

LEVERETT FIRE DEPARTMENT STUDY COMMITTEE

REPORT

AUGUST, 2013

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

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REPORT OF THE LEVERETT FIRE DEPARTMENT STUDY COMMITTEE
August, 2013

REPORT OVERVIEW:

The Fire Department Study Committee was appointed by the Selectboard in December, 2012, and began meeting In January, 2013. The Charge to the Committee was to study the best avenues for the Town to provide affordable, community supported fire services for the future and to report to the Town with Committee recommendations.

Sections of this Report:

1. Description of the Leverett Fire Department: Page 3
Information about the Leverett Fire Department (LFD); its operations, functions and types of calls, staffing, and activities. The report also describes current cooperative agreements with other towns to support the LFD as well as demographic information relevant to the operation of the Department.
2. Personnel Needs of the Department: Page 11
Explanation of the staffing needs that will occur in the next few years with the impending retirement of several senior officers and highly experienced firefighters, and of difficulties in filling these positions.
3. Options to Address Staffing & Training Needs: Page 13
Overview of the range of options for meeting these needs with information on the feasibility of these options for Leverett, including cooperative arrangements with other towns to cover a range of functions, increasing the Leverett force with salaried firefighters, and recruiting staff.
4. Recommendations by the Committee of best options for the near future: Page 16

Appendices:

- A. Types of Consolidated Services/Cooperative Agreements
- B. "What happens when you dial 911 from Leverett"; June, 2013 Leverett Newsletter article
- C. "Another Town's Similar Story"; excerpt from Vermont newsletter, August 12, 2013

DESCRIPTION OF THE LEVERETT FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Committee wants to recognize the highly professional and competent services that our dedicated Chief, Officers, and Firefighters provide to the Town. Their level of dedication is very much appreciated.

As of July, 2013, there were 13 individuals on the force: Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, two Captains, 9 firefighters. It should be noted that all these individuals either hold jobs they cannot leave during their working hours, work too far from town, or have other obligations and thus may not be able to respond to calls when so engaged. There is typically more availability nights and weekends.

Fire Chief John Moruzzi has suggested that a force of 17 active firefighters would be optimal. This number of active firefighters would allow more diversity within the department in terms of the ability of individuals to respond to different types of situations as well as levels of training (fully trained to in-training). It would also increase the likelihood of someone being around town during all times of the day. This number of firefighters is in line with the Franklin County average of staffing ratio of 8.7 firefighters to every 1,000 residents. (Source: National Fire Protection Association Department Profile 2009).

Leverett, like other small towns in this area, has a Call Force. That means personnel receive pay for responding to calls and attending weekly training sessions; the Chief and officers receive a stipend for additional duties. The Fire Department budget for FY '14 is \$83, 837, as approved at the Annual Town Meeting of which personnel costs are \$59,532 and other expenses are \$23,902.

Types of Calls:

The Leverett Fire Department responds to a wide range of calls. The summary chart that follows shows the average number, range, and percentage of calls for the past 12 years. Medical calls account for 48% of the total calls with little variation of this figure year to year. Medical, alarm sounding, and motor vehicle calls account for 69% of all calls. Some types of calls are very low in frequency but the need for training in case one occurs is of paramount importance.

**LEVERETT FIRE DEPARTMENT - TYPES AND NUMBER OF CALLS
FOR PERIOD 2001-2012**

TYPE OF CALL	ANNUAL AVERAGE	RANGE FOR 2001-2012	PERCENT OF TOTAL
TOTAL # OF CALLS	121	95-147	100%
MEDICAL	58	42-69	48%
MOTOR VEHICLE Accidents & fires	16	12-23	13%
FIRES – Structure, Chimney, Electrical	4	2-7 (1-2 Structure/year)	3%
FIRES – Woodland, Fields, Brush, Illegal Burning	4	0-10	3%
ALARM SOUNDING Smoke and Carbon Monoxide	10	5-20	8%
MUTUAL AID	13	5-19	11%
WIRES DOWN Incl. Trees on Wire	7	1-11	6%
HAZMAT – Chemical, Fuel Spills	<1	0-2	<1%
SEARCH AND RESCUE Ice, Water, Cave, Plane Crash	1	0-4	<1%
MISCELLANEOUS – Odor Investigation, Pump Cellar, Appliance Malfunction	8	1-12	6%

Time of Calls: (representative data from 2012):

Days: 6 a.m. – 6 p.m. 70 calls

Nights: 6 p.m. – 6 a.m. 50 calls

Firefighters attend weekly 3- hour training sessions and often put in additional hours for training beyond these scheduled weekly sessions. To maintain a level of preparedness for the varied types of emergencies, training must be extensive and a minimum of 2 years is needed to complete basic training in all areas, covering each topic once. It takes 5-10 years for firefighters to be fully qualified to respond in all situations by having acquired some actual experience with each of the different types of calls and reviewing/updating themselves in all areas of the curriculum. All firefighters must meet the State requirements for certification as First Responders. The following is a description of the department's training areas.

LEVERETT FIRE DEPARTMENT - TRAINING AREAS

Firefighter safety. Donning personal protective equipment, self-contained breathing apparatus operations, PASS alarm operations, firefighter survival, driving and operating apparatus, fire behavior, building construction, etc.

Company operations. Scene size-up, chimney fires, structure fires, automobile fires, gas/fuel fires, pump operations, hoseline operations, water supply, hydrants, firefighting foam operations, extinguishers, forcible entry, Rapid Intervention Team, ventilation, ladders, ropes and knots, extrication, salvage and overhaul, incident pre-planning, wildland-urban interface, motor vehicle accidents, motor vehicle extrication, search and rescue, ice and water rescue, high-angle rescue, etc.

Hazardous Materials. Identification of hazards, evacuation zones and procedures, how to safely contain and manage haz-mat incidents, etc.

Incident Command System. Understanding command structure and functions

Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG's). Reviewing and understanding all department operational guidelines

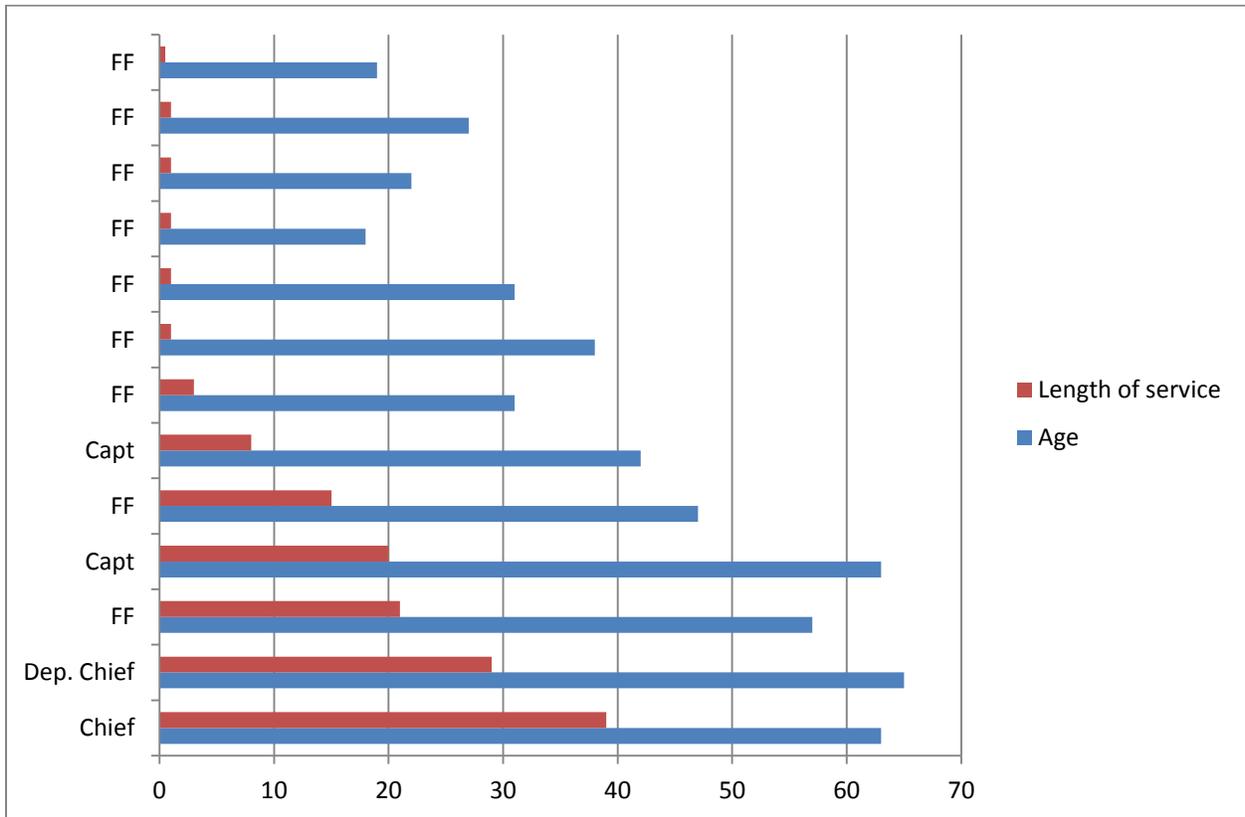
Medical. Training in the Emergency Medical Services System as a First Responder including: anatomy and functioning of body systems; patient assessment; lifting and moving patients, rescue breathing; CPR; dealing with various types of medical emergencies including behavioral emergencies and crisis management, bleeding, shock, muscle injuries, childbirth, pediatric emergencies, and special considerations for the elderly and patients with special needs.

Fire Service is a highly professional and often dangerous job. Types of incidents (e.g., acts of terror), regulations, requirements, and technology have changed dramatically in the past decades. Trucks and equipment are highly complex. Training and experience are critical for maintaining safety for the firefighters and residents. In many cases, firefighters are literally putting their lives on the line.

The Department is now faced with the loss of its most experienced and long-serving firefighters and officers, including the Chief, the Deputy Chief/Training Officer, and one of the Captains. In the next few years, this entire group can be expected to retire. The number one need for the Town is to address this staffing need of the Department in the very near future. See the later section on “Personnel Needs”.

The following chart indicates a pattern of individuals joining and leaving the force in shorter time periods than in the past, often well before they have received sufficient training to reach a level of proficiency that would enable them to respond to many types of calls. The pattern is that as one recruit joins, another leaves. This is a problem both for maintaining an adequate size force and for providing continuity and stability.

CURRENT LEVERETT FIREFIGHTERS LENGTH OF SERVICE & AGE



DEMOGRAPHICS OF LEVERETT:

The changing demographics of Leverett impact the Fire Department and its future.

Leverett's population has doubled in number since 1960 and the percentage of residents 65 and older has more than doubled: 7% to 17%. This trend is likely to continue, reflecting the similar national demographic. Almost 50% of calls are medical in nature and the fire department is very likely to see an increase in medical calls due to the increasing senior population. The timely availability of a Leverett First Responder firefighter is critically important in these situations.

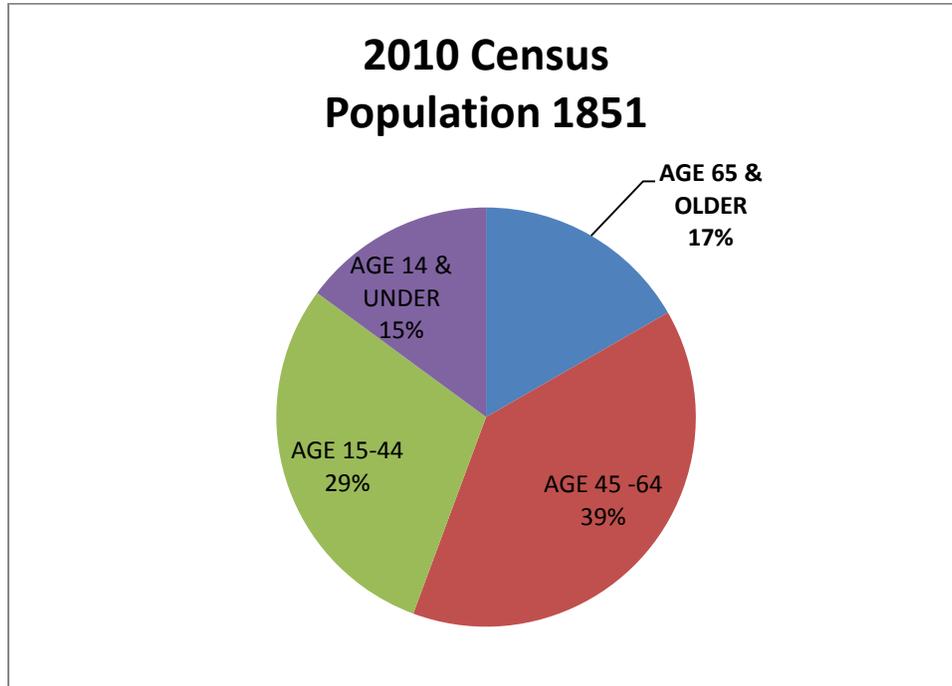
Ambulance service is a contracted service. When there is a 911 call, the Dispatcher pages Leverett firefighters (who are First Responders) and also calls the ambulance. However, the demands are also great on Amherst's ambulance service, and there have been occasions when an ambulance has had to be called from another town further away.

POPULATION COMPARISON – LEVERETT, MA

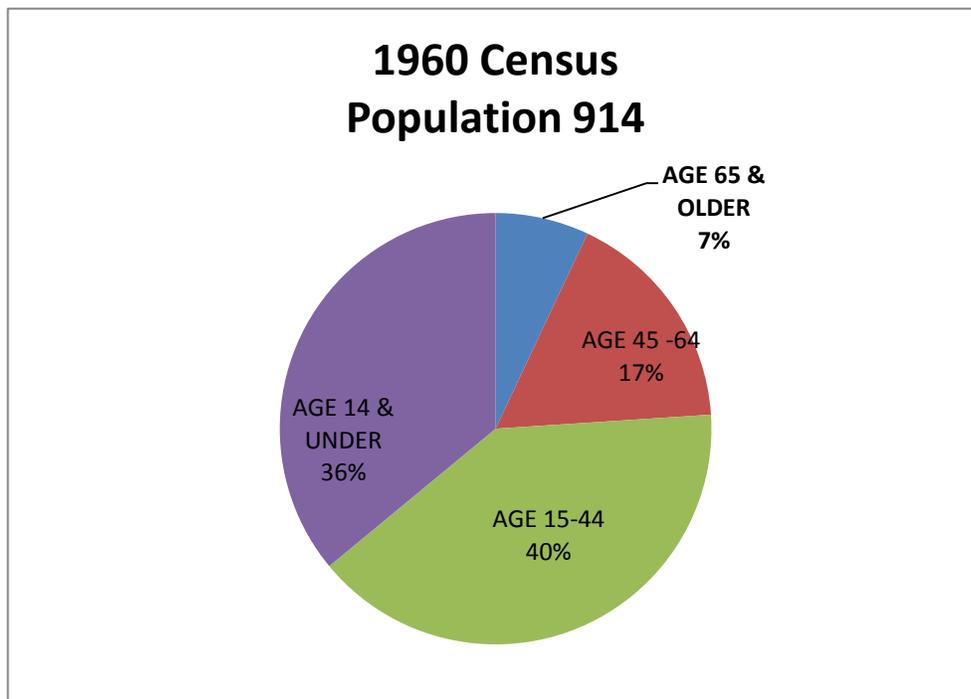
CENSUS YEAR	TOTAL # OF RESIDENTS	AGE 65 & OVER	AGE 45-64	AGE 15-44	AGE 14 & UNDER
2010	1851	309	721	545	276
1960	914	64	155	366	329

RECRUITING AGE POPULATION (2010) AGES 20 - 39 = 330 INDIVIDUALS

POPULATION COMPARISON LEVERETT, MA



RECRUITING AGE POPULATION (2010)
AGES 20 - 39 = 330 INDIVIDUALS



RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION:

Recruitment is a national problem:

These demographic changes shed light on why recruitment is and will continue to be so challenging. The trend in Leverett follows the national trend of the aging of the population. In 1960, 24% of our population was over 44 and now it is 56%!!

Directly related to the recruitment challenge is the current statistic for the 20-40 year age range. This is the optimum age range for recruiting individuals who are young enough to be able to stay with the department long enough to obtain the 5-10 years of training/experience necessary to be fully qualified firefighters. As of the 2010 census, there are only 330 individuals in the age range of 20-40 , thus only 330 individuals who are the best possible candidates for recruitment.

Retention of firefighters on the force for more than a short period of time (see the Length of Service chart above) is also a struggle. Reports and articles reviewed by the Committee point to understandable reasons that people leave volunteer fire service: job relocation, individual mobility, the needs of children, family demands where both adults are working or where there is a single parent, stress and demands of fire service, health, and inability to meet the necessary time commitment. Thus, committed individuals may join, but then are forced to leave when their life situation changes. Maintaining a trained Call force is difficult, particularly in a town the size of Leverett with only 330 residents in the appropriate age bracket.

External support for recruitment and retention:

Committee members met with representatives from the Massachusetts Call and Volunteer Firefighters Association (MCVFA). This statewide association supports Call/Volunteer Fire Departments through small grants to help meet a range of fire department needs, sponsoring training, legislative advocacy, identifying opportunities for recruitment and retention campaigns, and providing scholarships for firefighters who are enrolled in programs leading to college degrees at the bachelor's level and above.

While we discussed many ideas for recruitment and retention, it is clear that these efforts are likely to result in adding, or replacing, very few firefighters given the Town's demographics. The Town needs to address the longer term and broader issues which are not going to be solved by recruitment and retention efforts alone. However, recruitment and retention must be part of a larger planning effort.

Some of the ideas discussed with MCVFA that are relevant to the work of this committee are:

- Recognizing the importance of public relations as a significant activity of a fire department. Ongoing community outreach and provision of information is key to any effective recruitment effort. One open house or newsletter article will not have much impact.

- Information about the department needs to be distributed frequently and be focused on the range of activities of the department and its “successes”. Fire departments need to “blow their own horns”.
- Community support is needed in this public relations effort; it cannot fall to just the Chief or the firefighters; this support may be through a “Fire Corps” or Town Committee.
- Outreach activities could include: posters, mailing informational postcards; more and regular open houses; distributing refrigerator magnets; regular postings on a town website with pictures, or a department Facebook page. MCVFA could help fund many of these efforts through their “Fire Company of the Month” grants (limit \$1,000).
- Coordinating outreach and public relations campaigns with neighboring towns. This would have more impact when all towns do this in the same time period.
- Utilizing available Incentives to help with retention, including property tax reduction (which would require authorization by the State, but MCVFA has filed legislation to allow property tax abatement for firefighters and believes passage is very likely), publicizing the scholarships available through MCVFA for eligible individuals using SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Firefighters) FEMA grants.

COOPERATION WITH NEIGHBORING TOWNS:

Mutual Aid and Cooperative Agreements: Since Call Firefighters cannot always respond to emergencies, particularly during their work hours, and since, for certain types of calls, a minimum number of firefighters must be available before the fire department can respond to the scene of the call, some towns have developed Service Exchange Agreements, including Mutual Aid. Under the Mutual Aid Agreement, after determining that the Leverett Fire Department is unable to provide a timely response, Shelburne Regional Dispatch Center requests a response from another town’s Fire Department. This assures there will be *some* response from a fire service. However any Mutual Aid response from another department requires that that town’s available firefighters drive to their station, gather equipment, and then transport their personnel and apparatus to Leverett. Their arrival on the scene is likely to be 15 minutes or more after Dispatch received the original 911 call. Clearly this is less than ideal in an emergency. However, it is the reality for small towns with Call or Volunteer Fire Departments.

Leverett has an Automatic Mutual Aid agreement with Shutesbury. Firefighters in the cooperating town are automatically dispatched for certain types of incidents: structure fires, chimney fires, ice/cold water rescue, high/low angle rescue, and motor vehicle accidents with entrapment. Due to their complex nature, these calls require a large number of fully trained firefighters. The agreement with Shutesbury is designed to increase the likelihood that an adequate number of personnel will be available to respond to such calls. If additional personnel are needed, Tri-State Fire Mutual Aid is utilized.

Tri-State Fire Mutual Aid: If Leverett firefighters in charge of a scene assess that more help is needed, a call is made to the Dispatch Center for mutual aid, and towns are summoned according to a protocol specifying the order of towns to be contacted. The sooner an assessment of need is made, the faster the response. Other forces respond as available.

Appendix A , “Types of Consolidated Services/Cooperative Agreements” outlines other ways towns can work together. Currently Leverett participates in some Service Exchange Agreements, is served by the Shelburne Regional Dispatch Center, and participates in FRCOG (Franklin Regional Council of Governments) discussions, programs, and services.

PERSONNEL NEEDS OF THE DEPARTMENT

Fire service in Leverett in 2013 needs to be viewed in a broader frame than in the past. The changes in the Town’s demographics, the types and frequency of calls, and the range of functions to be performed have necessitated major changes in the level of professionalism and sophistication required in the fire service. Medical responses now account for almost half the volume of calls. The Committee recognizes the need for the Town to acknowledge and support the maintenance of this level of professionalism.

Because of the commitment of our dedicated core force, we have become accustomed to receiving responsive and effective service from the Leverett Fire Department. But the situation will be changing with the upcoming retirements. To avoid a lessening of the quality of service we have enjoyed up to now, certain steps are required.

1. A larger force should be maintained. It is not adequate for Leverett to rely on Mutual Aid as this usually entails a lengthy response time

A larger force than we presently have is needed so there can be enough firefighters at advanced levels of training to respond and to be active on the scene, drive a truck, etc.

A larger force is also needed so that newer members at various levels of training are available to advance and fill positions that become vacant.

Recruiting challenges are evident from the demographic data, and this problem has been evident for some time. A Leverett study focusing on recruitment was done in 2006-7, and concluded that the recruitment effort was not proving successful. Alternatives to an all-volunteer force were discussed. At that time, the estimated cost of hiring a full- time firefighter was deemed to be too great. Continued efforts at recruitment are still needed and alternatives still need to be explored.

2. Steps must be taken to provide for the replacement in the near future of the department's experienced officers and firefighters. When five firefighters including the Chief, the Deputy Chief/Training Officer, and one of the Captains retire, we will be losing experience and the core that has provided stability to the force.
3. The frequency, intensity, and high quality of the current training program must be maintained. It is necessary to assure that training is provided by qualified trainers and that there is a plan for determining who will perform this function.
4. Additional staff should be provided to assist with the increasingly complex and demanding requirements for permitting, inspections, and reporting: These ever increasing administrative duties can consume a great deal of time beyond the hours for which the Town currently provides reimbursement. There is also a need for these tasks to be done in a cost effective way.
5. Because the responsibilities of the Chief and Deputy Chief in particular, have developed over time and in response to the abilities and willingness of the individuals involved, there is a need to review job responsibilities and the hours needed to adequately perform assigned tasks and then to evaluate the need for reasonable compensation based on defined job descriptions. This includes determination of the responsibility for carrying out the training function.
6. Better coverage during the work week and day time hours should be provided for. The lack of available call force members during these hours has already been discussed.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS:

The primary focus of our study has been on the personnel needs of the Department. Major vehicle needs are part of Capital Planning. However, there are other equipment needs such as outfitting new recruits, upgrading and replacing "turn out" equipment every 2-5 years due to wear and tear and to changes in technology and standards.

In the past, Chief Moruzzi has successfully obtained grants to defray costs, but has stated that he anticipates fewer grants will be available in the future.

Outside sources since 2001 have been primarily through FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) and Volunteer Fire Association Grants (VFA). The FEMA AFG funds provide SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response) grants to increase the number of frontline firefighters in a community. FEMA Fire Prevention & Safety (FPS) grants support projects to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters.

Since 2001, the Department has received grants to fund the purchase of turnout gear (\$14,135), a skid unit and pagers (\$19,840), a rescue set (\$9,890) and other items such as a thermal imager, radios, helmets, and GPS equipment. The total grant amount for the period 2001 – 2012 as reported by Chief Moruzzi was \$71,403.

There are challenges and drawbacks to sharing equipment with other towns, particularly vehicles and major apparatus. While a joint purchase may seem cost effective, the logistics are difficult. Where is the equipment housed? Who is available to transport it? Is the distance reasonable? In Franklin County, travel distances and time could prove problematic. From comments from Fire Chiefs in the county (documents reviewed by Committee), equipment sharing is not necessarily a viable option as equipment is often needed immediately and at a local station when an emergency arises.

OPTIONS TO ADDRESS STAFFING & TRAINING NEEDS

The Committee has reviewed various options to try to address the previously stated needs of the Fire Department. These options fall into 2 main categories:

- A. Developing Cooperative Agreements with other towns.**
- B. Improving and strengthening the services within the Leverett force itself.**

A. Cooperative Agreements with other towns:

The term “regionalization” is frequently referred to when governmental officials and others struggle with reduced budgets. This general term may conjure up expectations of major mergers resulting in loss of local authority. The concept has been used when referring to fire services. The Committee has chosen not to use this global term but to study various types of cooperative arrangements that cover a broad range of activities. See Appendix A: Types of Consolidated Services/Cooperative Agreements.

The Town could consider pursuing various forms of such consolidated/cooperative agreements but there are issues to consider.

Automatic Mutual Aid: Developing automatic mutual aid is only feasible with towns that are geographically appropriate. Travel times, road layouts, etc., are vital factors. In addition to Shutesbury, with whom we already have an automatic mutual aid agreement, the only other towns that might be effective mutual aid partners are Sunderland and possibly Montague. However, mutual aid agreements necessarily involve giving, as well as receiving, aid. The size of Leverett’s force must be adequate to respond to the other town’s needs as well.

Mutual aid creates the potential danger of overtaxing our own department with the larger number of calls that would result from needing to respond to emergencies in other towns. The

time demands on the Leverett force would likely be increased, perhaps beyond the capacity and willingness of the members of a small force.

Other agreements: It is more feasible to develop some form of agreement to perform other tasks such as permitting, testing of equipment, and training. However, this does not address the need for daytime response or for increasing the size of the force.

Merging fire services with a neighboring town: This is an extremely long-term option with many logistical issues. From the reports we have reviewed, it appears that few successfully completed mergers have taken place after negotiations. Often “local control” issues are a barrier expressed by town boards and communities. The Committee does not recommend pursuing this option at this time.

Increasing cooperative training with other towns to address the importance of maintaining quality training: The advantage would be that if firefighters are trained together in the same way they could function more effectively as a team when mutual aid is needed. However, there are difficulties involved with scheduling. Also, different operating guidelines and different types of equipment in each town create different training needs. Each town would still have to designate its own training officer.

Additional FRCOG options: The FRCOG is currently conducting a regional study of fire departments with a focus on equipment and operations, and providing an inventory of equipment. Their final report is due December, 2013. Additional options for cooperative agreements, etc., may arise from the FRCOG study and continued discussions among Fire Chiefs.

B. Strengthening Services within Leverett:

Leverett cannot develop cooperative agreements by itself. Other towns must view potential arrangements with Leverett as beneficial. At present, given the size of the Leverett force and the reduced availability of its members, Leverett is not necessarily in a position to reciprocate the provision of services by other towns and therefore potential arrangements may not be viewed favorably. The Fire Study Committee has determined that while it is valuable to continue discussing and pursuing a range of cooperative agreements, it is essential that Leverett focus on strengthening services within the Town itself to address the immediate needs facing the Fire Department.

Creating a combined Salaried and Call Force: Hiring a full-time person was considered as far back as the 2006 Leverett Fire Department Study Committee. Since then, the situation has changed both locally and in terms of fire service in general, and this option should now be reconsidered. The sharing of full-time personnel with an appropriate neighboring town would also be an option short of a more involved merger. Flexible scheduling of hours would allow greater coverage. There is also an option of sharing a Fire Chief, which may become more

relevant in the future with the retirement of the current chiefs or if the need for more cooperation with neighboring towns seems desirable.

Continue efforts to recruit additional firefighters from Leverett and develop additional incentives for retaining individuals on the force so that they can attain a level of experience that could qualify them to assume positions of leadership in the future. However, we must bear in mind the increasing struggles the Town is having with recruitment and retention as well as the reality of Leverett demographics.

COST versus RISK

The critical issue that any community must address is to weigh the *Increased Cost* of a more effective department against the *Level of Risk* it is willing to incur.

This issue was presented in a report by consultants to the Town of Hadley regarding the development of their fire department (March, 2012). The report states that the real issue facing every community is “to determine an acceptable level of risk and then define an appropriate level of service for the community. Planned growth of the department is essential to provide a consistent service level to the community while keeping pace with increased demands for service.”

Our committee has reviewed documents and reports that state that forms of cooperative agreements or “regionalization” in town services in general have increased greatly in the country as a whole since the 90s. Many local fire chiefs see these agreements as a future direction since they can offer more efficient services at lower cost, but there are realistic limitations as addressed above. Developing agreements takes time; the process is complex, and often there are competing issues of desire for “local control” that may override concern for cost saving.

Our Committee has concluded that such agreements should be considered in the future, but they will not address the immediate needs of the department. **The Town must come to terms with the new reality of providing fire service.**

The Fire Study Committee’s Recommendations have been developed to address what we see as an increased level of risk in the near future due to the impending loss of highly trained personnel. In any event, the issue of Cost vs. Risk should be the essential consideration in the Town’s deliberations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION:

Recognizing the need for a fully staffed and stable fire department, the current effort at recruitment needs to continue. However, the Town needs to acknowledge the difficulties in recruiting a sufficient number of volunteers given the changing life styles of residents and the demographics previously outlined in this report.

In addition to continuing the existing outreach via the Newsletter and presence at town functions, the Committee discussed the need for people to have more information about the specifics of being a firefighter and serving the Town. As discussed at the meeting with MCVFA representatives, public relations need to be considered a key component of any recruitment effort.

Information distributed to the town needs to be multi-faceted (electronic, print, mailings, open houses, etc.); no one strategy is going to be successful in recruiting individuals. A campaign could possibly be coordinated with other towns. Outreach and education needs to be frequent and must focus on the range of activities of the department and the incidents in which the department's professional service has been critical.

The responsibility for public relations, outreach, recruitment and education cannot fall to Leverett's or any small Call Force, exclusively. Call firefighters already provide many hours of service in the community. Therefore, the Committee recommends the establishment of a Town Citizens Fire Department Support Committee. This is discussed in recommendation #6. Such a committee could work with the Fire Chief on the preparation of grant proposals and requests for other funding such as that which MCVFA has available.

It is also important that the Town support the efforts of the Fire Department to retain recruits for the 5- 10 years necessary to reach a level of proficiency in all the areas of training required to respond to the range of calls received. The Committee suggests the Town consider offering incentives which could encourage individuals to make a commitment to service on the force. Possibilities include investigating whether there are methods by which tax abatements can legally be provided to help with the cost of living in Leverett; publicizing and assisting with the applications for scholarships for eligible firefighters, or offering financial awards for length of service.

2. HIRING OF A FULL-TIME FIREFIGHTER AND PART-TIME CHIEF: In view of the continuing struggles to recruit sufficient firefighters to provide coverage for the Town, the Committee has concluded that there is a now a need to move to a blended model of a

Call and Salaried force. Firefighting requires professional skills and is demanding of time. The need to supplement a Call Force is emerging nationwide. The Committee recommends hiring a full-time firefighter in the next fiscal year given the impending retirements of current members. Other towns across the county are facing the same issue. Appendix C, "Another Town's Similar Story", is an excerpt from a Vermont small-town newspaper and succinctly summarizes the needs addressed in the Committee recommendations.

Hiring a Full-Time Firefighter:

Qualifications: The person hired should be an academy trained, fully certified firefighter, preferably EMT trained, able to become certified as a trainer, and qualified according to State standards to perform inspections and permitting.

The addition of this position will address the following needs:

- **Public Safety:** Leverett is currently an all-call force and members work and have commitments out of town during the day. As a result there is typically no firefighter in Leverett during the daytime hours of the work week. A full-time firefighter would provide that presence and be able to coordinate and expedite responses to emergencies and other calls as well as to perform non-emergency functions. Be it a motor vehicle accident, fire, or medical emergency, the difference in coordination time of 5 or 10 minutes can save a life or a structure.

This is particularly true given that almost 50% of all calls are medical in nature. In view of the increase in Leverett's elderly population and the consequent likely increase in medical calls in the future, the ability to have a firefighter who is a First Responder and possibly an EMT in town during the day is of heightened importance. A single firefighter who is able to respond immediately could be life saving.

The full-time person will help enhance the professionalism of the fire department by maintaining a continuing presence during the day and ensuring the ability of the department to respond quickly to all calls for assistance. The visibility of the department in the community would be significantly increased.

- **Non-emergency and administrative functions:** The availability of a full-time firefighter would provide the Chief with assistance in carrying out his/her responsibilities for performing inspections and permitting, inspection and maintenance of equipment, satisfying local and State reporting requirements, and meeting all of the ever-evolving standards now faced by a fire service in Massachusetts.
- **Training:** The national trend toward professionalization of fire services creates an even greater need for training to meet the requirements presented by new types of calls (e.g., hazardous materials), and by more technical and complex

equipment. More training is required of our firefighters for certification of proficiency in performing tasks according to the Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) of the department. A full-time firefighter with the specified qualifications noted above would fill a critical role in the department by assisting with the coordination and provision of training. The scheduled hours of the full-time firefighter would have to be adjusted if he/she is assigned duties as a trainer.

- **Continuity:** The Committee's analysis of the length of service of current and recent Leverett firefighters shows clearly that the leadership and experience of the force has been provided by a small cadre of dedicated individuals who have served the force for approximately 20 years but who are nearing the recommended retirement age. Recruiting and retention trends have not kept pace with the need to maintain a fully staffed force or to retain individuals long enough so that they can reach the necessary levels of proficiency and experience to enable them to rise through the ranks and be in line to assume officer positions as vacancies occur. The Town cannot assume that the devotion and time commitment shown by this group of individuals soon to retire will be replicated in the future. Hiring a full-time firefighter in the next fiscal year would support the department during the transition as the long-serving firefighters and officers retire.
- **Recognition:** Hiring a full-time person would demonstrate the Town's commitment to its fire department and its recognition that the field now requires a high level of skill and professionalism in all aspects of fire services.
- **Grant Assistance:** To assist with the costs of hiring a full-time firefighter, the town could apply for a FEMA SAFER grant, which could potentially meet these costs for a year or two, although the town would ultimately have to assume responsibility for the position. However, the Committee also wants to emphasize that waiting for possible grant funding might delay the hiring and therefore not meet the immediate needs of the Department.
- **COST:** The Committee was not able to obtain a great deal of comparative cost information. However, based on salaries in towns of comparable size to Leverett we estimate the cost to hire a full-time firefighter with the specified qualifications would be a salary in the range of \$35 - **\$45,000**.

Comparisons available (approximate):

Sunderland FT FF: hourly about \$18/hour or estimate in the \$36 – 38,000 range.

Shutesbury FT Chief: \$47-48,000

Turners Falls: FF \$40,000; Captain: \$46,000

As noted above, there is the possibility of applying for a SAFER grant to fund a full-time firefighter. However, these grants are for a limited number of years, after which the Town should commit itself to sustain the position.

Hiring a Part-time Chief:

As part of a Call-Salaried model, the Committee recommends that the position of Fire Chief be a part-time salaried position with a specified number of hours, base pay, and provision for compensation for additional emergency services. The duties and responsibilities would require clarification should a full-time firefighter be hired. The part-time Chief would be trained to lead at all calls when on duty, carry out administrative duties, and be able to become certified as a trainer. The Committee recommends that the Town continue to designate the position of fire chief as a "Strong Chief".

COST: Current stipend of Chief for FY '14: \$19,852. The Chief reports 20 hours on a time sheet and additional undocumented additional hours. We can expect that a part-time Chief's salary will be more than is currently budgeted.

3. TRAINING: The Deputy Chief is currently the Training Officer and will be retiring in the near future. The Committee recommends that a clear plan for meeting future training needs be identified. The assignment of this responsibility could be affected by the hiring of the full-time firefighter who, if he/she is a certified trainer, might perform these duties, but this cannot be assumed. In any event, performance of the training function needs to be clearly assigned within the department. There has also been discussion of shared training with other towns' fire departments but this does not alter the necessity that Leverett must have its own Training Officer.
4. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER TOWNS: Discussion could be pursued with Sunderland, Shutesbury, and possibly Montague (the 3 feasible towns given geography) regarding the future types of collaboration (training, shared inspections, equipment testing, public relations and outreach, etc.) that might be possible. Discussions with Sunderland regarding future Automatic Mutual Aid would also be appropriate should Leverett increase the size of its force. In addition, the possibility of sharing of two full-time firefighters with staggered shifts to provide needed coverage during critical hours when Call Force members are not available could be kept open. Committee members have had discussions with the Fire Chiefs or others in Sunderland, Shutesbury, Wendell and Hadley on these matters.
5. FRCOG: Review the Final Report, due December, 2013, and its recommendations for implementation in Leverett. The current review is focused on equipment inventory and description of department operations. However, the intent is to expand future discussions. Leverett has been very involved up to now and the Committee recommends that this continue.

6. **COMMUNITY SUPPORT & EDUCATION:** It is important that the Town receive regular information about the fire department's operations and needs and the possibilities for cooperation with other towns for purposes of recruiting. There is also a need for the Town to have general awareness of the many critical functions that the Leverett Fire Department provides in order to develop town support – both in implementing department recommendations for fire safety and for maintaining understanding of the need for budgetary support as needs increase in the future in the field of fire and emergency services.

The Committee recommends that a town committee be created to assist the fire department with its education functions, including events to promote recruitment and to increase public awareness of the department's activities. A town committee could also assist with grant proposal research and writing. The fire department relies on volunteers who cannot be expected to donate even more time to plan events etc. for purposes of education and recruiting.

7. **EQUIPMENT:** Assessing equipment needs requires a high level of professional expertise. The Committee recognizes that this should fall within the scope of responsibility of the Fire Chief and Officers. Equipment maintenance and replacement needs should continue to be monitored and coordinated with Capital Planning. Some needs for replacement and upgrading of equipment resulting from new technology or standards such as for turn-out gear may fall outside the purview of Capital Planning and be in the annual budget request. Long-range projections should be anticipated and communicated to appropriate committees.

Possibilities should be pursued for regional testing of equipment, regional fire inspections, regional training on use of equipment as well as any recommendations related to equipment that might be part of the FRCOG study.

APPENDICES:

- A. Types of Consolidated Services/Cooperative Agreements
- B. "What happens when you dial 911 from Leverett"; June, 2013 Leverett Newsletter article
- C. "Another Town's Story"; excerpt from Vermont newsletter, August 12, 2013

APPENDIX A

TYPES OF CONSOLIDATED SERVICES/COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FIRE PROTECTION & EMS

GOALS MOST CITED: increased efficiency in service delivery including response time, more complete personnel coverage both during day and night hours, provision of specialized services and responses, training; costs savings related to facilities and equipment.

INTERMUNICIPAL AGREEMENTS: The authorizing statute for inter-municipal agreements is MGL Chapter 40 Section 4A.

Merging fire services/departments: combining all functions of 2 or more town departments:

Formal Contracts: one city or town agrees to provide a service to another for a fee; e.g., contract with Amherst for ambulance services.

Joint Service Agreements: two or more municipalities join forces to plan, finance and deliver services within the boundaries of the participating jurisdictions; e.g., if Leverett planned to finance and share equipment or a facility with another town; or jointly hired an employee; or shared EMS such as Whately, So. Deerfield and Sunderland are planning.

Service Exchange Agreements: largely made up of mutual aid agreements for public safety; e.g.,

Tri State Mutual Aid Inc.: participating towns in Massachusetts, southern Vermont and New Hampshire agree to respond to a major event in one of the member towns if additional assistance is required. .

Automatic Mutual Aid: Firefighters in the cooperating towns are automatically dispatched for certain types of major incidents. Leverett has an automatic mutual aid agreement with Shutesbury and such an agreement is feasible in terms of proximity with Sunderland and Montague.

Statewide Task Force: the Leverett Fire Department participates in this Task Force and can be called to assist with incidents throughout Massachusetts.

Franklin County Incident Management Team

Note: All of the above forms of consolidation/cooperation have greatly increased nationwide since the 1990's and have been successful in terms of the above stated goals.

Fire District: a quasi-municipal corporation and independent governmental entity that exists separate from the town(s); district has its own taxing authority. Fire Districts currently exist within towns (e.g. in Franklin County So. Deerfield and Shelburne). Theoretically they could exist between towns; tax arrangements would have to be worked out and special State legislation would be required.

FRCOG REGIONALIZATION AGREEMENTS

For example, communication systems linking police, fire, EMS and dispatch throughout Franklin County and beyond; regional emergency preparedness.

Possibilities for future discussion: Regional testing of equipment; Regional fire inspections (issue of collection and distribution of fees).

REGIONAL DISPATCH CENTER: organized via State and County (Tri-County Mutual Aid agreement)

APPENDIX B

LEVERETT FIRE STUDY COMMITTEE
WANTS YOU TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR FIRE DEPARTMENT:

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIAL 911 FROM LEVERETT?

...a trained State Police Officer sitting in the red brick barracks on Route 2 in Shelburne Falls will pick up the phone and quickly assess the nature of the emergency. These people are trained for this; your job is to answer their questions clearly.

IF IT IS A FIRE, the Dispatcher will flip a switch that triggers a beeper worn by a Leverett Firefighter. This alert will be issued three times over a few minutes until a Leverett Firefighter responds that he or she is en route to the fire station. The responding firefighters keep reporting back to Dispatch about the status of the local response. If no Leverett Firefighters are on hand (often the case during the daytime hours when our Call Firefighters are at work), the dispatcher will follow a specific protocol to trigger an appropriate Mutual Aid call. Depending on the emergency (structure fire, brush fire, chimney fire, car fire) this Mutual Aid signal will alert firefighters in neighboring towns (often where there are paid full-time Firefighters) in a specific sequence chosen by Leverett Chief John Moruzzi to assure the most rapid response.

IF IT IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, the Dispatcher will page Leverett's Firefighters who are trained First Responders, order the ambulance, and bump the call to a second dispatcher who, again following a specific algorithm, will learn more about the symptoms, talk the caller through some first aid, and maintain an ongoing assessment. The Town recently renewed a contract with Amherst to continue the excellent ambulance coverage for Leverett. These days, about half of all calls to 911 from Leverett are medical emergencies, not fires -- another reason why local First Responders are so important for ill or injured residents in Town.

IMPORTANT: In Leverett, a 911 call from a cell phone will not go directly to Shelburne Falls and will delay response time – IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, USE A LAND LINE. Also, if you see an accident or a fire and must use a cell phone, pull over lest you drive out of range. [The Editors acknowledge the overall improbability of cell coverage in most of Town]

APPENDIX C

ANOTHER TOWN'S SIMILAR STORY

The issues are the same!

From: Charlotte, Vermont
Charlotte News
August 12, 2013

Charlotte is a small town just south of Burlington, VT. They have a volunteer fire service and a rescue service with ambulance (Charlotte Volunteer Fire & Rescue Service- CVFRS). While their organization and funding arrangements are different from Leverett's, the following excerpt from the local paper, summarizes the issues and recommendation to hire a full-time firefighter discussed in the Leverett Fire Study Committee report. Recruiting and maintaining a volunteer/call force is a national problem.

The world of volunteer fire and rescue services has suffered from a cruel form of math the past 30 years. Since 1983, volunteer firefighters have decreased significantly while the amount of training required to volunteer in a leadership capacity has increased, largely due to regulations from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

According to John Snow, vice president of CVFRS's corporate board, "The idea that a couple of people can show up with a hose and a truck has evolved to the point where OSHA, the NFPA, have set these standards for safety that get higher and higher each year, the amount of training required of people responding gets higher and higher each year, and the number of volunteers is going lower and lower. So we're asking more of our volunteers, and we have fewer and fewer of them to work with."

Indeed, since 2005, eight members have left Charlotte's fire department—four since 2011—decreasing its members from 30 to 22. The rescue squad has seen a more precipitous decline in volunteers in the same time span—from 36 in 2005 to 11 currently. In order to maintain an adequate level of daily coverage, the rescue squad pays two full-time staff and 14 per-diem staff to provide EMT service to the community 24/7.

This wasn't always the way CVFRS operated. In the 1990s, the rescue service was stretched thin, sometimes with only two volunteers to provide on-call service during weekdays, so with the help of the Selectboard, the organization moved to hire highly trained paid staff to ease the burden on volunteers and to keep the ambulance in compliance with state regulations. Now a similar situation has developed in the fire department, and it has reached a critical point this year.

Out of the 22 fire department volunteers, only seven are currently trained to act in a command and incident assessment capacity. Most of these on-call volunteers work outside of Charlotte on weekdays. One drives a truck, another is in school, another has been away with his family. Fire Chief Davis, the closest in proximity to answer a call, works in Shelburne.

What's more, the demographics of CVFRS's volunteers are a looming issue. Snow compared it to a barbell with many young people who will likely leave for college or job opportunities on one end and many older people who, while willing to work hard and train, have diminishing physical capabilities on the other end. Harder still is the reality of attracting, training and cultivating dedicated volunteers.

Therefore, for the first time since its creation in 1950, CVFRS's budget proposal includes funding to pay a full-time firefighter, someone guaranteed to be available on weekdays, someone certified to respond to calls in a leadership capacity, assess it, and call in additional resources if needed.

According to Davis, what happens in the first ten minutes of a situation has a critical bearing on its outcome. At the moment, CVFRS's response time is somewhere between seven and 20 minutes, sometimes longer. Davis believes the department's response time would become faster if a trained, certified officer was already in the building, ready at a moment's notice to respond to an event.

"I know having someone in the station has done a huge thing for our rescue time for our ambulance calls," said Davis, "and I know it would be the same for the fire response."

What's more, having one qualified firefighter at the station during weekday hours would open a plethora of opportunities for current volunteers while relieving them of some of the responsibilities—equipment maintenance, inventory, grant writing and cleaning—they often have to defer.

"It's a deceptively important change," said Snow. "Getting the right person, a properly trained person, who you know will be in the station available during the day is deceptively powerful in enabling us to use the other resources we have more productively."

Further, a trained firefighter would be able to train less-experienced firefighters while he or she is at the station, thus enabling current volunteers to increase their skills.

"It's a real catalyst," said Snow. "It's not an arithmetic sort of progression. It's not like you've got so many people and you're adding one. You're enabling a whole order of magnitude of efficiency by guaranteeing that one piece."

Davis, Snow and Ed Sulva are each quick to point out that its budget proposal is a last resort, a move made completely due to low volunteerism.

"It gives us absolutely no joy to go to our fellow townspeople and say 'we are asking all of us to pay more,'" said Snow. "We only do that because we think the loss of volunteer resources, both people and the skills they represent, puts us in a position where our ability to provide the public safety response that we have historically provided will be in jeopardy."
