

11.0 Training

11.1 Overview

Effective fire department training programs include adequate and relevant training programs and facilities. All of the Town of Bethlehem's five fire districts should have implemented in-house training and education programs that reflect the scope of services provided. Ideally, all five district's training programs should mirror each other to insure continuity of firefighter competency, which can lead to effective and safe fire ground operations.

To be effective on the fire ground and other emergency operations, firefighters have to be thoroughly trained before participating in these operations and must receive training regularly. In many fire departments, some essential skills are used infrequently. A downward trend in the number of structure fires has been experienced in many fire departments. Some officials make the argument that because there are fewer fires, there is less value to maintaining minimum training for firefighting and related skills. But in reality the opposite is true. The job of providing firefighting and related services requires a higher level of training because of the unpredictable nature of the service. Without a structured training program a community may experience an increase in fire losses while jeopardizing the lives of citizens and firefighter alike. One challenge in the volunteer fire service is finding the time for live fire training exercises. However, in order to retain skills and safety, live fire and rescue training, along with accompanying classroom training, is essential.

11.1.1 National Standards and District Training

At a minimum, the Town of Bethlehem's five fire districts should schedule drills that address all the basic essential fire ground and emergency scene operations throughout each year. An excellent guide to meeting these criteria is NFPA's Standard 1001, which covers the fundamentals of firefighter training. Another NFPA guide, Standard 1500, *Firefighter Safety and Health Programs*, can be used as a basis for fire department in-service training. This guide calls for monthly training totaling a minimum of 24 hours of training per month.

The use of modern technology, such as cable TV, to distribute training programs to several stations, or other electronic tools such as interactive internet conference or online learning systems that offer the delivery of programs can help ensure a consistency of training criteria and related standard operating procedures. These tools can also make training available on a 24-hour basis, facilitating scheduling for volunteers.

Manitou, Inc. conducted onsite interviews of chief officers and training officers from each district. Based on these interviews and supporting material it was found that all the districts have in place a formal training and drill program. All programs appeared to be adequate and to some degree incorporated New York State and/or NFPA guidelines. All districts incorporated classroom as well as drill ground activities. Interviews revealed some comprehensive programs managed by dedicated training officers. In general, training appeared at the forefront of each district's priorities for its members and the communities they serve. All districts provided

excellent training facilities at their respective fire station, including classrooms and supporting resources.

11.1.2 Training Facilities, Aids and Equipment

A fire department training program should be supplemented with adequate facilities and related equipment to ensure firefighters receive realistic training. Training facilities can be shared by more than one fire department. The following provides an overview of facilities and equipment as recommended by the FSRS.

Drill Grounds. A drill yard consisting of a minimum of two acres is necessary for optimum maneuvering of fire apparatus around drill towers, burning building, and related outdoor training props.

Drill Tower. Towers are intended for developing ladder and high angle and related technical rescue skills and practices. In addition, they are used for advancing and stretching hose lines up interior stairwells and/or working from standpipe at various floor levels. In most communities, towers should be at least four stories in height. The Town of Bethlehem's fire training facility includes a four-story drill tower, which is adequate for most high level ladder and related drill work.

Burn Building. Either a standalone or designed in conjunction with the drill tower, a burn building should be provided for interior firefighting training. Interior operations include live fire training utilizing hose line, SCBA use, and related operations such as search/rescue, forcible entry and ventilation. ISO gives credit for having a cutaway fire pump and fire hydrant.

Training Manuals. Related training manuals and guides should be included as part of the training program. Suggested references should at a minimum include the following publications:

- National Fire Protection Association's Fire Protection Handbook
- International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA) assorted fire training manuals
- Fire Engineering's Fire Chief Handbook
- International City/County Manager's Association's Managing Fire and Rescue Services Handbook

Drills. Drill work should be conducted to insure fire companies are efficient in all fire ground operations. There are three types of drills that should be conducted, as described below.

- **Half-day (3 hours) drills.** Eight individual company drills should be conducted per year. Drill work should include hose lays and ladder work along with an assortment of structure fire operations.
- **Half-day (3 hours) multi-company drills.** Four multi-company drills should be conducted per year. Similar to individual company drills, multi-company drills should be conducted to insure proficiency in engine and ladder company coordination.

- **Night drills (3 hours).** Night drills should be conducted to insure proficiency of operations during evening hours when fire ground coordination may be more challenging due to limited visibility.

Note: the FSRs allows for double credit where two or more of the above drills are conducted simultaneously.

11.2 Minimum District Training Standards

In this section we report the minimum training requirements for various positions currently required for each of the fire districts within the Town of Bethlehem.

11.2.1 Delmar Fire District

Table 11.1: Delmar Fire District training requirements

Chief Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All captain training/certification requirements • Confined space safety and awareness • Arson awareness • Fire cause and origin • Principal of fire investigation
Line Officer	<p><u>Lieutenant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essentials of Firemanship • Initial Fire Attack or Intermediate Firefighter • HazMat Operations • Weapons of Mass Destruction • Emergency Vehicle Operations or Firefighter I <p><u>Captain</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lieutenant training requirements • Pump operator • Ladder company operations • Advanced firefighter • ICS 1200 or FF II
Interior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essentials of Firemanship • SCBA qualification
Exterior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essentials of Firemanship

11.2.2 Elmwood Park Fire District

Elmwood Park has the following training requirements for their positions. In addition to these shown here, the Chief and Assistant Chiefs serve as Departmental training officers. One Lieutenant is designated as the EMS Officer, and is also responsible for training.

Table 11.2: Elmwood Park Fire District Training Requirements

Chief	5 years as a Firefighter 3 Years as Assistant Chief All other requirements plus Fire Officer II
Assistant Chief	5 years as a Firefighter 3 years experience as a line officer All other requirements plus Fire Officer I
Captain and Lieutenant	Interior Firefighter FFI and FFII of equivalent Pump operations Firefighter Survival Accident victim extrication training National Incident Management System Must be at least 19 years of age, and active with the Department for at least 12 months

11.2.3. Elsmere Fire District

The Elsmere Fire District retains a robust and detailed training program, including programs for recruitment, Class A and B firefighters, line and chief officers. Special programs include an online based Target Safety firefighter and officer training program, National Incident Management System per federal requirements, and comprehensive records of various aspects of the training program including individual records, inventory of training manuals, props and related materials. In addition, the district has in place a comprehensive pre-fire plan inventory system.

Table 11.3: Elsmere Fire District training requirements

District Chief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class A firefighter • Meet all training requirements of line officer • Incident Command and HazMat Incident Command • Must reside in District or Membership/Response District • Must have been a Line Officer for 3 years • Complete all requirements for active membership as per Company Constitution
Line Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be qualified on all district apparatus. • Essential of Firemanship, Basic 2000, or Firefighter I or equivalent. • Introduction to Fire Line Officer Course or equivalent. • Class A firefighter • Complete all requirements for active membership as per Company Constitution
Interior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be qualified on all district apparatus. • Essential of Firemanship, Basic 2000, or Firefighter I or equivalent. • Introduction to Fire Line Officer Course or equivalent. • Class A firefighter • Annual 8 hour OSHA Safety Training • Annual Fit Test
Active Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete at least 20 weekly drills per year • Attend 10% of calls per year • Complete Essential of Firemanship, Basic 2000, or Firefighter I or equivalent within 18 months of joining • Complete NYS Haz Mat 1st Responder in order to respond to Haz Mat calls
Fire Police Lieutenant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS Fire Police Course • Qualified on M38 • Member of Fire Police minimum of 12 months
Fire Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS Fire Police Course in lieu of Firefighter I within 18 months of joining
Recruit Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete an Initial Training Period conducted by a Line Officer within 6 months of joining

11.2.4. Selkirk Fire District

Table 11.4 outlines the Selkirk Fire District’s training requirements for members. Note that they do not have traditional line officer ranks.

Table 11.4: Selkirk Fire District’s training requirements

<p>Chief Officer</p>	<p><u>District Chief</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firefighter 1 or Basic & Intermediate or Essentials & Initial Fire Attack • Weapons of Mass Destruction • Pump Ops & EVOG • Hazmat Ops • NIMS – ICS 100, 700 & 200 (Incident Command) • ICS 300 & 400 • Live Fire Training 1A & 1B • Confined Space Awareness • Intro to Fire Officer (Preparing for Command) • Arson Awareness • Fire Cause & Origin / Principles of Fire Investigation <p><u>Company Chief</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shall have a minimum of three (3) years in the fire service of Selkirk Fire Department. • Firefighter 1 or Basic & Intermediate or Essentials & Initial Fire Attack • Weapons of Mass Destruction • Pump Ops & EVOG • Hazmat Ops • NIMS – ICS 100, 700 & 200 (Incident Command) • ICS 300 & 400 • Live Fire Training 1A & 1B • Confined Space Awareness • Intro to Fire Officer (Preparing for Command) • Arson Awareness • Fire Cause & Origin / Principles of Fire Investigation • Working Knowledge of Apparatus <p><u>First Assistant Chief</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shall have a minimum of two (2) years in the fire service of Selkirk Fire Department. • Firefighter 1 or Basic & Intermediate or Essentials & Initial Fire Attack • Weapons of Mass Destruction • Pump Ops & EVOG • Hazmat Ops • NIMS – ICS 100, 700 & 200 (Incident Command) • ICS 300 • Live Fire Training 1A & 1B
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro to Fire Officer (Preparing for Command) • Arson Awareness • Working Knowledge of Apparatus <p><u>Second & Third Assistant Chief</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shall have a minimum of two (2) years in the fire service of Selkirk Fire Department. • Firefighter 1 or Basic & Intermediate or Essentials & Initial Fire Attack • Weapons of Mass Destruction • Pump Ops & EVOG • Hazmat Ops • NIMS – ICS 100, 700 & 200 (Incident Command) • Live Fire Training 1A & 1B • Intro to Fire Officer (Preparing for Command) • Arson Awareness • Working Knowledge of Apparatus
Line Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not applicable
Interior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firefighter 1 • Firefighter Survival • NIMS 100, 200 & 700
Exterior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scene Support Operations • Hazardous Materials Ops • Weapons of Mass Destruction • NIMS 100, 200 & 700

11.2.5. Slingerlands Fire District

Table 11.5 outlines the Slingerlands Fire District’s training requirements for members. All officers must be active members for two years prior to being eligible for promotion. All officer ranks (except fire police) require that the candidate is a Class A (interior) firefighter. The requirements of each rank include the requirements of the lower ranks as well. Finally, promotion requires that a minimum of one year is spent in the next lower rank.

Table 11.5: Slingerlands Fire District’s training requirements

Chief Officer	All of previous requirements, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS Cause and Origin • NYS Fire Reporting Workshop (Chief) • NYS Advanced Firefighter or equivalent (1st Assistant) • NYS Preparing for Command • NYS Hazardous Materials Operations (2nd Assistant)
Line Officer	<u>Fire Captain</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS Pump Operator <u>Fire Lieutenant</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS Intermediate Firefighter (or equivalent) <u>Rescue Captain</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS Rescue Operations • NYS Confined Space Awareness or equivalent <u>Rescue Lieutenant</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS Basic Firefighter • NYS Accident Victim Extrication or equivalent
Interior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firefighter I
Exterior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scene Support Operations
Recruit Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interior FF I

11.3 ISO Training Review

A review of each district’s ISO survey is a good indication of the effectiveness of each district’s training program. It should be noted the scope of ISO’s surveys of fire department training is limited to those programs that are related specifically to structure fires. Other training needs should be addressed as well, including those that relate to non-structural firefighting, EMS, rescue and hazardous materials.

In this section we summarize the training ratings received by the five districts in their latest ISO reports. The average credit earned for training amongst the five districts is 3.14 out of a potential 9 credits. Review of deficiencies was limited due to the minimal information provided in ISO survey reports.

A detailed listing of individual district ISO training reports is included in the Appendix.

11.4 Minimum Training Recommendations

All members of each fire district should undergo new recruit and training for upper positions meeting the following criteria:

Table 11.5: Minimum training recommendations, basic requirements

Minimum standards	All new recruit firefighters should receive a minimum of 240 hours of introductory training within their first year of appointment per NFPA 1001.
Individual	Each individual member should complete an average of 20 hours of training per month, per NFPA 1001.
Officer	Each officer should receive at least two days of officer training annually, per NFPA 1021.
Driver/operator	Each driver should receive four half-day sessions per year, in accordance with NFPA 1002 and 1451.
New driver/operator training	Each new driver should receive 40 hours of training, per NFPA 1002 and NFPA 1451.
Hazardous Materials	All district members should receive four hours of HazMat training per year, per NFPA 472.

Ideally, all firefighters should become familiar with target hazards within their respective district. At a minimum this should include hospitals and related health care facilities, schools, places of assembly, large industrial and commercial, and similar facilities.

Each district should retain complete training records in order to determine the efficiency of fire and emergency services operations. This is especially important when being surveyed by ISO with regard to community fire insurance ratings.

Recommendation 11.1: In order to ensure continuity and coordination of training for all firefighters, create a training committee comprised at a minimum of each district's training officers. The committee should be tasked with developing and administering the following and producing a monthly report to each District:

- Uniform Standard Operating Procedures (SOGs) for all fire and rescue services
- Broad-based minimum standards for firefighters and officers
- Training and education programs
- Scheduling of programs and drills
- Management of programs and records
- Identification of training material and related resources
- Technical and programmatic assistance
- Identifying future training program needs

Recommendation 11.2: As part of the duties of the proposed training committee, develop minimum skills and training standards for firefighters and officers. Standards should be developed that are broad-based in nature to allow for flexibility and sensitive to limited time of volunteer members. Additional training may be necessary pending special operations provided by a particular district. The training standards should include at a minimum the following:

Table 11.6: Minimum training requirements, specific requirements

Position	Minimum Requirements
Chief Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line Officer qualifications • Fire Officer II • ICS 300 & 400
Line Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class A Firefighter qualifications • Firefighter II • Fire Officer I • Strategy & Tactics for Initial Company Operations
Interior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit Firefighter qualifications • Firefighter I • Apparatus Operator • SCBA qualifications • Incident Command • Introduction to Fire Officer • NIMS 100, 200 & 700
Exterior Firefighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit Firefighter qualifications • Scene Support Operations • Hazardous Materials Ops • NIMS 100, 200 & 700
Recruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Firefighter In-house Orientation • Essentials of Firemanship • HazMat for First Responders

Recommendation 11.3: Upgrade the town training facility to include a classroom for onsite instruction and open burn pit for Class B fire training.

Recommendation 11.4: Conduct an annual needs assessment to determine the future needs of the facility including funding levels and sources, maintenance of facility, and future needs and upgrades.

11.5 Town Training Facility

The Town of Bethlehem provides a town-wide training facility which is available to all town fire districts. The original facility was constructed in 1970 with improvements and additions made over the past 10-15 years. The original facility includes a drill tower and surrounding drill yard of approximately two acres. Recent upgrades include a one-story gable roof addition, interior remodeling of the first and second floors for interior firefighting simulation, propane tank and related props.

Administration. The facility is administered by the Town of Bethlehem’s building official, who oversees the day-to-day operations and maintenance. A committee, comprised of fire district

officers, in conjunction with the building official, administers scheduling of the facility. All fire districts utilize the facility on a regular basis and have access at all times.

Funding. The Town of Bethlehem originally provided funding for the maintenance and upkeep of the facility and grounds. In recent years, funding has come from the fire districts exclusively. Each fire district submits funding on an annual basis. Funding supplements for 2011 was \$5,000 from each district. Annual operational cost is approximately \$15,000. The Town of Bethlehem does receive additional user fees from the City of Albany and in-kind funding from various private industries for periodic use of the facility.

Condition. The facility and grounds overall are in good condition. Regular upkeep includes repair work on the drill tower and exterior props as well as maintenance of grounds and related features are overseen by the town. A structural engineer inspects the property annually.

Facilities. The site includes a four-story drill tower with a one-story addition and a propane simulator with various outdoor props. Other firefighting and rescue props are located throughout the site providing a variety of training simulations. Recent updates include the installation on the first two floors of the tower interior finish for live burns and an addition to simulate a one story residential structure with gable roof. The site is surrounded by a looped water system with fire hydrants.

Accessibility. Each district has access to the facility. The building inspector serves as the primary coordinator. District officers are provided keys to the entry gate and structures.

12.0 Record Keeping

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of fire service information management concepts and to offer guidance for improved record management. A management information system should be maintained in order to support the management of the fire department. The management system should provide administrators with data that indicate the department's effectiveness in preventing and controlling fires and other emergencies that occur in the community. The records system provides data for reports on department activities, accomplishments, and projecting long-range needs. This section provides findings observed during onsite interviews with fire department administrators and a review of related documents and reports.

12.1 Types of Record Systems in Use

Fire department record keeping comes in various forms, including those consisting of paper (hard copy) and/or computer-based systems. During recent decades there has been a gradual transition from all paper-based to incorporating software systems, some of which are designed specifically for the public fire services. Records management systems used amongst the five fire districts include hard copy and Firehouse® and Red Alert® software systems. Both these systems are comprehensive records management systems for fire agencies and have ample capabilities and pre-built reporting for many necessary tasks and compliance issues.

12.1.1 Delmar Fire District

The Delmar Fire District makes use of a computerized record system. They have data in some free-standing databases and applications in addition to the comprehensive system. The District plans to switch from Firehouse® to Red Alert® in the coming months.

12.1.2 Elmwood Park Fire District

Elmwood Park Fire District uses FIRM® software for some of their records. Their use of computerized records includes some of the key records for departmental administration.

12.1.3 Elsmere Fire District

The Elsmere Fire District has a robust utilization of its computerized records system. They currently use the Red Alert® software package.

12.1.4 Selkirk Fire District

The Selkirk Fire District has recently increased its utilization of computerized records. Relying on the Firehouse® records system, they are in the process of inputting information from paper files into the computerized system.

12.1.5 Slingerlands Fire District

The Slingerlands Fire District does not use a computerized records system for its key records. Paper forms and files are used exclusively for all records. The district has no current plans to move toward an electronic records system.

The records systems in use are summarized in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1: Records management systems in use, Town of Bethlehem Fire Districts

District	Paper-based	Software
Delmar	Partial	Firehouse®/Red Alert®
Elsmere	Partial	Red Alert®
North Bethlehem	Partial	FIRM®
Selkirk	Partial	Firehouse®
Slingerlands	Complete	None

12.2 Benefits of Records Management Systems

The collection and proper filing of records and reports is paramount to modern public fire and rescue services. Without a well-organized system of record keeping, a fire department will have many challenges to effectively managing and administering the various services it provides to the community it serves. In fact, proper record keeping plays a vital role in every component of a fire department. Examples include:

General Management

- Daily and monthly reports
- Annual reports
- Special reports

Financial Management

- Inventory
- Purchase orders
- Budget
- Payroll

Emergency Response

- Incident and fire investigation reports
- Ambulance billing

Fire Prevention

- Inspections
- Pre-fire plans
- Plans review

Training

- Personnel attendance
- Subject areas covered
- Certifications and licensing

Facilities, Apparatus, and Equipment

- Pump and hose tests
- Inventory
- Preventive maintenance

13.0 Town-wide Pre-planning and Inspections

The administration of fire prevention is handled jointly by the individual fire districts and the Town of Bethlehem. The prevention of fires and pre-incident planning are important in reducing losses, and in managing demand for services. In this section of the report, we will review both functions and offer recommendations for the future.

13.1 Pre-Planning

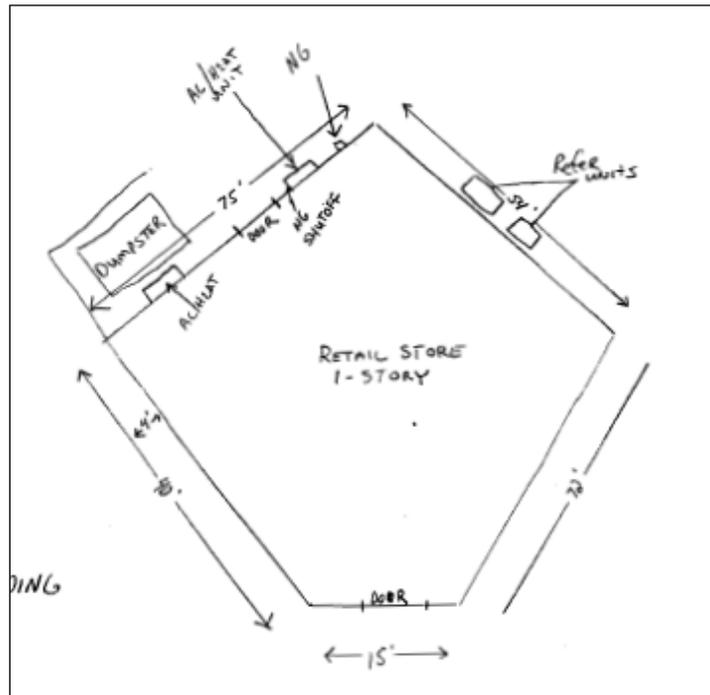
Pre-incident planning is considered by NFPA 1620, *Standard for Pre-Incident Planning* (2010), as “criteria for evaluating the protection, construction, and operational features of specific occupancies to develop a pre-incident plan that should be used by responding personnel to manage fires and other emergencies in such occupancies.”

Pre-incident planning can range from measures as simple as color-coding fire hydrants based upon the amount of water they can deliver, to more elaborate, electronic systems for real-time retrieval of building floor plans and critical information such as fire protection systems, occupant loads, hazards to firefighters, and requirements for special tools, techniques, or equipment. The use of such information can improve safety and reduce losses as fire services are better prepared to respond to emergencies.

A key dependency in this process is the Town of Bethlehem Building Division, which receives building plans for new construction. Pre-planning activity by the five fire districts varies in terms of its sophistication and its intensity.

We received very limited information on pre-planning practices in the five Town of Bethlehem fire districts. Some districts doubtless have little or no such plans, and others may have better-developed programs. The Slingerlands Fire Department has pre-planning information for certain large buildings within its district. These plans consist of address information, contact information, aerial photographs (from Google or similar source), street maps showing the subject building, and hand-drawn site plans. The site plans show critical information. Figure 13.1 below shows a typical building diagram used by the Slingerlands Fire Department.

Figure 13.1: Building Pre-planning Floor Diagram (Slingerlands Fire Department)



Modern records management software suites for fire services typically include modules that are designed to facilitate storage and timely access of pre-planning information. We will discuss this further in the section on information systems.

13.2 Inspections

The Town of Bethlehem operates a Code Enforcement function as a division of the Department of Economic Development and Planning. The department consists of a building inspector/fire marshal, four assistant inspectors, plus an administrative assistant. The department exercises authority to enforce the New York State Building Code Suite, based on the International Code Council's codes as adopted by the State of New York. Although permitted under New York State law, the Town of Bethlehem has no modification or local amendments to the New York State Building Code. None of the five fire department officials in the Town of Bethlehem are code enforcement officers.

The Department of Economic Development and Planning reviews plans for all new construction. For commercial buildings or significant multi-unit development, the plans are usually referred to the local fire chief as a courtesy. The chief has the ability to raise concerns, but he or she has no authority to impose recommendations either with the building division, with the property developer, or with the builder. In some cases, an informal negotiation takes place between the town and a developer where concerns are raised. These concerns are often accommodated and addressed.

The Code Enforcement division has a robust inspection program. A local fee schedule supports the inspections program. Commercial and assembly properties are inspected annually. Multi-unit dwellings with more than three units are inspected once every three years. These dwelling inspections are limited to common areas. Inspections are facilitated by an inspection form that is used by the Code Enforcement division. In 2009, there were 1,743 dwelling units located within multiple dwellings.²² The division received 92 code-related complaints in 2009, all of which were followed up by inspectors.

The Town of Bethlehem does not require operating permits for hazardous processes or high life-risk occupancies. Such permits are used in some communities to trigger additional inspections as well as receive additional revenue for more intensive services.

The relationship between the Department of Economic Development and Planning and the five fire districts is perceived by representatives as good. There is little formalized in the way of procedures or systematic meetings, but all of the inspectors have some affiliation as members of the various fire districts, and are thus sensitive to the needs of the fire service.

Interviews with fire district representatives and the building inspector indicate that both sides are generally pleased with the level and quantity of communication taking place. The building division receives reports from the fire districts about a.) structure fires; b.) carbon monoxide exposures; and c.) fires involving fuel-burning appliances, chimney, flue, or gas vent. These notifications are made based on Section 110.1 of the New York State Building Code. Notifications are made on a form template provided by the Town of Bethlehem. The fire districts reproduce these forms at their expense.

A building inspector is notified whenever there is a structure fire, and he or she will respond to the scene by request to provide consultation on structural stability or habitability of a structure. However, cause and origin investigations for fires are the responsibility of Bethlehem police working with the local fire chief.

13.3 Recommendations for Pre-plans and Code Enforcement

Recommendation 13.1: The Town of Bethlehem implemented a false alarm ordinance, which included fines for excess alarms in the FY 2011 budget. This is an important step not just from a revenue standpoint, but also as a means of controlling demand for fire services. Although the false alarm ordinance was not cited as a critical issue, a number of members interviewed during our focus groups indicated that a large number of false alarms from a few problem locations placed a burden on the members and discouraged participation in the program. An effort should be made by the Town of Bethlehem to formally include the fire districts in the regulatory process. Consideration should be given to increasing the fee schedule for multiple false alarms and to working with the town building officials to see that systems are maintained or modified to reduce false alarms.

²² *Uniform Code: Minimum Standards for Administration and Enforcement*, Local Government Uniform Code Administration and Enforcement Report, 19 NYCRR Part 1203, 2009, p. 2.

Recommendation 13.2: Another concern is the need for code familiarization training for fire department chief officers. Although training has been provided in the past, it is not done on a systematic basis, and turnover in chief officers and changes in the building codes makes the need for regular training apparent. A formal training program for code awareness should be instituted, and made mandatory for incoming chief officers. The chief officers serve as the eyes and ears for the Town of Bethlehem due to the frequency that they are inside buildings throughout the town; therefore, they should be aware of the building code so that potential issues observed in the field can be referred for follow-up.

Recommendation 13.3: A standardized pre-planning template for all fire districts should be established. This template should be made available in a form compatible with the electronic records storage system, with copies accessible at the dispatch centers as well as available on the scene of emergencies. This information should include, at a minimum: site plans, key hazards, and fire protection systems. This pre-planning information should be incorporated into training programs so that new members are familiarized with its availability and use.

Recommendation 13.4: The five fire districts in the Town of Bethlehem should consider developing a fee-for-service agreement with the town's Code Enforcement Division to prepare basic preplan information. With a common records system, access could be provided to the town to enable direct input of this information, saving time and effort and increasing accuracy.