

**HILLTOWN TOWNSHIP BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
SPECIAL MEETING FOR DCED FIRE REPORT REVIEW  
Tuesday, June 5, 2007  
9:30AM**

The special meeting of the Hilltown Township Board of Supervisors for review of the DCED Fire Report was called to order by Chairman Richard J. Manfredi at 9:38AM and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Also present were: John B. McIlhinney, Vice-Chairman  
Barbara A. Salvadore, Supervisor (arrived 9:42AM)  
Kenneth B. Bennington, Township Manager

**A. INTRODUCTION OF DCED PARTICIPANTS AND RECOGNITION OF FIRE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Fire Company Representatives:	John Gillespie Phil Myers Randy Teschner Ray Scheeler Mac Jacobs Ray Fegley	Chief, Silverdale Fire Company Chief, Dublin Fire Company Chief, Chalfont Fire Company Chief, Telford Fire Company President, Telford Fire Company Hilltown Emergency Management Coordinator/member Telford Fire Company
	Harry McElhare Joe McDonald Steve Coll Jim Walters	Chief, Sellersville Fire Company President, Sellersville Fire Company Chief, Souderton Fire Company Chief, Hilltown Fire Company

PA Department of  
Community and  
Economic Development: Mike McCafferty

**B. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY: None.**

**C. ORAL EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BY MR. MIKE McCAFFERTY** – Mr. McCafferty of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development explained that DCED was asked to conduct this study several years ago. Originally, another individual was responsible for the study, however was unable to complete it. Mr. McCafferty had asked the Township and the fire companies to present certain information such as membership rosters, bylaws, SOP's (Standard Operating Procedures) and SOG's (Standard Operating Guidelines), financial statements and other pertinent documentation. He then visited each fire station, reviewed and inspected all pieces of equipment, apparatus, and the facilities themselves. Numerous observations were made

as to the condition of each piece of apparatus and equipment. Most of the information included in the report came from interviews with elected officials and Township staff, and the fire company volunteers, including fire chiefs, administrative officers, officers and members. The report was compiled in conjunction with a review of NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) standards.

#### Facilities

The first portion of the review began with inspection of the facilities – each fire company's station, its location, construction of facility and condition of facility.

#### Apparatus and Equipment

The next portion of the review began with an inventory of each fire company's equipment and apparatus. Such details as condition of equipment/apparatus, mileage, etc. were considered and observed. DCED also investigated whether or not any of the fire companies owned unusual pieces of equipment, something that no other fire company in the area might have, which would prove valuable for use by other fire companies, and would also increase the call volume in all probability.

#### Personnel

DCED is aware that all fire departments in this area are 100% volunteer. An inventory of each fire company's roster was conducted, including junior fire fighters, fire police, etc., and it was noted how many members might respond to a typical fire call. Dispatch and communications was also taken into consideration. Since not all the fire departments that service Hilltown Township are located in the same county, Mr. McCafferty took into consideration that there may be possible delays with dispatching.

#### Operations

The fire department's response times were reviewed, as well as a review of how many companies respond to an average fire or incident. As far as the initial response to fire calls, NFPA standards were reviewed, and it was determined that in some but not all cases, the fire companies did not meet NFPA standards for the amount of individual members necessary.

#### SOG's and SOP's

DCED reviewed each company's Standard Operating Guidelines and Procedures, most of which Mr. McCafferty felt were very good.

#### Bylaws and Administration

DCED reviewed each company's individual bylaws and administrative procedures, making a few observations and recommendations.

#### Mutual Aid

Upon review of the Mutual Aid policies, Mr. McCafferty noted that most, if not all of the fire companies, routinely responded to multiple jurisdictions on the first alarm.

#### Training

Mr. McCafferty commented that most of the fire fighters are very well trained and the companies maintain high standards with respect to training requirements for their members.

#### Finances

DCED reviewed each department's finances, how much funding was appropriated from each municipality, as well as fundraising efforts by the individual companies. Mr. McCafferty noted that some of the fire companies did not provide complete financial information, as is their prerogative, however a good financial picture was compiled. It was determined how much funding is provided to each company from Hilltown Township on a yearly basis. DCED was asked for suggestions as to a different method for funding distribution, which has been addressed in the report's recommendations.

#### Water Supply

It was noted that most, though not all, of Hilltown Township is covered by a public water system. No hydrant flow tests were conducted, and DCED was able to obtain only very limited flow test information. In the areas where no hydrants exist, DCED notes that tanker trucks are available for use.

#### Inter-Fire Company Relationships

DCED found no major problems with inter-fire company relationships. There were a few minor problems noted with respect to the relationship with each individual fire company and the municipality.

#### Fire Code Enforcement

The building and fire code enforcement in Hilltown Township was reviewed. It was noted that the fire companies actually have no role in Code Enforcement, which in Mr. McCafferty's opinion, is probably just as well. Mr. Bennington advised that Pennoni Associates has been replaced by BIU for building inspection services since the initial study was conducted. Mr. McCafferty stated that the former Fire Marshal position has not been reactivated since the previous individual resigned from employment with Hilltown Township.

#### Public Relations, Recruiting and Member Retention

Portions of the report focus on recruiting and member retention. Mr. McCafferty acknowledged that there is a huge problem with many Pennsylvania fire departments

unable to recruit the necessary volunteers to effectively function. The report provides recommendations as to possible sources of additional personnel.

#### Long Range Planning

Suggestions were made by various individuals with respect to long range planning such as department consolidation.

#### Recommendations

DCED made 35 recommendations, which Mr. McCafferty stated is far fewer than normal.

#### D. BOARD OF SUPERVISORS' REVIEW OF DCED REPORT WITH MR. McCAFFERTY –

1. Supervisor McIlhinney commented that in May of 2003, the Fire Prevention Bureau requested that the DCED study be prepared, which has finally reached fruition in 2007, yet most of the documentation and particularly the financial data indicated in the report is from 2004 or 2005. Therefore, he questioned the validity of a study that is already 3 years old. Mr. McCafferty replied that not all of the information is that dated, noting that he was collecting data as late as 2006. Typically, these reports take anywhere from 3 months to a year to complete. Mr. McCafferty explained that the reason for the delay in completing this report is because the gentleman who was originally assigned quit half way through the study. Supervisor McIlhinney expressed concern with the lack of an accurate picture of the financial status of each fire department at the present time.

2. It appears to Supervisor McIlhinney that the report is directed primarily toward the Hilltown Fire Company, and in particular its Line Lexington station. He noted that Station 60 of the Hilltown Fire Company has the equivalent of six bays in their structure, as does Silverdale, Dublin, and Sellersville, while Souderton and Telford have seven bays, and Perkasic has nine bays. Yet in the report's analysis of materials and equipment, 24 pages were devoted to describe the Hilltown Fire Company, with only 5 pages for Silverdale, 3 pages for Dublin, 8 pages for Perkasic, and 2 pages for Sellersville, 13 pages for Souderton, and 1 ½ pages for Telford. Supervisor McIlhinney noted that the other fire companies, even though they may have similar equipment, seem to have larger budgets than the Hilltown Fire Company, yet the preponderance of this report appears to be dedicated to the Hilltown Fire Company. He feels that the thrust of the entire report is slanted to favor the Hilltown Fire Company.

With respect to the number of pages and the amount of equipment, Mr. McCafferty advised that the report was compiled on the information that was provided to him by the fire companies, and the format in which it was provided.

3. Supervisor Salvadore disagreed with some of the comments in the "Local Government Relations" section of the report, and asked which government officials Mr. McCafferty spoke to in the Township's administration. Mr. McCafferty was not comfortable with disclosing names of any individuals, and noted that Recommendation #26, which states "Fire company representatives should meet regularly with Township officials to discuss matters of mutual concern" has been included in the report. He would encourage open lines of communication between the fire companies and the governing body.

4. On page 78 of the report, "Fire Department Administration," Supervisor McIlhinney noted the first 13 items refer to the Hilltown Fire Company and the next 8 items refer to the Perkasio Fire Company. There is no discussion about the administration of the remaining 5 fire companies that serve Hilltown. Mr. McCafferty explained that he obviously did not find anything in the remaining five company's bylaws that he felt might present major problems.

5. Supervisor McIlhinney referred to page 81, "Finances," which again refers to the Hilltown Fire Company showing a portion of the company's income for 2005 was derived from the following: "Fund Drive" in the amount of \$15,359.00, "Fund Raising Projects" in the amount of \$10,000.88, "Other" in the amount of \$17,321.58. Supervisor McIlhinney asked if Mr. McCafferty knew what those three income numbers represent. Mr. McCafferty believes the revenue from the Fund Drive was from a mailing, and that the Fund Raising Projects revenue was obtained from raffles or other miscellaneous activities. "Other" revenue was obtained from State grants.

Supervisor McIlhinney stated that the Dublin Fire Company holds many fundraising events – bake sales, dinners, breakfasts, carnivals, etc., but noted the absence of those activities by the Hilltown Fire Company.

6. Supervisor McIlhinney referred to page 84, which states "Due to recent developments in parts of the Township (notably that portion in which the Silverdale Volunteer Fire Company is first-due) some people have suggested that the distribution formula be revised. The author believes that this may be a good idea and will address this issue later in this report." He asked who "some people" are. Mr. McCafferty replied that one Township official and one or two fire company members had expressed this opinion.

7. Page 90 notes that the position of Township Fire Marshal is currently vacant, and that one reason cited for not filling the position was the fact that inspection fees, fines for fire code violations, and other revenue generated by the Fire Marshal's activities was not sufficient to fully fund the position. Supervisor McIlhinney advised that the revenue generated by the former Fire Marshal was zero, while the cost to fund

that position totaled \$100,000.00. Mr. McCafferty was not aware of that, and noted that no specific figures were provided to him when conducting this study. Supervisor McIlhimey is opposed to the appointment of a Fire Marshal, when he feels those duties could be handled by the State, Bucks County, or by the fire chiefs. Mr. McCafferty commented that things are much more complicated now with the abundance of hazardous materials and with changes in the building/fire prevention codes. Considering the growth potential of the Township, Mr. McCafferty would recommend that someone be appointed to enforce the fire codes.

Chairman Manfredi questioned the basis of the report's recommendation to fill the Fire Marshal position. Mr. McCafferty replied that the recommendation was simply to insure that the fire codes and fire related Ordinances are being enforced, and noted that the safety of the Township residents was a top priority in making this recommendation. He suggested that perhaps the Township should consider hiring a part-time Fire Marshal, or assigning those duties to a contracted agency.

8. Having participated in a similar study for EMT services, Supervisor Salvadore understands that the consultant can only work with the information that is provided to them. Since the Township provides funding to each of the seven fire companies, Supervisor Salvadore advised that each fire company provides the Township with a copy of their audit report each year, which she feels would have assisted Mr. McCafferty during the preparation of this report.

Discussion took place concerning several specific recommendations as noted in the report:

Recommendation #1 – The Hilltown Township Fire Company should proceed with plans to build a new station to replace the existing Station 60. The proposed site (behind the present Station 60) is a good location.

Mr. McCafferty commented that fire apparatus is much larger today than it was in the past when Station 60 was first constructed. The Hilltown Fire Company owns property to the rear of their existing Station 60, a location that the report recommends for future construction. Chairman Manfredi commented that it would be premature to consider constructing a new station until consideration has been given to fire company consolidation (Hilltown and Silverdale Fire Companies) as is recommended in the report. Mr. McCafferty commented that the report is strictly advisory, and any of the recommendations found within should be considered at the discretion of the Board of Supervisors. Discussion took place.

Recommendation #6 – The closest fire company (or companies) should be dispatched to all calls, along with any special apparatus or equipment that may be needed, regardless of municipal boundaries.

Supervisor Salvadore understood that this was the case at the present time. While compiling data for the report, Mr. McCafferty was told by one fire officer that in some instances, the closest fire company is not always dispatched. Discussion took place.

Recommendation #8 – Representatives of the fire companies and municipalities should meet to discuss a possible realignment of the first-due areas of the various companies. The present response system should remain in place until any possible realignment is finalized.

Supervisor McIlhinney asked if a particular fire company made this request, noting that a realignment of the first response area would culminate in a readjustment of funding. Mr. McCafferty replied that one fire company made that request. Personally, Supervisor McIlhinney has not had an indication from any of the fire companies expressing unhappiness with the first response areas currently in place.

Recommendation #19 – The fire companies should apply for 2% state loans as necessary, and the municipalities should guarantee repayment of such loans if necessary.

Supervisor McIlhinney questioned the origin of this comment. Mr. McCafferty explained that the State manages a program of loans to fire companies and ambulance services at a 2% interest rate for major purchases, such as new trucks or new stations. In many instances, the municipality is asked to guarantee the repayment of the loan, though Mr. McCafferty noted that very, very few fire companies have ever defaulted on the loans over the years. If that were to occur, Supervisor McIlhinney asked if the municipality would then take over the assets of the fire company. Mr. McCafferty is not certain, however he believes that would be a reasonable assumption.

Recommendation #22 – The fire companies should consider holding joint fundraising activities, such as raffles. With a larger area in which to sell tickets, etc., it may be possible to take in more money and give larger prizes.

Chairman Manfredi wondered if inter-company relationships are such that it would not lend itself to joint fundraising. Mr. McCafferty replied that was not his experience.

Supervisor McIlhinney asked if information gathered would indicate how much fundraising each individual fire company is presently doing. Mr. McCafferty advised that the individual fire companies did provide information as to what types of fundraising

activities they participate in, with some providing a rough idea of how much money is made from these activities.

Supervisor Salvadore asked if there is a certain percentage of their budgets that would signify the average amount of money raised by fundraising activities. Mr. McCafferty does not have access to that type of information.

Recommendation #23 – The Township and the fire companies should consider changing the formula for distribution of Township funds. A possibility would be a formula based on a base rate, the percentage of land area covered, the assessed valuation of the property in each company's coverage area, the population of each area, the number of calls answered by each company, and possibly a deduction based on the previous year's fire loss in each area. (This would tend to discourage the practice of one company trying to handle calls alone. If a company let a fire get too big while trying to avoid sharing funding by calling in another company, it would end up reducing its own appropriation).

Supervisor McIlhinney inquired as to how DCED arrived at the basis of this recommendation. He explained that the Township currently utilizes a formula based on assessed valuation and area, which does not include population or the number of calls a fire company may respond to. Upon review of reports submitted by some fire companies, Supervisor McIlhinney discovered that in some of the monthly call totals, the same response addresses are listed over and over again, or there may also be 2 or 3 line items listed for the same address on the same day at the same time, though they are each considered a "call." Mr. McCafferty understands that this might be a problem, however if a change were to be made to the formula, the municipality could add a stipulation that would preclude this type of activity. Supervisor McIlhinney believes that the system currently in place is the most fair because it provides for each company to be aware of what their funding will be and when they will receive it on an annual basis.

Chairman Manfredi agreed that all the factors included in the recommendation for changing the formula for fund distribution are critical, however he wondered if Mr. McCafferty knows of a system in use elsewhere that could be used to apply these specific components or factors to. Mr. McCafferty is not aware of any specific system in use at the present time.

Recommendation #25 – Dry hydrants should be installed along streams or other bodies of water in areas where there are no hydrants.

Supervisor Salvadore asked the definition of a dry hydrant. Mr. McCafferty explained that a dry hydrant is basically a piece of pipe that is partially stuck into the ground and



extends out into a body of water, such as a lake or stream, to which a hose can be connected to withdraw water.

Recommendation #28 – The presently vacant Township Fire Marshal's position should be filled.

Supervisor McIlhinney disagreed with this recommendation.

Recommendation #30 – A live-in program could possibly be started to increase manpower. This would save college students some money in housing costs as well.

Mr. McCafferty explained that a number of fire departments in the Harrisburg area now provide a program where college students actually live within the fire station and in return for their room and board, they respond to any and all fire calls while they are present in the station. Supervisor Salvadore commented that there are several fire stations that could not accommodate such a program.

Recommendation #31 – The Hilltown Township Fire Company should not build a third station at this time. The Souderton and Telford fire companies can adequately serve the western portion of the Township. If future conditions warrant, a third station could be built at a later date.

Supervisor McIlhinney asked how this recommendation would work for the Line Lexington station of the Hilltown Fire Company, and asked if either Souderton or Telford fire companies could cover the service area of Line Lexington. Mr. McCafferty believes it is conceivable. He explained that it was suggested that the Hilltown Fire Company was considering construction of a third station in the western portion of the Township, and it was his impression that the main reason was to reduce the number of calls that Souderton and Telford would respond to in Hilltown Township, which would then result in reallocating those funds to the Hilltown Fire Company.

Recommendation #32 – A consolidation of the Hilltown and Silverdale Fire Companies should be explored. If such a consolidation takes place, it might be feasible to close Station 61 and transfer that station's apparatus to Stations 59 and 60.

There were some members of both fire companies that felt a consolidation would be a good idea, while other members of both companies did not. Based upon the distance between the two stations, the number of calls handled by both companies, and the manpower response, Mr. McCafferty felt that the idea should at least be explored.

Recommendation #34 – A consolidation of all seven fire companies serving Hilltown Township should be given some consideration, although this need not be a top priority. A time frame of five to ten years would appear to be appropriate here.

Chairman Manfredi wondered why this recommendation would not be a top priority. Mr. McCafferty replied that the current system appears to be working reasonably well. It does seem as though each year there are fewer and fewer volunteer fire fighters, with the numbers dwindling particularly over the past 15 to 20 years. He believes that there may be a time in the not so distant future, when none of these seven fire companies will be able to fully staff their apparatus when responding to calls.

E. DISCUSSION OF REPORT WITH FIRE SERVICE PROVIDERS –

1. Mr. Phil Meyers, chief of the Dublin Fire Company, does not believe the initial request for information from DCED was to provide an itemized inventory list, however he would be able to supply that information if it is still needed.

2. Mr. John Gillespie, chief of Silverdale Fire Company, stated that his remarks and comments today are his own as one individual member, and noted that he was not speaking as a representative for the Silverdale Fire Company as a whole.

With respect to Recommendation #32, Mr. Gillespie stated that each of the fire companies also serve other municipalities besides Hilltown Township, and any changes that are considered should also have the agreement of those other municipalities.

Mr. Gillespie advised that the Silverdale Fire Company had requested a dry hydrant several years ago, however there was no support from the municipality at that time.

Concerning Supervisor McIlhinney's comments about duplication of calls, Mr. Gillespie explained that in some instances, they are QRS calls. If that is the case, he suggested that there be a differentiation between fire calls and quick response medical calls. Further, he noted that a reason to reinstate the position of Fire Marshal would be to resolve the issue of multiple false alarms.

Mr. Gillespie also suggested that the Supervisors prepare a standardized report that requests specific information to be completed by each fire company, if that is their desire.

Mr. Gillespie encouraged the Township to adopt the proposed Ordinance that would permit the fire companies to participate in third party billing to recover costs incurred in emergency responses. Supervisor Salvatore advised that the Board of Supervisors intend to address this issue at the July 11<sup>th</sup> meeting with the fire companies.

3. Randy Teschner, chief of the Chalfont Fire Company, commented that even though they were not included in the report, their fire company does cover one road in Hilltown Township. He further advised that the Chalfont Fire Company serves three different municipalities, and each of those municipalities distribute funds the same way, based upon assessed value.

4. Mr. Steve Coll of the Souderton Fire Company referred to Recommendation #7, noting that he disagreed with being required to notify a chief officer from Hilltown Fire Company on all fire calls in Hilltown Township, particularly if that fire call is located on the opposite side of the Township.

Recommendation #33 suggests the consolidation of the Telford and Souderton fire companies. Mr. Coll advised that the Souderton Fire Company primarily serves Souderton Borough, as well as Franconia Township and Hilltown Township. When Mr. McCafferty recommended the consolidation of Telford and Souderton fire companies, he was not necessarily referring to consolidating all services in one fire station, which he does not believe would be practical. It was his intent to recommend the consolidation of administrative/financial matters and other training functions, simply due to the very close proximity of both fire stations.

5. Mr. Ray Scheeler, chief of the Telford Fire Company, noted that this fire report was started in 2003, with the main purpose to determine whether Hilltown Township had adequate fire protection. At this point in time, it is Mr. McCafferty's belief that Hilltown Township does have adequate fire protection.

With respect to volume of fire calls being a type of incentive, Mr. Scheeler noted that if the Telford Fire Company establishes an active fire prevention program, their call volume could naturally decrease, and they would then be penalized for active fire prevention.

Mr. Scheeler advised that the Telford Fire Company budget is 50% funding from municipalities, and 50% from fundraising. He stated that manpower is an issue for both training and for fundraising. He suggested that the various municipalities should consider increasing its fire tax if a fire company cannot do enough fundraising due to lack of manpower.

6. Mr. Ed Rochelle of Perkasio Fire Company, speaking as a private citizen and as a dispatcher for the County, asked who was on the Board of Supervisors at the time this study was initiated. Chairman Manfredi does not believe he was a member when the study was initiated. Mr. Bennington recalls that the Board who requested this study included himself, John Bender and George Egly.

Discussion took place concerning fundraising issues. Mr. Rochelle commented that perhaps it is the general public's perception that fire companies are paid by the municipalities, particularly new residents moving here from Philadelphia or other large cities, where paid fire departments are the norm. He felt it was important to make the community aware that the fire companies in this area are volunteer-based, and that they depend on donations from the general public.

With respect to dispatching calls and first-due responses, Mr. Rochelle advised that the County dispatches calls according to how the individual fire companies have established the call order. He felt it was important to note that two of the fire companies who service Hilltown are located in Montgomery County, so therefore when a call comes in, Bucks County dispatch would then disburse that information to Montgomery County, which could result in a delay. Discussion continued.

While pleased to hear Mr. McCafferty say that there is adequate fire protection in Hilltown Township, Chairman Manfredi believes that the goal should be excellent fire protection service.

Supervisor Salvadore felt that the point made about education is critical. It is her understanding that newer residents of this area are not aware that fire and emergency services are volunteer staffed, and assume that those services are paid for with taxpayer's dollars.

7. Mr. Jim Walter, chief of the Hilltown Fire Company, believes that the reason a large percentage of the report is based around the Hilltown Fire Company was due to the amount of information that was provided by the former fire chief. Mr. Walter advised that the Hilltown Fire Company is willing to explore any of the report's recommendations. He agreed with Chairman Manfredi that the goal should be excellent fire service, not simply adequate.

8. An unidentified individual asked what the next step of this process is. It is Chairman Manfredi's opinion that another meeting with the fire companies is crucial and that the Board of Supervisors and the fire companies, collectively, pursue a way to reach excellent fire service, rather than adequate service.

9. With respect to the Fire Marshal position, an unidentified individual asked if someone is currently conducting fire inspections of commercial buildings and enforcing fire codes at the present time. Chairman Manfredi advised that there is no full-time or part-time employee performing Fire Marshal duties at this time. He noted that he personally received an offer from one individual to volunteer in that capacity, however Chairman Manfredi has not pursued that further with his fellow Supervisors.

Supervisor McIlhinney commented that prior to employing a Fire Marshal, the Township was adequately taken care of, and believes that remains the case. Chairman Manfredi stated that the position of Fire Marshal is a personnel matter and a budget issue to be considered by the Board of Supervisors.


F. RELATED ISSUE DISCUSSION – None.

G. PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

**\*A complete copy of the DCED Fire Protection Evaluation Report is on file at the Township office and is available for public inspection.**

H. ADJOURNMENT – Upon motion by Supervisor Salvadore, seconded by Supervisor McIlhinney, and carried unanimously the Special Meeting of the Hilltown Township Board of Supervisors to review the DCED Fire Report was adjourned at 11:13AM.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Lynda Seimes  
Township Secretary

(\*These minutes were transcribed from tape recordings taken by Mr. Ken Bennington, Township Manager, and are not considered official until adopted by the Board of Supervisors at a public meeting).