



MEMORANDUM

TO: Marjorie McGinnis, Town Administrator, Town of Leverett
FROM: Becca Meekins, Public Services Manager and Stephen Foley, Associate, Collins Center
DATE: August 9, 2024
RE: Findings and Recommendations – Phase 1 Leverett Fire Regionalization Feasibility Study

Executive Summary:

In the Spring of 2024, the Town of Leverett engaged the Collins Center to conduct Phase 1 of a feasibility study to consider a regional approach to fire and emergency medical services and/or a sharing of resources to maximize fire and emergency response and sustainability to the towns of Wendell, New Salem, Shutesbury and Leverett. Through a combination of data collection, analysis and interviews, the project team has developed the following options for the towns to consider and further investigate in Phase 2 of the study.

1. Two regional full-time Firefighter/EMTs with shared responsibilities for inspections, training, prevention and outreach, in addition to fire and emergency medical response.
2. Full-time regional administrative Fire Prevention/Outreach/Inspection Officer responsible for coordinating and tracking training efforts for all department members in the four towns and for conducting all inspections required by law in the four towns.
3. Joint procurement of a regional record data management system that connects the four communities to improve information sharing and access across all four towns.
4. Joint procurement of tablets to be utilized for inspections, response data, identify target hazards, and water supply locations.
5. Shared Fire Chief to serve two or more of the participating towns.

Background and Demographics:

The towns of Leverett, New Salem, Shutesbury and Wendell are contiguous rural communities in western Massachusetts in Franklin County and are north and west of the Quabbin Reservoir. Each of the four towns is served by a Select Board-Open Town Meeting form of government. The demographics of each of the four communities are similar with respect to population, residential and commercial development levels, and number of single-family homes. Each of the four towns have limited opportunities for economic growth and development given the size of the Quabbin Watershed and its location, the rural nature and lack of public transportation, and challenging geography and road infrastructure.

Municipality	2021 Population	Land Area	Residential/Commercial/Industrial Split	Single Family Homes
Leverett	1,862	22.81	90/10	655
New Salem	997	44.77	92/8	452
Shutesbury	1,731	26.52	96/4	767
Wendell	926	31.84	82/18	411

**Division of Local Services MA Department of Revenue Data and Analytics Resource Bureau*

In addition to the population being similar between the four towns, the ages are similar too. Across the state, populations are aging rapidly and as a result, there will be additional demand for fire and emergency medical services. According to a 2023 Boston Globe article, “In Massachusetts, about 1.2 million people were 65 and older in 2020. That number was up 32.2 percent from 2010.” (“Following a national trend, Mass. Got a little bit grayer in 2022.” Finucane and Fujiwara, Boston Globe, June 2023.) Additionally, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), “At age 65, older adults are twice as likely as the population at large to be killed or injured by fires. By age 75, that risk increases to three times that of the general population, and four times by age 85. One in three older adults will experience a fall, sending an average 1 in 17 to the emergency department each year in the United States. There was a 34% increase in invalid assists (known as lift assists) from 2014 to 2017. Fire service now attend more falls than fires among older adults.” (NFPA “Steps to Safety: The Facts”, www.nfpa.org, 2024.)

Median Age of Population	2015	2020	2022
New Salem	49.8	56.1	55.8
Wendell	49.6	50.9	51.7
Shutesbury	48.3	47.5	53.9
Leverett	49.8	47.4	49

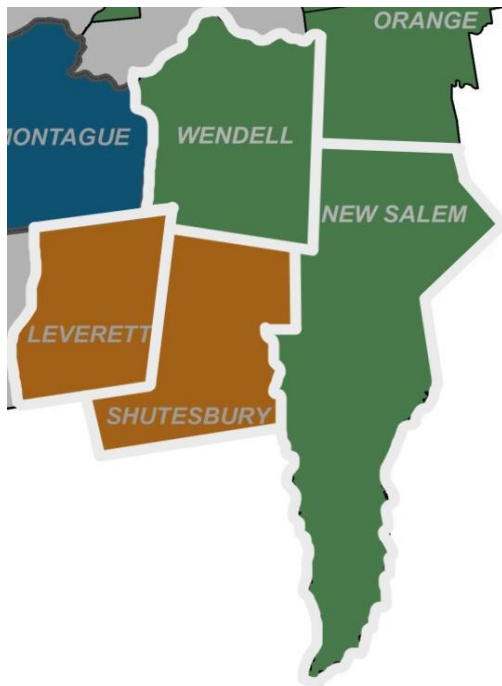
**Source: United State Census Bureau*

Population Years 60 and Older	2015	2020	2022
New Salem	275	373	383
Wendell	284	318	319
Shutesbury	418	593	640
Leverett	690	698	703

**Source: United State Census Bureau*

While each of the four communities have similar land area, population, and development profiles, New Salem contains significantly more land area, and is the largest town by area in western Massachusetts including Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire counties, with a significant portion of the land being in the Quabbin Watershed. All four communities are dispatched by Massachusetts State Police – Shelburne Dispatch (B-2), and several of the towns

already share services in a variety of ways, including schools, police, and animal control. All four towns are members of the Union 28 school district. Wendell and Leverett currently have a shared



police department which includes animal control, and New Salem and Wendell currently have a shared Fire Chief. From a firefighting and operational perspective, fire equipment used by the four towns is compatible which allows for interchange of hose, self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) and they are all dispatched by the same barracks. They all provide mutual aid to one another and will request service from one another when needed for various equipment and apparatus. Additionally, each of the four communities takes advantage of many of the same grants including but not limited to: the Department of Fire Services Equipment Grant, the Department of Fire Services SAFE grant, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Associations Emergency Management Performance Grant, and more.

**Map Source: Municipal Digital Equity Planning Services; Franklin Regional Council of Governments*

Number of Grants Received	FY23	FY22	FY21
Leverett	4	6	4
Shutesbury	1	1	1
New Salem & Wendell	3	3	4

The pre-existing partnerships across various departments within the four towns, in addition to their relative similarities with respect to geographic location, population, development profiles, and operations, offer a unique opportunity for the towns to consider a shared approach to the delivery of fire and emergency medical services. Like most rural communities in Massachusetts with large un-developable parcels due to natural restrictions and largely residential tax bases, towns are always searching for ways to create more efficient and effective service delivery models that adequately deliver the required services, but that do not significantly add to the existing tax burden. Fire departments in small rural communities have a unique challenge beyond simply considering the tax burden, as call/volunteer staff are increasingly difficult to recruit and retain. According to the National Volunteer Fire Council, there were 897,750 volunteer firefighters in 1984. That number is down to 676,900. As volunteer numbers declined, the number of calls to fire departments nationwide tripled. (“Volunteer Fire Service Fact Sheet”, National Volunteer Fire Council. 2024).

Compounded on dwindling volunteer numbers nationwide, increased time demands to fulfill rigorous training requirements make it challenging for volunteers who work full-time in other jobs to find time to complete the training requirements. Recent proposed OSHA regulations

would set new standards for protecting emergency responders from a variety of occupational hazards. This well-intentioned regulation will unfortunately have significant financial and administrative impacts on small call/volunteer Fire/EMS departments, as outlined in the Massachusetts Call/Volunteer Firefighters Association comments on the OSHA proposal, which states “These proposed OSHA rules essentially treat all fire departments the same without regard for their size, complexity, budgets, populations served, emergency call volume, staffing, and community risk. Compliance with these rules is simply not financially feasible.” (Massachusetts Call/Volunteer Firefighters Association Comments Docket ID: “Emergency Response Standard” (Emergency Response) Rule. July 16, 2024. Goldstein, Ph.D. President.) Leverett, Shutesbury, New Salem and Wendell have begun pursuit of a regional partnership to address all the above outlined challenges to continuing to provide responsive and professional fire and emergency medical response support to their communities. Opportunities for a regional approach to fire and emergency medical service delivery are further explored in this memorandum.

Fire Operations in Leverett, Shutesbury, New Salem and Wendell:

Staffing:

Leverett, New Salem, Wendell and Shutesbury all operate a combination career and call/volunteer staff department. Leverett and Shutesbury both have full-time Fire Chief’s, with the remainder of their staff being call/volunteer. New Salem and Wendell share a full-time Fire Chief between the two towns, and the remainder of each of their staff are call/volunteer. Below is an estimate of staff in each of the departments who responded to at least one fire call in 2023 and are considered “active” fire personnel.

Number of Active Personnel (Responded to at least 1 call in 2023) *	
Leverett	11**
New Salem	11
Wendell	7
Shutesbury	11

**Includes Chief in each community. For New Salem and Wendell, the same Chief serves both towns.*

***As of 7/30/24, Leverett has 9 active personnel, only 8 of which have responded to a call in 2024.*

Call response for each community varies between members. The number of staff who responded to 30% or more of all calls in 2023 for all four towns was between 36% and 86% (see below). However, when that percentage increases to 50% of all calls, the number of staff responding drops to between 0 and 33%, signaling that there are few staff who can respond to the majority of calls, in some part due to having full-time employment commitments outside of the area that prevent daytime response.

2023 Staffing and Call Response – Town of Leverett		
Total Calls		215
Total Responders (includes Chief)		11
Response Breakdown	Total Responses	% of Calls Responded to
Responder #1	179	83%
Responder #2	100	47%
Responder #3	83	39%
Responder #4	81	38%
Responder #5	37	17%
Responder #6	35	16%
Responder #7	28	13%
Responder #8	27	13%
Responder #9	24	11%
Responder #10	21	10%
Responder #11	6	3%

2023 Staffing and Call Response - Town of New Salem		
Total Calls		126
Total Responders (includes Chief) *		11
Response Breakdown	Total Responses	% of Calls Responded to
Responder #1	58	46%
Responder #2	53	42%
Responder #3	50	40%
Responder #4	47	37%
Responder #5	36	29%
Responder #6	23	18%
Responder #7	14	11%
Responder #8	8	6%
Responder #9	7	6%
Responder #10	2	2%

**Due to the combined reporting module used for New Salem and Wendell, the project team was unable to differentiate which calls the shared Fire Chief responded to in each town, therefore the Chief's responses are not counted in the response breakdown, only in the total responder calculation.*

2023 Staffing and Call Response – Town of Wendell		
Total Calls		116
Total Responders (includes Chief) *		6
Response Breakdown	Total Responses	% of Calls Responded to
Responder #1	84	72%
Responder #2	63	54%
Responder #3	38	33%
Responder #4	37	32%
Responder #5	19	16%
Responder #6	16	14%

**Due to the combined reporting module used for New Salem and Wendell, the project team was unable to differentiate which calls the shared Fire Chief responded to in each town, therefore the Chief's responses are not counted in the response breakdown, only in the total responder calculation.*

2023 Staffing and Call Response - Town of Shutesbury		
Total Calls	149	
Total Responders (includes Chief)	11	
Response Breakdown	Total Responses	% of Calls Responded to
Responder #1	127	85%
Responder #2	100	67%
Responder #3	52	35%
Responder #4	49	33%
Responder #5	29	19%
Responder #6	29	19%
Responder #7	28	19%
Responder #8	27	18%
Responder #9	24	16%
Responder #10	23	15%
Responder #11	22	15%

Number of Staff Responding to 30% or more of calls in 2023		
Town	Number of Staff	As a % of all Staff
Leverett	4	36%
New Salem	5	45%
Shutesbury	4	36%
Wendell	5	83%

Number of Staff Responding to 50% or more of calls in 2023		
Town	Number of Staff	As a % of all Staff
Leverett	1	9%
New Salem	0	0%
Shutesbury	2	18%
Wendell	2	33%

Fire/EMS staff in all four departments are trained to the Emergency Medical Responder (formerly known as First Responder) or higher level and are required to maintain CPR/AED certifications. Most have received Incident Command System (ICS) 100 and 700, with Officers in New Salem and Wendell, as well as the Shutesbury and Leverett Fire Chiefs having completed ICS 200, 300, and 400. All responders in Leverett, New Salem, and Wendell have been trained to Firefighter I/II standards, as well as Hazardous Materials (HazMat) Awareness Level Training. Wendell and New Salem each have two (2) Basic EMTs on staff, Shutesbury has one Paramedic, and Leverett has five (5) Basic EMT's and a Paramedic. There are clear varying levels of training and certifications throughout each of the four departments, but at least three of the four have what is considered adequate training for fire response (a minimum of Firefighter I, First Responder, CPR/AED, ICS 100 and 700, and HazMat Awareness Level). All four towns currently conduct some training together and have an established training schedule. A noted challenge to increasing training and certification access for call/volunteer members is budgetary limitations. For example, all four

towns currently only have funds available to send one person to the Fire Academy in a fiscal year. This is a challenge not unique to the Quabbin region, but rather, like previously referenced from Massachusetts Call/Volunteer Firefighters Association, compliance with existing training requirements is challenging for small rural communities, and adding additional requirements as proposed by OSHA will only further exacerbate funding challenges.

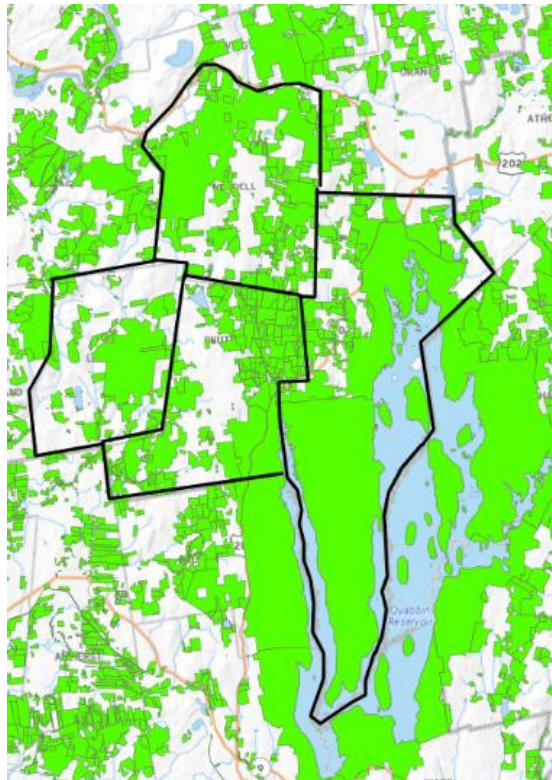
Wendell and New Salem currently share a full-time Fire Chief. During the course of the study, it was revealed that the shared Chief is likely to retire in the next year. Given this vacancy, discussion of a shared Chief between not only Wendell and New Salem, but also Leverett and potentially Shutesbury, should be explored. Most successful shared services agreements, particularly as they relate to staffing, are made during a transition period. Given the timing of the Chief's retirement from Wendell and New Salem, now is an ideal time to further explore and consider additional communities who could benefit from a shared Fire Chief arrangement.

Equipment and Assets:

As previously mentioned, all four towns currently utilize compatible equipment including hose size and self-contained breathing apparatus. In addition to the equipment utilized, Shutesbury, New Salem and Wendell all have individual fire stations. Leverett headquarters is based in the Public Safety Complex which is shared with the Police and Highway Departments. As previously mentioned, each of the four towns is engaged in mutual aid agreements with one another, providing not only staffing when needed, but also the use of equipment and assets when needed.

Geography:

The Quabbin Reservoir region is one of the most unique geographic locations in the Commonwealth, with protected land and water supplies hindering significant economic growth for the communities contiguous to the reservoir. The Quabbin is one of three active watersheds that currently provide over two hundred million gallons a day to the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA), which provides public drinking water to 3.1 million people in Central and Eastern Massachusetts. The Department of Conservation and Recreation owns or has control of activity on 62% of the Quabbin watershed. Portions of both Shutesbury and New Salem directly abut the reservoir, and Leverett and Wendell fall to the west and north, respectively. In addition to the challenge of providing public safety services in and around the reservoir, a sizable portion of land in each of the four towns is considered protected open space land, meaning access is typically limited, the environment tends to be heavily forested or covered in brush, and difficult to access. Below is a map showing the protected open space land in each of the four towns. The portions in green are protected. Again, this reflects not only the challenging aspects of firefighting and emergency response to the region, but also the limited economic development opportunities which prevent increased tax revenue and the opportunity to shift the tax burden off residents.



**Source: Wendell Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023-2030; Prepared by the Wendell Open Space Committee and Franklin Regional Council of Governments.*

Fire Department Administration:

Each of the four towns has varying levels of data management and access to information related to the services that each of the Fire/EMS departments provide. Leverett utilizes, as of July 1, 2024, Emergency Networking data management software for tracking calls for service, inspections, hours for staff, training, payroll, and other related information system requirements.

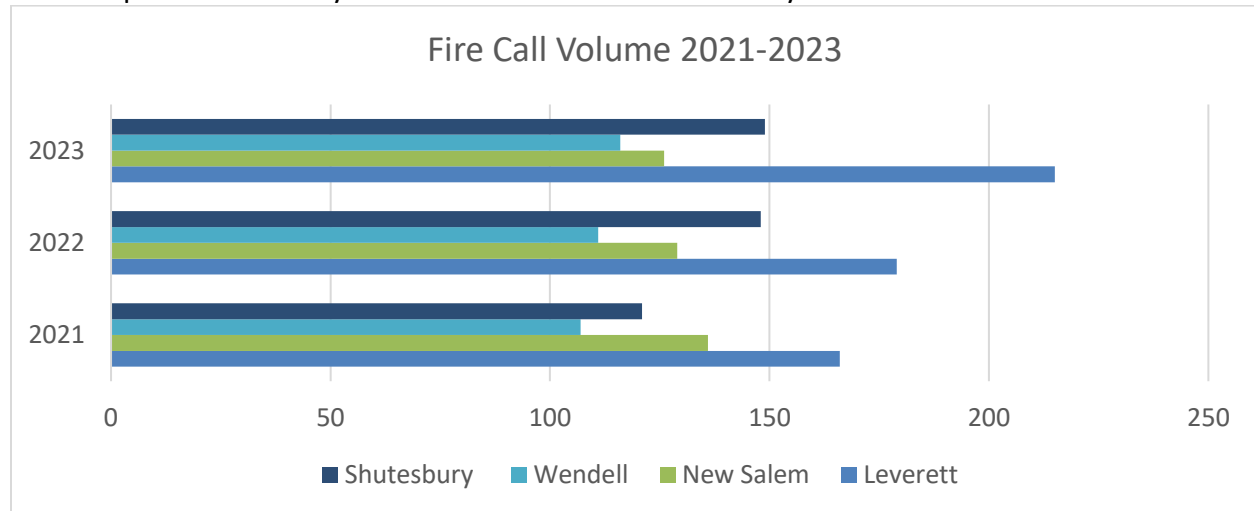
Shutesbury currently utilizes a legacy platform that is no longer supported to track calls and response times. Calls are manually imported to the system and only tracks a limited set of data and information related to fire and EMS responses, including total calls, responses, average response time, call type, average number of responders, time of day, and apparatus response. The platform has limited analysis capabilities and the information contained on the platform is not backed up to the town's server. All other information and documentation for Shutesbury, including all permit requests and results, tracking of trainings, certifications, payroll, payables and other related technical and administrative documentation is kept on paper in files at the Fire Department.

All four towns lack geographic information systems (GIS) integration into their response systems, and Leverett is the only town that has begun utilizing tablets to track inspections, access water supply locations, and other pertinent information utilized in the response to a fire scene or for inspection purposes. GIS capabilities will assist in dispatching from Shelburne barracks and be an added tool as part of each community's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP).

GIS information can be done through the GIS systems manager at the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), or through the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Call Volume and Inspection Data:

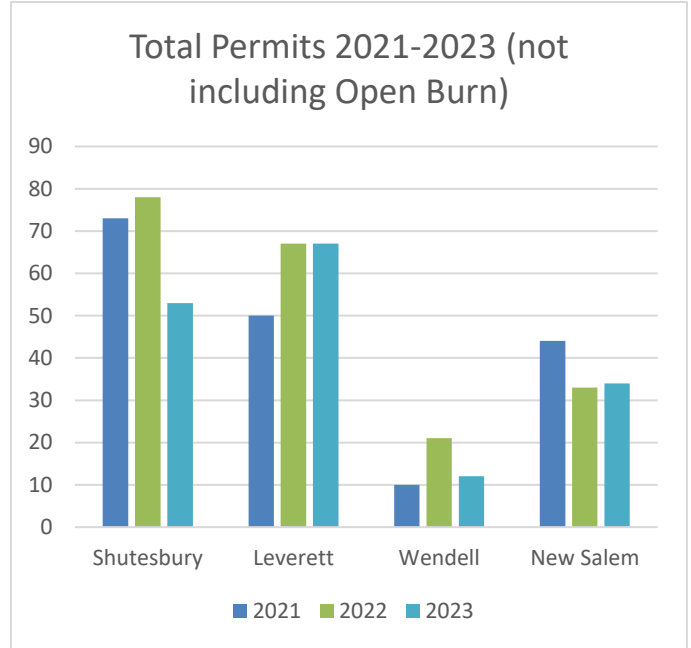
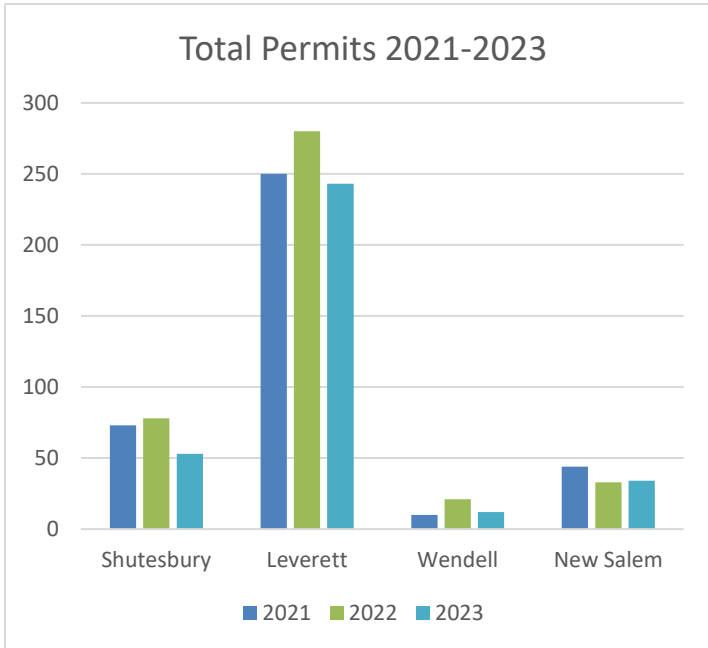
The number of calls for service vary across the four towns, though calls for emergency medical assistance continue to grow and make up the majority of calls in each of the four towns. Leverett does respond to significantly more calls than Wendell and New Salem (almost double) and in 2023 responded to nearly a third more calls than Shutesbury.



Call volume across the four towns has remained steady in the last three years, Leverett experiencing the largest increase in calls since 2021, and New Salem experiencing a decrease over the three-year period.

Increase in Fire Calls 2021 to 2023	
Leverett	49
New Salem	-10
Wendell	9
Shutesbury	28

All four towns complete inspections and requests for permits to varying amounts. Below is a chart reflecting the total number of permits issued over three years. Leverett appears to issue significantly more permits than the other four towns because they include open burn permits issued through an automatic online process. Shutesbury, Wendell and New Salem also issue the same permits through the online process, but do not include them in the overall permit count. Not including open burn permits, the total number of permits issued is similar across all four towns.



Each of the four towns has similar inspection fee schedules. Leverett charges \$50 per initial inspection, and a \$25 reinspection fee. Shutesbury charges \$50 per inspection of any type, and re-inspections may require an additional fee. Wendell charges \$25 per inspection of any type, and New Salem charges \$50 for everything except for 26F inspections, for which it charges \$50 for the initial inspection, and a \$25 reinspection fee.

Inspection Fees (assumes no charge for annual school/life safety inspections)	FY21	FY22	FY23
Shutesbury	\$ 2,950	\$ 3,200	\$ 1,950
Wendell	\$ 700	\$ 525	\$ 300
New Salem	\$ 1,900	\$ 1,300	\$ 1,150
Leverett	\$ 1,400	\$ 2,150	\$ 2,150

As previously mentioned, response to more than 50% of all calls in the year is limited to only one or two members of each department, at the most. While getting consistent response from any call/volunteer member is impressive, responders often have full-time jobs of their own that require their time and attention during the day, and oftentimes are not geographically close enough to provide response even if the member was able to leave their day job for a call. As notated earlier in the report OSHA/EPA has required two in/two out ruling since the late 1990's. (29 CFR 1910.120) and the National Fire Protection Association Standards 1500 Fire Service Occupational Safety and Health and NFPA 1720 Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments requires the same standard. Both Standards reference the OSHA/EPA regulations and while these standards are not codified in any Massachusetts General

Law or regulation, they have been utilized as evidence in civil lawsuits against municipalities as the “recognized” standard across the country. The two in/two out ruling provides for two firefighters (properly trained and equipped) to conduct interior firefighting operations (if deemed safe to do so), and two firefighters to perform rescue if those interior firefighters become trapped, lost, or impaired. Some municipal fire departments have labeled the two exterior firefighters as a “RIT” Team (Rapid Intervention Team)

Interviews and Recommendations:

During the study, in addition to collecting quantitative data and information from each of the four departments regarding operations, the project team conducted interviews with each of the Fire Chiefs representing the four communities, and with each Town Administrator or Coordinator. As a result of those interviews, the following themes emerged.

1. The ability to recruit, train, and retain paid on-call firefighters is increasingly challenging.
2. There is limited operational capacity to safely and efficiently manage on-scene incidents given the limitations and challenges of an on-call department.
3. There is no updated automatic response plan, dispatched by Shelburne Control (B-2), which can extend response times based on availability.
4. Individual community geography and communication dead spots compromise timely response to incidents, and impact on-scene coordination for command and control.
5. Fire prevention and inspections are consistent throughout each of the individual communities but are managed differently.
6. Public life safety education is conducted as needed and when requested but not necessarily promoted.
7. Record management systems are not compatible or maintained electronically in all cases.
8. Economic growth is extraordinarily limited in all four communities, given land use restrictions and the vicinity to the Quabbin Reservoir.
9. Emergency medical services are provided by two separate entities to the four communities (two are served by Amherst Fire/EMS, and two are served by Orange Fire/EMS)

Based upon all the quantitative and qualitative data and information that was collected as part of the study, the project team recommends that the towns consider one or more of the following recommendations.

1. Hiring of two regional full-time Firefighter/EMTs with shared responsibilities for inspections, training, prevention and outreach, in addition to fire and emergency medical response.

The project team recommends that the four towns consider adding two full-time Firefighter/EMTs who will have shared responsibilities amongst the four towns for inspections, training coordination, prevention and outreach, in addition to fire and emergency medical response. Given the limited response to fire and emergency medical calls

by the current departments, aging population in the region, increasing challenges with recruiting, training and retaining qualified paid on-call staff, and impending training mandates from the federal government, the addition of full-time staff for departments is on the horizon. A regional approach to full-time staff will limit the financial impact to each of the communities served and provide coverage and response that adequately meets the requirements of NFPA two/in two/out recommendations from OSHA.

2. Full-time regional administrative Fire Prevention/Outreach/Inspection Officer responsible for coordinating and tracking training efforts for all department members in the four towns and for conducting all inspections required by law in the four towns.

The addition of a full-time administrative Fire Prevention/Outreach/Inspection Officer would allow for a more robust fire prevention program in each of the four towns, that would allow for more public health education and outreach, and interaction with community members. In addition, this position would be responsible for all inspections throughout the four towns and would be responsible for managing the training program for all four towns. This option does not address the coverage and response challenges mentioned in recommendation 1.

3. Joint procurement of a regional record data management system that connects the four communities to improve information sharing and access across all four towns.

Given the current state of data management in all four towns, this would significantly improve communications and access to information across the four towns. An updated electronic system would allow for ease of access to data and information, would be secure and backed up to each town's servers, and could integrate GIS and tablet usage.

4. Joint procurement of tablets to be utilized for inspections, response data, identify target hazards, and water supply locations.

Pursuit of recommendation number four should be done in conjunction with recommendation three. Due to the outdated systems used by Shutesbury and New Salem/Wendell, implementation of an updated robust data management software would be critical before considering implementation of tablets for response and inspection use. The use of tablets across response and inspection disciplines has been growing over the last several years. With GIS integration and water supply location, response times can drastically decrease as responders have real time information regarding the location of resources and access means for any call. In addition, tablets reduce the use of paper, and can fully integrate records to the data management system without manual entry, saving valuable time and resources.

5. Shared Fire Chief who could serve two or more of the participating towns.

Given the timing of this feasibility study, and the impending retirement of the New

Salem/Wendell Chief, consideration of a regional or shared Chief amongst additional communities should be considered. The project team also recommends a list of minimum and preferred qualifications that a Fire Chief in Massachusetts should hold. Important to note is that while few if any certifications are enforced by the state proactively, there are generally recommended trainings/certifications for firefighters agreed upon by state and federal agencies. Enforcement of licensure or certification of a particular responder typically comes after a major incident if it is found that a firefighter has not been properly trained and is determined liable for loss of life or damage to property. Attached to this memo as “Exhibit A: Fire Chief Recommended Qualifications” is a list of recommended qualifications for consideration when looking at a shared Chief model.

Financial Considerations and Governance Model Options

Exploration into one or more of the above recommendations may not necessarily result in a budget decrease. Oftentimes shared services agreements are implemented for enhanced service delivery rather than financial savings. A high-level overview of the potential cost estimates and impacts on a few of the options are highlighted below. The governance and assessment model selected may impact these estimates. Other potential assessment models could include a utilization-based model (based on number of inspections and calls), EQV, or some combination of the above. In the scenarios presented below, the assumed assessment model is a combination of inspection utilization and population with a 50% weight to each.

Population-Based Assessment		
Town	2022 Population	As % of Total
New Salem	1074	20%
Wendell	847	15%
Shutesbury	1754	32%
Leverett	1793	33%
Total	5468	100%

Inspection Utilization-Based Assessment		
Town	2023 Inspections	As % of Total
New Salem	34	20%
Wendell	12	7%
Shutesbury	53	32%
Leverett	67	40%
Total	166	100%

**Recommend a three-year rolling average for utilization-based assessment models.*

Population/Inspection Utilization Basis - 50% population/50% Utilization Weighted		
Town	Model	As % of Total
New Salem	$(20\% \times .5) + (20\% \times .5)$	20%
Wendell	$(15\% \times .5) + (7\% \times .5)$	11%
Shutesbury	$(32\% \times .5) + (32\% \times .5)$	32%
Leverett	$(33\% \times .5) + (40\% \times .5)$	37%
Total		100%

Model 1: Shared Fire Chief between Leverett, New Salem and Wendell and addition of a full-time Administrative Fire Prevention/Inspection Officer shared by all four towns, hired by Leverett. Estimate for cost of full-time Administrative Fire Prevention/Inspector is \$65,000 salary and \$14,857 in benefits.

Town	Potential Assessment for Insp/Prev Ofc
New Salem	\$ 16,356.25
Wendell	\$ 5,772.80
Shutesbury	\$ 25,496.51
Leverett	\$ 32,231.44
Total	\$ 79,857.00

**Follows Inspection Utilization-Based Assessment model*

A shared Fire Chief could follow a simpler population-based assessment model since inspection duties are not the responsibility of the Chief, and as a result, are not a factor in the utilization rate. The current salary and benefit rate for the Leverett Fire Chief is \$93,583. In the event of an expansion of duties due to a regional approach to Fire Chief services, the salary has been adjusted to reflect the increase in responsibilities.

Town	Potential Assessment for Shared Fire Chief (3 Towns – does not include Shutesbury)
New Salem	\$36,105.66
Wendell	\$28,474.39
Leverett	\$60,276.95
Total	\$124,857.00

**follows Population-Based Assessment model*

Model 2: Two full-time Firefighter/EMTs shared amongst the four towns. Assessment model is a combination of population and fire calls with a 50% weight to each. Estimated starting salary for Firefighter/EMT is \$60,000 plus approximately \$15,000 in benefits assuming they take advantage of a family health plan, for a total cost of \$75,000.

Fire Call Utilization Assessment		
Town	2023 Fire Calls	As % of Total
New Salem	126	21%
Wendell	116	19%
Shutesbury	149	25%
Leverett	215	35%
Total	606	100%

**Recommend a three-year rolling average for utilization-based assessment models.*

Population/ Fire Call Utilization Basis - 50% population/50% Utilization Weighted		
Town	Model	As % of Total
New Salem	$(20\% \times .5) + (21\% \times .5)$	20%
Wendell	$(15\% \times .5) + (19\% \times .5)$	17%
Shutesbury	$(32\% \times .5) + (25\% \times .5)$	28%
Leverett	$(33\% \times .5) + (35\% \times .5)$	34%
Total		100%

Town	Potential Assessment for two Firefighter/EMTs
New Salem	\$30,325.22
Wendell	\$25,974.03
Shutesbury	\$42,498.75
Leverett	\$51,202.00
Total	\$150,000.00

**Follows Population/Fire Call Utilization-Based Assessment model*

Governance Models:

The exact costs of the above options may vary slightly depending on the governance model implemented. The simplest and most common governance model used in the Commonwealth is the Inter-Municipal Agreement (IMA) whereby one community provides a service to another (a vendor/client relationship). IMA's can be authorized by the Chief Executive Officer of a town authorized to execute a contract in the name of the organization (Select Board). Prior to 2008, approval required a vote from Town Meeting in addition to the Chief Executive. Typically, IMA's are written contracts between two or more municipalities, under which one local government agrees to provide a service to another local government for an agreed-upon price. An example of a formal contract is the sharing of personnel with another jurisdiction. There are already existing IMA's held between some of participating towns (Wendell and Leverett Police Services).

In an IMA, there is a "host" community, or one that is providing services to the other. Typically, the host agency is compensated for its administrative services through an administrative fee or

“indirect” rate, negotiated as part of the IMA. This fee is built into the assessment method. Some of the known challenges to an IMA are that the liability for services provided typically falls on the host community, despite “fault,” there is no separate legal entity that can be held liable, and there is a 25-year statutory limitation on all IMA agreements.

A second option would be to create a joint powers entity (JPE), which is the creation of a separate legal entity who will provide selected services to a specified jurisdiction. The Chief Executive Officer (Select Board) may enter into a joint powers agreement (JPA) with another governmental unit to exercise common powers and duties within a region. The JPE is established as a public employer, requiring all retirement and pension liabilities associated with staff employed by the JPE to be allocated to the JPE. The established corporation or “entity” has the power to:

1. Sue and be sued
2. Make and execute contracts and agreements
3. Make, amend and repeal policies and procedures relative to the operation
4. Receive and expend funds
5. Apply for and receive grants from the state or federal government or other grantors
6. Submit annual report to each participating unit which includes detailed financial statements including the method by which the annual assessments were calculated

The participating agencies must select a Board of Directors to oversee the JPE that is representative of the organizations that are within the jurisdiction of the JPE. The noted benefits of a JPE are that it eliminates risk to any individual participating entity, it is a public employer with its own employees rather than burdening constituent members, and it is not subject to the 25-year limitation that an IMA is. However, there is some loss of local control over assessments and policy-setting decision-making to a shared district or board.

The final option for the region is pursuit of a Fire District. MGL Ch. 48, Sec. 60-80 establishes the legal authorization for cities and towns to establish a fire district, to serve some pre-established boundary or section of land, and cannot serve less than one thousand people. To establish a fire district, a petition must be brought to each town meeting that will be included in the boundary of the district, requesting to raise taxes for the establishment and maintenance of a fire/EMS department for the delivery of fire and emergency medical services. The following is a general outline of steps for the creation of a fire/EMS department within a district once town meeting has voted to establish the district:

1. The district must meet and vote to establish a Fire/EMS Department, consisting of a Chief and other staff required to fulfill the services.
2. Establish the terms of the Chief and Deputy if applicable.
3. The district may vote to authorize the Prudential Committee to appoint staff including the Chief.
4. A District Meeting (like a Town Meeting) may be called with a warrant established by the Prudential Committee, with at least 7 days’ notice to the inhabitants. Notice

requirements are set forth in the by-laws, or if by-laws do not exist, by a vote of the district or by posting in prescribed locations set forth in the law.

5. A special district meeting may be called with 100 registered voters (like Special Town Meeting).

6. The clerk of the district must certify to the assessors of the town all votes of the district authorizing interest to be added to taxes and funds to be voted to be raised for the promulgation of services by the Fire/EMS Department to the established District. Once raised, the funds shall be turned over to the District Treasurer.

7. The assessors, treasurer and collector of a town in which such district is organized shall have the same powers and perform the same duties relative to the assessment and collection of the money voted by the fire district as they have and exercise relative to the assessment, collection and abatement of town taxes, and the sums so voted shall be assessed upon the property, real and personal, within the district.

8. The district will be a separate entity but a member of the regional retirement agency and assessments for pension liability and OPEB will be established by the regional retirement agency for the district and its members.

The most significant benefit of establishing a regional fire district is the reliability of a funding source which levies taxes to provide services, rather than an assessment to one or more participating jurisdictions, like in an IMA or JPE.

Next Steps and Conclusion:

Based upon the analysis and results of Phase 1 of the feasibility study, the project team feels that there is a significant opportunity for the towns of Leverett, Shutesbury, Wendell and New Salem to pursue one or more of the established recommendations, particularly around shared staff. To facilitate this process moving forward, the project team will assist in the drafting of a Phase 2 grant application from the Commonwealth’s Community Compact Best Practices Grant, should the towns choose to move forward. That application process typically opens in August and awards are made on a rolling basis beginning in the Fall. If the grant is awarded, the Center will move forward with Phase 2 as it’s outlined in “Exhibit B: Scope of Services” attached to this document. This scope may be revised depending on which governance model the towns choose to pursue.

The project team would like to thank the Towns of Leverett, Shutesbury, Wendell and New Salem for their participation and partnership on this project and hope that the results of the initial phase will set the towns up for future success in pursuing shared fire and emergency medical services.

Exhibit A:

**Massachusetts Fire Chief
Recommended Minimum Qualifications and Certifications**

Education:

Preferred background in Fire Science (associate degree or bachelor's degree), an EMT-Basic certification and Hazardous Materials (HazMat) Operational Level Responder certification.

Training and Certification:

Recommended upon hire:

Successful Completion of Firefighter 1 and 2 Through the Massachusetts State Fire Academy or other accredited fire training institution

- Successful documented training of ICS 100, 200, 300, 400 and 700
- Successful completion of Basic Fire Inspection requirements

Preferred or pursued after hire:

- Fire Officer 1
- Successful completion of both initial fire company operations, and multiple fire company operations (Offered through the State Fire Academy)
- Firefighter Safety and Survival; Rapid Intervention Training (offered through the State Fire Academy)
- Rural Water Supply Course (offered through the State Fire Academy)

Exhibit B:
Phase Two Scope of Services

1. Overview

The towns of Leverett, Shutesbury, New Salem, and Wendell are interested in exploring the feasibility of developing a regional approach to fire services and/or sharing resources to maximize fire response and sustainability to the four towns. Leverett currently operates under the direction of a full-time Fire Chief, with an all-call department. Wendell and New Salem currently share a Chief who works part-time in each town but is currently working under a legislative waiver which is set to expire in October of 2028. Shutesbury currently employs a full-time Fire Chief who oversees an all-call department. All four towns currently have mutual aid agreements and routinely share training resources; however, ongoing staffing shortages and a declining volunteer pool have created response challenges, a common issue across the state. Shutesbury and Leverett currently contract with Amherst Fire/EMS for EMS response, and Wendell and New Salem use Orange Fire/EMS.

To leverage the existing resources in the region, Leverett wishes to engage a consultant to conduct a feasibility study to explore the possibility of regionalizing fire services between the four towns. This proposal is developed in two phases. The Center understands that Leverett has not yet acquired funding for the second phase, but funding options for phase 2 and implementation will be researched as part of phase 1.

2. Project Deliverables

The deliverables will be as follows:

1. *Phase 1 – A findings memo or report that outlines potential operating models and impacts based on the data collected and analyzed in phase 1. The Center will provide a scope and budget for a grant application to fund phase 2 of the proposed workplan.*
2. *Phase 2 – A report that incorporates the findings from phase 1 and includes a financial model and results of stakeholder/public engagement with recommendations for implementation.*

3. Workplan

In order to complete the noted deliverables, the project team will follow the workplan outlined below:

Phase 1:

Step 1: Kick-Off Meeting

Representatives from the Collins Center (project team) will hold a kick-off meeting with project representatives to discuss the workplan and stakeholders involved in the process.

Step 2: Data Collection

The project team will make data requests to all four towns participating in the study (this includes data from Amherst Fire/Rescue and Orange Fire/Rescue). Requested data will include but not be limited to:

- Organizational structure
- Governance structure/model
- Staffing levels (includes longevity of members and training/certifications)
- Pay schedules
- 5 years of capital and operating budgets/expenditures (includes enterprise, revolving or capital stabilization funds)
- Training requirements/schedules
- Permit requests – 5 years
- Data on response times – 5 Years
- Call Data/Volume – 5 years
- Assets (capital equipment, facilities and fleet)
- Demographic data of towns over 10 years (to determine shifts in demand)
- Existing mutual aid agreements or MOUs.
- Current ISO Rating per community, including GIS mapping of static water supply access

Step 3: Interviews

The project team will conduct interviews with the Town Administrators and Fire Chiefs of each of the four participating towns.

Step 4: Data Analysis

The project team will review all data collected and conduct an analysis of operations for all four towns, research and develop governance structure options based on the data. This will include high level estimated financial implications of regionalization or shared services, high level analysis of facility location and asset sharing. A detailed financial model will be included in Phase 2 of the study.

Step 5: Draft and Finalize Phase 1 Memo

The project team will draft a memo or report based upon the findings, incorporate recommended changes as appropriate, and will present the findings of the final draft at a public meeting.

Step 6: Creation of Task Force and Phase 2 Planning

Based upon the results of Step 3, the project team will assist in the development of a regional task force to lead the project in phase 2 and implementation. The project team will identify funding methods and availability for phase 2 of the project and will aid in drafting grant proposals on behalf of the task force.

Phase 2: (The Center and the client recognize that all steps defined in phase 2 below will only be undertaken if additional funding is acquired following the completion of Phase 1)

Step 1: Phase 2 Kick-off Meeting with Task Force:

The project team will hold a kick-off meeting for phase two with the Task Force to review the work plan and discuss lessons from Phase 1. Based on results of phase 1, the Task Force will need to determine during this process which model should be pursued.

Step 2: Additional data collection

The project team will identify any data not collected in phase 1 that may be required for a deeper financial and operational analysis of regionalization options. Additional data may be requested related to the below. The analysis will focus on how a regional or shared services approach may impact the following:

- Administrative Data (personnel, duties, records, incident reporting, inspections, training, etc.)
- Staffing (current levels, recruitment/retention schedules, wage data)
- Training – review current training/certifications/instructions/standards/benchmarks, etc.
- Fire Prevention – plan review, inspections, permitting
- Community Outreach – review any current outreach conducted by departments and assess changes to public outreach if a regional or shared services model is adopted.
- Emergency Management/Preparedness: review current emergency management structures/efforts and assess the impact of a regional approach.

- Equipment/Apparatus – review current fleet, assess deficiencies, develop resource sharing model and financial model for funding future capital equipment in a regional approach.

- Response Time – Assess impact on response times, available personnel, capabilities, communication and coordination in regional models.

Step 3: Interviews

Additional interviews (individual and group) will be conducted with stakeholders with guidance of the Task Force. Interviews will seek to uncover additional operational challenges or successes of each of the four communities which will be factored into the impact analysis and detailed

financial modeling. The project team will gather input on expectations and concerns of each town in pursuing regionalization.

Step 4: Public Engagement/Outreach and Survey

The project team will participate in one public engagement/listening session for each of the four participating towns with the aim of educating the public on changing trends in fire response and recruitment challenges of call/volunteer departments (will likely use data collected in phase 1 to show this) and will collect feedback on concerns or resistance to regional approach. The project team will also deploy two surveys as part of Step 2 – one survey to the VFD membership in each of the four towns, and one to the public.

Step 5: Draft Report

Based on the findings from phase 1 and the results from phase 2, the Center will develop a report with findings and recommendations based on all feedback and data collected. The recommendations will include detailed financial and operational models which will provide direction on the implementation phase, if applicable.

Step 6: Final Report and Presentation

The project team will collect any edits to the draft report and incorporate them as appropriate and will develop and conduct one final presentation of the findings and next steps. The Center will provide assistance in drafting a grant application should the results of Phase 2 indicate funding as a requirement for next steps.