



Report

Hebron, NH Fire Department

January 2015

BACKGROUND

On January 6, 2015, the MRI team traveled to Hebron at the request of Hebron Fire Chief John Fischer and the Board of Selectmen to evaluate two current issues with the Hebron Fire Department.

The first issue was the request by Chief Fischer for the town to obtain a tanker/pumper for the Fire Department. The Hebron Fire Department (HFD) has had a tanker in the past, but that vehicle has since gone out of service, and was disposed of due to its age and related maintenance and repair issues.

The second issue was the theory of adequate compensation for the Town of Hebron to provide fire protection and emergency medical transporting services to the Town of Groton.

The Town of Hebron is a rural community, covering about 19 square miles (including 2 of water), with approximately 600 year-round residents. The population swells in the summer months with tourist and seasonal residents. Hebron is also home to 5 large summer camps. The bordering Town of Groton is another rural community of approximately 600 residents, but Groton's area is much larger at 41 square miles.

Combined, the Town of Hebron Fire Department's response area is comprised of approximately 1,200 year round residents and 60 square miles. There are no notable high-hazard areas or hazardous process facilities in the response district. There is a high amount of target hazards for life safety including the summer camps that are populated by adults and children in the summer months. The entire response area is without a municipal fire protection water supply system (pressurized hydrants), meaning the fire department would have to be self-sufficient and transport needed water directly to the scene. There are some dry hydrants that allow access to the obvious lake water and, while these dry hydrants provide some access, it is not feasible to depend on that access being readily available in all instances.

ISSUE #1 - ACQUISITION OF APPARATUS

The Hebron Fire Department is a paid-per-call organization that provides fire protection/suppression and emergency medical transporting service to the residents of Hebron and Groton. The HFD provides these services utilizing three engines, 2 forestry units, 1 ambulance, and other support vehicles/equipment.

The department's newest engine (Engine 1) was purchased in 2003 and is a custom pumper that carries 1,000 gallons of water. This vehicle runs first due to fire/rescue incidents in the district and is the primary fire suppression unit for the HFD. It is a custom cab, so it can carry at least four personnel comfortably to incidents in the area.

The second engine (Engine 3) is a 1987 International that carries 1,250 gallons of water. This vehicle is almost thirty (30) years old and is showing its age. This engine is used for mutual aid responses. (Mutual aid calls do not include the Town of Groton, as it is part of Hebron's protection area). This vehicle is a commercial chassis with a cab that allows for a maximum of three people in the seating area.

The third engine (Engine 2) is a 1978 Ford. This engine is used primarily as a back up engine. It carries 750 gallons of water. It is extremely aged for an in-service piece and should have been retired from active duty many years ago.

It should be noted that neither of the older engines meet today's safety standards for fire department apparatus, and these trucks could put the members of the Hebron Fire Department at risk for personal injury. Neither vehicle has adequate safety features that are incorporated into modern fire apparatus. Items such as adequate seat belts, collision/rollover avoidance programming, air bags, rollover crush protection, anti-lock braking systems, etc. are absent in these two engines.

The Fire Chief has recommended a new Pumper/Tanker for the HFD. This new piece of apparatus would be built on a custom chassis that is made for the fire service and could accommodate up to six crewmembers, carrying them safely to the fire scene. This vehicle would be expected to have, at minimum, a carrying of 2,500 gallons of water to help alleviate the concerns of having adequate water supply on the emergency scene. The vehicle requested is a pumper/tanker as it would also have a pump, hoses, ladders, and all other equipment that would qualify it as a Class A pumper, as set forth in the NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) standards for fire department apparatus.

RECOMMENDATION – ISSUE #1

It is our recommendation that the Town pursue the purchase of the pumper/tanker that the Fire Chief has requested. Actually, we could not agree more with Chief Fischer. His

recommendations, requirements, and technical specifications for the new apparatus are spot-on. The MRI team was actually quite surprised to find that there was not an adequate tanker in the fire station already, and we understand that the first concern for the Hebron Fire Department on the scene of a structure fire or other large fire incident will be the lack of an adequate water supply. We concur.

We recommend that the Town of Hebron pursue lease purchase options with the leasing companies that are associated with reputable apparatus dealers to find the best financing opportunities for a lease/purchase of a new pumper/tanker, and that the Town follow Chief Fischer's specifications carefully. We also recommend that the town does not deplete the fire apparatus capital reserve account for this purchase, but rather uses just some portion of that fund toward the lease purchase. Lease financing rates are at all-time lows and very good financing deals are available.

We also recommend that, due to age and condition, the two older engines (Engines 2 and 3) be retired **and disposed of** when the new pumper/tanker is put in service. The fire department main fleet should be composed of a primary attack engine and a water supply piece (tanker). As the new pumper/tanker will also be equipped as a Class A pumper, it can also serve as a backup/reserve piece for all other functions, thereby eliminating the need for reserve apparatus.

This purchase should not be delayed as the Hebron Fire Department does not carry adequate water supply at this time, and lives, property, and the safety of the volunteer members of the Hebron Fire Department are at risk.

ISSUE #2 - COMPENSATION FOR SERVICES TO GROTON

The MRI team was asked to evaluate whether or not the Town of Hebron is being adequately and fairly compensated by the Town of Groton for fire and EMS services.

Currently, the Town of Hebron charges the Town of Groton \$30,000.00 annually for fire protection and emergency medical transport coverage. Additionally, the Town of Hebron is reimbursed by Groton for payroll for actual hours spent on Groton incidents, which averages approximately \$7,500.00 annually. This annual fee is for services provided only, and does not include the cost of capital needs such as fire apparatus, ambulances, fire station maintenance, etc.

Again, the agency with the primary responsibility for emergency services in the Town of Groton is the Hebron Fire Department. The distribution of incidents between the two towns appears to be almost perfectly equal which means the services are pretty equally divided between the two communities.

The Town of Hebron Fire Department provides transporting emergency medical services to the Town of Groton. As is usually the case, the transporting agency (HFD) has billing rights to the patient transported, so Hebron collects the revenue from any transports that are successfully collected.

The Town of Hebron has an assessed valuation of \$267,489,153.00. The Town of Groton has an assessed valuation of \$191,829,656.00. Hebron is 19 square miles, with over 2 square miles of that being lake. Groton is 41 square miles, twice the size of the landmass in Hebron. The population of the two towns is virtually equal, as is the number of requests for service and the hours spent in each community.

The current calendar year budget for the Hebron Fire Department is \$100,160.00. This number does not include capital or utility costs for operation of the fire department and its apparatus.

RECOMMENDATION – ISSUE #2

It is our recommendation that the compensatory schedule be adjusted over the next three years. It is our opinion that the towns are virtually equal in fire suppression/EMS needs, population, evaluation/area ratio, and demographics. Therefore, the cost for services supplied should be equal as well. We recommend that the two towns agree to a flat rate charge for services and do away with the accounting of an hourly payroll between the two communities.

Currently, the Town of Groton is paying an average of \$37,500.00 annually for this service, which includes the previously mentioned payroll reimbursement for hours worked in Groton. We recommend a flat rate of \$40,000.00, all-inclusive, be implemented in the 2015 budget, with a \$5,000.00 increase in subsequent years until the cost of the main budget is shared equally at fifty percent of the main budget. If the budget holds at \$100,000.00 in 2017, then Groton would be responsible for a payment of \$50,000.00. Any increase in the budget should be divided equally.

This amount does not include capital costs, but that is made up to some degree by the fact that Hebron is collecting all available EMS revenue that can then be applied to the Fire Apparatus/Ambulance Capital Reserve Account. This theory is for the current and proposed fleet of apparatus. If additional needs come up in future years (such as the addition of an aerial ladder) then this formula should be revisited.

THE PROJECT TEAM

Alan S. Gould, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, is a graduate of Saint Anselm College with a BS degree in Criminal Justice. He is certified as a Public Manager by the American Academy of Certified Public Managers and has completed numerous management and leadership programs including the Babson Command Training Institute and the FBI's LEEDS

program. He is recognized for his creativity in community policing and his leadership in promoting ethics in the law enforcement community. Mr. Gould began his public sector career with the Salem, NH, Police Department where, during 21 years, he served at all ranks of the Department. He served as Chief of Police in Rye, NH, where, upon retirement from law enforcement, he was appointed and served as Town Administrator until joining MRI in 2008. Mr. Gould served as the Ethics Instructor at the New Hampshire Police Academy for 15 years and has been an instructor of college courses in Criminal Code, Criminal Investigation, Report Writing, Constitutional Law, and Juvenile Delinquency. Among his many community involvements, Alan served as an initial incorporator of the Greater Salem Council Against Family Violence; a founder of New Hampshire's second "visitation center" designed to protect children from abusive parents; an initiator of Rye Senior SERVE, a non-profit organization established to help seniors remain in their homes as they age; and he continues as the Emergency Management Director in the coastal community of Rye, NH, located within the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant's Emergency Planning Zone. In addition to his responsibilities as MRI's Chief Operating Officer, Mr. Gould manages many of the company's projects and occasionally serves in interim municipal management roles.

Christopher J. LeClaire currently serves as the Fire Chief for Newburyport, MA. Prior to his appointment in Newburyport, he served as Fire Chief /Emergency Management Coordinator for the City of Portsmouth, NH, and has over 25 years of experience in fire protection, EMS, emergency management, and law enforcement. He holds a degree in fire protection, and is one of only a few to be designated as a Chief Fire Officer by the Center for Public Safety Excellence. He has several strategic and management certificates from the New Hampshire Fire Academy and the National Fire Academy. He is a senior instructor for the New Hampshire Fire Academy, and serves on the Governor's Council on Emergency Preparedness and the Homeland Security Grants Committee. He serves as the President of the Seacoast Chief's Mutual Aid District and chairs the Portsmouth Area Emergency Planning Team. Chief LeClaire is certified as a Fire Instructor II and Fire Officer IV. He is also a Past-President of the New Hampshire Association of Fire Chiefs. Chief LeClaire has served as a subject advisor to MRI since 2011 and will occasionally work on a project team.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the MRI Project Team,



Alan Gould, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer