

**North Cornwall Township  
DCED Fire Study Meeting  
December 13, 2022, 6:00 p.m.**

**Call to Order**

The December 13, 2022, DCED Fire Study Meeting was called to order by Sam Abram at 6:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

In attendance were Township Supervisors Ron Sell, Treasurer; Mike Wahmann, Vice Chairman; and Sam Abram, Chairman; Township Manager Tom Long, Sr.; Public Works Director Justin Thompson, Neversink Fire Company Representatives Chris Lux, Tim Houser, and Shaylene Scheib, Josh Shank and DCED Representatives Floyd Wise III, Anne Weaver Morrow, Kelly Wilson, and Yvonne Lemelle.

Others in attendance are listed on the sign-in sheet.

Mr. Thompson began the discussion with **Recommendation Statement #1 from DCED:** “Establish fire response and formal staffing benchmark performance objectives as per NFPA 1720 for the suburban area through several implemented avenues to increase total available staff numbers. Augmentation of daytime staffing hours with supplemented compensation plans and inclusion of available full-time positions.”

**Step 1-** Recruitment and retention strategies for volunteer agency support.

**Step 2-** Enrichment of volunteer stipend and incentive rewards.

Mr. Thompson said the Township’s response is to modify the retention program over the next few years to incentivize member retention and reward top call responders. The Township will work hand in hand with the Fire Company to develop these programs. It was acknowledged that changes in 2023 are coming in this area as recently addressed by Neversink Fire Company.

Mr. Lux responded that for 2023, he will remove the cap of \$600.00 placed for tax reasons, 1099 miscellaneous forms will be issued, and after 10 calls are run by a firefighter their count goes back down to zero and they start getting paid from then. The Township is budgeted for \$10,000 and Neversink will supplement it if they have to. Mr. Lux also proposed a staffing model. Because they miss a majority of their calls between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., he feels he can possibly staff the fire station with 2 people, one driver and 1 non-driver, or two drivers, if the Township will fund \$125,000 a year to cover 4-hour paid shifts at \$15.00/hour. While it’s no guarantee, he feels it’s a possibility this can help solve missed calls.

Mr. Wise informed all that there are 2 ways to manage what Mr. Lux has proposed. One way is for the municipality to manage the fund and schedule. The other is a pass-through fund in which the fire company manages the schedule and hiring. Fiscal statements, detailed payroll and budget information, etc. would have to be provided regularly to the Township.

Mr. Lux said his goal is to keep volunteers under the 20 – 25 percent income threshold before they become full-time employees so the fire company is not becoming their employer and not requiring them to pay social security.

Mr. Wise said make sure the hours are capped by income and by number of hours. He also stated that volunteers may have to be supplemented or paid part-time. The budget for that is not as bad as having to pay for full-time fire department service coverage.

Mr. Lux said his staffing model plan is not finalized. He stated it will be a lot of work and he doesn't want to take the time until he knows it will be funded. Mr. Lux said it doesn't make sense for Neversink to fund it, so he is looking to the Township to do so.

Mr. Wise asked if the fire department currently uses the Active 911 system. Mr. Lux responded they do. Mr. Wise stated there is a scheduling component to check in on duty and it works well, but only if volunteers remember to check in that they are available.

Mr. Lux responded that he would like members to sign up for a shift. If they fail to show up, they get points. Too many points result in being ineligible for the program. He would like to look into getting a time clock installed. If a member goes over their 4-hour shift, that extra time goes toward the retention program compensation. Additionally, shift work can include tasks such as: running saws, administrative work, and cleaning.

Mr. Wise added that more members retained will allow more training and prevention activities in the community.

**Step 3-** Development and employment, at minimum on Full-Time and one Part-Time Public Safety Officer positions as supplementation to staffing model.

In response to Step 3, Mr. Sell stated the Township is budgeted in the 2023 year for 1 Full-Time Public Safety Officer. Future growth in the Township will determine if a part-time position would be added. Mr. Wise discussed the balance of chain of command with that position. Mr. Thompson added that there are some gaps that need to be filled by this PSO such as fire and safety inspections. Mr. Lux pointed out that the PSO would not be in the firehouse at all times. Mr. Wise responded that most PSO's have a utility vehicle while addressing issues throughout the Township. Including any members in quarters, this position would allow for up to 3 firefighter staff to be on duty, which is better than zero.

The PSO job description is completed and is slated to be advertised in the coming weeks with interviews in February and the PSO will start in early spring.

**Step 4-** Development of regional shared cost mechanism for full-time/part-time staff for Fire Department and Codes Enforcement Enhancement.

Mr. Thompson stated the Township may have to look into the possibility of having Lebanon City FD be first due for call boxes in the southeast portions of the Township. NCT would reimburse Lebanon City for providing this service. NCT acknowledges the recent population growth in this area and the travel time from the current Fire Station to the area is difficult due to traffic and distance.

Mr. Abram said there has been informal discussions about this with Lebanon City, but they were receptive to the idea. Mr. Wise cautioned the writing of the contract for remediation in case some calls are not answered by Lebanon City due to their own city's calls. Paying per call is a better option. The Fire Chief added that the city is on that box as well. Mr. Lux added further that the Township fire department responds to the city's calls as well.

**Recommendation Statement #2-** Development and implementation of capital apparatus replacement plan with strategy to maintain minimum necessary unit service needs, as well as increase safety of fleet while reducing maintenance costing. Maintain adequate service life of units and transition to Township owned/maintained model.

Ideal fleet size and typing, per study:

- 1 structural firefighting engine with light rescue (passenger vehicle) capability
- 1 structural firefighting engine/tanker combination
- 1 minipump/ 4 door truck with cargo/towing capability
- 1 command/duty officer vehicle

Mr. Thompson asked if the engine/tanker combo fits the needs of the Township. He also asked if anything mechanically is wrong with the current tanker other than its age. Mr. Lux said it only runs on 10 calls a year. Mr. Wise said it was identified in the study due to its age and rotation. Mechanically it looks like it is in great condition and it's the slowest running unit.

Mr. Thompson asked if everyone was ok with the current fleet. Mr. Lux responded he thinks so, as long as someone is saving money to replace it eventually. He would not change anything today. Mr. Sell acknowledged that Mr. Lux had been in contact with Glick to inquire about a new piece of equipment at a cost of \$900,000.00. Mr. Wise said the current fleet is in pretty good condition as it sits today. The dates for replacement can be flexible. Mr. Lux reiterated someone should be saving money for replacement, but they are fine for the next couple of years.

**Recommendation Statement #3-** Development and implementation of capital facility plan with strategy to maintain minimum necessary firehouse service needs, as well as increase in safety and functionality of floor space. Maintain adequate length of service planning for facility upgrades to meet the needs of the future.

Mr. Sell provided the Township's response to Statement #3. He said the fire company should begin to check for any grants to assist in the construction costs. NCT is currently not willing to contribute to major building additions given their (fire department) current finances and assets.

Mr. Lux responded that he has asked their grant writer a couple times if anything was out there, and he was told the fire company was not going to get one based on what other fire companies need.

Mr. Abram asked if they had plans to address anything in the fire department building. Mr. Lux said nothing significant. He added that two years ago he wanted to install a new heating system and the Township Supervisors challenged that. Someone came in to check it and said it still looks pretty good. They are not going to replace it now, even though it is 20+ years old. Fire

Chief Shank added that federal grants that are available for building upgrades are for sprinkler and fire alarm system purchases.

Mr. Abram asked if the Fire Chief has identified any building upgrades that are needed. Chief Shank listed the living quarters situation. Mr. Sell asked if there was enough room inside the current building to make those improvements. Ms. Scheib answered no. She stated you need the same type of facilities for men and women and there is not enough room for that currently in their set up. A type of building addition would be needed to add a shower in the women's bathroom, as there currently isn't one. Any female firefighters would have to use the men's shower. Mr. Sell asked about the empty lot next door to the fire department. Mr. Lux responded they have plenty of land. He added that he drew a sketch to show a 150 x 50-foot addition showing improved living quarters, sleeping area to house 6 males, 2 females and 2 others, 2 showers, 2 bathrooms, small exercise room, 4 storage closets and a kitchen area. The current kitchen area would become a meeting room. He cannot fund it, but if staffing is increased, they need somewhere to rest in between calls. They have plenty of land, they have acres, stated Mr. Lux, but they cannot fund this project.

Mr. Sell asked if the fire department were able to talk about the items they would like to do as a result of the DCED study. Mr. Lux responded they want to increase retention and the funding is there, figure out staffing and for that he needs \$ 125,000.00 a year, and figure out how to improve the building for new staffing and current female staffing. He went through the calls from the past 6 years engine ran 390 calls, rescue ran 960 calls. The rescue is very important to the fire department. He feels it is their most versatile piece for the diverse types of calls they get. It has foam and all the hose line that is needed. Mr. Abram inquired when they had to last use foam. Mr. Lux answered that it has been a long time, but it is there in case they need it. The rescue was paid off in June. Mr. Wise said that it's a good thing to not have that debt. Mr. Lux agreed. He said Neversink is sitting in a pretty good financial situation with nothing that is owed specifically except for utility bills. In his opinion, staffing and a bigger building are the fire department's biggest hurdles, and they go hand in hand.

Mr. Thompson said they want to get the PSO officer in place and then make decisions in time.

Mr. Wise said that it sounds like personnel is the top priority for both the Township and Neversink. More than firetrucks and facilities, personnel is across the board a big issue across the state. Between the PSO position, the stipend process and possible part-time staffing both the Township and Neversink are on the right track. For public safety, the public needs a firetruck that can move water effectively, and firefighters who are trained properly. He added that while parade trucks and having a nice firehouse are always wonderful, the communities need protected by a functional unit and trained responders.

Mr. Lux said he hears the Township on the PSO position, but he does not understand how it will work. If the PSO is at a location other than the firehouse, how will this change response time? Mr. Thompson responded that the Township has been told for some time that Neversink does not have drivers, so if a driver is in place it may help the issue, although not a fix-all solution. Mr. Wise asked Fire Chief Shank how many members were either drivers or eligible for training to

drive the firetruck. Chief Shank responded 3 to 4. Mr. Wise suggested they make it a priority to get people trained in driving. Chief Shank said one member did complete training, but he works full-time day shift elsewhere, so adding another driver is not going to fix the daytime missed calls. They will still have a daytime shortage. Mr. Abram pointed out that that is why the Township is considering the PSO position. While they may be out of the firehouse, they will still be within township lines and be able to respond.

Mr. Abram addressed to the Chief that the Township could fix the problem. They could hire 8 full-time firefighters, build a station, and acquire equipment and then the problem is fixed. They could respond to every call and be Township employees. But it is not feasible. The funds are not there for it in the next year. Mr. Lux said he would hire for part-time shifts at \$125,000.00 a year before he would do a negotiation with Lebanon City FD. Mr. Sell added that the Township is considering all ideas. Chief Shank wanted it to be clear that if they get a fire call in the Springwood area, if members are present in firehouse, they are not responding much later than when Lebanon City FD gets there. He understands seconds matter. Discussion followed regarding the types of vehicles Lebanon City FD responds with depending on the type of call. Also discussed was the collaborative environment Neversink and Lebanon City FD have.

**Public Comment:** None

Ron Sell made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:46 p.m. Mike Wahmann seconded the motion. All were in favor.