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VILLAGE OF BELLOWS FALLS



FIRE DEPARTMENT ANALYSIS

And

RECOMMENDATIONS

January 3, 2013

*Helping to promote fire and personal safety
for your business, home, school, church or town.*

The Chief

The Chief has the overall responsibility for the training, performance and perception of the BFFD. It is a responsibility that is tied to the desires of the Village Trustees, the oversight of the Town Manager, the limitations of the Village budget, perceptions and needs of the residents, the standards required by the NFPA and VOSHA, the union representing the full time firefighters and the needs of the on call officers and firefighters of the department. This position must be responsive to all but remain within the guidelines the financial side provides to operate.

The Bellows Falls Fire Department is rated by the ISO as a “4” department. This is a very difficult rating to attain and maintain and it is a tremendous credit to the Chief and the officers and members of the Department. This rating is extremely beneficial to the commercial property owners of the Village of Bellows Falls as their fire insurance premiums are reflective of the rating of their fire department. The rating attained by the BFFD is maintained by hard work, difficult training and strong leadership. All these factors are present in the BFFD and the Village should be extremely proud of its department’s efforts and results.

The Chief has to balance the parameters of the budget and the guidelines of the elected officials with the desires and requests of the members of the department. This balancing can often cause confusion and complaining from those not considering the large picture of how the Department fits into the community. It is very admirable to have firefighters desiring to perform more varied types of services within the community. The wanting to perform more “special operations” type work and take on additional EMS responsibilities shows that the members are confident of their skills and desirous to give more to their community. However, the Chief has to view everything within the context of the “bigger picture”. The Village budget must be adhered to and adding additional training, equipment and responses is very difficult to do once the budget is established. The Chief has to continue to work within the budget while not discouraging the drive and devotion of the Department’s members. Often, the

failure of the Department to expand into new areas of operations or to add additional training is viewed by the Department's members as a failure of the Chief to listen to the members and initiate new operations. The members of the Department need to understand the connection between their Department's operations and the Village budget.

The Chief should actively seek out and apply for grants to procure personal protective equipment for the members, grants for training expenses and grants for needed Department equipment. The Chief should also establish a procedure for distribution of new PPE to Department members and that procedure should be known to all.

The Chief, as a manager, has the responsibility to establish procedures to insure the Department functions in a professional manner. Some of these procedures require actions on behalf of the members of the Department to request time off for vacation time, training or sick leave. The Department then has to take actions to insure that the staffing of the Department is maintained during this time off period. Members need to be canvassed to determine if they are available to fill these open shifts. There is a responsibility on those members to assist the Department by giving prompt acknowledgement as to their availability to work on given days. The answer of "I'll get back to you" followed by days of non-contact slows down the entire process and leads to frustration and complaining by the member requesting the time off. The blame may be directed at the Chief for the delay but in essence it is not of his doing. The Chief however must be careful to not allow the approval process to become one of control by purposely delaying a decision. A time frame should be set for these decisions and only members who have replied on their availability considered for the filling of these shifts.

The fire service is one filled with danger and quickly changing events. It is one where training is of primary importance as a simple mistake can quickly become a serious injury or fatality. During incident operations the Chief has to execute a plan for the mitigation of the incident but also oversee the actions of the firefighters under his command. Mistakes will always happen; the goal is to minimize the number and degree of the mistakes on every call. A cardinal rule

which must be followed is to “praise in public, criticize in private”. A Chief must adhere to this rule but at the same time use the mistake as a teaching lesson. Often a mistake is made that is fundamental in nature or of a severity that threatens safety. Quick, strong orders must be given to correct or cease the faulty actions but the orders need to be non- personal and directed against the action itself. Any personal discussion with the member(s) should be reserved for the operation critique period in the firehouse or off to the side in a private area. The Chief should insure that a post operation critique is the norm following Department operations and that all members who responded take part in the critique.

The flow of information in the Department is upwards and downwards. The BFFD conducts department meetings as well as staff meetings on a monthly basis. The members of the Department should use these meetings as an opportunity to ask questions and discuss decisions that have been made or are pending. The meetings should not be a listening experience but rather a discussion of ideas, policies and limitations. If the members choose to sit quietly and not participate then they are inhibiting the upwards flow of communication. The members of the Department should understand that this is their Department and their efforts and or lack thereof can build it or weaken it. There should be minutes of the meetings posted in the firehouse and e-mailed to the Department members for the ability of all to see and understand the discussions that took place and the reasons for decisions. The Chief should appoint one member per month, on a rotating basis, to take and write up the minutes for distribution to the members. This would remedy the situation where-by members claim they don't know what was going on because they missed the meeting.

The Chief must be available to all his members and this policy is in effect at the BFFD. Too often members stated that they did not want to sit with the Chief to discuss an issue as they felt they already knew that his answer would be not one that they wanted to hear. Some examples given were requests for more training on new subjects, increased EMS response, equipment and training or increased

responses to special operations type calls. When asked if the Department's budget played a role in the answers to these requests the members stated that the budget did but "the Chief needs to get us more money". The members of the Department need to understand the overall fiscal picture of the Village and how the Department fits into that picture. The members of the Department can assist the Chief in securing additional funding by their professional demeanor, their dealing with the public and by team building in the firehouse to present a single vision of goals rather than individual goals.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Chief should use monthly meeting time to discuss with the members the Department's budget and expenditures and its effect on decisions.**
- 2) The Chief should seek out grant money for the purchase of PPE, training and Department equipment.**
- 3) The Chief should establish a written procedure for the distribution of new PPE to the members.**
- 4) The Chief should set a time frame for time off request approval decisions.**
- 5) Members who are eligible to fill in for shift coverage need to be responsive to the Department's need to provide staffing for each shift. When contacted about their availability they must be responsive as to their availability and stay in touch with the Department. The Chief should consider a time frame that members need to respond by to be considered for shift filling.**
- 6) The Department should insure that post operation critiques are held for all operations. A non- personal discussion of mistakes observed or alternate methods of performing tasks should be the focus. On scene discussions should be of a training type nature or "off to the side".**
- 7) Staff meetings and Department meetings should be conducted in a give and take type format after the Chief has passed along department information. The members should take an active part in these meetings which will help**

in disseminating information and explaining decisions. Minutes of the meeting should be taken by a member chosen by rotation and the minutes e-mailed to all members and posted in the firehouse. The minutes shall be submitted to the Chief before distribution to insure that no personal or confidential information is disclosed.

The Deputy Chief

The Deputy Chief position is one that serves as an assistant to the Chief, acts as Chief during absence of the Chief and also serves as a buffer between the Chief and the company officers and members. This position should be recognized as a management position by the Village and treated as such.

There are questions and requests that should be delegated to the Deputy for a decision to help streamline decisions and record keeping. As an example, the members indicated that requests for training were in some cases not answered for weeks. The Deputy in the BFFD is also the training officer and these requests should be analyzed and acted upon by him. The Chief should recognize the benefit of delegating this task to the Deputy (Training Officer) as a step that will hasten the decision making process and also free up time for the Chief. As the training officer the Deputy will be in the position to update the training records as the member completes the training.

The Deputy Chief should also be empowered to make decisions on staffing swaps and time off requests. To assist with streamlining the decision time for time off requests, the request from a firefighter seeking time off should include the name(s) of the member(s) who would be willing to work for the shift. The decision of which firefighter would do it would be reserved for the Deputy Chief to decide based upon the matrix established by the Chief. The Chief could be supplied with a notice of approval/disapproval form that the Deputy could present to the Chief the morning following the request decision. This could be a simple boilerplate form with room for comments if necessary.

These two changes, if enabled, would reduce the time frame for training approval and also reduce the time frame for time off requests. These two requests and the time needed to approve them were two issues brought forth by the F/T firefighters during my interviews. The initiation of these two procedures would not increase the Chiefs workload and would not add greatly to the Deputy Chief's workload. The implementation of these procedures would also reinforce the chain of command structure to the firefighters in the department and keep the training officer constantly apprised of requests, needs and certifications and re-certifications.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Deputy Chief position in the BFFD should be recognized as a managerial position. Having the Deputy Chief serve as union president creates a conflict that can be problematic. While it is recognized that the full time members may belong to the union the elected position of president is one that a person in the Deputy Chief rank should avoid so as not to set up a possible conflict of interest.**

- 2) The Deputy Chief should have approval authority over the member's requests to attend outside training. As the Training Officer the Deputy has close contact with the training levels of each member as well as the need to certify and re-certify in mandated courses. The Chief should develop, with the Deputy, a matrix to highlight needed individual certification deadlines as well as an approved list of training courses offered. The choice of which member will be offered the course would be determined by the procedure established by the Chief.**

- 3) The Deputy Chief should have approval authority over member's requests for time off. This will ease the workload on the Chief and re-enforce the chain of command that the members should follow in the department. The Chief should establish the guidelines necessary for time off requests and that should be made available to all members. The member requesting the time off should canvas the members eligible to fill in for the time off requested and present that list of willing fill ins along with the time off request. The decision on who is to fill in the requested time will be made based on an overtime matrix developed by the Chief. Members need to understand that when they are asked if they are available to fill in a shift their answer needs to be forthcoming so that coverage can be assured. 24 hours is a reasonable period of time for a member to make a final decision to accept or decline the fill-in shift.**

- 4) The present duties assigned to the Deputy Chief should remain in effect.**

Command Structure

The Village of Bellow's Falls Fire Department (BFFD) has a vertical chain of command that flows from the Chief to the Deputy Chief to the on call Captains to the firefighters. This chain of command is different from the majority seen in the fire service as the company officer rank is composed of on call members and does not include any full time members. This type of chain is one which can create gaps and cause confusion at fire scenes or other responses. The on call nature of the two Captains can lead to times when neither is present at an incident. Should this occur at a time when the Chief or Deputy has not arrived then the question becomes one of who is in charge. In speaking with members, some felt the full time firefighter would be in charge while others felt that the member with the most seniority is in charge. To add to the confusion, questions were raised about on call firefighters who haven't been active in a while appearing on the scene and claiming seniority. This can lead to conflicting orders, duplicated actions, missed assignments and an increase in the possibility of injury to members.

In the past the BFFD had a Captain appointed from the ranks of the full time firefighters. This position should be filled and the duties of this officer clearly spelled out. While this would only have a full time Captain available on certain shifts it would allow for the discussion and promulgation of the chain of command in the absence of the Chief Officers. The duties and requirements for the on call Captains should be clearly spelled out and the members appointed to those positions held accountable for fulfillment of their duties. The seniority of the individual members needs to be taken into account but the question of who is in charge must be understood by all. The chain of command for the BFFD is written and is contained in the department's operating procedures. This document should be the subject of a drill session so that it can be explained clearly to all and allow for feedback questions and answers including the "what if" scenarios.

Each member of the Department has a responsibility to be knowledgeable of the guidelines and directives promulgated by the Department.

Recommendations:

- 1) The position of “Full Time” Captain should be filled. This position gives a goal for the full time firefighters to strive for and allows the full time firefighters to have equal representation in the “officer’ (Captain) rank.**

- 2) Duties can be delegated down to this Captain to assist in streamlining communications and relieving the Chief and Deputy of some workload.**

- 3) The chain of command within the Department flows downwards and upwards. Request, concerns and complaints need to flow within the chain of command. Only in very rare incidents would the flow circumvent the chain and move to the civilian or political front. ALL members need to understand that their requests, concerns and complaints should go to the next highest level for proper administration. Members should insure that they are totally familiar with all written guidelines and procedures issued by the department. Many issues voiced by members are clearly spelled out in these guidelines and procedures and have been for a number of years. The Department should insure that all members are familiar with the location and content of these guidelines and procedures by dedicating a portion of a training session, annually to discuss these documents.**

- 4) The decisions made by each level should be explained fully to the individual requesting the decision. A “No” answer must be given with a reason why such as “Department guidelines” or “budget restrictions” or whatever is the basis for such decision. Members must understand that the department must follow the parameters of the budget and is restricted in its ability to operate beyond that.**

Officer and Members

The BFFD has a command structure that includes the Chief, Deputy Chief and two (2) on call Captains. These positions guide the department, train the members and deliver to the Village of Bellows Falls the fire and emergency service it requires. The positions listed above require individuals who are knowledgeable, dedicated and capable of providing that leadership and training the department requires. The members of the department likewise need to possess the desire and the ability to understand the training, perform the tasks and carry out the missions of the department. Any breakdown in the dedication or in the deliverance or performance of the necessary training in the department can affect the deliverance of service to the community.

The BFFD should perform a comprehensive analysis of each of the command (officer) positions and set a minimum standard for that rank. Such standard should include response to alarms, attendance at trainings, training level of the individual and department. The on call Captains in particular should understand their position as a role model and mentor to the on call and full time members. There should be a semi-annual review of attendance numbers for these officers and a level of training certification expected of each of them. The nature of on call response is voluntary and perfect attendance cannot be expected however the absences should be a small percentage or explanations provided that are acceptable to the Chief and Deputy Chief. In the same manner if the Department chooses to fill the position of full time Captain then this individual would be held to similar standards of performance.

These performance standards should be written and promulgated for all to understand and the performance expectations of these standards should be made clear to an individual being considered or currently in this position.

The on call Captains and full time Captain (if filled) have the responsibility of assisting the Chief and Deputy Chief in the training of the members. They need to apprise the Chief and Deputy Chief of members that need additional training or

who are lax in their effort or attendance. They, as officers, are responsible for their department's performance, the safety of the members and the delivery of services to the community.

The Department should also have minimum standards promulgated for the on call firefighter members. These standards should be understood by all and closely monitored by the officers, Deputy Chief and the Chief. It is understood that these members volunteer their time and that their assistance is vital to the Department but their safety must be assured through training. Their training cannot be carried out without their attendance. A member noted to be falling behind in training or exhibiting a higher than average absence from drills and responses should be interviewed by the Captains and/or the Deputy Chief. The Chief should be apprised of the situation and the results of the interview.

The performance standards for the Chief and Deputy Chief should be established by the Village and monitored by the Town Manager. The performance standards of the full time firefighters should be established by the Chief and monitored by the Chief with input from the Deputy Chief.

Recommendations;

- 1) The BFFD should analyze each rank within the Department and promulgate a minimum standard for that rank. Response to alarms, attendance at training sessions and Department meetings, training levels and department should all be considered in the standards. A semi-annual review of the officers in relation to these standards should be conducted by the Chief. A private interview with the member by the Chief should be held if the member's levels do not meet the standards. If necessary the Chief may remove a member from the officer position if the member fails to maintain standards.**

- 2) The officers in the Department (full time if filled and on call) should understand that they serve as mentors and role models for the members.**

The officers should offer assistance in training to any member that requests it or any member that they see as requiring it. Their observations should be made known to the Deputy Chief and the Chief during staff meetings to help identify training needs in the Department. The officers and members need to understand that this is their Department and their actions and attitude help to shape it. The goal should be to strive for excellence and to assist other members in achieving the standards the Department strives for.

- 3) Members of the Department should understand the chain of command exists for the dispersal of orders and information and also to allow them to voice concerns upwards. Issues in the Department that affect a member should be addressed by that member to the next higher level of command. Officers receiving notice of an issue affecting a member shall take action to resolve it if within their authority or to direct it up to the next level of command. In any case the officer shall notify the affected member of the action taken and the reason why. This would continue until resolution. The practice of voicing Department issues outside the Department to elected or appointed officials without going through the chain of command is not proper and should not occur. The full time members have their union as an avenue to voice their concerns if they feel the chain of command has failed them. The on call firefighters can bring their concerns to the on call captain and then onto the Deputy and ultimately the Chief.**

Training Requirements and Records

The firefighters of the BFFD currently respond to structural fires, brush fires, motor vehicle fires, motor vehicle accidents, power emergencies, hazmat situations, carbon monoxide detector activations, smoke detector activations, elevator emergencies, water leaks, cardiac medical calls, back up ambulance calls, flooding calls, downed wires, and toppled tree calls. In addition they also respond to mutual aid calls in and out of the Town of Rockingham as well as automatic box responses out of the Village confines. This list indicates the majority of calls the BFFD respond to but it is not all inclusive. The fire service is often called to assist civilians or other agencies in ways that would be considered unique. This list does not include the day to day maintenance and training duties that the firefighters must perform.

The purpose of this listing is to indicate the level of training that the firefighters need to undergo to safely execute the mitigation of these incidents. The in house training of the BFFD members can only encompass so many hours each month. There exists a true need for the members to attend outside training to obtain and maintain the certifications they need to perform their duties safely and efficiently. The Village needs to insure that the members are trained to necessary levels and require that these levels be maintained and certified to continue as firefighters for the Village. There exists a liability issue for the Village if mandatory training levels are not obtained and maintained by the firefighters who respond to calls.

The BFFD in conjunction with the Village should develop a training certification spreadsheet for each member that would indicate at a glance the training level of each member, dates of certification, dates of needed re-certification, dates of training, subject matter and Chief/Deputy Chief approval. This spreadsheet can also be used to calculate the hours of training performed by the individual member and the department as a whole. The Chief/ Deputy Chief can utilize this sheet as a guide in the recommendations and approvals for individual training. The development of a database like this will also help to streamline the workload of the Chief and the Deputy Chief.

The full time members of the Department have certain certifications that they must maintain to fulfill their job requirements. These certifications must be renewed at certain time periods. The Department should not delay any approvals for these re-certifications as their need is mandatory. The member should submit a request for the re-certification training in a timely manner to allow for shift coverage and acceptance into the training course. The approval of this training should be expedited by the Deputy Chief and Chief and notification passed along to the involved member. The involved member should assist in the shift filling by presenting names of consenting members to the Deputy Chief.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Department should develop an electronic spreadsheet that would show each member and indicate their level of training in the various subjects along with their dates of certification and upcoming need for re-certification.**
- 2) The Training Officer (Deputy Chief) should have the responsibility to maintain and update this spreadsheet as necessary.**
- 3) Full time members needing re-certification of job required skills shall have those requests processed and approved without delay by the Deputy Chief.**
- 4) Full time members seeking approval for training courses for needed re-certification of required skills shall present to the Deputy Chief the name of an eligible member(s) who would be willing to fill in for the shifts uncovered by the course attendance of this member.**

Training Sessions

The BFFD holds a monthly training session (drill) on the first Wednesday of each month in the evening. The drills are run by the Deputy Chief who at times enlists the aid of additional members to help conduct the drill. The drill runs for approximately 2 hours and the subject matter varies.

During my interviews with members the subject of training and these drill sessions came up repeatedly. The comments centered on the break of groups and the understanding of group leaders. When training subjects are covered they are often discussed or presented with the group as a whole. After the presentation, break- out groups are often utilized to allow members to practice “hands on”. These groups start with certain members assigned to each but members have indicated that they tend to break apart and some members wander to other groups.

It is imperative that training sessions be conducted with a defined structure. Members should be assigned to a group and a group leader should be assigned to conduct the training. The input of all is encouraged but allowing one member to dominate the discussion and training should be discouraged. The group leaders should ideally be the Department officers (Captains) and they should control the members of the group. Members should not be allowed to move about between groups as it becomes difficult to determine if they received all aspects of the training. The expertise of individual members should always be utilized but the group leader must maintain control of the discussion.

The training subjects are not always posted prior to the training sessions and this is a good practice. The “on call” nature of the majority of the Department precludes perfect attendance at every training session. There can be a tendency for some to skip a training if the subject doesn’t interest them. There may also exist the belief by some that they already have mastered a subject so they may not attend.

The problem with this is that there may be new procedures added to a subject that need to be taught. The attendance of all is then vital. When the Training Officer does not disclose the training subject it removes the option to pick and choose. It also becomes more realistic to the Department as their next response can be any one of a multitude of incidents.

The Department officers (Captains) should all be enlisted to assist the Deputy Chief in choosing a subject, gathering written materials, assembling equipment and leading a break-out group. The Captains should also be charged with conducting a training session on a rotating basis to help further develop their knowledge and teaching skills and to further display their commitment to the members and the Department.

Firefighter level members should be encouraged to ask for further assistance from the full time members and the Captains if they have difficulty with a particular subject or wish to refresh themselves on a subject they have not practiced in a while.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Department should establish a minimum number of trainings per year for an on call firefighter to maintain their "active" status.**
- 2) The Department shall establish a minimum number of trainings per year that on call Captains must attend to maintain their rank of Captain.**
- 3) The Training Officer (Deputy Chief) should enlist the aid of the Captains (on call and full time-if filled) to develop training subjects and to structure and conduct the training sessions. This could be done on a rotating basis with the Deputy Chief and the 2 or 3 Captains each taking a turn.**
- 4) The Chief and deputy Chief should observe all members during training sessions to insure participation, to monitor the Officer conducting the drill and to insure that the subject is covered completely.**

- 5) During break-out or hands on training sessions members should be assigned to a group and the group leader identified. Members should not be allowed to roam about to different groups or to monopolize a group discussion unless the group leader approves or requests the member's dialogue.**
- 6) Members should be encouraged to give feed back to their Captains on the training subject matter and method of training.**
- 7) Members should be encouraged to ask for further training or personal assistance on any subject matter that causes them difficulty. The object is to provide the necessary training to keep the members, civilians and community safe.**

Community Relations

The Village of Bellows Falls Fire Department is viewed very favorably by the residents of the Village. The Department provides a very fast response and exhibit a very professional demeanor while carrying out their operations. The support of the community can never be taken for granted and their support must be earned each and every day. The residents of the Village pay the salaries and operational costs of the Department and what they expect in return is a responsive professional department they can count on and be proud of.

The Department needs to insure that they reach out to the community to provide them information about their responsibilities and operations and to allow them to see their tax dollars at work. Often they only get to see the Department at emergency operations and their view may be from a distance behind warning tape.

There are many opportunities to be open and transparent to the public. The annual parade is an event that is known to all and the Department does make their presence known. The goodwill gathered from an event like this serves the Department well but there are other times that the Department should look at as well.

Visits to the schools can generate a lot of good will as well as develop an interest in younger people towards the fire service. Visits to senior centers provide the residents with assurance as they see their fire protection and also allows familiarization of the building for the firefighters. Performing inspections is a great opportunity to explain the Department's mission and operations and to assist the occupants or owners in improving their fire safety. Smoke detector placement and operation can also be discussed at these times.

These outreach actions are not the sole responsibility of the Chief or Deputy Chief, they are the responsibility of every member of the Department. If there are opportunities for Department participation in community events then all members need to assist in making it happen. An "outreach" committee should be formed within the Department to explore ways to reach out and participate. The members cannot sit and wait for the Chief to do this; again, it is a team effort. The results of this outreach work may very well manifest itself in the approval of a larger operating budget for the Department. This possibility is one that the Department cannot afford to ignore.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Department needs to recognize the need for constant outreach to the citizens of the Village.**
- 2) This outreach can not only afford the opportunity for the public to become more familiar with the Department but can also afford the Department the opportunity to conduct familiarization drills at designated sites.**
- 3) The Department should form an Outreach Committee to explore opportunities to meet with and educate the public on not only the Department's goals and operations but fire safety in general.**
- 4) All members should be encouraged to participate in outreach activities.**

Village of Bellows Falls

Fire Department Analysis

This report is presented to the Village of Bellows Falls as the requested analysis of the Bellows Falls Fire Department. Fire Safety Management Inc. was contacted by Tim Cullenen, Municipal Manager, and contracted to perform an analysis of the Bellows Falls Fire Department with emphasis on communications issues within the Department.

The analysis contained in this report looked closely at the flow of information and communications within the Department and also reviewed additional areas that I felt were necessary for a thorough understanding of the departments' make-up and operations. The methodology I used was to interview the fire chief, the city manager, the union representative for the fire department and members of the department both full time and "on call".

The report presented here is an objective view of the Bellows Falls Fire Department and the ways management interacts with the members. This report will also present recommendations to help increase the efficiency and productivity of the department. It is my hope that the recommendations contained herein are looked upon as steps that will benefit the citizens and businesses of the Village of Bellows Falls and not as "employee benefits". It is important to understand that the mission of a fire department is one that needs to be proactive in nature; the task of fire prevention and training should be viewed as important as that of extinguishment. A phone call for fire department assistance is one of "here and now". Where other municipal functions may have to be delayed due to budgetary restraints, the essential emergency services must be delivered immediately, professionally and in numbers necessary for the prompt and safe mitigation of the situation. **The safety of the citizens and of the responders is dependent on a well-trained and well equipped Fire Department. The professional leadership of the Department is of paramount importance during an emergency incident. This report will highlight the areas that need to be addressed to insure these high levels are maintained.**

Kevin F. O'Donoghue
January 3, 2013

Bellows Falls Village

Fire Department Analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This analysis of the Village of Bellows Falls Fire Department will concentrate on communications issues and the reasons why such issues exist. The recommendations contained in this following section are formulated based upon professional experience, national standards, independent department evaluations and from discussions with Department officers and firefighters. These recommendations are set forth to assist the Municipal Manager of the Village of Bellows Falls to better understand the current state of the fire department and to consider options to improve the delivery of fire service in the Village. This improvement will better serve the businesses, citizens and firefighters of the Village of Bellows Falls.

The Village is fortunate to have a Fire Chief who has led this department to a very high level of professionalism. This can be measured by the Department's ISO (Insurance Services Organization) rating of "4" where "1" is the highest and "10" is the lowest. There are very few "4" Departments in the State of Vermont and this rating provides for a very desirable fire insurance premium rating for commercial businesses within the Village. The Village should be very pleased that the firefighters they now have are aggressive and eager to learn and improve. The firefighters are proud of their Village and their Department and are very much in favor of additional responses, training and inspections. This desire to do more should be looked upon favorably and if possible funding found to allow them to use their expertise for the good of the citizens.

The pride and interest exhibited by the members has to some extent been held back in recent years. Part of this directly relates to budget limitations that the Village must enact and part is related to personnel practices that occur in the Department.

The budget limitations are real and a fact of life for every community. The members of the Department must realize that these limitations directly dictate the ability of the Department to add additional training or more specialized responses. The past history of the Department's responses, inter- action with other first responder agencies and funding for staff coverage must all be taken into account in the discussion of expanded training and response types.

The personnel practices within the Department that hold back initiatives are basically founded in two main areas, communications and chain of command.

The budget of the Village is addressed annually by the Village Trustees with input from the Department. The personnel issues will be addressed by this analysis.

Village of Bellows Falls Fire Department

Key Recommended Actions

- Appoint a Full Time firefighter to the rank of Captain.
- Promulgate a SOG on the duties of the rank of Captain, both F/T and On Call.
- Review the duties of the Deputy Chief and delegate more responsibility to that position for training and time off approval
- Establish minimum standards for On Call members
- Establish a time frame for response to requests for training.
- Establish a procedure to expedite decisions for time off requests.
- Assign members to drill groups and identify group leaders.
- Insure uniform records are kept to reflect all training done by individual members
- Insure FD participation in community events.
- Apply for grants to update members PPE.
- Insure a round table approach to staff meetings.
- Insure all members are familiar with and adhere to the chain of command.

