



# Bedminster Township

## Blue Ribbon Committee Report: Review of Fire and Rescue Services



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## Chapter 1 - Forward and Goals

### FORWARD:

The volunteer culture is deeply ingrained in New Jersey, and its existence must be fostered carefully. That said, there are massive problems facing municipalities in the near term as the structure of local government as it exists today is not sustainable. The survivors, both the volunteers and the municipalities, will be those who are pro-active and get out ahead of the problem.

Volunteer morale is a fragile thing. As Mayor I found that good volunteers, regardless of the position, are motivated by high levels of activity, ability to contribute to the product of the group, the quality of the leadership and the clarity of the mission. Maintaining a volunteer core is critical. This must be primary in any changes that are implemented.

As we prioritize the issues, the protection of life should always be first. Protection of property, while important, does fall into a lesser place.

### OBJECTIVES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

The purpose of this report is to take a close look at our emergency response operations and search for a path that will maintain and hopefully improve our response capability in our resource constrained world, establish a path for future capital purchases, and keep our services volunteer based.

### AUTHORS:

The primary writer of this report, Robert F. Holtaway, served the township for 7 years as a planning board member and chair, then for 9 years as an elected member of the Township Committee, with 8 of those years as mayor. Lance Boxer served for 4 years as a member and officer of the Rescue Squad, and for 5 years as Land Use Board member and chair.



## Chapter 2 – Economic Environment

Municipalities, Bedminster included, are under considerable economic pressure. This is the result of the general economic conditions resulting from the recession of 2008, as well as New Jersey having the highest property taxes in the nation, second highest overall taxes, and the resulting taxpayer backlash. This backlash has placed a 2% levy cap on municipalities. Out of our \$10 million or so budget, approximately \$6 million is raised by taxes. That limits our annual revenue increase to around \$120,000. While I was mayor that barely covered the increases in the items we have no control over such as health care, insurance, utilities etc.

Another related pressure is the push for municipal merger and consolidation. There is a bill in the legislature that will penalize us by denying municipal aid to towns in the amount that could have been saved with a merger, consolidation or shared service. Bedminster has pursued shared services at every opportunity.

For years, Bedminster Township has struggled, usually successfully, to maintain its municipal property tax rate at or below inflation. This is a daunting task due to the many costs that are beyond our control, including health care, pension, insurance, energy, contract increases, etc. Increases in these areas are almost all in excess of the 2% cap on taxes raised, which reduces the funding available for everything else.

Additionally, we suffered a big drop in other income, creating further pressure. State “aid” has been reduced; we have lost about 8% of our total income over the last few years. Bedminster has been a saver, and in 2008 we had interest income of over \$440,000. In 2011 it was below \$30,000. Our annual income from non-tax sources has dropped over a half million dollars since 2008.

The municipality has made substantial changes over the past several years to reduce the cost of services and the cost of running government. Some of these include:

- Combining the positions of Clerk and Administrator.
- Re-organizing the finance department and having a part time CFO.
- Re-organizing the Police Department from a Chief, Lieutenant, and 5 sergeants to a Chief, Lieutenant (who retained all his sergeant duties) and 4 sergeants.
- Merging the Planning Board and Board of Adjustment into the Land Use Board.
- Merging Open Space and Farmland Committees.



- Changing our Health Services contract to Somerset County.

Additionally we have looked hard at the services we do provide, and have decided that if we spend taxpayer's money, it should benefit a majority of the taxpayers. This has resulted in:

- Major modifications to the bulky waste program to reduce costs as well as require payments by those who do use it to help offset costs.
- Increased fees for recreation programs and summer camps to make them more self sufficient.
- Restructuring of building department fees.
- Fees for consultations with township professionals by developers.
- We have moved our healthcare to a HIF (non-profit member owned) to stabilize and reduce costs.

There has been some help from the state, although not anywhere enough. The health care, pension, and arbitration changes are where some progress has been made, however, so far the help to Bedminster from these changes is minimal.

A major burden for the Emergency Service Units is the incessant increase in requirements for procedures, equipment and training. Not too many years ago you jumped on the back of the truck and off you went. For the most part, many of the requirements have increased the safety of the operations, reduced injury or worse and possibly increased efficiency. This has occurred at greatly increased cost, in both the form of money and volunteer time. These added burdens, regardless of benefit, are hard to cope with and are creating a crisis.

When the discussions over needs are completed, the bottom line is the residents are of the impression there is a 2% cap on their taxes and they are upset when it is exceeded.



### Chapter 3 – Emergency Response Background

Bedminster is presently served by three volunteer emergency response units, 29 Fire, 29 Rescue, and 63 Fire.

The cultures and structures of these three organizations are quite different.

- 63 Fire, the Pottersville Volunteer Fire Company, is an independent company created in 1953. Its service area is in two municipalities, part of Bedminster Township and part of Tewksbury Township. 63 Fire as an entity owns its firehouse and the adjacent school building that it leases to a daycare operation. The newest engine is owned by Bedminster Township, the balance of the rolling stock is owned by 63 Fire. There are no formal funding mechanisms in place with Tewksbury for cost sharing for either capital or expenses. We were lead to believe that Tewksbury would contribute capital of \$25,000 per year for 10 years to 63 Fire which they would put towards the truck, but Tewksbury has only been contributing \$23,000/year, requiring 63 Fire to make up the difference. 63 Fire does successfully do fundraising, including pancake breakfasts and the like, with their main event being the antique show. Like most companies, 63 Fire struggles with daytime response. The Pottersville Firehouse and fire company is also a social center for the village.
- 29 Rescue, the Bedminster Far Hills First Aid Squad, is an independent company created in a split of the former 29 Fire/Rescue in 1941, with its service area including all of Bedminster and Far Hills. 29 Rescue owns its building, property and rigs. There is a formal agreement in place between Bedminster and Far Hills Borough to share service, and capital costs. Far Hills and Bedminster contribute to operational costs; however there is no formal agreement on this sharing. Bedminster and Far Hills taxpayers contribute to 29 Rescue to support operations. To this point they have been capital independent, but the president of the squad has informed ESFAC that it may not be able to internally fund major capital items going forward. 29 Rescue does do fundraising, with their main source an annual mail campaign and a “thank you” follow-up program. In 2012 and 2013 they sponsored a circus event. 29 Rescue struggled with daytime response and about 7 years ago contracted with Somerset Hospital to provide weekday daytime coverage at no cost to Bedminster. Somerset does use the 29 Rescue building as its base.
- 29 Fire, the Far Hills-Bedminster Fire Company, formally known as Union Hook and Ladder, is an independent company founded early in the last century, with its current service area including Bedminster with the exception of Pottersville, and Far Hills. At this time 29 Fire owns its firehouse on Miller Lane, which sits on land jointly owned by Far Hills (20%) and Bedminster (80%) and the old firehouse in Far Hills, which is for



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sale. The understanding is that the proceeds from the Far Hills firehouse sale will be used to pay down debt. The ladder and rescue trucks are owned by Bedminster Township. There is a formal agreement in place between Bedminster and Far Hills Borough to share service and capital costs. Bedminster taxpayers contribute to 29 Fire for operations and capital items. 29 Fire does limited fundraising, mainly an annual mail campaign. Daytime coverage is supplemented by DPW employees who are members of the company



Chapter 4 – Company Financial Data

The following is the base financial data we have collected from the companies and the municipalities involved. This data is unaudited, and there are some apples to oranges issues with how the companies classify items which causes variance that may require further refinement for a complete understanding.

This data is presented for comparative and information purposes.

	63 Fire	29 Rescue	29 Fire	Totals
2012 Operating Expenses (Actual)	\$135,071	\$74,112	\$175,683	\$384,866
Balance Sheet Non-Cash Assets 12/31/12	\$702,091	\$415,200	\$2,464,285	\$3,581,576
December 31, 2012 Cash on Hand Value (Total)	\$337,817	\$396,700	\$155,457	\$889,974
Bedminster Insurance Payments (see note)	\$30,000	\$10,000	\$45,000	\$85,000
2012 Municipal Operating Contribution (Bedminster)	\$58,125	\$23,125	\$88,775	\$170,025
2012 Municipal Operating Contribution (Far Hills)	\$0	\$9,921	\$32,375	\$42,296
2012 Municipal Operating Contribution (Tewksbury)	\$20,189	\$0	\$0	\$20,189
Total Operating Contributions	\$108,314	\$43,046	\$166,150	\$317,510
2012 LOSAP Payment Bedminster	\$15,749	\$7,453	\$0	\$23,202
2012 LOSAP Payment Far Hills	\$0	\$1,863	\$0	\$1,863
2012 LOSAP Payment Tewksbury	\$6,749	\$0	\$0	\$6,749
Total LOSAP Payments	\$22,498	\$9,316	\$0	\$31,814
2012 Municipal Rolling Stock Payments (Bedminster)	\$44,833	\$0	\$171,666	\$216,499
2012 Municipal Rolling Stock Payments (Far Hills)	\$0	\$0	\$60,000	\$60,000
2012 Municipal Rolling Stock Payments (Tewksbury)	\$23,000	\$0	\$0	\$23,000
2012 Facility Payment Bedminster	\$0	\$0	\$99,400	\$99,400
2012 Facility Payment Far Hills	\$0	\$0	\$24,850	\$24,850
Total Capital Contribution	\$67,833	\$0	\$355,916	\$423,749

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	63 Fire	29 Rescue	29 Fire	Totals
Current open municipal debt (Bedminster)	\$176,527	\$0	\$930,473	\$1,107,000
Current open municipal debt (Far Hills)	\$0	\$0	\$60,000	\$60,000
Current open municipal debt (Tewksbury)	\$138,000	\$0	\$0	\$138,000
Total Open Debt	\$314,527	\$0	\$990,473	\$1,305,000
2012 Fundraising/Contributions all sources	\$57,028	\$52,153	\$55,630	\$164,811
Insurance	\$32,189	\$23,093	\$5,158	\$60,440
Rental income from assets	\$15,860	\$0	\$7,200	\$23,060

As can be seen, there are numerous municipal sources: the operating subsidy, LOSAP, mortgage payments, capital contributions, note payments, etc that create the total cost to the taxpayer.

While digging for this report it has come to our attention that Bedminster Township has been paying 100% of the property and casualty insurance and workman’s compensation premiums for all of 63 Fire, 29 Fire and 100% of the workman’s comp for 29 Rescue with them paying their property and casualty. For purposes of this report we have estimated the total cost of insurance for emergency services is \$85,000 out of a total of \$253,000 paid by Bedminster. At this time we were not able to get an accurate breakdown from the JIF.

In the documents provided to this committee the 63 Fire proposed 2013 budget spending is listed as \$193,330. This includes \$19,600 for workman’s compensation insurance which is actually paid directly by Bedminster. Not noted are the property and liability insurances on the Schoolhouse, and firehouse, also paid entirely by Bedminster. The budget also includes some exceptional items including \$8,500 for Chiefs/Computer room renovations and \$5,000 for the Chief’s vehicle cabinet renovations.

Inspection reveals that there is no Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP) for 29 Fire. When this was proposed 15 years or so ago, 29 Fire indicated they would rather have the money go toward equipment as they did not think it would be a motivator for recruiting or retention. Based on our discussions with the three companies it appears 29 Fire’s opinion is now shared by all three. A study on moving away from LOSAP is beyond the scope of this report; however as it appears to be a failure at its intended purpose of enhancing recruiting and volunteer retention, further study should be completed on eliminating LOSAP.



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One comparison above is the Operating Expense per Company Call. This uses the first line operating expense value divided by the total number of calls by the company. 63 Fire is \$1,239, 29 Rescue is \$97, and 29 Fire is \$374. The value for the rescue squad is driven by high call volume, and Somerset Hospital covering most of those calls with limited operating expense to the Squad. 63 Fire is 4 times higher than 29 Fires cost due to 63 Fires operating cost being 75% of 29's, and their calls being 22% of 29's.



Chapter 5 – Company Operations

The following table presents underlying data related to the number of tax units, calls, types of calls, and training. These numbers are collected from the reports provided by the Companies to the Township Clerk for use by the Township Committee. The data presented is for the calendar year 2012.

	63 Fire	29 Rescue	29 Fire	Totals
Residential Tax Units in Service Area (Bedminster & FH)	136	4621	4485	N/S
Non Residential Tax Units in service area	8	164	156	N/S
Tewksbury total tax units in service area	177	0	0	177
Total Bedminster Calls 2012	64	691	377	1,132
Total Far Hills Calls 2012	0	74	93	167
Total Tewksbury calls	45	0	0	45
Calls onto 78 or 287 (included above)	0	73	69	142
Company total calls	111	765	500	1,376
Total "Hot" calls (fire related activity)	79	*	274	353
Total False alarms/turnarounds	32	*	226	258
Percent of calls False Alarm or Turnaround	29%	N/A	45%	N/S
Calls (total) per tax unit in service area ( not inc. 78/287)	0.35	0.14	0.09	
Calls by Somerset Medical Center (Included above)	0	450	0	450
Mutual Aid to Others (Out)	2	8	30	40
Mutual Aid from Others (In)	**	40	8	48
Members 12/31/11	19	*	31	50
Training hours total	4,034	*	16,996	21,030
Training hours per member	212	N/A	548	N/S

\*Not Provided by 29 Rescue

\*\* Not provided by 63 Fire

COMMENTS ON THE DATA:

Inspection of the records shows that 29 Fire and 29 Rescue spend a substantial effort responding to incidents on the interstate highway system. While this helps maintain an activity level that hones and maintains skill, it also imposes a burden in that this volume is over and above that normally expected for a town of our size.



In 2012 29 Fire responded to a total of 500 calls. Of that 274 were “hot” calls (not a false alarm or turnaround). In 2012 63 Fire responded to a total of 112 calls, of that 79 were hot calls. This represents a “needless” response rate of 45% for 29 Fire and 29% for 63 Fire, both of which the writers find unacceptable.

Several years ago the township passed an ordinance regulating alarm systems which improved things, however, it appears that this requires more study or stepped up enforcement and is beyond the scope of this report. In some instances there are multiple false alarms to the same address within a short period of time.

The nature of our response to alarms may need to be tempered, especially in the case of 3 or 4 alarms within a 24 period. It seems pounding volunteers is less expensive for an owner than maintaining/upgrading their alarm system or providing training for their personnel.

It appears that the ordinance or the administration of the ordinance should be changed to affect the economics of providing maintenance, upgrades or training being less costly than paying the fines. A majority of the penalties collected for false alarm response should go to the responding organization as an offset to the annoyance and cost.

There is an anomaly in the numbers that should be researched further, and that is the ratio of fire calls to rescue calls between Bedminster and Far Hills. Bedminster has about one fire call for every two rescue calls (0.54), while Far Hills has about 4 fire calls for every three rescue calls (1.26). This could just be a case of small sample size skewing the numbers or the impact of 63’s service area, but deserves checking. This difference becomes noticeable when calculating unit costs.

There is a wide difference in the number of fire calls per Bedminster tax unit between 63 Fire (0.35) and 29 Fire (0.09). This indicates 63 Fire has about 4 times as many calls per tax unit as 29 Fire. When looking at the demographics, this difference is hard to explain. We expect there are certain properties that are having excessive number of calls that is skewing this statistic. This should be investigated to reduce the ratio.

Another big difference is the average reported training hours for 29 Fire and 63 Fire. 29 Fire’s average is 2.5 times 63 Fires average. We don’t know if this is an error, or if reporting differences can explain it, however it is significant and deserves attention.



## Chapter 6 – Cost Sharing Between Municipalities

All three Companies serve two or portions of two, municipalities. We have attempted to look into the cost sharing arrangements to determine the fairness of the cost burden for the various towns.

We use two basis of comparison, the first is the “tax unit” which attempts to scale the number of structures, and therefore the households involved; and second is the number of calls into the service area. These statistics can be done any number of ways. There are other influences such as rental apartment buildings which count once as a tax unit but contain numerous households. The tax unit assumption favors Far Hills and Tewksbury in the attempt to assign per residence values.

<b>Bedminster Contribution Costs</b>	63 Fire	29 Rescue	29 Fire	Total
Annual Cash From Bedminster Taxpayers	\$148,707	\$40,578	\$404,841	\$594,126
Outstanding Bedminster Debt per Tax Unit	\$1,226	\$0	\$218	\$1,444
Annual Cost per tax unit in service area	\$1,033	\$9	\$95	\$1,137
Annual Cost per Bedminster Call	\$2,324	\$59	\$1,074	\$3,456

<b>Tewksbury Contribution Costs</b>				
Annual Cash From Tewksbury Taxpayers	\$49,938	\$0	\$0	\$49,938
Outstanding Tewksbury Debt per Tax Unit	\$780	\$0	\$0	\$780
Annual Cost per tax unit in service area	\$282	\$0	\$0	\$282
Annual Cost per Tewksbury Call	\$1,110	\$0	\$0	\$1,110

<b>Far Hills Contribution Costs</b>				
Annual Cash From Far Hills Taxpayers	\$0	\$11,784	\$117,225	\$129,009
Outstanding Debt Debt per Tax Unit	\$0	\$0	\$155	\$155
Annual Cost per tax unit in service area	\$0	\$31	\$304	\$334
Annual Cost per Far Hills Call	\$0	\$159	\$1,260	\$1,420

### COMMENTS ON THE DATA:

The outstanding figure is the cost of service per “tax unit”. Protection for those units in the 63 Fire service areas is a factor of 10+ over the balance of Bedminster (\$1,084 in 63’s area vs. \$95 in 29’s area). This is probably the most telling data point in the entire study.

A big item to be addressed in the name of fairness is the lower contribution rate of Tewksbury on both a tax item stand point (\$1,084 for Bedminster and \$282 Tewksbury) and a per call



basis (\$2,440 for Bedminster and \$1,110 for Tewksbury). This means that Bedminster is subsidizing Tewksbury to a substantial extent. We realize that times are tough but Tewksbury should be paying their fair share or give up their service area.

A hidden cost for Bedminster is the value of the Bedminster DPW loss of productivity that is contributed in kind to the fire companies. In fairness, an agreement should be reached between Far Hills and Bedminster to reimburse Bedminster, either by accepting billing for DPW employees who respond to daytime calls in Far Hills, by reimbursing a percentage of the annual time spent on calls, or not permit DPW employees to leave their posts for Far Hills calls.

An obvious conclusion is that if 29 Fire was to cover Bedminster's portion of 63's service area there would be substantial cost savings to Bedminster taxpayers. The incremental cost would be minimal, and resolving the false alarm issues could keep 29 Fire's call volume at or below what it is today.

There would be logistics issues involved including the new fire engine owned by Bedminster but partially paid for by Tewksbury, the mortgage on the existing buildings, etc. There are also other items which must be considered in the mix, such as response times, volunteer availability, etc.



## Chapter 7 – Equipment Requests and Future Investment

The major cost for emergency services, other than police, is capital and its carrying cost. Bedminster has grown in population from about 2400 in 1980 to 8300 in 2000. For a while we were the fastest growing municipality in New Jersey.

Our population has stabilized, actually dropping between 2000 and 2010, and we are in the build-out phase based on current zoning. The need for growth of municipal facilities has passed, and we are entering a maintenance phase. During our growth period we replaced our municipal building, police building, DPW building, and firehouse.

As we anticipate only incremental growth, our capital plans should only reflect the necessary replacement of equipment as it becomes aged and a maintenance problem, or there are radical changes in technology or regulations.

Currently, ISO, the main fire rating organization, is revising its rating method and it appears there is less emphasis on hardware. An analysis of these changes is beyond the scope of this effort.

There are currently requests for a tanker truck and two command vehicles. These items deserve discussion.

The first is the 63 Fire's request for a new water tanker. Their tanker was destroyed in an accident about two years ago. They have operated without the tanker since that time. In 63 Fire's "Response to Committee Notes" dated June 17, 2013 there is an extensive discussion on Topic 1, which was for 29 Fire to support 63 Fire with tanker dispatch, which 63 Fire and 29 Fire agreed with and has been implemented.

The response continued into the need to replace the tanker and there are several points that are made in the letter that require discussion.

The third paragraph says "As you know, PVFC serves an area of Bedminster that does not have fire hydrant services." Actually there are 25 hydrants in the service area, of which 19 are paid for by Bedminster taxpayers at a cost of \$10,000 per year. At a follow-up meeting this was discussed and we were told the flows were inadequate for firefighting. We obtained test data for 4 hydrant flow testing on 08/12/13 for Purnell School as follows:



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Hydrant #	Static Hydrant#	Location	Static PSI	Residual PSI	Pitot	Flow data GPM	Flow at 20PSI GPM
11	17	40 Pottersville Road	115	70	30	1300	1946
10	25	Purnell School	115	55	45	1126	1443
25	10	Purnell School	115	45	40	1061	1251
17	11	120 Pottersville Road	120	90	60	1300	2490

Based on the letters comment that the 750 gallons will last for 5-1/2 minutes, this yields a required flow of less than 200 GPM.

The flow and pressure values listed above are well into the acceptable range for hydrant service. With the recent replacement of the water main for Black River Road from Pottersville Road thru the village the flows, which may have been impacted by the old piping, should now flow well. While testing will determine the actual conditions, it appears the hydrants with the village area are probably adequate to support fire fighting operations.

We have requested the fire official to continue testing of hydrants in the 63 Fire service area to determine if service is adequate. It is our expectation that the majority, if not all, the hydrants would pass muster.

As an aside, when 63 fire was lobbying for the foam truck, one of the attributes used in the justification of the first foam truck for Bedminster was the foam leveraged the water needed by a factor of 10:1, bringing the effective water capacity to over 5000 gallons.

On the second page of the memo there is discussion that the furthest dwelling in 63's Bedminster service area is 7.2 to 7.9 miles from 29 Fire and discusses the impact on response time. My own house which is in the 29 service area, is shown by Google maps to be 7.7 miles, and that is our first response distance, not a secondary tanker response distance. The travel time of the tanker will not endanger the primary task, which is life safety, however it is possible there could be some additional property damage due to the travel time, although that applies throughout the township and not just Pottersville. If money was to be invested, and we don't think it should be at this time, it appears it should be to improve the first response for life safety in the southwest portion of the township.



There are also requests for command vehicles for both companies. We had discussions with the companies about “fast response” vehicles which would be dispatched on alarm with the first on site determining if a greater response was needed. The “fast response” vehicle would be much lighter than an engine, and carry the equipment to assist in evacuation of the structure for life safety and limited firefighting. The fast response unit would make the determination if engines were required for additional life safety or property damage reduction,

The fire departments opinion was they roll an engine on every alarm and would continue to do so. If that continues to be the case, and given the new engines carry full communications gear and everything else required for first response, the value of a command vehicle needs to be evaluated. With the advent of the county wide dispatch and all Bedminster emergency vehicles having trunking radios, coupled with the move to tablet based information packages in each response vehicle, the need for a “command vehicle” may be waning. It must be kept in mind that the actual “first to arrive” most often is the police, and that should be utilized in evaluation of the needs.

The need for future equipment must be tempered with a serious discussion of the actual need, not just replacing for the sake of replacing. The goals must be set and the tools needed to meet those goals put into the capital plan.



## Chapter 8 – Financing Opportunity for Emergency Services

Consideration must be given to the creation of a revenue stream to support emergency services. There is an existing stream, however it does not benefit Bedminster residents to the extent it should. Our daytime rescue services are provided by an outside agency that generates revenue from its services, and we should consider adopting this policy as well.

There is one form of revenue stream that we believe must be avoided at all cost, and that is the creation of a Fire District. This is yet another government organization that has taxing powers, and typically is populated with those in the fire service who take care of each other at great expense to the taxpayers.

The following projection is based on a financial merger of 29 Fire and 29 Rescue which is discussed in Chapter 10.

We looked at other squads that operate with this proposed plan successfully. The following is data from several RFP’s that provide insight on Rescue revenue flows. Inspection indicates that the size of the organization has little impact on the average net collection per trip. The averages take into account courtesy write offs, estimated at 20%, and waiver of co-pays for Medicare patients.

Buena BORO RFP information 3/2013

Year	Volume of calls	Receipts per year	Payer Mix
2011	520	\$148,007.57	NA
2012	478	\$146,460.36	42% Mcare, 13% Medicaid, 35% commercial
2012	Average trip sheet	\$306.40	

Edison Twp. RFP information 6/2012

Year	Volume of calls	Receipts per year	Payer Mix
2010	4325	\$1,560,245.36	1956 Mcare 45%, 292 Medicaid 34%
2011	4448	\$1,329,064.66	42% Mcare, 13% Medicaid, 35% commercial
2011	Average trip sheet	\$298.80	

Gloucester County EMS RFP information 8/2012

	Volume of Calls	Net collected	
2010	10833	3,395,784.12	Mix not available
2011	11096	3,336,154.56	Mix not available



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2011	Average trip sheet	\$300.66	
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The following revenue estimate is based on 29 Fire/Rescue covering 24 hours by 7 days. The First Aid call value is based on the three examples above. The false alarm is an estimate based on an update to the ordinance to strengthen the penalties for false alarm; the others are based on some insurance company data.

SOURCE	INCIDENTS	\$ / INCIDENT	TOTAL \$
First aid calls Bedminster & Far Hills	765	\$300	\$229,500
29 FireFalse alarm	196	\$100	\$19,600
29 Highway / vehicle calls	69	\$750	\$51,750
29 "Hot" calls	274	\$200	\$54,800
	Total		\$355,650

If there is a period where the Somerset Medical Contract must be honored on an interim basis or the decision is made to leave Somerset on the current coverage, the revenue stream estimate would be revised as follows.

SOURCE	INCIDENTS	\$ / INCIDENT	TOTAL \$
First aid calls Bedminster & Far Hills	351	\$300	\$105,300
29 FireFalse alarm	196	\$100	\$19,600
29 Highway / vehicle calls	69	\$750	\$51,750
29 "Hot" calls	274	\$200	\$54,800
	Total		\$231,450

The revenue stream based on today's operational setup, which is the three operating companies, and implementing the "soft billing" system would provide the following estimated savings for the taxpayer.

Operating Contributions	\$154,196
LOSAP Payments	\$9,316
Rolling Stock Payments (Debt Payment for equipment)	\$231,666
Facilities Payments (Debt payments on Miller Lane Firehouse)	\$124,250
Total Funded By Taxpayers In Bedminster & Far Hills	\$519,428
Revenue anticipated from soft billing	\$231,450
Percentage savings for Bedminster & Far Hills	45%



The above does not include any revenue from 63 Fire for Bedminster, which would be in the range of \$10,000.

Creating this revenue stream is not without consequences or burdens that must be considered including at least:

- The volunteer staff may not be able to cover the daytime shift that may have to be absorbed in the coverage without Somerset Hospital. This may require retaining paid EMT's which will impact the net cash flow.
- Some volunteers may feel that their volunteer status is compromised and leave the organization.
- Some donors may resent charges being made. The numbers are based on "soft billing" that has little or no impact on the resident involved. The imposition of the Somerset Medical Center coverage "soft billing" about 10 years ago went without major disruption to donations.
- A non-profit subsidiary would have to be created that would hire staff for the operation of the daytime shift that would use our ambulances. This would require several members to serve as trustee's to operate the non-profit.
- The securing of an outside service to process the call data and perform the billing would be required. There are numerous RFP's available in the marketplace that could be used as a basis.
- The requirement to have the ambulances licensed by the state. As our rigs are in good shape, well maintained, and operated carefully so this is more of an annoyance than a burden.

The logical choice would be to start the soft billing procedures and leave the contract for Somerset in place. The difference in the revenue would be about \$124,000 compared to doing 24/7 coverage, and the cost of staffing could consume a good part of that amount.



## Chapter 9 – Bedminster Operational Support

Bedminster Township has been and continues to be, the largest provider of fire personnel during daytime hours. Since the transfer of daytime first aid response responsibility to Somerset Hospital the need for employee response has somewhat diminished.

Presently the employees who are members of 29 Fire or 63 Fire leave their posts to respond to calls. This presents a burden to the municipality, especially for 29 Fire calls, due to work interruptions where virtually everything stops. This is especially pressing during events where the DPW must also respond to close roads, clear trees, etc. The overarching fact is life safety must be primary, and resources deployed to meet that need. An excellent example was the flooding that occurred this spring where DPW was left virtually abandoned and unable to conduct its tasks related to public safety during the emergency.

We do not recommend that the township attempt to prohibit the response, obtaining daytime coverage is difficult at best. We recommend the possibility of creating two distinct non-overlapping teams which could be selected for alternating response, be it by the day, the week, or the month as decided. This would allow both the fire companies and the municipality to meet their responsibilities, albeit both being somewhat handicapped.

An administrative procedure should be developed that defines the team system, and the time to be allotted to fire calls, clean-up, reports, and other miscellaneous fire and rescue service tasks. This should include a clear policy on payroll impacts etc.

Additionally, specific attention must be paid to the occasion when the Chief, assistant chief or other line officer is a Bedminster employee. The amount of time taken from municipal duties, what will be included in pay hours, etc must be carefully defined.

In order to help expand volunteers for the companies, being a qualified fireman or EMT should be given preference at the time of hiring for any municipal position, and the issue of the companies accepting foreign training hours, points and other requirements from their home department standardized as to encourage maximum participation.



## Chapter 10 – Consolidation

If we were starting from scratch there would probably be a regional emergency service organization, or at least a single Bedminster/Far Hills Organization. Well, looking at history, we discover that once upon a time there was only one. From the turn of the last century (1900's) thru the post WWII period there was only one, Union Hook and Ladder, which served Far Hills and Bedminster. In the early 1950's something of significance occurred, and Union Hook and Ladder split, creating two companies, 29 Fire and 29 Rescue. In a similar time period the Pottersville Volunteer Fire Company was founded. We have not delved into why this occurred, however we suspect it boils down to the impact of several strong personalities. The problem is, residual animosity exists to this day

During our joint discussions with the companies, the “Hatfield and McCoy” relationships were discussed openly. All agreed that it exists and it has no place in a taxpayer supported organization. This is a deep seeded problem that has hampered all previous attempts at cooperation that would benefit the residents.

This problem must be immediately resolved by the leadership of the companies, and if not by the companies, then by the municipality. It must be kept in mind that the companies are independent corporations and the only tool available to the municipality is funding or lack thereof.

Historically the Township Committee has had minimal involvement with the companies even with the investment of tax dollars. The selection of leadership or the operational decisions of 63 Fire, 29 Fire or 29 Rescue have been internal issues. The committee has requested call reports, and at one time there was a request for audited statements, however, that requirement was dropped a number of years ago. The governing bodies have of late been the supplier of capital money for purchases of equipment for both Fire Companies, and will likely be called on for future needs of the Rescue Squad. The last thing the companies need is intervention by the governing body, so it behooves them to resolve these problems.

The reasons for consolidation are discussed in other chapters on costs, response times, volunteer availability, and funding, which will not be discussed here. The question is, what's the logical next steps toward sensible, fact based decisions, and an abandonment of traditions that burden the residents.

29 Fire and 29 Rescue should be promptly melded back into one operating organization as it existed prior to the split.



- Based on size alone, it makes sense that 29 Rescue be disbanded, and the members who don't already belong to 29 Fire join and 29 Fire be renamed 29 Fire/Rescue.
- The 29 Rescue building should be disposed of and all operations moved to the new firehouse. This could allow faster equipment roll, as there may be more qualified volunteers available as many of the firefighters are also rescue squad members. Also use of municipal employees would be more efficient.
- The corporate shell of 29 Rescue should be dissolved after the capital equipment and other assets are transferred and the building sold to return it to the tax rolls.
- The Somerset County Hazard Mitigation Plan recommends the retrofit or relocation of the rescue squad building due to its location adjacent to, and in the flood plain, of the North Branch of the Raritan River. Consolidation would save the taxpayers on the order of half a million dollars on this issue alone.
- If 29 Fire Rescue needs additional space, storing the old engine for example, a portion of the old firehouse at DPW should be provided.
- This merger would allow the funding opportunities discussed in other chapters to support most of our emergency services.

The issue with 63 Fire is more difficult. The municipal support is provided by Bedminster and Tewksbury and there is no formal agreement between the two, and there is inequity in the cost sharing favoring Tewksbury. Again these issues are discussed in other chapters and will not be repeated here. The actions should be taken incrementally, but promptly, and include:

- The relationship between 29 Fire and 63 Fire needs to be addressed. Bedminster taxpayers have invested millions of dollars in facilities and equipment. The volunteers and the equipment must be fully utilized. The leaderships of both companies must take whatever measures are required to eliminate the issue, no matter how draconian, as this behavior is no longer tolerable.
- Operational organization, joint training and cross membership between 29 Fire and 63 Fire should be started immediately.
- A study should be conducted by Bedminster and Tewksbury on the service areas and response times. The committee should include Oldwick Fire, 63 Fire, 29 Fire and municipal representatives appointed by the mayors for example.
- Consideration must be given to any financial support differences between Bedminster and Tewksbury. The costs must be fairly shared, and not based on historical levels.



- Consideration of making 63 Fire a substation of 29 Fire/rescue should be evaluated.
- A merger similar to the one discussed for 29 Rescue and 29 Fire should be investigated.
- Difficulties are presented as 63 Fire owns their firehouse as well as the old Pottersville School, which provides rental income. The sale of the school building would be economically viable as it is rented, Other uses for the firehouse would be problematic.
- A method of maintaining the community center functions now provided by 63 Fire should be part of any changes proposed.

A concern with consolidation would be an increase in calls for the combined company..From the rescue side this is not as issue as the rescue service area is unchanged and we would not expect a change in call volume.

For the Fire company, a reduction of 25% in the 258 false alarms/turnarounds would make the number of calls for the combined fire company the same as the current call rate for 29 Fire. This speaks strongly for the modification and enforcement of the false alarm ordinance.



## Chapter 11 – Fire Official

As part of our discussions with the Fire Companies the issue of greater cooperation between the departments and the Fire Official came up. There was a general undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the communication between the departments and the Fire Officials.

As the discussions were general, we requested both companies to provide us with a list of the items where improvements could be made. 29 Fire responded to the request, 63 Fire did not. This report uses the 29 Fire List for discussions with the Fire Official. The items, in summary, are as follows:

1. Provide a copy of each commercial inspection performed. - The response was that there are about 100 life hazard inspections and 300 non-life hazard inspections. The time required to process 400 copies on both ends would probably not have a cost benefit. Providing selected copies, or allowing inspection of files could work.
2. Provide copies of all violations cited. - The response was that this is doable, with the caveat that the violator has appeal and other rights that will not be violated.
3. Provide a copy of yearly filings. - Again a volume issue and inspection welcomed.
4. Invite the department to attend inspections at large commercial facilities. - This request may be welcomed by some large users, and objected to by some as well. The Fire Official has no objection; however the inspection schedules cannot be jumbled about in an attempt to accommodate the fire department attendance.
5. Provide other data that may aid in our preplanning. Examples are floor plans, alarm types and locations...- The Fire Official does not have plans, they are within the purview of the Building Department. Security concerns by some owners may limit access without permission from the owner. The alarm data may be on the drawings, and also lie with the administrator of the alarm ordinance which is not the Fire Official.
6. Provide interaction between the department and the alarm administrator regarding false alarm fines. - This should probably be facilitated by the Township Administrator to be sure policy is followed.
7. Provide copies of permits or C of O's issued on a routine basis. Need update from 2010. - The building department issues over a thousand permits per year so specificity is required, and again not under the control of the Fire Official.
8. Provide copy of all Knox Box installations and changes. - This is being updated and could be provided when completed.
9. Provide information on private hydrant testing, locations, and installations. - This is a work in progress and this report contains the results of some Pottersville hydrants.



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10. Provide copy of correspondence of relevant from the water company. – No problem, the definition of “relevant” must be worked out.

The fire official noted that the fire company does not supply fire call reports to him.

While a number of the above requests are beneficial, care must be taken not to create a bureaucracy that does nothing but collect and transfer information that will never be used. The administration must find a happy medium that meets the primary goal of life safety.



## Chapter 12 - Summary of recommendations

The following recommendations are driven by the data collected, and are not going to be popular with part of the population.

1. Resolve the equity issues involved with Tewksbury Township.
  - a. See Chapter 6
2. Consolidate the three organizations into one, that being 29 Fire/Rescue.
  - a. See Chapter 10 and Chapter 6
3. Dispose of excess real estate generated by the merger.
  - a. See Chapter 10
4. A larger organization will require less “rainy day savings” allowing a reduction the combined cash assets allowing the excess to reduce the debt.
  - a. See Chapter 4
5. Develop clear response protocols within DPW for members and any members acting in the capacity of “Fire Officer”.
  - a. See Chapter 9
6. Establish hiring policies giving priority to experienced firefighters and EMT’s and consider maintaining professional certification as a requirement for employment.
  - a. See Chapter 9
7. The Municipalities should establish a service agreement with the Fire/Rescue Company.
8. EMS calls covered outside of Somerset Medical Center should go to soft billing the came as SMC.
  - a. See Chapter 8
9. Fire calls should go to a soft billing procedure.
  - a. See Chapter 8



10. There should be no rolling stock equipment purchases until the consolidation is complete and a needs analysis completed. This includes tankers, ladders trucks, engines, and command vehicles.
  - a. See Chapter 7
  
11. Investigate if there are any opportunities in a vehicle transfer plan from code enforcement plan to Fire Rescue use.
  
12. Develop a plan for added interaction between the fire/rescue service and the Fire Officials' office. Items such as inspection data, call history, joint inspections, violations, Knox Box data, and hydrant testing and availability data should flow both ways.
  - a. See Chapter 11
  
13. The municipality should establish a time frame for the implementation of the recommendations.

END