

ELSMERE FIRE DISTRICT

“INTO THE FUTURE”

A FIRE DISTRICT STUDY

FOR 2020 AND BEYOND



By: Dr. John Granito
Anthony R. Granito
Austin R. Sennett

Preface:

In a little more than five years the Elsmere Fire District will enter into its second century. One hundred years of protecting the residents of the Hamlet of Elsmere. A lot has changed from those days in 1922. At that time the men were just back from the “war to end all wars”, the prized apparatus was a 1917 Model T Ford, fires, when they occurred, were predictable to some degree and it was difficult to bring members into the service. The firefighters at the time were given, when they were available, leather helmets and rubber boots. The science of fire was just beginning to be understood by the rank and file firefighter and training was done when there was time. The Ford Model T used the most modern technology of the day, a soda-acid combination.

Changes have certainly occurred in this almost one hundred years, but the problems of personnel and technology still exist, along with a long list of others. One of the comments made of the fire service, although untrue, is that the fire service is “steeped in tradition, unchanged by progress”. It is very important that we do not allow this comment to become self- fulfilling.

What can, or what should we do to be ready to enter our second century? What changes await us in 2022 and beyond? Will we be ready to face the many challenges of this new century? Better yet, are we really ready for 2017 and 2018? What will we, as a department and a fire company, look like going into our next century? What changes are needed to maintain our ability to deliver premier service and required deliverables to our clients, our residents and businesses?

For all these reasons, and more, the Board of Fire Commissioners felt it imperative to commission a study to look into our ability to enter into this new century and to fully review the needed changes to make this entrance a smooth transition from today to tomorrow and into the future.

J. E. Brennan
Chairman
Board of Fire Commissioners

Index:

- A. Introduction
- B. About the Authors
- C. Assumptions
- D. Questions for the Future
- E. Attachments

A. Introduction:

A number of years ago the town fire departments joined in concert to have a study performed by Mr. Charles Jennings, Manitou, Inc. This study, a “Collaborative Planning Study”, while not touching on the consolidation of departments, did report on the need to consolidate in a number of operational aspects. To date, we have followed the direction of this report and have tried to meet the implementation of its objectives. It has become evident that this report, while meeting its objectives, did not deal with future needs, changing technology and demographics, regulations and certainly not the lack of and the aging of a volunteer force.

This study, done by three individuals, honored within the fire service with excellent reputations and integrity, will allow us to look closely to what our needs and requirements will be going into our next one-hundred years of service. In addition, our authors have the added ability of reviewing our needs from a very different perspective than the previous study. These authors are long time members of the Elsmere Fire family and as a result know from experience and on a first hand basis what exactly is needed. The collective knowledge and experience of these gentlemen is known and respected worldwide and their comments and suggestions contained in this report will bring together their wide and varying backgrounds on the national and world stage with that of a working knowledge of the basic operational aspects of the Elsmere Fire Department.

B. About the Authors:

Dr. John A. Granito
Anthony R. Granito
Austin Reynolds Sennett

Dr. John A. Granito:

Dr. Granito is an internationally known consultant in fire protection, emergency and crisis management and corporate security. In addition he is a noted author, instructor and lecturer. He has been Associate Editor for two national fire service magazines. He holds a doctoral degree in leadership studies and is a Professor Emeritus and retired Vice President for Public Service and External Affairs at the State University of New York at Binghamton. His consultant credits include work with many countries, their fire departments, security organizations and emergency management groups and militaries. His consulting credits include; City of New Orleans Fire Department (post Katrina review), Port of New Orleans, IBM Corporation, DOD-Strategic Air Command, US Army, National Emergency Management Institute, Agency for International Development, NFPA, FEMA, and NASA to name but a few. He was an instructor at the National Command and Staff School and the National Emergency Training Center. He was also the lead instructor for the University of Maryland's Leadership Training program. In addition, he has consulted for, created curriculum for or led training programs in Winnipeg, Chernobyl, London, Caracas, and Toronto, Berlin and all over the United States. He is an author of more than 200 chapters, reports, reviews, and journals for the most prestigious of publications. He is the author of part of the Fire Chief's Handbook and conducted research at the University of Oklahoma State University. His credits and accomplishments continue and are too numerous to mention.

Anthony R. Granito:

Mr. Granito began his career in the fire service as a member of the staff of the New York State Office of Local Government, Division of Fire Safety, (predecessor of the Office of Fire Prevention and Control) as Assistant Director for Technical and Field Services. In 1972 he accepted the position of Director of Research with the National Fire Protection Association, (NFPA). During his tenure he was responsible for the introduction of the “Learn Not To Burn” curriculum in North America. In addition, he served as a consultant to the Massachusetts Department of Vocational Education and the Department of Public Safety. Taking a leave of absence from NFPA, he served in the federal government as Deputy Superintendent of the US Fire Academy. From 1980 until the present he served as the Superintendent of the Nassau County Fire Academy and the Executive Director of the Nassau BOCES. In addition, during this period, he was involved in the insurance industry and did consulting work worldwide, most notably in the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Bermuda, Venezuela and throughout North America. He has lectured worldwide and is the author of many books on fire service management and tactics. Mr. Granito served as a fire officer, assistant chief and commissioner in the Elsmere Fire Department.

Austin Reynolds Sennett:

After leaving the Elsmere Fire Company in 1974, having progressed to the rank of Lieutenant, and making his mark as a gifted firefighter and training officer, he moved to the Boston area where he joined the National Fire Protection Association. In his 10 years at NFPA he served as Director for Continuing Education, building on his days at Elsmere, deeply involved in training. He also served as Project Director for OSHA and monitored the Department of Transportation, instructional development and field training contracts.

Leaving NFPA to enter the private sector, he founded Emergency Response Systems, LLC., an independent consulting firm dedicated to fire service subjects pertaining to organizational issues, personnel development, needs and risk analysis. During this time he made noteworthy contributions working with the fire departments of Prince William County, VA, Wake County, NC, St. John's County, FL, Bowling Green, KY and Albany, NY. Mr. Sennett worked extensively with General Motors Corp., Sheraton Hotels, Inc., and the United States Coast Guard. He is a certified Level III Fire Department Instructor and is certified by the National Board of Fire Service Professionals.

C. Assumptions:

In order to undertake a study of this nature, certain assumptions must be noted in order to progress through an orderly review of facts, figures, demographics and overall knowledge of the subject matter to be able to arrive at some reasonable result. The following are the assumptions that were given to the authors in order to set the stage for their efforts:

1. Tax levy revenues and budgets will remain constant and in line with inflationary trends of 1-2% increase per annum.
2. General operational expenses will also remain constant but with a possible fractional increase over revenues.
3. Current apparatus will remain in place and will not change until 2021, when E-32 is scheduled to be replaced, along with S-33 in 2023, see projected Apparatus Reserve spreadsheet.
4. Operational expenses for buildings and grounds should remain within budgetary guidelines, and district reserve funding for fixed facilities and plant improvements (spreadsheet attached) should be capable of withstanding the expenses of the aging process and the needed improvements. This will not follow if new quarters are considered for the Wemple/Feura Bush Road property.
5. Volunteer in-take should remain constant through 2020 where minimal growth or decreases can be expected. After 2020 and depending on a number of external factors, volunteerism may well see an even more serious drop in participation. See personnel graph, attached.
6. Adherence to standards, regulations and government mandates will continue to be a monetary drain and will negatively impact operational efficiencies. Training standards and requirements will affect both department effectiveness and have a negative impact in obtaining new volunteers.

D. Questions for the Future:

1. What future trends and changes in training, apparatus purchasing can be expected?
2. What technological or philosophical changes in the science of firefighting can be expected?
3. What restrictive laws, mandates or standards could be expected?
4. Any method to anticipate volunteer trending?
5. Is there a way to maintain an all-volunteer response?
6. Any possible changes in local operational commitments and/or altered mutual aid agreements?
7. Any needed management or operational improvements and/or efficiencies?
8. Should the Mission Statement be modified to meet future trends?
9. What will the volunteer department look and act like in 2025?

E. Study Results, Suggestions and Observations:

Your request poses only the first of at least three major questions which should be applied locally, we judge, although we have attempted in our discussions and meetings to address only the first – which asks about “**national trends and forecasts**” concerning the nation’s volunteer fire service.

As an aside, and not as a response to your request, we offer the recommendation that, once those trends are considered, a comprehensive and very accurate analysis of the current status/environment of the Elsmere Fire District and Fire Department would be necessary. In fire organizations, as in businesses and governmental agencies alike, this process typically is carried out at “retreats”, and addresses the second major question: which is “**Where is our organization today?**” as measured along each variable of a full listing of important issues. The third question, of course, is “**What must we do to continue to fulfill our mission and meet our goals**” as the future descends upon us?”

Returning to your inquiry, however, we herewith submit the following as our compilation of national trends which could well influence happenings in your jurisdiction. They are not in priority order, since the pressure strength of each on Elsmere would require your local assessment following the second step above:

- Continuing development of governmental agency rules and regulations concerning, but certainly not limited to, health and safety in fire department operations. Example: OSHA 2 in/2 out and RIT functions;
- Promulgation of governmental agency findings and recommendations concerning many operational functions. Example: New NIST recommendations on residential structural fire attack;
- Continuing release of national recommended practices which “have the weight of law.” Example: NFPA Standard 1720 and many others, and multi-organizational industry standards such as commercial structural firefighting, plus identified volunteer best practices from around the country.
- Continuing professionalization of administrative, service, and operational fire department positions. Example: certification and detailed requirements for Safety Officers;
- Increasing emphasis on certification of all levels and types of officers, and accreditation of Fire Departments, all including volunteer officers and departments;

- Increasing emphasis on educationally sound, comprehensive, reality-based training; Example: Widespread use of incident command, flashover and other simulators;
- Increasingly vigorous emphasis on safety and various health issues related to fire departments. Examples include : PSOB Law and “Everyone Goes Home” programs;
- Public awareness and resulting demand for a broad span of service delivery items from volunteer departments. Example: Public education programs, pre-hospital medical service, hazmat response;
- Widespread emphasis on equity of service delivery by the appropriate volunteer department. Example: Public issues over equitable level and type of service delivery throughout a taxable area.
- Growing public awareness over fire department capability, availability, and capacity to provide reasonably adequate service delivery. Example: Waiting for rescue response at technical rescue incidents such as car fires, plus increased growth of combination departments.
- Public disdain for negative public image/illegal activity; Example: Seemingly stupid, drunken, boorish, or theft acts:
- Widespread public concern over the cost of volunteer fire departments. Example: Failed votes for stations and apparatus.
- Growing necessity for organized volunteer fire department activity to influence outside conditions. Example: State Fire Chiefs Association’s *and* FASNY’s push for increased state benefits to volunteers;
- Increasing pressures to identify and implement measures, other than financial incentives, in order to recruit and retain appropriate volunteers;
- Increased emphasis in volunteer membership diversity;
- Focus on larger, amalgamated/combined departments. Example: Public emphasis on rapid response by fully trained and sufficient resources.
- Increased awareness and involvement by local agencies related to how fire departments provide adequate services to the communities under their jurisdiction (Although Fire Districts have a certain level of autonomy, the executive and legislative bodies in the areas they serve ultimately have final control for determining emergency services priorities).
- Increased involvement by the State Controller’s Office in auditing Department budgets and expenditures should be anticipated: (A January 2002 – May 2015 Study by the Controller, identified a wide range of financial issues in Volunteer Organizations. That study will likely result in closer Statewide monitoring and involvement.

Elsmere has a history that demonstrates the organization's ability to effectively address most of the eighteen points presented in this report. Some of those eighteen points are directly related to areas that currently, directly challenge the Department's leadership direction and responsibilities. With that said, we strongly support our recommendation that the department initiate a project that will involve all interested members in reviewing and where necessary, redefining the mission, goals and objectives of the EFD. All of those participating should be familiar with the eighteen points presented in the report and, when documented, the Board's response to that report. The Board's written response to the report would provide the foundation for responding to our recommendation to continue the process.

Site Specific Considerations:

1. Service Deliverable: Discuss and document observations, considerations and specific recommendations regarding how the department will provide equity of quality level and response time service to the entire district. The determination of how Elsmere will provide that equity of quality level and response time service in the southern area of the district needs to be addressed soon.

Develop, document and pursue specific recommendations, including deployment, response and staffing alternatives that would improve emergency response services within the Town of Bethlehem.

Discuss and document (prioritize) a list of additional deliverables and programs, both social and emergency response oriented, that the department should initiate within the next five years.

2. Recruitment and Retention: Discuss and document specific plans to address this issue. There is a meaningful difference between State/National trends and Elsmere's recent and versioned ability to attract and retain new members. There is also a recognized issue related to attracting new members in the Southern portion of the district. This issue is directly related to item 1 above.

3. Leadership: Identify and document critical leadership dimensions that will be expected from the Board and Department Leaders for the next five years. A series of supporting behaviors should be demonstrated by any individual selected for a leadership position. The leadership and communication styles of the current Board both individually and collectively may not affect the same organizational success and continuity as in previous years with a new generation of members.

The organization should consider what organizational and personnel changes would be necessary, in the event that a combination of paid and volunteer personnel become essential to meeting response time objectives.

4. Training: Develop and document observations, considerations and specific recommendations related to State training programs, delivery systems and “minimum requirements.”

Given the previous five to ten years of fire ground experience, there is a need to provide effective simulated training for incident commanders and firefighters.

5. Communication: Identifying both internal and external communication concerns and provide specific recommendations to improve them. We have never been involved in an FD study where communication was not an identified concern. Our personal belief is that issues related to ineffective communication are the most identifiable cause of organizations failing or failing to progress.

F. Attachments:

1. Apparatus Reserve Spreadsheet
2. Building Reserve Spreadsheet
3. Personnel Graph
4. Mission Statement
5. Manitou: Collaborative Planning Study, see website for complete study