

Ron Graner
Questions & Answers
RE Philipstown Fire Rescue & EMS report to the community
June 8 2011

Questions from emails, Fax & phone calls sent directly to me after the report was released

- Some of questions I received were incorporated into the 6/8 presentation as clarification

Will current leaders be part of the process to address changes and improvements?

- I sincerely hope so!
- I strongly believe that the current leaders understand the issues
- I strongly believe that by working with a mediator that any past negative feelings will be overcome
- I hope that the improvement process will be inclusive of the entire community

If leaders quit, what will happen to our fire rescue & EMS services

- I truly believe that the leaders of these services care deeply about the people in this township and that they will want to work to assure their neighbors and families safety
- If some leaders do leave, I believe that there are others who will step up to fill leadership roles
- Nobody is irreplaceable & New leaders will bring fresh ideas

What happens if our Volunteers QUIT?

- This has happened before in NYS because an agency's leaders were in conflict with local elected officials
- Some of those volunteers quit to blindly follow poor leaders
- BVL
- The fact is YOUR Volunteers deeply care about this community
- Your Volunteers are willing risk their lives to serve this township
- Volunteers who care about safety and making improvements to safety will want to stay involved and be part of the improvement process

How will the community know if help will come when we need it?

- The Town and the Village must direct that all volunteers in every agency utilize the Iamresponding program to show that they are available to respond if needed. Iamresponding is a free software program provided by the county
- Every volunteer with access to a phone has the ability to show his or her status. Currently the availability portion of the program is not being used by agencies in Philipstown
- The town must contact each of the surrounding agencies to advise them of current issues and to arrange for potential emergency response if it is needed
- The county 9-1-1 center needs to monitor Volunteer availability VIA Iamresponding and immediately dispatch the nearest mutual aid agency when the system shows that sufficient volunteers are not available for any reason.
- This should be policy & procedure no matter what happens

I am a “newcomer” to Philipstown. I have a business,, finance, technology, legal, human resources, etc background but no knowledge about fire rescue or EMS. I do not think I could be an emergency responder due to several reasons. How can I help?

- Contact your town or village elected officials
- Let them know what knowledge skills and abilities you have and that you would like to help.
- The community needs to use the expertise that its residents have
- Do not stay a “newcomer” Become part of the community
- Being part of a small town involves more than appreciating the scenery and being able to get to the city with ease
- Get involved with your “new” neighbors and friends to make Philipstown a stronger and better community for you and your family
- Share your Knowledge Skills and Abilities

Questions from Town Clerk email 6/7 from questions submitted to the Town Board,

Financially speaking, what benefits would the taxpayers of the Villages of Cold Spring, Nelsonville and the portion of Philipstown that the Cold Spring Fire Company protects see under a consolidated emergency services?

- Broader Tax base to provide funds required for service delivery
- Improved leadership looking a community wide issues to contain costs
- All the improvements in staffing, training and savings noted in the report

It was the Fire Company's understanding that this report would be reviewed internally by the Town Board and the agencies involved, yet it was distributed to the public by Cold Spring Mayor Seth Gallagher. Why was there a change in methodology? Was the report released via the FOIA law?

- The report was submitted to the Town for distribution to the agencies involved for their review
- It is unknown to me who or how the report was released to the public
- The report is a Public Document funded by NYSDOS and is subject to FOIL

I believe that Town officials are quoted in the PCNR referring to this report as "angry." Why do you feel this way? What do you think would provoke anger on the part of the consultant? How could this admittedly "incomplete" process have been conducted more smoothly?

- The comment about anger was addressed in my presentation and again, I was not angry. However, I was very disappointed in the failure of leaders to understand the importance of open communications with the public especially since all of our and the town’s correspondence stressed the goals of this study.
- The process certainly would have been much better if LEADERS had willing to be open to reporting to their community through this report.

- Leaders' failure to understand the importance of this study to themselves, their agencies and the community highlighted the serious leadership disconnect that needs to be addressed through mediation to rebuild trust between all factions and the community.
- Leaders' comments that they were unaware of the goals of this study just do not jive with the reality of multiple agency contact made by me and the town which carefully detailed what the objective of this study was.

Mr Graner cites "An example of the cost savings from consolidation of administrations can be found in the metropolitan region of Ontario, Canada, where the administration of over 200 fire departments was consolidated. The same benefits have been found in Florida, Georgia and many other states in the USA, where single administrations successfully provide service through multiple stations often County wide and regionally" -what other examples locally, in New York State, in the North East can we look to as an example?

- The reality is that most governance in NYS is stuck in structures that were established many years ago. NYS has initiated changes in governance in an effort to reduce costs to taxpayers and to provide a more efficient and effective government structure and save the state from loss of businesses and taxpayers. Consolidations of many levels of government services and structures are currently taking place in many areas of NYS and they can be viewed on the NYSDOS web site; <http://www.dos.state.ny.us/LG/lge-reports.html#PubSafety>
- From my reports the Towns of Manlius & Pompey are in serious planning phase for addressing forming a Joint fire district
- In the Town of VanBuren 2 agencies are now consolidating

Is this really a "consolidation" report as the press has deemed it, or is it an "Efficiency Effectiveness & Safety" report as the title and the Town Board suggests?

- The total goal of the study and my direction from the town was that this was to be a study of Efficiency Effectiveness & Safety. This was clear in all correspondence with the agencies
- Management and Leadership are always key issues in examination of efficiency effectiveness and safety
- The failures in leadership pointed the clear need to address consolidation of administration to improve Efficiency effectiveness and safety

If it is the latter why include the recommendations section where the author presses for consolidation and not just leave it as an "assessment of current conditions?"

- I was directed to provide my expertise and recommendations for improvements.
- It would not make good business sense for any government to contract for a study and report from any outside expert and not have his or her recommendations to address the findings of that study as part of the report

Wouldn't a statement from the Town Board that consolidation was off the table (before the report) had made participation more attractive to local Emergency Services?

- It is hard to accept this as a serious question from a person in leadership. Who really goes to the Dr for a physical and tells the DR before the exam that they do not want medications or surgery if the Dr finds a problem that might cause them to die if untreated?

The goal of this study was not to make the process more “attractive to local emergency services. The goal was to assure the community that their tax dollars were being used to provide them with an efficient, effective and safety emergency service system

- This question itself reconfirms my strong belief that there are issues in leadership understanding of their roles that must be addressed by mediation counseling and leadership training.

Supposed "Leadership Failures" play a central theme in the report. How many times did Mr. Graner reach out directly to myself? I don't recall a single instance.

- Every agency was contacted repeatedly by Mail, EMAIL, Fax and by Phone by myself, and by the Town. If any agency leader was unaware of the study it highlights a leadership communications issue that needs to be addressed internally
 - 3 local meetings were publically announced & held
 - Contacts for each agency were identified
 - People from each agency and the public did attend.
 - My contact information was in or on every piece of correspondence and my business cards were handed out at each meeting
- If anyone in leadership did not know about the study or how to contact me to participate it shows that my findings RE leadership are correct.

The author cites "There is census information that there are more females in the community than males. Yet it appears that the number of females in the fire rescue services does not reflect their proportion in the community. This is not uncommon but it does indicate that efforts must be made to improve recruitment and retention of females as volunteers in fire rescue and EMS." As an expert, and ex Fire Chief what specific recommendations does Mr. Graner make towards this goal?

- Make certain that women feel welcome in your stations
- Actively recruit women
- Utilize local residents with expertise in human resources, marketing and psychology to determine why the numbers are low and prepare plans to address solutions for recruitment and retention of volunteers male and female
- Use local expertise to market the needs of the agencies for people to become volunteers.

Was any effort made to reach out to each department's service area? ie. people whose homes we have responded to, homeowners we have assisted, etc.

- Yes!!!
- We held a meeting for the public that was well advertised and many citizens attended
- There were announcements in the newspapers and on line
- I know the public was aware of the study because I received phone calls and emails from members of the public during the study period

What role, if any did the Village of Cold Spring have in preparing the report? Were they a "joint-agency" in securing the grant and commissioning the report?

- The Village and all agencies were given an opportunity to participate in the study.
- Village leaders did participate in the public meeting in January
- The village provided tax information relative to the fire company
- My contract was with the Town of Philipstown
 - Town & Village leaders are in my opinion to be commended for their efforts to assure taxpayers that their services are efficient effective and safe

Has Mr. Graner ever made a recommendation against consolidation?

- I do various types of studies and every case is viewed independently and governance is not always part of that study.
- I do feel very strongly that administrative costs must be controlled and that regional service delivery is more effective than fragmented isolated structures and that leads me to recommend consolidation of governance.
 - My experience in the benefits of consolidation of services started in 1980 with consolidation of emergency communications services for 80 public safety agencies in Monroe County
- NYS has more taxing entities than the rest of the nation combined. If NYS is to survive governments must become more efficient.
- I strongly support efforts to reduce the tax burden for taxpayers through efficient and effective governance and consolidation of administrative structures is my structure of choice

The part of the report dealing with pre-planning cites "The list of high risk targets did not include the historic structures on Main Street and other village locations that are the driving factors of the tourist visits that drive the local economy. None of the target hazards identify the number of people required for incident mitigation or the fire flow that would be needed to combat a fire in each location."

- It is good to see that the questioner had read this section of the report.
- It is very clear from comments and information we received that detailed planning for effective response force and fire flow is lacking.
- These are key issues that must be addressed for life and property safety

Does Mr. Graner believe that the Fire Company should be intimately involved in the approval process of Village functions, such as allowing large vessels to dock at the Cold Spring dock, utilizing the dead end dockside property for bands, fireworks and movies, etc.?

- I fully support regional planning efforts that include the input of all emergency services

Does he believe that the Village of Cold Spring should have it's own ladder apparatus to cover target locations (Main Street, the school, Foodtown), or does the mutual aid plan suffice?

- The question misstates my findings.
- I do not support the Village operation of a fire company because the agency regularly responds outside of the Village limits into other jurisdictions which need to have a voice in the service level they are receiving since they pay for those services. Village control does not provide this to those non village taxpayers
- I strongly believe that Village taxpayers are paying a disproportional part of the costs of this company and unless changes are made to the governance of this company that tax burden will be adverse to the village residents
- I recommended a Town Wide Joint Fire District that would incorporate all of the agencies under a single governance and administrative structure
- The leaders of that Joint district need to examine future needs and capabilities
- The leaders of that district need to determine where the needed equipment will be placed or respond from

Will a consolidated Fire Department lead to a new Firehouse for the Village of Cold Spring? Will it make it easier to finance?

- Again, I do not see the Village as a separate part of the future of fire rescue services in Philipstown
- The New Joint district will need to examine all facilities and determine the most cost effective ways of assuring proper facilities
- Costs for any new facilities would be spread over the total tax base and they would serve the entire tax base
- The larger tax base will improve the ability to negotiate loans if and when they might be required

Or would a centralized department lead to closing of certain buildings/sites?

- GIS studies coupled with local expertise RE travel will help to determine the optimum locations for all stations.
- Optimally I believe it would be best to combine EMS and Fire rescue into combined station locations to help contain costs and improve service capabilities.

Have there been any meetings, either formally or informally, with the Village of Cold Spring Mayor and/or Trustees and the Supervisor and/or Councilpersons to discuss any of the perceived issues cited in this report?

- I would hope so
- I have not been part of any such discussions

How much of this report is "new information" and how much is from a previously used "template?"

- The findings and recommendations in this report are 100% based upon my local findings in Philipstown.
 - I use a similar report format in my reports because I find it is easy for readers to use as a tool for improvement
 - Yes the same conditions do exist in other locations too. The decline in volunteer staffing is not a local issue
- I personally typed every word in the report and created the charts re staffing etc.
 - The section on benchmarks and national standards are boiler plate that I include in my reports to aid readers who are not familiar with fire rescue and EMS services to understand that standards do exist.

One of the issues that came out of last year's Christmas Eve fire was a lack of sufficient water flow in the Village of Cold Spring. Would a consolidated district in anyway help with rectifying this problem (pooled resources) or would it still fall on the shoulders of the municipalities directly affected?

- This question again hits at the core of my findings that there has been a leadership failure. There should be no one in the fire rescue services that is not fully aware of and planned for the inadequacies of fire flow in the villages. There is no reason why the lack of proper fire flow should have only become aware at an emergency incident.
- Preplanning efforts should have been in place to assure proper water supply (fire flow)
- Yes it would help to have leaders in place that would be aware of their responsibility to conduct preplanning and practices for operations.
- Hopefully new leaders would also take advantage of the County BES GPS units to map water supply locations to be included in the county 9-1-1 dispatch center maps that current leaders have not done
- Hopefully fire leaders would establish dry hydrants and cisterns where non exist to supplement domestic water service mains.
- Hopefully the fire service leadership would be an integral part of a community wide effort to address water supply
- Improved preplanning and practices drills will benefit operations

In the same vein, would consolidated taxpayers have to assume debt and mortgages for buildings and apparatus that they did not approve?

- NYS laws determine what costs of former districts can become the debt of the consolidated district
 - One law does state that capital debt remains with the originating district
 - It is important to follow legal guidance from lawyers with expertise in this filed.
 - I am not a lawyer

What effect, if any, would consolidation have on the Firefighter's Service Award Program

- There absolutely needs to be a detailed and comprehensive program that is designed to retain dedicated volunteers in service to the community.
- The leadership of the Joint Fire district need to make volunteer recruitment and retention a primary objective of the district
- A service awards program for active and qualified volunteers certainly needs to be part of that volunteer retention program