility. Signs should also be placed on Providence Street and at the intersection of Morrison Drive, that clearly indicate the way to the fire and rescue station. This is a recommendation that could be accomplished quickly and relatively inexpensively.

APPARATUS

The geography, infrastructure, hazards, and construction features within the community all play a major role in determining the composition of each department's unique and individualized apparatus fleet and equipment inventory. Mendon is primarily a rural community with the expected limited fire potential such communities usually present. However, new single family dwellings are nearly all built utilizing lightweight construction which presents many safety hazards to firefighters. These factors, as well as projected future needs, must be taken into consideration when specifying and purchasing apparatus and equipment. Every effort should be made to make new apparatus as versatile and multi-functional/capable as is possible and practical.

A review of the Mendon Fire Department's apparatus fleet in terms of age, condition, and capabilities finds an aging fleet, although overall it appears to be well maintained and in good condition. The department's pumpers are fourteen and twenty-three years old. The rescue truck, which is licensed as a Type 5 ambulance, is sixteen years old. The two brush trucks are sixteen and thirty-three years old. Few department members can drive or operate the latter unit. The department's most heavily used vehicle, its single ambulance, is nearly eight years old. The newest piece of apparatus is Tanker 1, which is five years old. The study team did note that the pump on this vehicle is undersized by current standards and just barely achieves "rated" capacity. The truck also has very little equipment of any type on it.

For its staffing and normal expected operational needs, the Mendon Fire Department has a too large and specialized fleet. Although this situation is not necessarily unusual in volunteer and call fire departments, we believe that the department, and community, would be better served long-term by somewhat rightsizing and consolidating the current apparatus fleet into one with more operationally diverse capabilities.

When compared to national averages, a community the size of Mendon would typically have the following resources to conduct effective fire service operations:

- 2 pumpers, one of which would be a fire/rescue pumper
- 1 water tender/pumper
- 1 wildland suppression vehicle
- 2 ambulances (1 primary and 1 backup)
- 1 fire station

A fire/rescue pumper, or squad, combines the functions of an engine (pump, hose, water) with vehicle extrication, and possibly other basic special hazards/operations (technical rescue/hazardous materials) tools and equipment. It is our opinion that this concept of operations should be adopted, and in fact, be the basis of Mendon's rescue operations which are almost exclusively going to be related to vehicle rescue and extrication operations. There is no need for a separate dedicated rescue truck in a community such as Mendon.

The MRI study team has concerns over the fact that Mendon has only one ambulance. In any community, there are going to be occasions where there are simultaneous, or at least overlapping incidents, or situations, even relatively minor motor vehicle accidents, where more than one ambulance may be required. In each of these cases, mutual aid would need to be summoned to Mendon to handle the second incident. The odds of simultaneous or overlapping incidents increases in a community such as Mendon, where every transport to the hospital will take time by virtue of the fact that all the local hospitals are located in neighboring communities, some with extended travel distances that lengthen turn-around time. This is especially true when road conditions may be hazardous, particularly during the winter. In addition, anytime the ambulance must be taken out of service for routine maintenance or minor repairs, the department has no transport vehicle to respond with, again forcing a reliance on mutual aid. Any type of significant mechanical problem, or an accident involving the single ambulance, could effectively render the department's most important, and frequently used resource, out of service for an extended period of time.

With the current ambulance nearing eight years old, the need for a replacement is fast approaching. Long-term, the town should give serious consideration to maintaining two ambulances in its emergency vehicle fleet. One would function as the primary response unit, while one would serve as a back-up and second unit when needed. Based upon usage, a new ambulance should be purchased every seven to ten years. As a new vehicle is placed in service the current second unit/spare could be removed from service while the current primary unit is moved to second unit/spare status.

Recommendation

When the time comes for replacement, Engine 4, 1994 HME/Central States pumper, and Rescue 1 should be combined into a versatile, multi-purpose fire/rescue pumper as part of a process to right size the department's apparatus fleet.

Recommendation

Consideration should be given to removing Brush 1, the 1984 AM General/Fire One brush unit, from service.

Recommendation

In order for the Mendon Fire Department to continue to be able to provide service to the community if there are simultaneous or overlapping incidents, multiple patients from a single incident, or when the ambulance is out of service for maintenance or repair, a second ambulance should be added to the fleet. With the current ambulance nearly eight years old and still in good condition, we recommend that the town include funding for the purchase of a new ambulance in the FY 2018 capital budget at town meeting. By the time this new ambulance is delivered, the current vehicle will be ten years old and can be moved back into the role of a reliable second unit.

IX. QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING, AND SELECTION OF OFFICERS

Training is, without question, one of the three most important functions that a fire department should be performing on a regular basis; the others being response to emergency incidents and fire prevention activities. One could even make a credible argument that training is, in some ways, more important than emergency responses, because a department that is not well trained, prepared, and operationally ready, will be unable to effectively, efficiently, correctly, and safely, fulfill its emergency response obligations and mission. A comprehensive, diverse, and ongoing training program is absolutely critical to the fire department's level of success. The need for well-trained officers, who may be faced with serious life and death decisions that must be made quickly and correctly are absolutely mission critical to any emergency services provider's ability to perform their designated mission(s).

Professional development for fire department personnel, especially officers, is also an important part of overall training. There are numerous excellent opportunities for officers to attend training on a wide range of topics outside of Mendon, including the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in Stow, and the Volunteer Incentive Program (VIP) at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. All state sponsored fire academy courses are offered without charge to local municipalities. Annual events, such as the Fire Department Instructor's Conference (FDIC) in Indianapolis and the Firehouse Expo, provide a wide range classroom training, as well as extensive hands on evolutions. Beyond the practical benefits to be gained from personnel participating in outside training, encouraging personnel to earn and/or maintain various specialized certifications, such as Fire Instructor or Fire Officer, increases the positive professional perception of the organization and can help to demonstrate a commitment to continued excellence. The Mendon Fire Department has traditionally not encouraged or supported outside training or certification endeavors by its personnel.



As has been noted previously, one of the major issues facing the Mendon Fire Department is the fact that very few of the current members of the department are even trained or qualified at the basic skills and competency levels commensurate with their positions. Only a handful of the members of the department are apparently certified at the Firefighter I/II level and only three personnel possess paramedic certifications. If personnel have not earned even these basic certifications, it is impossible to imagine that they could function appropriately as officers. This is a major problem for the town and fire department, one that must be resolved.

The Mendon Fire Department currently does not have any type of formal promotional, or officer selection, process established. There are no officers in the call department. The only two officers are the two career assistant chiefs, one of whom was “promoted” to “senior” assistant chief within the past two years. There is no formal documentation to say how this promotion was made (or how the initial selections and promotions were made), and the town did not establish or approve any process.

All officer positions, both career and call, should be filled based upon the person’s firefighting/emergency services training, certifications, and experience commensurate with the position being sought, along with successful completion of a rank appropriate assessment process, and a basic practical skills evaluation. We would highly recommend that these standards include some provision requiring completion of Fire Instructor Level I and Fire Officer Level I as a minimum. All officers should also be required to have completed rank appropriate National Incident Management System (NIMS) training. Finally, they should be required to have completed incident safety officer training.

In conjunction with the officers who will be selected to fill the remainder of the department’s key leadership positions, the next fire chief should work to implement a career development program and succession planning process to ensure that all officers can perform their superior’s duties, as well as identify the core future leaders of the department. This should include both career and call officers.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department, with the support of the Town of Mendon, should make it a priority to develop and implement a plan for providing and requiring that all personnel, both career and call, attend, and successfully complete, a state sponsored training program that will result in their achieving basic Firefighter I/II certification.

Recommendation

All officer positions, from lieutenant to fire chief, should be filled based upon the person’s firefighting/emergency services training, certifications, and experience, commensurate with the position being sought, along with successful completion of a formal, rank appropriate assessment process, and a basic practical skills evaluation.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should insure that all department members are trained/certified to the minimal NIMS level required for their duties/responsibilities and ranks. In addition to the basic I-100/I-700 training mandated, it is our recommendation that all officers should be trained to the ICS-300 level. All chief level officers should be trained to the ICS-400 level.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should require its career officers, and strongly encourage its call officers, to obtain a certain level of fire officer certification as a job requirement, such as Fire Officer I for lieutenant, Fire Officer III for deputy fire chief, and Fire Officer Level IV for fire chief.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should require that all officers be certified as Incident Safety Officers. Additional personnel who may be interested should be encouraged to take this training and obtain this important firefighter safety certification.

Recommendation

As part of the succession planning process, the next fire chief should work to implement a career development program to ensure that all officers can perform their superior's duties, as well as identify the core future leaders of the department.

X. ON-CALL PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAM

As previously noted, the Mendon Fire Department is a combination fire service organization that is supposed to be primarily call, supplemented by a small career staff. In reality, the current composition of the department is closer to a 50/50 split of career and on-call. As is evidenced by the need for this letter, the department is under an increasing level of scrutiny based on the community leadership's concerns relative to its operational capability and response. The department is truly at a crossroads, caused in part on a diminishing level of on-call membership and response. It is clear that the department is currently not meeting the expectations of the community, and if unchecked and in fact not quickly reversed, the department will soon cease to be a viable emergency response organization.

The Town of Mendon has expressed a desire to retain a strong call firefighting force. We concur and believe that goal is realistic and achievable for the foreseeable future. However, it will require the implementation of program(s) to recruit and then retain personnel; a strong commitment from the town; and strong leadership in the fire department.



In March 2004, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) issued a report by the Volunteer and Combination Officers Section, entitled *A Call for Action: Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service*. Among other things, the report highlighted the fact that the ranks of volunteer/call firefighters nationwide are declining due, at least in part, to an increasing demand for services. There are also various other factors that are prevalent to the reduction in the number of volunteer and on-call firefighters in communities such as Mendon. Among them is that the demographics of many communities today do not support a sufficient number of the types of person who is attracted to the fire service in the 21st century - someone with time to dedicate to public service, or a young person who wants to make a career of it. We have found that on average, for every five on-call firefighters recruited, two will remain active after a period of 48 months has elapsed. The task of recruitment and retention is further complicated when the department lacks leadership and a true commitment (whether real or perceived) to the on-call force.

Presently, the Mendon Fire Department has approximately ten on-call members on its roster. This is considerably less than the 20 to 25 active on-call members we have seen on the rosters of other departments in relatively comparable communities. On its own, this number is insufficient to provide an adequate level of emergency service to the town. However, in almost any call/volunteer emergency services organization there is going to be a percentage of members whose names still appear on the "active" roster, yet they no longer truly are, or are minimally so, for a variety of reasons. Factor in that most members of the department have a primary job, other than the fire department, that probably limits their availability to respond, mostly during normal business hours, and the current personnel picture becomes much more of a concern. Based upon our analysis only about three or four of the on-call personnel respond to incidents on a regular basis.

It is apparent that long-term leadership issues present within the organization, and more recently the total lack of leadership, must be addressed prior to making any substantive progress towards recruiting and retaining on-call personnel. In the absence of addressing the leadership issues through the pending total change in the department's top leadership, any effort will be wasted as the department membership likely becomes further disenfranchised and the number of active firefighters will continue to wane. Over the next three to five years, a significant effort will need to be put forth towards recruitment and retention of on-call personnel. Although Mendon is far from alone in dealing with this reduction in on-call staff, it is essential that addressing this situation is clearly identified as a top priority of the new fire rescue chief and be adopted as a shared mission of the entire department.

The Mendon Fire Department also does not have a formal recruitment and retention program for call personnel and has only very infrequently actively recruited for new members. The MRI study team was informed that most new members of the department are recruited by word of mouth or are "walk ins". There is no mention of the need for additional members on the town or fire department's websites, or even a person to contact if someone is interested in joining



the department. This is something that is frequently displayed very prominently on the websites of many call/volunteer departments.

Even if the recruitment obstacles can be overcome, hurdles remain before a new member is a productive member of the department. Once an individual becomes interested in becoming an on-call firefighter, they must achieve a level of ever increasing specialized skill that is time consuming. Often exit interviews reveal that the training commitment alone is daunting and one of the primary reasons that on-call personnel resign. It is also costly to the department. To become a certified firefighter takes several hundred hours. Once certified, there are the dozens of hours training annually spent maintaining firefighter and EMT or paramedic (if required) skills and certifications. Unfortunately, in 2017, the average citizen does not want to spend a great deal of personal time dedicated to the fire and emergency services, especially when family commitments take priority. In addition, many on-call firefighters in departments that have a career force handling the day-to-day emergencies, find it hard to stay motivated if they are not being utilized frequently. Other reasons are for difficulty recruiting and retaining members include:

- An overall reduction in leisure time
- Employment obligations and the common need to maintain more than one job
- The virtual elimination of employers understanding and flexibility relating to this form of community service
- Increased family demands
- Generational differences and increased family demands
- Increasing training requirements
- The cost of housing in many affluent communities
- Organizational culture
- Internal respect
- Recognition of personnel
- Internal communication
- Department leadership styles and commitments

It is easy to believe that increasing the number of on-call firefighters can be a cure all to eliminate all staffing, and thus response problems. Unfortunately, in 2017, this is an increasingly difficult problem to overcome. However, there still appears to be a small town feel to Mendon, and perhaps more importantly, still a sense of community. These are key attributes that may increase the likelihood of success for any call firefighter recruitment and retention program. Some studies and reports prepared by various entities have noted that many call and volunteer fire departments serving small to medium sized communities anticipate that about one percent of its year-round population will be members of the fire department. This would equate to about 58 members in Mendon. While we believe this figure is overly optimistic, particularly in 2017, if we cut it in half and said one-half of one percent, the department could

still anticipate a membership of 29 residents of the town, nearly triple the current on-call contingent.

As most rural and suburban communities across the United States are dealing with the reduction in volunteer and on-call staff, trying to reverse this trend has become a common issue in many places. When compared to the ever-increasing costs of employing additional full-time career personnel, many communities have come to the conclusion that investing in on-call personnel is the best, and more cost effective, practice, and to that end they have pursued some of the following strategies:

- A. Creating a marketing program to recruit new personnel into the department.
- B. Placing a prominent banner or link on the home page of the Town of Mendon and Mendon Fire Department websites.
- C. Conducting a recruitment mailing to all residential properties in the town with information about the fire department and recruiting new members.
- D. Placing signs at the entrances to town recruiting call members to the department.
- E. Placement of a temporary sign board at various locations in the community.
- F. Working with local businesses in an attempt to form partnerships that would allow employees to leave work to respond to emergency incidents when needed.
- G. Hire a volunteer firefighter "Recruitment and Retention Coordinator" to develop, implement, and coordinate these activities. This could possibly be undertaken by a number of communities as a regional endeavor.
- H. Nurture the call fire department.
- I. Provide a tax abatement incentive for volunteer firefighters modeled after a program in place in the State of Connecticut.
- J. Increasing compensation rates or the minimum hours paid for a response.
- K. Provide a reduction in property tax for on-call service.
- L. Provide on-call firefighters with community-based benefits
- M. Provide community based awards and recognition.



In the smaller government, anti-taxes, and benefits climate of today, many of these benefits can be controversial. However, after considering these strategies, we have focused on developing innovative strategies for the Town of Mendon. One example of an unconventional and innovative best practice that we feel would work in Mendon is to provide a health insurance package for self-employed, year-round residents, provided they complete training, certification, and provide the town with a high level of immediate response. Typically, this type of program attracts electricians, plumbers, painters, and other trades, as well as self-employed professionals that would be beneficial to the organizations.

An example of this best practice has worked successfully in the Town of Holliston, Massachusetts, for several years. Viewed as costly and unconventional, this program has retained a high level of active personnel that provide an immediate response on a 24/7 basis. This strategy to invest in the on-call force avoided the need for career personnel and compared to a smaller neighboring community, produced an overall cost (including health insurance) of 50% of what the neighboring community pays for fire protection. We believe a program of this nature is a good fit for Mendon and should be considered. During our research for several previous studies in similar communities, a member of the study team visited Chief Michael Cassidy in Holliston and conducted an interview pertaining to this concept. This interview found that this strategy has directly contributed to maintaining a viable on-call organization in the Town of Holliston.

Obviously, health insurance is expensive and costs seem to escalate on an annual basis. However, landscapers, trades people, stay at home parents, and self-employed professionals that work from home are also confronted with this cost. The ability to join the town's insurance in itself may reduce their cost. Furthermore, the town could develop a sliding scale that would pay a percentage of the health insurance cost equal to the level of response provided by the responding firefighter. We have suggested rate cost sharing in the table below:

FIGURE 6: PROPOSED HEALTH INSURANCE PERCENTAGES

PERCENTAGE OF TRAINING AND INCIDENT RESPONSE	PROPOSED OF HEALTH CARE EXPENSE PAID BY THE TOWN
90% or greater participation	50%
70% - 89% participation	40%
50% – 69% participation	30%
33% – 49% participation	20%
25% - 33% participation	Eligible to enroll at the employees cost
Under 25% participation	Not eligible to enroll

The federal government has a version of the Staffing for Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program that pertains strictly to volunteer and on-call firefighters. It provides competitively awarded funds to municipalities to recruit and retain on-call and volunteer



firefighters. The grant funds expenses, such as recruitment campaigns, providing money for such as expenses as tuition for college curriculums in fire science, for EMT and paramedic training, for health insurance for call members, for physical fitness programs, uniforms, and various tax incentives offered to attract new candidates to join the fire department, and then stay for an extended period of time.

We believe that the town/department should attempt to secure a SAFER grant to recruit and retain on-call members for the first time. This grant should note the staffing issue that currently exists and indicate that the grant would be an attempt to meet the NFPA 1720 fire response standard. The goal of developing a viable call force of twenty-five total on-call firefighters would also be a goal to articulate in the grant application. It is quite possible that a portion of the health care program cost described above may be eligible for incorporating in a SAFER grant.

There are no easy or guaranteed solutions to the staffing quandary facing Mendon and many other communities throughout the country. It is also important to stress that what may work in one community with regards to staffing and call/volunteer recruitment and retention may not work in another nearby community. Each community must individually determine what programs, incentives, and motivations will work, and be most effective in their community.

Recommendation

The Town of Mendon and the Mendon Fire Department should apply for a federal SAFER grant for 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, such as tuition reimbursement, health care benefits, tax abatements, etc.

Recommendation

The Town of Mendon should recognize that the only way to develop a more active and properly staffed fire department in the absence of hiring a larger force of career firefighters is to determine what would motivate potential responders and craft a program of investment that meets these extrinsic and intrinsic needs.

Recommendation

The Town of Mendon should convene a focus group to determine what concepts and recruitment and retention strategies are feasible and most attractive to potential candidates.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should set a realistic goal of recruiting at least 15 to 20 new members over the next three years, and simultaneously set a goal of increasing the overall call member force to around 25 to 30 active personnel. These personnel should be required to



be properly trained and certified to the Firefighter I/II level, and preferably to the EMT-basic level.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should make it a priority to develop an active on-call recruitment program led by the call deputy fire chief. At a minimum, this program should consist of:

- 1. Developing a recruitment brochure and mailing it to all residents*
- 2. Holding periodic open houses at the fire station*
- 3. Performing public outreach through the local media*
- 4. Contacting community and service groups*
- 5. Developing an eye-catching banner on the town's and fire department's web sites*
- 6. Placing signs recruiting call/volunteer personnel at the main entrances to town*
- 7. Placing a temporary sign board at various locations within the community*
- 8. Placing signs for call/recruiting volunteers in local businesses, particularly high volume locations*
- 9. Implementing a fire explorer program*
- 10. Radio and media advertisements*

Although time consuming, consideration should also be given to conducting a door-to-door recruitment campaign of every residence in the town.

The proposed SAFER Grant could be utilized to cover many of the above expenses.

Recommendation

The fire rescue chief should develop a social media presence and involve other members of the department in this endeavor.

Recommendation

The Town of Mendon and the Mendon Fire Department should attempt to enter into partnerships with local businesses to allow their personnel to respond, when needed, to emergency incidents during working hours, without any financial penalty.

Recommendation

The Town of Mendon should explore the feasibility of utilizing, and in fact encouraging, town employees to perform “dual roles” by serving not only in their full-time positions, but also serving the town as call firefighters and/or rescue personnel. Caution is needed here though as there are provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act that would be applicable, particularly if these personnel respond to incidents during times when they are not working.

Recommendation

The Town of Mendon should consider the development of a program that would provide active responders with the opportunity to obtain health insurance. The town should pay a graduated percentage of this program based upon participation levels suggested in Figure 6.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should develop a series of team-based activities that build involvement in the organization.

Recommendation

The Mendon Fire Department should seek assistance from the Massachusetts Call and Volunteer Firefighters Association (MCVFA) relative to enhancing recruitment and retention efforts in Mendon.

XI. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

Based upon our analysis of the current day operations of the Mendon Fire Department, we have found an organization that is currently in crisis. The department has lacked singularly focused leadership for many years. This has led to a lack of focus, direction, and common vision within the department. At the time of this assessment, the department’s two assistant chiefs (its only officers other than the police chief serving as acting fire chief) were both on extended injury leave with uncertain futures. This has, in essence, left the department to run on its own with no direct, day-to-day direction or supervision in place. In addition, the ongoing and very acrimonious dispute between the town and the senior assistant chief is almost certainly impacting morale within the organization.

Although most of them are dedicated to their department and community as one would expect from emergency services personnel, few of the department’s personnel possess even the most basic of emergency services certifications. Even though the department provides both fire



suppression and ALS level EMS services, only one member is properly certified at the Firefighter I/II level. On the EMS side, there are only three licensed paramedics, two of whom are on injury leave. Just two members of the call force are certified at the EMT-basic level. Newly hired career personnel have not been required to successfully complete (or in some cases even attend) Firefighter I/II training and/or paramedic training as a condition of employment. Although the department does have a nominal training program, it is far from adequate.

Staffing remains a problem for the department. The number of call firefighters is limited and there has been no active recruitment or retention program in place. Although it has been beneficial to the department to help it cover staffing shortages caused by the long-term injuries to several personnel, one of the current career staff was hired without authorization of the town governing body and is not budgeted for in the coming fiscal year.

Having a sense of common vision is important in any organization to ensure that the organization and its personnel are moving in unison toward a common goal(s). Having a common vision is not only about making sure that all parties are aware that they are in the same boat and rowing, but even more importantly, that they are rowing in the same direction. The impact of not sharing a common vision will be very noticeable in the quality and quantity of work performed, but also with the spirit and passion that the work of the organization is accomplished.

The department lacks any type of long-range or strategic plan that charts its projected path to the future. To the best of our knowledge, the department does not have a mission statement. In fact, when questioned, one of the department's officers stated, "Somebody may have put some kind of mission statement on the website" (they hadn't). A mission statement, if carefully developed and truly accurate, should provide the very foundation for the Mendon Fire Department and why it exists. The mission statement should be providing that broad direction that everything else that the fire department does is going to be built upon. The fire department also does not currently have any formal vision statement, nor has it developed any core values that will help to drive the organization forward.

The department does not have any standalone rules and regulations. Although it does have a standard operating procedures (SOP) manual, many of the procedures date to 2005, and have not been updated since. The most recent appear to be from around 2009. It was reported that the procedures are rarely enforced.

Even the areas of the department that would be considered positives tend to have caveats associated with them. For instance, despite concerns that they may lose it, the department's license to provide ALS level EMS services was recently renewed. However, the renewal did identify a number of operational and staffing concerns related to the service. The department's station, while probably adequate for the needs of the department, has been neglected from a maintenance and organization standpoint. It also has some code and life safety concerns. The



department's apparatus fleet, while generally well maintained and equipped, is too large and is aging.

Looking ahead, the fire department does possess some definitive positive attributes, most notably the dedication of its core membership group. The ISO evaluation conducted in October 2015 earned a rating of 5/5Y which is commendable for a primarily call fire department in a small town, without a municipal water supply system. This shows there is a strong foundation upon which to build.

However, the department is also facing serious challenges both today, and looking toward the future. With volunteerism declining and the ranks of call emergency services personnel dwindling nationwide, the Town of Mendon faces the dual challenges of attempting to balance a credible emergency response system, staffed primarily with call members, supplemented by a small career staff, while simultaneously facing a slowly increasing number of requests for service, both emergency and non-emergency.

To that end, we propose the following objectives as a roadmap for initiating the significant change and major rebuilding that need to be done to the department.

- 1. The Town of Mendon should hire a qualified interim fire chief as soon as possible to provide absent and much needed day to day supervision and oversight to the fire department. Although the town needs a permanent, long-term fire chief that process can take up to six (6) months or more from the start of the recruitment process until the selected candidate assumes command. The department needs daily, hands on supervision immediately to begin to oversee and address many of the deficiencies that exist. An additional benefit to this approach is that it will potentially make the job more attractive to the type of candidate that Mendon needs to lead its department long-term.**
- 2. The Town of Mendon should formally adopt by bylaw, the revised organizational chart for the Mendon Fire Department as recommended previously in this letter. This formal adoption should include the formal bargaining and reclassification of existing personnel as appropriate.**
- 3. The (interim) fire chief should form a membership/management committee within 30 days of assuming command. This committee is designed to enhance communication, construct more positive relationships, and provide a mechanism for members to have an active voice within the organization and begin setting the direction for the future. This committee should consist of as many stakeholders as wish to participate. The chief should hold two meetings per month for the first six months to a year, and then meet monthly for the foreseeable future. Minutes of these meetings should be developed, shared**



with the department, the Board of Selectmen, and the town administrator, as an attachment to the chief's monthly report. If necessary, outside professional assistance is available to assist with facilitating this endeavor.

4. The (interim) fire chief should immediately begin providing a weekly e-mail update to all members of the Mendon Fire Department. This regular update, designed to enhance communications, should be started by May 1, 2017.
5. The Mendon Fire Department should develop a mission statement, vision statement, and a list of core values that guide the department's overall mission and operations.
6. The Mendon Fire Department's mission statement should be prominently displayed in the station, along with the vision statement and core values.
7. The Town of Mendon should complete driving record and background checks on all current members of the fire department to ensure that they are eligible to be firefighters.
8. The Town of Mendon should require all existing personnel to complete the standard Massachusetts Initial Medical Testing for Firefighters, including drug testing. In addition, the department should require that candidates successfully pass the entry-level physical agility testing (ELPAT), or equivalent requirements for firefighter candidates. Both of these screening tools will help to ensure that all personnel are physically capable of performing the duties of a firefighter.
9. The Mendon Fire Department must implement an aggressive and mandatory, back to basics, fire training program for all personnel that is based upon Massachusetts Fire Academy's call and volunteer basic skills program (243 hours of instruction and 23 hours of on-line learning).
10. Conduct a comprehensive review of existing training records. The (interim) fire chief should meet individually with each member to review the training file and develop a prescriptive training plan.
11. A concerted effort should be made to certify as many existing career and on-call members as possible to the level of Firefighter I/II through the Massachusetts Fire Training Council. This action should include a training effort that is designed to train and refresh all candidates on the 85 specific "non-fire" hands-on skills and 20 "live fire" skills essential for certification and basic level.

12. Subject to negotiation, ALL career personnel who are not currently licensed as paramedics should be required to successfully complete this training.
13. The fire chief should begin to identify members of the department who could possibly possess the skills to be developed into officers and begin to mentor them and provide appropriate additional training. Part of this development process could include the delegation of certain assignments to these personnel.
14. The (interim) fire chief should form a committee for the purpose of putting together an aggressive and wide ranging program for recruitment and retention of call personnel. While a long-term strategy to address this issue needs to be developed, there are also short-term actions that can be taken to try to immediately recruit additional personnel.
15. The (interim) fire chief should work with the Town of Mendon to address the deficiencies, particularly those associated with life safety, identified in the existing fire station.
16. The (interim) fire chief should work with the department's membership, the board of selectmen, and town administrator to develop a plan to improve the overnight response system in use by the Mendon Fire Department. This will serve to bring consistency to the level of service provided to the community throughout the day.
17. The (interim) fire chief should begin work, assisted by a committee of department stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive and up-to-date rules and regulations document. This document should then be submitted for approval by the board of selectmen. After approval, the document should then be distributed to, and signed for, by each member of the department. It could then provide an orientation overview, and indoctrination to the department's behavioral expectations for new personnel.
18. The (interim) fire chief, assisted by a committee comprised of a cross-section of department stakeholders, should begin the revision and updating of the department's standard operations procedures or guidelines (SOP/SOG) manual, starting with mission critical procedures such as, but not limited to, *basic engine company and truck company operations, dwelling fires, commercial structures, rapid intervention team operations, personnel accountability, gas leaks, hazardous materials incidents, ice rescue, vehicle extrication operations, thermal imaging camera use, and automatic external*

defibrillator use. The committee should be given whatever support is necessary to complete at least a basic manual update within one year.

19. Based upon the foundation that currently exists and building upon the results of the recommendations contained in this letter, the Town of Mendon and the Mendon Fire Department should develop a formal process for implementing a long-term vision for the department and developing a strategic plan.
20. Mendon should enter into discussions with the municipal administrations, and fire department leaderships of its adjacent communities, for the purposes of identifying possible opportunities for shared services, and long-term explore the feasibility of a more regional approach to fire protection and EMS delivery systems.

In conclusion, the missions performed by the fire department are some of the most basic and fundamental functions of government; to ensure the safety and protection of its residents and visitors. The real issue facing the Mendon Fire Department, and the Town of Mendon then, as it is for every community, is to determine an acceptable level of risk and then define an appropriate level of service for the community. There is no "right" amount of fire protection or EMS delivery. It is a constantly changing level based upon the expressed needs of the community. Determining the appropriate level of service also involves deciding upon the municipalities' fiscal ability, and willingness, to pay for the desired level of service. These are decisions that the citizens of the town and the board of selectmen will ultimately need to make.

Respectfully submitted,

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(ghs)

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