

Firefighter Comments Regarding the Buracker Report

Spring Garden Career
Firefighters Comments
Regarding the
Buracker Report

Lee: Spring Garden Twp

With the much anticipated public release of the Joint Fire Services Plan prepared by Carroll Buracker & Associates, Inc. the SGTPFA supports and endorses their recommendation as follows "The Spring Garden and Springettsbury Townships are encouraged to merge their respective fire and rescue service delivery agencies into one highly effective, cost efficient, state-of-the-art fire agency in accordance with Pennsylvania statutory authority". This public funded study is the second study within the last year to recommend merging of fire departments. A study released in March 2006 conducted by Robert Heddon through the Governor's Center for Local Government Services recommended consolidation of fire departments. In addition to recommending the merger, the Buracker report states "Based on the national experience and that of the Study Team, it is clear that there are significant service improvement benefits, and cost reduction and avoidance opportunities that would benefit the taxpayers of Spring Garden and Springettsbury Townships". We encourage this committee to send the same recommendation to the Board of Supervisors and ask them to move this process forward as soon as possible.

Springettsbury
Township Career
Firefighter Comments
Regarding the
Buracker Report

Springettsbury Township Professional Fire Fighters

Comments offered for the

Springettsbury / Spring Garden Township

Fire Services Merger Ad Hoc Committee

November 21, 2006

David N. Eckman, President

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Ad Hoc Fire Service Merger Committee for this opportunity to provide our comments relating to the report released last month by Carrol Buracker Associates. Our members have had ample opportunity to review the report and we did conduct a joint meeting last week so that we could openly discuss our findings. The comments we offer to you tonight are the result of that open process. The lions share of our testimony can best be categorized as typographical errors – mistakes that really do not change the conclusions offered but may be confusing to the general public when reading the report.

On page 1 of the Executive summary, the discussion on the demographics of the two Townships incorrectly describes the population density of Spring Garden Township as 2787 persons per square mile when in fact it is 1787 persons per square mile which is much more aligned with the population density of Springettsbury Township which is calculated to be 1430 persons per square mile.

On page 13 of the Executive Summary, the description of the uniformed rank structure contained within the two departments is reversed. Spring Garden actually uses the chief, lieutenants, and fire fighters and Springettsbury uses the civilian manager, captains and fire fighters.

On the first page of chapter 3 on page 33, the ISO class for Springettsbury Township seems to be erroneously contained within the description of the Spring

Garden Fire Department. We really are not sure if the ISO of Spring Garden is class 5, or if Springettsbury is a class 5 and the sentence is in the wrong place.

On page 35, the shift schedule calculation requires some clarification. The typical fire fighter 24 hour shift on duty, followed by 48 hours off duty yields an average 56 hour work week. A kelly day, which is actually a day off, scheduled every six weeks yields a 52 hour work week. There are some differences in the two declared FLSA periods, but I do not think that is something we will not be able to work together to resolve.

The ad hoc merger committee is about to embark on, what may be the most complicated part of this process – the consideration and debate over the worthiness of merging two municipal fire departments into one independent agency. We have been, and continue to be supportive of that concept and can embrace the many elements of the joint fire services plan. In fact, we have already begun the process to merge the two Unions, recognizing that dealing with one collective bargaining representative for actual contract negotiations will be much more effective in getting the deal done.

We would however ask, that as you deliberate, that you try not to allow the recent headlines over police departments sway your decisions. There is absolutely no question, among those of us who know and understand these issues, that a regional approach to delivering emergency public services is better done through regional

entities.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to provide some thoughts on the ongoing merger project. We stand ready to continue to work through the difficult issues as we move forward.

I am happy to take any questions from the committee.

Springettsbury and
Spring Garden
Township Volunteer
Firefighter Comments
Regarding the
Buracker Report

Questions and Thoughts from the Volunteers of Spring Garden and Springettsbury Townships related to the Merger

11/21/06

After several meetings and healthy discussion specific to the merging of the Fire Departments of Spring Garden and Springettsbury Townships, the Volunteer Advisory Board presents the following list of questions and thoughts. Please understand that the Volunteers of both Townships are undecided about what to think of the Merger at this time, but look forward to participating in any way that proves beneficial to the Fire Departments and the residents of Spring Garden and Springettsbury Townships.

The Volunteers respectfully request answers to the questions listed below to help them determine the appropriate course of action relative to Volunteer Firefighters and Fire Police.

What is the purpose of the merger? There are many differing theories "floating" around the various Fire stations – ranging from cost savings for the residents to creating efficiencies and improving service. The Volunteers simply would like to get a clear-cut reason for pursuing this merger.

Why is it that there are virtually no people with ANY experience in the providing of Fire/Rescue services included in the committee? (Exception is Bill Mader) Would that not make sense? Possibly having someone that has been on the Fireground, someone that has actually provided Emergency service (Fire/Rescue, Fire Police, EMS) might be a valuable asset to the committee if they are to make a truly INFORMED decision. Thoughts?

What is wrong with the way things are right now? Through mutual aid agreements, Spring Garden and Springettsbury Township Fire Departments, as well as surrounding municipalities, are working together at this time and we are getting the job done.

How can we provide better service than what we have right now? We do agree with increasing the staffing on each piece of apparatus that leaves the stations. This is a safety issue for the Firefighters as well as an operational benefit (a way to get more done in less time.) However, consolidation of Fire stations in order to increase staffing on apparatus may be shortsighted.

If the goal is to save money – why not do a joint purchase agreement?

A merged Fire Department will not be a significant savings the Townships. We do realize that some efficiencies will occur – HR functions, administrative operations, and the like.

What are the Townships expecting from the volunteers?

What do the Townships see the volunteers doing besides Fire/ Rescue?

What is the Volunteer's mission or purpose in the new department?

In what ways are the Volunteers going to have ownership in the new department? Are the Townships looking for financial commitments from the Volunteers? If so, what do the Volunteers get in return? To be blunt and to the point - What's in for us?

Is the plan to close one or more existing fire stations and possibly build a new station(s) to house apparatus and career personnel? If so, how are these new stations being funded?

Does the Buracker report take into account or allow for the increased costs associated with Health care, pay raises, increased fuel costs, etc that will likely happen over time. The report states figures and makes projections about future savings, etc. Is it safe to assume that these estimates reflect an allowance for increased costs of various expenses that the Townships WILL incur? How will these increases affect the Township residents?

Based on the GIS information given in the Buracker report, locations for fire stations are based on response times that are established by NFPA Standards. Has anyone given consideration to actual call volume based on box numbers (where historically the calls are actually located)?

Station 13 in Spring Garden runs a great deal of calls to YCP.

Station 15 in Spring Garden runs to Memorial Hospital.

Station 16 in Springettsbury runs to Pleasant Acres quite a bit.

There is mention in the report about having one of the Career officers handle Volunteer issues (training, recruitment, retention, etc.) What guarantees do the Volunteers have that things are going to run smoothly and that the Volunteers are not going to be "run out" after the Merger takes effect and assets are committed, if this is the case?

There is lots of talk about bolstering the Volunteer ranks in both Townships. What are the thoughts and ideas about how accomplish this? With the increased training requirements that are mandated by the state to be a qualified Firefighter, the time commitment is HUGE!!!! What ways are being thought of to make it worthwhile to become and/or continue to be a Volunteer Firefighter? The sheer "love of the job" will only attract **and keep** a select few.

York College is a great source of Volunteers. Station 13 is VERY convenient to YCP. If Station 13 is no longer a Fire station, this will likely impact Volunteerism in Spring Garden Township's Fire Department. Thoughts?

Are the Townships "throwing money" at the problem – a problem that is still vague in definition? Let's face it, if/when the merger actually happens, it is going to be VERY expensive for the Townships at least initially. Are these expenditures necessary and

where is this money coming from? Are the residents aware of what is happening and the costs associated with this plan?

Relief money? What is the plan for this? The Volunteers have been told that the Townships are not permitted by law to “play” with this money. What are the intentions?

For the most part, it is felt that the Relief organizations will continue to support the Fire/ Rescue services as much as possible, just as they have in the past. It appears as though the financial responsibility for purchasing new Fire apparatus, etc. will fall on the Townships after the Merger takes place. How are the Townships planning to pay for this equipment? Fire Taxes, etc? There will be large amounts of money available through Relief, but the Volunteers will not easily give up this money in exchange for nothing.

What are the long-term thoughts about EMS in the townships? Will EMS become something that is offered by the Fire Department?

What are the volunteers going to be able to do in the new system – hold offices, etc.

We do realize that Volunteer Firefighters may have the opportunity to serve as Line Officers on the fireground – subordinate to career personnel. This changes very little from the way things are right now. In what other things are the Volunteers going to be able to be involved?

What happens to Fire Police? There is little mention of Fire Police in the Buracker report. Is it being assumed that the Fire Police will simply “follow along” with the Volunteer Firefighters? The reality is that there are more Fire Police than there are Firefighters. This issue is one that needs some attention.

Will the Townships support the Fire Service better than they have in the past or are they creating a new system so that only a few people have to deal with the problems/ issues that will possibly get “swept under the rug”?

Is there a possibility for the volunteers to have their own station and trucks staffed by volunteers?

How is it that a name and “Identification Package” can be developed without giving the men who wear these identifiers a REAL say or even an opportunity to come up with something of their own? Yes, there were Career Firefighters on the “committee” to decide on these things, but the reality is that VERY FEW people in the rank and file actually like anything about the name or the ID package. (Example – York Area United Fire & Rescue – sounds like a Soccer team more than a Fire Department.) Maybe it’s too late for changes, but the thought still remains – why were the Career people not given a chance to suggest names or design a patch. The Bradley Academy did an AMAZING job given what they had to work with, but why not ask the people who are supposed to take pride in the name and pride in the patch what they think? The Volunteers did not comment heavily due to the fact that these things were not for US, they are for the Career people with very few exceptions.

Ideas:

Combined solicitation – Spring Garden and Springetts – there is LOTS of money out there simply waiting to be acquired.

What do we want:

We want to show up and fight fire. We want to be able to continue to do what we love to do whenever it is possible for us to do this. The idea of having duty shifts that are scheduled goes against the idea of Volunteerism. We understand that this idea creates a sense of duty and belonging, but it is impractical to think that the few Volunteers that are truly active are going to or be able to take time out of their already busy lives to sit at a Firehouse waiting for a call for an 8-12 hour shift.

What happens when a call comes in shortly after “John’s” shift? His wife and kids are upset that he has been gone for 12 hours. Is he expected to leave his home AGAIN for who knows how long to go help out – AGAIN leaving his family to do without him.

We want training that is more convenient to the volunteers – weekends and evenings – not always during a weekday when we are at our regular jobs.

We want to remain active in Fire/Rescue, Fire Police, EMS, Administrative and Social activities, and Fundraising.

The volunteers all have differing desires. Some just want to run calls and fight fire. Others want only to do Fundraising. Still others just want to go to a place where they can hang out and “shoot the shit” and have a cup of coffee. ALL of these activities need to be addressed in some way.

We want representation on the Supervisory Board –

We would think it beneficial to have someone with some sort of Firefighting experience/ background on this board. Would the Committee entertain the idea of having Volunteers on the Supervisory Board – making the board 5 members instead of 3? Is this board going to be 2 or 3 people? There are conflicting numbers in the Draft Charter and the Buracker report.

We would like some sort of recognition for our efforts and for the services that we provide.

We as Volunteers do understand that many times, our work is thankless. We derive our pleasure and our satisfaction from doing a tough job well and from helping our fellow men in their time of need – not from a paycheck. However, it would be nice to have the municipalities that we (Career **AND** Volunteer) serve get some sort of recognition for the fact that we do what we do **AND** we do it well.

We would like a fuel stipend simply to help offset the cost of fuel used while responding to alarms. This pertains especially to Fire Police.

We want some sort of ownership in the new Department. We want a say in how things are run. If we sell the Grantley station (for example) and agree to put the ambulances at the "new station" and "give" that money to the Townships to help with the building of a new station – we want a say in how things are set up and operated as well as a say in the design of the new station – volunteer dorm, bathroom, etc.

We want to have a meeting to discuss the nitty-gritty details of the merger and get answers to the questions that we have. Maybe a meeting with representatives from the Career staff, Volunteers, and the Townships would be in order. This meeting would be lengthy, but productive in nature.

We want a place to go and hang out, train, ride engines/truck, and **feel welcomed**. We DO NOT want to be outcasts. We ARE a valuable resource for the communities that we serve and save the Townships lots of money by doing the things that we do. We DO NOT ask for much.