



STAMFORD MAYOR
MICHAEL A. PAVIA

As your Mayor and Director of Health, Safety and Welfare of our city, the safety of the citizens of Stamford has been and must continue to be, my number one priority that rises above any individual needs or self-serving interests. And, as promised during my campaign, I have proposed a plan to help consolidate our five volunteer fire departments and improve fire service throughout the City of Stamford.

To effectively address some of the long identified problems that face our current fire system, it required a detailed look at the history and structure of our fire departments and how they provide service to our city. This in-depth analysis was provided to us by a Fire Taskforce which I formed earlier this year. The study revealed not only how the departments operate today, but also how fire protection began years ago. The organization and establishment of Stamford's volunteer companies is clearly defined in our City Charter.

This past June, the taskforce and I presented a new fire plan in its entirety to the public and members of the Board of Representatives. It demonstrates the restructuring of Stamford's fire service and addresses the rationale behind my vision for the future of fire service in Stamford.

In the following article, there is a Q & A which outlines the plan. Like any other complex problem, there are no easy solutions, but as you read on, I hope that many of your questions will be answered.

To all of our firefighters – both volunteers and paid - I salute you for the tremendous sacrifices you make every day, the responsibilities you accept and risks you have taken to protect Stamford citizens. I look forward with great anticipation to a cohesive resolution.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Pavia
Mayor

The History of Volunteer Fire Service

In the last issue of Stamford Plus Magazine, the article, "Stamford's Bravest at 125", noted that until the 1950's, fire service was divided into both the Town and the City of Stamford. Paid firefighters protected central and southern parts of the city; volunteer companies Long Ridge, Turn of River, Belltown, Glenbrook and Springdale, later becoming the "Big Five", served all areas to the north.

From Stamford's founding in 1641 to the 19th Century, fire protection consisted of citizens forming bucket brigades to put out fires. The first organized department began in

1844 when it was determined that more efficient fire equipment was needed for a growing city. Revenues from taxes allowed the formation of the Rip-powam Fire Engine Company. Several engine companies developed within the downtown as Stamford's population grew and were still supported by volunteers. The Stamford Fire Department began in 1885, becoming a part-paid and part-volunteer fire department. As more firehouses were established downtown in the 1900's, lack of volunteer personnel eventually led to an all-paid company.

Founded in 1908, Springdale Fire Department

became the first volunteer fire company in rural Stamford and remains the oldest volunteer department. In the 1920's, as the company realized the necessity to expand fire protection and equipment, they invested in a Buick Supply Wagon and their first fire apparatus. After World War II, as the Springdale community grew, the Springdale FD knew they needed to expand to meet the needs of residents. Through generous donations from the Springdale community, a new fire house was built at 987 Hope Street in 1955. The Springdale FD currently houses a Stamford Fire and Rescue engine; the remaining apparatus is driven and staffed by volunteer firefighters.

Long Ridge Fire Department was formed from the Long Ridge Association, which began in 1926. The Associa-

tion, involved in many duties and activities of the community, determined that providing fire protection was essential. Association members soon raised enough money to purchase two trucks. With no fire house, the trucks were stored in various locations, including the now Long Ridge Tavern. In 1930, the association went on to become the Long Ridge FC. Today LRFC mans two fire stations to cover the most northern areas of Stamford. Both houses are staffed with one paid driver at each station 24hrs a day. During the day an engineer and Fire Marshall also respond to emergencies.

The Glenbrook Fire Department, also known as the New Hope Fire Department Inc., originated in 1916 when both fire companies merged to serve the residents of Glenbrook. These two departments

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were staffed primarily by volunteers until the late 1960's. Faced with a shortage of volunteers during daytime shifts, the company introduced paid personnel to supplement fire coverage. Today, Glenbrook houses Engine 6 from Stamford Fire & Rescue.

Belltown Volunteer Fire Department was formed in 1928 by neighbors helping neighbors. As technology improved, the Belltown community came together to help purchase the department's first fire engine. This engine was stored in Mr. Berg's barn on Dale Place. Faced with similar challenges of other departments, volunteer fire personnel became scarce as they were summoned to war and paid personnel were introduced. Belltown's current fire house, on Dorlan Rd, was built in 1960. Belltown has always been a close knit neighborhood hosting block parties and open houses to serve its residents. Belltown FD recently returned to an all volunteer fire department.

Residents of the Turn of River area also realized a need to provide fire protection to the vast area; community members banded together to form the Turn of River Fire Department in May of 1928 and was manned by volunteers. A one-story wooden structure housed the first piece of fire apparatus, a loaned engine from Glenbrook FD which served until members raised enough funds to pay for their own fire truck. Years later, a building program allowed them to build a firehouse to meet the growing needs of the community. TRFD was faced with the necessity to bring in their first paid firefighter in 1944 when there became a shortage of drivers due to WW II. TRFD has expanded to two firehouses and continues to maintain a combination system of both paid and volunteer firefighters; two Stamford Fire and Rescue engines assist with fire coverage within the district.

For more information, please visit the City of Stamford's web site www.cityofstamford.org

The Evolution of Stamford Volunteer Fire Department and Stamford Fire & Rescue

1. What is the Mayor's new plan?

The Mayor's plan calls for the consolidation of FOUR volunteer fire departments: Long Ridge, Turn of River, Belltown and Springdale. These departments will combine into ONE volunteer fire department. The new department will be what is known as a "combination department". It will be comprised of both paid and volunteer fire fighters and will be known as the Stamford Volunteer Fire Department.

2. Why doesn't the city create one fire department instead of two?

Due to existing legal limitations, state statutes and our city charter, replacing the volunteer departments would be a difficult, lengthy and unrealistic process. To do so would require significant charter revision or in the alternative, protracted litigation, which to date, has been unsuccessful and remains unpredictable. More importantly, volunteer fire service - more than a century old tradition in Stamford - has served our community well; each neighborhood fire department takes deep pride in the birth and creation of their fire companies, most of which were established with their own funds and manned by their neighborhood residents. The reorganization of the volunteer companies is by far the best option and has the unanimous support of all of the volunteer companies affected.

3. Why consolidate the existing volunteer departments?

Consolidating the existing volunteer departments will result in standardized operating procedures, uniform and consistent training levels and hiring standards, purchasing policies and tighter fiscal control - throughout our city. It will also allow for a centralized command structure headed by a paid full-time fire chief of the newly created company, and establish greater oversight by the local community and the City of Stamford. This will result in stronger, more efficient delivery of fire service in the districts currently being served by the present independent departments. Allowing the present situation to continue is simply not an option and we are compelled to implement the improvements proposed under the plan as soon as possible.

4. How will the new plan be paid for?

The plan calls for the creation of one fire-taxing district. A district Board will be elected from members of the public which will set the budget for the volunteer fire department and collect revenues from property owners in the district. Currently, residents in the volunteer fire districts already pay for fire service through a portion of their real property taxes. Residents in the fire district will now have that portion deferred directly into the new taxing district. These revenues collected by the fire district would be committed exclusively to providing fire service

for those residents in the district. Preliminary numbers strongly indicate that this would result in a net zero increase to property owners in the fire tax district. This will result in better fiscal control by residents, more accountability and overall transparency.

5. How will the new Stamford Volunteer Fire Department operate?

This department will be structured like many other fire departments in the country; it will have a Board of Trustees who will act as governing body which will oversee hiring of new personnel, budget planning, capital projects, equipment purchasing, building maintenance and repairs, etc. The SVFD Chief, appointed by the Board of Trustees, will report directly to the Board. Volunteer officers will also be elected by each company within the department to ensure accountability is maintained. The Board will be comprised of representatives from city government including the Director of Public Safety.

6. How will the SVFD effect fire service in my neighborhood?

It will greatly enhance it; there will be better, comprehensive service, with increased response time and personnel. Cross-trained fire personnel, who must meet state mandated levels of training and certification before hiring, will now be able to respond to emergencies throughout the entire fire district. An estimated 61 paid firefighters are needed to staff this new department, 24 hours per day, 7 days a week - optimally staffing all stations at all times. Ten are currently employed at the Long Ridge Fire Department; additional hires may include local, certified fire personnel. Paid fire fighters in the district will be supplemented by volunteers as needed, who must also maintain the same levels of training and certifications. The proposed plan will also allow for the clear determination of what type of fire apparatus should be dispatched to a scene, relying upon clearly established and standardized protocols.

7. What will happen to the Stamford Fire and Rescue personnel currently stationed in the Turn of River and Springdale district?

These employees will be re-deployed into the city fire department (SFRD) and will fill current vacancies, anticipated retirements, and future personnel demands which often lead to significant overtime costs. The Mayor's plan does not call for any layoffs of current Stamford Fire and Rescue personnel. Mutual aid and assistance between Stamford Fire Department and the Stamford Volunteer Department will improve resulting in more comprehensive fire and emergency response levels throughout the entire City of Stamford.