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Analysis of Fire Department Staffing, Facilities and Operations



York Area United Fire and Rescue, Pennsylvania

*Draft -- Staffing references
highlighted in light blue*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The consultants reviewed all aspects of York Area United Fire and Rescue in detail. During various multiple-day site visits, the consultants interviewed key personnel from the Townships, including board members, the Fire Department and other agencies that had a role in the operations of the fire department services. Statistical data items were reviewed, collated and reduced to summary tables in the six modules of this report. The Consultants, at all times, strove for detailed factual data and a wide range of viewpoints.

The consultants were impressed with the high degree of organization and professionalism in York Area United Fire and Rescue. Several members of the consulting team monitored field operations whenever possible. In short, they are pleased to report that the department is performing well, but will greatly improve service and safety with additional staffing. On Page 15 of this module we note “Currently York Area United Fire and Rescue can rarely meet OSHA and NFPA recommended numbers of firefighters needed for a working structure fire. Ten years ago, staffing in the Springettsbury-Spring Garden portion went from 32 to 30 persons and has remained stagnant, even as the community and command staff have grown.” We advocate immediate plans for phasing in three-member crews on all fire companies.

Mission:

The report analyzes services provided now and those in an expanded role to address any “gaps” in emergency services. To his credit, Chief Hoff is working with the York County Fire Chiefs to include YAUFR more broadly and more effectively in regional initiatives.

We examined the existing mission of York Area United Fire and Rescue during the analysis and found it is almost a full-service system, delivering all forms of expected emergency response except for medical transport. YAUFR is not meeting national standards for crew sizes per apparatus or for needed personnel on the scene in a timely fashion.

On Page 26 of this module, we note: “As York Area United Fire and Rescue develops its fire protection, it should find a way to add personnel....What can be more expensive is an underfunded fire department which can cause high insurance rates and departing businesses and industry.

New fire stations are being considered in two areas, and we will show how these plans coincide with gaps in timely response. Hopefully, several new fire stations will serve the community and also be a recruiting tool to attract and retain firefighters. All five stations in York Area United Fire and Rescue provide first response for Emergency Medical Service and are able to provide assistance to the third-party ambulance providers.

Community LifeTeam provides quality hospital transports in Springettsbury and Manchester Townships and First Capital EMS does the same in Spring Garden Township. For both, run volume is increasing as is that among the five YAUFR fire stations. YAUFR needs to remain aware that a private corporation has the right to go out of business. One private ambulance provider, “Medcorp” did cease serving communities in six states rather abruptly. Currently Youngstown, OH is facing the possibility of losing its only ambulance service,

provided by AMR. We will suggest that York Area United Fire and Rescue have a "Plan B" for emergency ambulance transport service, if ever needed.

Staffing: York Area United Fire and Rescue

The consulting team found varying degrees of energy and enthusiasm among members of all ranks in York Area United Fire and Rescue. Overall, we saw a dedicated group of personnel who have done a nice job adapting to their current environment and circumstances. The many two-person companies do not meet national standards, which call for a minimum of four per apparatus. In a balance between safety and affordability, three per apparatus would make sense, and based on the budget data reviewed, would be achievable. Paid personnel on duty can respond immediately while volunteer personnel must respond from work or home, then board the apparatus and respond.

None of the five YAUFR stations are equipped for a volunteer live-in arrangement. Renovations to create such space would be costly and provide only a temporary fix since volunteers are vanishing. It would stand to reason that as volunteer and part-time personnel numbers continue to decline, there will be a need to pay for more personnel on duty. An increase in staffing could be phased in on an annual basis until three per apparatus are achieved.

Fire Apparatus and Equipment:

The rolling stock, or more commonly called fire apparatus units, now serving York Area United Fire and Rescue, were analyzed and found to be serviceable but, in some cases, aging. The plans for two new engines, new aerial ladder and new heavy rescue unit will sufficiently modernize the fleet. Then the fleet can be tweaked going forward to meet the needs of the district. Specifically, the consultants like the versatility of fire apparatus that combines engine and ladder capabilities into one vehicle. The aerial ladder equipment in YAUFR does include water, pump and hose capabilities but personnel limitations prevent their use for simultaneous engine and ladder capabilities.

Projected space needs for active and reserve equipment of the five stations were analyzed from both architectural and deployment perspectives. Impetus is given to the adapting of new technology in apparatus and to the removal of obsolete apparatus from fleet. From Module 2 "We believe that York Area United Fire and Rescue will improve its balance between personnel and equipment with minimum crew sizes of three (3)."

Territory Growth

York Area United Fire and Rescue is essentially a diversified community including residences and complex commercial establishments, and has the potential for hazardous material incidents from the many rail lines and trucking routes that traverse York County.

The six modules of this report will provide more specific and detailed information for targeted categories and will provide the logic and rationale behind the findings and suggestions. The report does not follow the same order as the executive summary above, since many of the subjects are interrelated, and are often cross-referenced in different modules.

On Page 5 of Module 2 we state: *We do note an unusually high percentage of overlap calls in the district, 42.38%. This is another reason to try to accelerate additional staffing, a factor that will help units clear a scene more quickly.*

On Page 3 of Module 3 we note:” The consultants feel that the emergency services lag behind this growth and additional funding will be necessary for personnel..... The on-duty complement of personnel on duty in the fire department should grow with the population served and the ever-increasing run volume.

We note throughout Module 4 “the ingredients of a fine supervisor, and YAUFR does have quality leadership. We do note, however that a single battalion commander covering the large district is spread thin. Fortunately, the 40-hour day battalion chiefs can fill in at times and help ease the supervisory demands. Far better would be to have two 24-hour battalion chiefs in the field. This would enhance timely response, bolster scene safety and free one of the company officers for more directed functions.at the scene of a fire or serious emergency.”

Fire stations:

The number and distribution of fire stations will be shown to be fairly good, with a need for a replacement station in Spring Garden and an additional new station in Manchester.. This will ensure blanket coverage for all residents. The current distribution is good but not perfect, with a heavier concentration in some parts of YAUFR, and a sparser distribution elsewhere. In **Module 2** of this report we will use computer time and distance provided by Michelle Harrell of the W5 Design Group to suggest better distribution in an affordable manner.

Specifically, we will show how the idea of separating the single station in Manchester Township into two will improve the response time footprint. Replacing fire stations seems to be an expensive proposition. However, the cost of the facility is a mere fraction of the investment in salaries for the personnel needed to staff the station over its lifetime. The importance of a quality location is shown to be an investment far beyond construction costs.

In Module 6 we note: “York Area United Fire and Rescue is facing an immediate need for improvements in staffing and personnel so as to remain viable as a service provider in vital life-saving operations.”



Training:

The report covers the importance of training in the fire department and provides suggestions both for basic firefighting operations, and leadership for officers. We advocate low-cost high-quality programs such as National Fire Academy courses. Additionally, the five stations can take advantage of the York County Fire School which is in the district for basic training.

Quality Training at the York County Fire School

Run Data, Fire Suppression, Risk Reduction and Balance in functions:

The report analyzes run data and response times and provides suggestions for improvement. Where service demand is greatest, response times are within recommended standards, but like most communities, there are a few areas of York Area United Fire and Rescue where average response times and distances are stretched to the limits of acceptability. The report addresses the changing nature of the fire department role in the community, looks at it from a regional perspective and notes the willingness of area fire departments to give and receive mutual aid.

On Page 26 of Module 3 we note: “Personnel are a major factor in the ISO rating and account for 85-90% of total expenditures per year. YAUFR should consider how many personnel the organization can reasonably afford and attempt to place the maximum affordable number on duty, as this is the largest category in the Fire Department Section of ISO.

Unfortunately, YAUFR scored only 5.04 points out of a possible 15 for staffing. More Personnel are genuinely needed. “

In Module 5 we note: If each company had at least three personnel, proximate protection in the first due zone is improved directly and overall protection in YAUFR is improved. Due to the size of the district being covered, pulling extra stations to make these calls can create response times well in excess of 10 minutes, which is often viewed as unacceptable to citizens.

YAUFR can only grow with paid personnel, as this is the trend in Pennsylvania and throughout the United States. This growth should essentially be in fire department staffing commensurate with population growth and run volume in the community. The hard data shows that calls are frequent, cover a variety of incident types, and point to the need for adequate staffing to handle the load. There were 3817 calls in 2020, 4228 in 2021 and over 4300 projected for 2022.

Water Supply:

The consultants analyzed the private York Water company and found that there are adequate water mains with sufficient volume and pressure in virtually all of the populated portions of YAUFR. The five stations can usually provide adequate water from tanks on the pumpers that respond so that sufficient water is available to control a room and contents fire. Fire companies can tap into hydrants with sufficient volume for the larger fires.



Water tankers or “tenders” are available from surrounding departments if the occasional need arises. When new hydrants are installed, they should be specified to have “Storz” fittings on the primary or steamer outlet at little or no marginal cost.

LEFT: Fire Hydrants are well-maintained in YAUFR, and can be counted on for adequate pressure and volume for structure fires.

Topography and Demographics

The study provides an overview of York Area United Fire and Rescue as a community, including topography, demographics, special hazards, target zones, and other unique characteristics that impact upon fire and emergency response. The study analyzes the community in light of new demands placed on the modern fire service, including emergency management and homeland security.

Standards, Comparisons

In analyzing call volume and response times, the report references national standards for performance and staffing recommendations, such as National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards 1710. The report also examines the present and future ability of York Area United Fire and Rescue to comply with the standards.

The report also provides present and future requirements necessary to maintain or improve district ratings by ISO (Insurance Services Office), which impact fire insurance costs, especially for businesses.

Regarding fire suppression activities at an incident, the report shows that York Area United Fire and Rescue can usually meet national standards for response time by the first arriving unit, even though individual fire companies are deficient in staffing.

Future Organizational Combinations:

When communities pay for full-time persons to staff fire stations, or even to guarantee that there will be a response, there is an efficiency gained if the persons can serve as both Firefighters and EMTs or paramedics, and give both fire protection and transporting ambulance service. Although this is not the model in York Area United Fire and Rescue, it has considerable success in other parts of the country. If on-duty persons are cross-trained, they can usually address the first emergency first--be it fire, EMS, rescue, HAZMAT, or other. Salaries of on-duty personnel can be paid for, in large part, with EMS transport fees paid by Medicare and other insurance.

Hence, a combination of Fire Department and EMS Transport operations in York Area United Fire and Rescue under a unified network should not be ruled out, especially in the longer term. We note that the existing third-party ambulance service does provide excellent transport services to York Area United Fire and Rescue community, even though the fire department arrives first in many cases.

Funding, Budgets:

Both the capital and operating budgets in York Area United Fire and Rescue are limited and the fire departments should be prepared to operate without significant increases. Nonetheless, we do recommend ways in which staffing increases can be funded. In light of the fact that paid personnel usually consume a major share of a fire department budget, any personnel additions would have to be off-set with new revenues.