

GTFD – Citizen’s Advisory Committee

Report & Recommendations

June, 2007

Committee

On April 2nd, 2007, Greenfield Township Fire Chief Terry Morris gathered a group of Greenfield Twp. residents to form the GTFD Citizen’s Advisory Committee, hereafter known as the CAC. Chief Morris explained to the committee he was concerned about the recent fire levy failures and the position of the fire department in relation to operations, finances, and the department’s ability to serve the growing community at a safe and reasonable level.

Chief Morris stated the committee would run itself, and he would be available to provide any information requested. He further stated the committee had total freedom to look into all aspects of the department and encouraged members to talk with firefighters, community members, other fire chiefs and firefighters from the surrounding area. He also made available any and all documents the committee wished to review.

Chief Morris concluded his kick-off meeting with a tour of the firehouse and review of their operations and equipment. At the conclusion of this tour, the committee became a self-directed entity, and Chief Morris became a resource for information.

One point the committee wants to make up front is that all committee members are Greenfield Twp. residents and have a vested interest in seeing the fire department succeed.

The Greenfield Township residents making up the CAC are as follows:

Joe Malone, Farmer and Retired Manager, Lithopolis Road

Ray Coats, Retired, Colonial Estates

Mark Weedy, School Administrator, Greenfield Estates

Dave Cotner, Small Business Owner, Carroll

Tammy Drobina, Writer, Carroll

Dale Walker, Retired, Election House Road

Lou Ellen Reef, Registered Nurse, Sheets Road

John Reef, Farmer & Retired Manager, Sheets Road

Rob Jackson, State Employee, Stringtown Road

The committee discussed the task at hand and decided to divide the work into three distinct areas:

Fiscal

Community Perception

Management / Internal Operations

Investigation

Fiscal – The Fiscal sub-committee reviewed the current operating budget for the GTFD and submitted several questions to the chief for clarification. The sub-committee also compared the salaries of all dept. personnel with averages for other comparable departments.

During the process of the CAC, it was learned the Fairfield County Sheriff's Office was investigating an apparent discrepancy in the GTFD payroll. No detailed information was available except that an employee had been fired by the Greenfield Township Trustees. No portion of this issue is included in this report due to the ongoing nature of the Sheriff's investigation. However, the recommendation section will address auditing suggestions.

Community Perception – The Community Perception sub-committee canvassed the township and asked residents a series of pre-determined

questions regarding the GTFD. 500+ Greenfield Township voters were surveyed and their responses reported back to the committee.

The issues discussed during the community canvass included the following:

- Firehouse move from Carroll to Havensport Road
- Taxes
- General Operation of the GTFD
- Miscellaneous Comments

Management / Internal Operations – The Management / Internal Operations sub-committee developed a questionnaire that was passed out to all GTFD personnel. The questionnaire was designed to solicit candid feedback on the following issues:

- Morale
- Working Relationships
- Technical / Professional Capabilities
- Internal and External Communication
- Suggestions for Change in the GTFD
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Fire Chief's Support of Personnel
- Township Trustee's Support of GTFD and Personnel
- Township Resident's Support of GTFD and Personnel
- Miscellaneous Comments

Findings

Fiscal – After reviewing all available information, it appears the expenses related to GTFD operations were reasonable. This includes expenses controlled by the GTFD administration and the township trustees.

The salary and benefits for the Fire Chief are comparable to other similar operations. This is compared to Bloom Township Fire Department (a similar dept. without a city in their jurisdiction) and other rural Franklin County Fire Departments with similar jurisdictional areas and residents.

Starting full-time pay for firefighters is in-line; however the top of the scale is below other area departments. Part-time pay scales are in line with comparable departments.

Community Perception – The 500+ community members interviewed had a wide variety of responses. Although each one had his/her unique perspective, there were several issues that were mentioned multiple times.

First, many residents stated the levies were not passing due to being on a fixed income or receiving misinformation about the levies. Some indicated they felt they needed to choose between the schools and fire department. Many Carroll residents opposed the fire house being moved outside of the village, however many rural Greenfield Township residents saw this as a favorable move.

Another issue concerned the fire chief and trustees. Several residents felt the fire chief was overpaid, but still others thought the fire chief did a good job and the trustees should allow him to handle department matters rather than micromanage from their positions.

There were several notable statements made by residents that should be brought to the trustees' attention:

- “I cannot believe they got a committee to come out and talk to the common taxpayer. Now maybe if they listen to the report some good will come of this.”
- “You guys (CAC) are wasting your lives on this study. Nothing good ever comes from surveys anymore. They will do what they want.”
- “Thanks for stopping, I don't have time because if I get started, you'll be here all day.”
- “The unrest among firemen spilling out into the community.”
- “I would like to see quarterly fireside chats with trustees and fire service, along with road service.”

Management / Internal Operations – Sixteen questionnaires (out of 54 employees) were returned to the CAC, and the information from the

questionnaires was reviewed by all committee members. Considering the total number of employees with the GTFD, readers of this report should be reminded the information indicates the view of less than half of GTFD personnel.

One consistent theme throughout review of the surveys is low or poor morale. It was quite evident there is a morale problem facing the department, and this will need to be dealt with internally. If this issue is not addressed immediately, the fire department will continue to experience problems among the firefighters and officers.

Another consistent response indicated perceived problems with the fire chief. There were numerous descriptions of the chief being a micromanager and hard to work with. Although there were positive comments, the chief will need to address this issue if the GTFD is to move forward as a professional organization.

Communication, both internal and external, drew a mixed response. Although some firefighters feel left in the dark on many departmental issues, others feel they are adequately advised of what is going on. Improvements with morale and management practices should alleviate this issue.

When considering support, the responding firefighters were split on whether the fire chief supports them. As far as the trustees, the majority of responding firefighters felt the trustees did not support the department or department personnel. Most of the firefighters felt the public does, or would support them, if the right information was communicated to them.

Recommendations

Based on the investigation, feedback, discussion, and all other information reviewed by the committee, the following recommendations are submitted to the Greenfield Township Trustees, Fire Chief, and Firefighters:

Fiscal

- A GTFD officer not involved in the preparation of payroll should be assigned the duty of auditing the payroll for each payroll period.

- An independent auditor from outside the GTFD should audit the payroll records each year.
- Information concerning suggestions to charge for EMS runs came to the committee's attention. The committee does not believe this is prudent at this time. The projected amount of revenue does not come close to what is needed and will also result in losing the free stocking of medical supplies by the hospital.
- The Carroll Station should not be re-opened at this time. It is estimated that \$10,000.00 to \$15,000.00 would be necessary to make it livable. The last levy campaign indicated if it did not pass, the station would not be re-opened, so this is not an unexpected result. GTFD is the Fire Department for the entire township and is currently located in a central location to serve all residents. If, in the future, the GTFD becomes more financial healthy, a sub-station in Carroll could be revisited.
- The trustees should consider some type of levy to improve fire emergency response services.
- The GTFD should also consider initiating a campaign for local volunteers to augment the regular firefighters, medics, and EMT's when they are needed.

Community Perception

- FIREFIGHTERS – All firefighters must realize they are representing the GTFD when in the public eye, whether they realize they are in the public eye or not. Personal issues, disagreement with policies, and unhappiness with department issues should be kept in the firehouse and not shared as common gossip and rumors. This type of action by the firefighters, officers, chief, or trustees only serves as a poison to destroy the GTFD from within.
- FIRE DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS – There were numerous times throughout this committee's investigation that the issue of driving to Meijer's came up. The committee feels there is absolutely no problem with the entire crew going to Meijer's for their meal supplies. This

creates a great opportunity for community relations plus keeps the crew together the respond at a moment's notice. The committee was also informed magnetic "DRIVER TRAINING" signs were ordered for the trucks. The committee feels most residents will see this as a rouse to explain why the fire trucks are on the road. The committee believes the majority of Greenfield Twp. residents like seeing their FD personnel out and about in the community, whether they go to Meijer's for a meal, attend a local ball game at the High School (this also helps with them being on scene if injuries occur), or take a short drive for driver's training. As long as the trips are not excessive or made for personal business, this should be seen as a positive activity. A log of reasons for trips is more than reasonable to explain a resident's complaints/questions with a logical response.

- The GTFD should host quarterly events for the public, such as open houses, etc. The GTFD should also assign a firefighter/officer the position of Public Relations Manager. This will go a long way to improving the GTFD's image to the public.

Management / Internal Operations

- CHAIN OF COMMAND – The Greenfield Twp. Trustees should ensure the GTFD Fire Chief and his staff have an opportunity to fulfill their duties prior to directly attempting to manage FD issues. The Chief is being paid an annual salary to run the FD, and all complaints from residents should be referred to him and his staff of officers. Should the staff be unable to resolve the matter, the chief will be the final word from the FD. Residents who are unhappy with the FD staff and/or chief's resolution and complain further can then expect the trustees to mediate the situation.
- The committee recommends the fire chief split his hours between administrative and operational activities when possible. For example, the chief should take runs on a limited, but regular, basis.
- MORALE – This is a major issue as related by the firefighters' questionnaires. It is recommended the chief provide team building events, exercise, or training series. These could be accomplished through the local university, private vendors, or a collaborative effort from other resources. This is the direct responsibility of the fire chief

to implement and improve morale. However, only with cooperation of the GTFD rank and file, will this be successful.

- The trustees and chief should develop and publish a continuous improvement plan for the GTFD. The plan should be reviewed and updated each year to have a continuous plan for improvement. This will also show the public, who can review the plan at any time, that township officials are thinking ahead. There are many resources that can assist with this type of plan.
- Management training should be offered to the fire chief and officers. The trustees should also consider attending these sessions to assist in the performance of their duties.
- The trustees should consider a ride-along program so they can get out with the firefighters and learn their job and what they go through on a day to day basis.

In conclusion, although the committee has outlined problems and issues surrounding the GTFD, these are not insurmountable. If the trustees, fire chief, and firefighters take the recommendations offered to heart, the GTFD can grow and become a more professional organization that is respected by the community and fellow public safety agencies.

The committee will be available at the June 27th Greenfield Township Trustees meeting to answer any specific questions from the trustees, fire chief, firefighters, or community.