



Policy Briefing Summary

Kennett Fire and EMS Regional Commission

An Analysis to Address Fire Response Performance in Western Kennett Twp and Region.

Date Presented: April 10, 2021
Prepared By: Eden R. Ratliff

Action Forcing Event

In February 2021, the leadership of Kennett Fire Company comprised of Deputy Chief Steve Melton, Vice President and Office Manager Gina Puoci, and Sargent Rick Franks, asked Kennett Township to complete an analysis of fire responses for Kennett Fire Company (“the company”) for calendar year 2020 to determine if there was justification to add paid firefighters (“paid fire”) to the company’s operations. The analysis identified significant response performance deficiencies for Kennett Fire Company and prompted Kennett Township to seek proposals from Kennett Fire Company and Longwood Fire Company on how to address the response performance deficiencies.

Background

To fully understand the contents of this Policy Briefing Summary the reader is advised to review the Information Briefing Summary “An Analysis of Kennett Fire Company Fire & Rescue Response Performance” dated March 4, 2021.¹ The Information Briefing Summary analyzed response performance data for 2020 that showed Kennett Fire Company having inadequate responses for 50% of their calls during the night and weekends and as much as 75% Monday – Friday 7:00am to 5:00pm. The findings of the analysis were reviewed with the Kennett Regional Fire and EMS Commission along with the Kennett Township Board of Supervisors both of whom expressed concern for public safety in Kennett Fire Companies first due territory of Kennett Square Borough and the western half of Kennett Township.

Kennett Township requested proposals from Kennett Fire Company and Longwood Fire Company to address the response performance.

Proposals

Kennett Fire Company:

The proposal submitted by Kennett Fire Company can be broken into two parts; Part 1 is addressing the response performance of their volunteers; Part 2 is addressing the response performance during the weekdays.

¹ Ratliff, Eden, *Information Briefing Summary, An Analysis of Kennett Fire Company Fire & Rescue Response Performance*, Kennett Pa, 4 March 2021

Kennett Fire Company has an active volunteer roster of about 20 individuals. The response rate of these responders was impacted by several factors in 2020 including COVID-19 and structure issues within the department. Newly appointed Fire Chief Tom Brady has instituted several programs for his volunteers to share the burden of responding as well as ensure the availability of volunteer crews on nights and weekends.

The newly instituted programs, some as recently as April 1, 2021, include a duty crew program Monday-Friday 6:00pm to 10:00pm, where volunteer staff the station. In addition, a volunteer on call rotation where volunteers are assigned designated overnights where they agree to respond to calls that may be dispatched ensuring adequate volunteer crews overnight. The Company has instituted the same program for full weekend coverage.

Part B of the proposal confronts the 75% inadequate response rate Monday through Friday 7:00am to 5:00pm. Since Kennett Fire Company has very few, less than 5, available responders during normal business hours, they propose to hire paid firefighters. Currently Kennett Fire Company proposes to support 2 firefighters Monday through Friday 7:00am to 5:00pm using a pool of part-time personnel. The third firefighter will be the administrative personnel who supervises EMS paid staff.

Longwood Fire Company:

The proposal from Longwood Fire Company is an explanation of how they can expand their current responder infrastructure to cover the western part of Kennett Township which is in the current primary response territory of Kennett Fire Company.

Longwood proposes to incorporate the western portion of Kennett Township into its first due territory and involve Kennett Fire Company and Hockessin Fire Company in the response plan. Hockessin would respond to all calls in the southern tier of Kennett Township reducing the current response time by an average of 6 minutes. Volunteer crews from Kennett Fire Company would still be dispatched, and respond when available, to all calls in the western portion of Kennett Township as they are now. Furthermore, Longwood Fire Company would also respond to all dispatches as well. This arrangement provides a 'safety net' in the event Kennett Fire Company is unable to deploy a qualified response and reduces response times in the southern portion of Kennett Township. The involvement of Hockessin Fire Company adds no costs to Kennett Township or the region. Longwood Fire Company proposes the Commission fund the unfunded third firefighter in its 2021 budget. See Exhibit A and B for coverage plan and estimated response times.

Analysis

The Kennett Fire Company proposal is thorough and promising as it adds structure for its volunteer responders to provide confidence there will be a qualified response on nights and weekends. The analysis of their 2020 data shows that the challenge in 2020 was not that they were not responding to calls, nor that they were not responding within the appropriate time frame, rather their crews were either insufficient in training or insufficient in quantity.² The installation of duty crews overnight staffing from home, and weekend staffing, gives confidence that qualified personnel are prepared to respond. This is a model currently instituted in part or in whole at Longwood Fire Company and PoMarLin Fire Company.

The challenge arises when measuring confidence of the programs long-term. Managing the overnight staffing, weekend staffing, and ensuring the participation in the duty crews is labor intensive and relies on the continued willingness and participation of the volunteers. The overnight staffing and weekend staffing has been in place for less than two weeks

² Ibid

therefore it is hard to determine if the programs will remain in place and effective. As summer looms and an economy that may be less restricted with COVID-19 regulations, it is unknown how willing and available the volunteer responders will be long-term. It is important to monitor the effectiveness of this program because it is pivotal the success of the response performance of Kennett Fire Company on nights and weekends. Because the implementation of the program is in its infancy, they should not be relied upon as guarantees for success at this time.

To address the challenge that the effectiveness of Kennett's plan for nights and weekends is not yet known, Kennett Township could change fire territory to ensure an adequate response to the western part of Kennett Township. Longwood has built out a volunteer program that has a response performance greater than 93% which can be expanded to cover more of Kennett Township. This would ensure a qualified crew is responding to every call in all of Kennett Township, a needed change from the response performance of 2020. As noted in the Longwood proposal, Kennett volunteer responders would still respond to dispatches in the western part of Kennett Township. This detail is incredibly important when considering volunteer recruitment and retention.

Volunteer first responders train aggressively to learn new skills and respond to emergencies. These volunteers want to use these skills which translates to running calls. Kennett Fire Company is company with a small call volume of around 350 calls annually. Longwood is busier with around 700 calls annually. Volunteers at both Kennett Fire Company and Longwood Fire Company will benefit from an increased call volume as it keeps them engaged and active. In addition, the region has the benefit of knowing that there will be a qualified response to the entire region with two companies responding. The safety net of two companies responding is important because if one company fails then there is assurance another company is responding in a timely manner.

The Kennett proposal also addresses the response performance experienced from 7:00am to 5:00pm Monday through Friday. In 2020 the inadequate response rate during this time was 75%. This response performance is in part due to most qualified volunteer responders not being available during normal business hours. To help address this, Kennett Fire Company has been cross staffing the ambulance and fire engines using the paid EMS staff to makeup the fire response crew effectively taking the ambulance out of service. This was a helpful stopgap measure but is imperfect as the need for fire crews and the ambulance can easily overlap. Even with cross staffing the response performance was at an unacceptable level.

To address this deficiency, Kennett Fire Company proposes to hire paid staff for their fire company. Paid staff while maintaining the Kennett Ambulance increases the costs of emergency service delivery out of Kennett Fire Company a noteworthy amount and is not sustainable. However, despite these challenges, the fire territory covered by Kennett Fire Company still needs to be addressed.

Longwood Fire Company has noted in their proposal that they can cover the daytime and evening call volume in Kennett Fire Company's first due territory in Kennett Township. To ensure that current service delivery standards, a 93% response performance, continues Longwood has requested that their third budgeted firefighter be funded.

The challenge of daytime staffing cannot be understated especially because both Kennett Fire Company and Longwood Fire Company experience the bulk of their all volume during the daytime hours.³⁴ While paid staffing is a trend across the fire service, ensuring efficient delivery remains critical to managing the change in service delivery.

Without paid staffing or the ambulance, Kennett Fire Company will not be able to adequately cover or respond to calls within the region during the day. Currently Longwood Fire Company can cover the volume with a third paid firefighter,

³ Kennett Fire Company, 2020 Annual Report, December 31, 2020

⁴ Longwood Fire Company, 2020 Annual Report, December 31, 2020

however, as the call volume grows so does the burden on a handful of responders. Paid fire staffing, under a single command structure, allows for the sharing of that burden along with the ensuring the efficient delivery of the fire service.

A single command structure would mean that all or most of the fire territory in the region would be under the primary territory of one company. Longwood Fire Company is the primary service provider for most of the region. Expanding the Longwood territory to include the western half of Kennett Township allows the assurance of a qualified response to dispatches, but also efficiency gains in service delivery. As Longwood proposes, the Kennett Fire Company would still be responding allowing for more coordinated responses and dispatches along with a more organized standard of cover. This can be done with both paid staff during the day and volunteer staff on nights and weekends.

An added benefit is the reduction of competition between fire companies. The fire service is one of pride, tradition, culture, and competition. While all these things can be powerful motivators, as resources dwindle, the room for competition does as well. Coming under a unified command facilitates teamwork and coordination as the companies are working together in a strategic manner in every step of the process. The work of a firemen is not only responding to calls, sometimes with other companies and sometimes not, but is also pre-planning, training, drilling, responding to calls, clean up, and after-action reviews. Engaging in these activities together on a regional basis, not just when territory overlaps, will create a unified fire service, with companies who have their own culture and tradition, and professional service delivery.

Recommendation

Based on the analysis provided within, I recommend the following action items:

1. The Kennett Township fire territory be reassigned to Longwood Fire Company as a primary service provider in accordance with the fire coverage and response plan outlined within the Longwood proposal.
 1. Kennett paid firefighters would dually dispatch in the western half of Kennett Township on fire calls as determined by the regional response and coverage plan.
 1. Kennett volunteer responders would respond to all calls in Kennett Township as determined by the regional response and coverage plan.
2. The Kennett Fire Company officially retire the Kennett Fire Company EMS Operations to allow for funding to be allocated to paid fire.
3. The Kennett Regional Fire and EMS Commission increase the annualized funding to Kennett Fire Company No. 1 to include two paid firefighters and one paid supervisor to allow for weekday fire coverage. Total estimated cost \$254,720.
4. The Kennett Regional Fire and EMS Commission increase the annualized funding to Longwood Fire Company to include one additional paid firefighter for weekday coverage. Total estimated cost \$74,100.
5. The above recommendations be effective May 3, 2021.

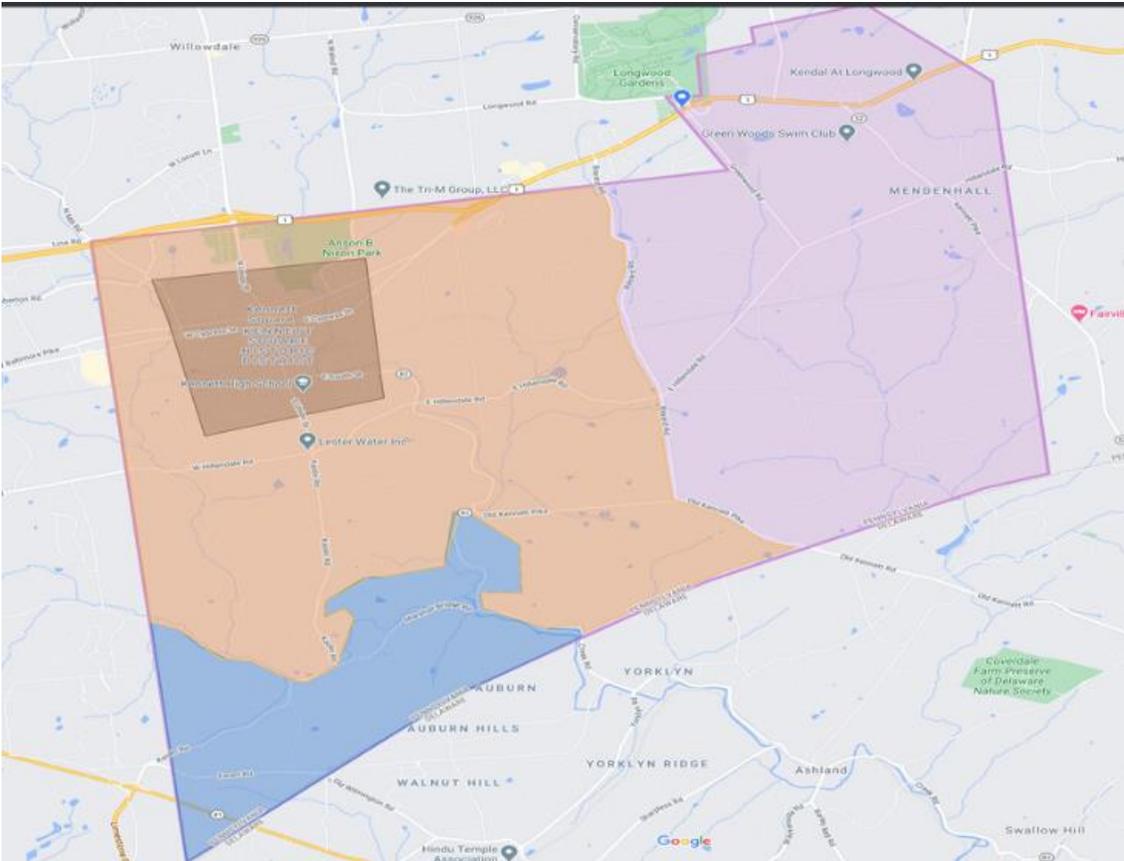
Enclosed:

Kennett Fire Company Proposal dated April 9, 2021.

Longwood Fire Company Proposal dated April 10, 2021.

Exhibit A

Proposed Response Plan



- Light Blue: Longwood Fire Company
- Light Red: Longwood and Kennett Fire Companies
- Dark Red: Kennett Fire Company
- Dark Blue: Longwood, Kennett, and Hockessin Fire Companies

Exhibit B

Estimated Response Times

