

# Proposed Merger of Spring Garden and Springettsbury Fire Departments

## Reasons to move forward

Several years ago, after a multi-alarm fire, Chief Emig asked Chief Stern if there was possibly a better way to coordinate the two townships' firefighting. His passing question developed into a formal Ad Hoc committee in June of 2005 charged with studying the idea of merged fire services. The Chiefs, the Managers, the Career Firefighters, the Volunteer Firefighters, a group of Citizen Volunteers, several professional consultants have all participated in an open and candid dialog, culminating in the presentation you've seen tonight.

Admittedly there are still a number of details still to be worked out, but the fundamental concept of a merged regional fire department is a viable and attainable way to dramatically improve the effectiveness of fire protection in our area.

- More effective response to larger incidents (i.e. residential structure fires):
  - First alarm initial response from a regional department could deliver 8 or more firefighters (full shift) substantially faster than the current tiered-alarm multi-department responses from County Control (i.e. First alarm: 4 firefighters from one department; Slight delay; Second alarm: 4 firefighters from another department; Slight delay; etc.).
  - Not only would *more* firefighters arrive *sooner*, but the regional firefighters will be immediately more effective because of practiced teamwork and familiar coordinated tactics.
  
- More effective training of career and volunteer firefighters:
  - Training within a combined department will guarantee effective, uniform and familiar command structure and operating procedures at larger emergencies.
  - Firefighters in a combined department will have a more complete working knowledge of the roads, structures, and nuances of both townships, saving valuable time in an emergency.
  - A larger department will offer opportunities for more specialized training to bring high level skills in-house.
  
- More effective long term spending based on the needs of a larger region:
  - Apparatus purchases can be made based on the needs of the region, reducing the money spent on very expensive, often redundant, specialized apparatus.
  - Computerized "Response Time Modeling" applied to a large region will more effectively position, equip, and staff future fire stations, reducing gaps in coverage and wasteful areas of overlapping coverage.

- More effective firefighter staffing, balancing manpower with call volume demands:
  - Springettsbury Township’s continuing growth and development is drawing more and more heavily on Mutual Aid support from adjacent fire departments. A more regional look at staffing will assign firefighters by need, not by municipal boundaries. (Background: Of the 210 Mutual Aid and Automatic Aid calls between the two Townships in 2005, 188 calls (90%) were Spring Garden Firefighters responding into Springettsbury Township, 22 calls (10%) were Springettsbury Firefighters responding into Spring Garden Township.)
  - The proposed department’s structure is scalable to anticipate including more municipalities in the future, further increasing effectiveness.
  
- Better recruitment, retention, and coordination of volunteer fire fighters.
  - Currently the two townships are served by three volunteer companies with very low and declining fire scene participation. Access to a larger regional department’s better training, better equipment, and higher combined call volume will attract and retain more active volunteers.
  
- Pennsylvania is the number one most fragmented state for governmental services in the United States, and York County is the 16<sup>th</sup> most fragmented county of the over 300 counties in the Northeast:
  - This is a unique opportunity for us to break out of our historical “small box” municipality thinking and look at a larger more regional view of service delivery.
  - This will be the first merger between career fire departments in Pennsylvania, giving us unique access to legislative, financial and technical support from both State and County agencies.
    - All of our State and County legislators have shown continued personal interest in, and vocal support for, our efforts.
    - To date, grant revenue has offset most of the costs for the feasibility studies, and legal and actuarial services.
    - Future grant revenue will most likely be available to offset continuing implementation, transition and start-up costs.
  
- Only a small cost savings are projected for the short term (3 to 5 years):
  - No reduction in staffing has been proposed.
  - Some additional job titles have been added (Chief, Admin Assistant).
  - Small savings in some areas from combined administration and purchasing (i.e. insurance, supplies, etc.).
  - All municipalities in Pennsylvania must accept the inevitable long-term cost increases necessary to offset the declining ability of volunteer fire companies to finance new apparatus and fire houses.