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# Shaping the Future of the Fire Service Feasibility of Development of a Unified Fire District and Other Opportunities for Shared Services in Schodack, NY

June, 2018

**Prepared for:**

Town of Schodack, NY

**Prepared by:**

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Project Director



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# Introduction

Public safety and the performance of fire departments are essential to a community's quality of life. Any change to these services deserves a thorough, objective analysis of existing conditions and identification of options for improvement. CGR believes that it is essential to engage the public, elected officials and fire service professionals at each stage of the process to ensure a successful project with a beneficial outcome.

CGR is pleased to respond to the Town of Schodack's request to study the several fire departments and districts in the town and consider options for consolidation into a single unified fire district, as well as other opportunities for shared services or collaboration.

**Since 1915, CGR has delivered results to the municipal, education, nonprofit and business-civic sectors through objective analysis, mission-critical data and strategic counsel. We have become a thought leadership partner of choice by empowering innovative solutions in the public interest. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, CGR has served communities throughout the Northeast and Great Lakes regions. In the core competencies sought by Schodack for this engagement – fire service operations, local government services, budget analysis, efficiency improvement and public engagement – CGR has a deeper portfolio of work with more localities than any other similar organization. Our website, [www.cgr.org](http://www.cgr.org), provides an overview of our recent portfolio of projects.**

## Proposed Project Personnel

Our project team will be led by Paul Bishop. An active paramedic, he combines 20 years of experience in EMS, public safety education and emergency planning with expertise in local government operations and fire department service delivery. Assisting him on this project will be James Harrington, a fire chief with more than 30 years' experience in a variety of fire service environments. The team will be supported by CGR's public finance and public sector management experts. Paul can be contacted at [pbishop@cgr.org](mailto:pbishop@cgr.org) or 585-327-7068.

### **Paul Bishop, M.P.A., Project Director**

*Associate Principal – Government Management / Public Safety*

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Paul Bishop is an Associate Principal at the Center for Governmental Research (CGR). He is a public policy researcher with a passion for addressing public safety issues. He brings his experience of emergency response, system coordination and thorough

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analysis to each CGR project on which he works. He also brings the perspective of being a public safety supervisor, educator and care provider to each aspect of analysis.

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***Most recently in the area of fire protection and EMS, Mr. Bishop was the Project Manager for the Evaluation of Operations of the Northeast Joint Fire District in Webster, NY and the Greene County EMS Resource Deployment Study. He conducted the analysis of public safety services for a four municipality shared services study in Cuyahoga County, OH.***

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His recent projects at CGR include serving as project manager for fire service studies in the Town of Webster (NY), Town of Byron (NY), Town of Ramapo (NY) and the Village of Sands Point (NY). He led CGR's projects evaluating law enforcement in Watkins Glen (NY), Dryden (NY) and three towns in southeastern Pennsylvania. He also played key roles on the Village of Medina (NY) dissolution study, the analysis of emergency medical services in Greene County (NY) and the analysis of the potential for merging two New York counties (Schuyler and Yates). He has also been leading the public safety evaluation for the Consensus CNY Government Modernization Study in Onondaga County, NY.

Prior to joining CGR in 2012, Mr. Bishop was the Manager of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Education at the Public Safety Training Center at Monroe Community College for 10 years. His work focused on all aspects of education for EMS including initial certification for emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics, as well as leadership development.

Mr. Bishop is currently an adjunct faculty member at Finger Lakes Community College, Monroe Community College, and a paramedic for a Rochester NY area EMS organization. Earlier in his career, he was involved in providing EMS care for patients and also supervised EMS providers in an urban setting. He earned his B.A. in Political Science from the University of Rochester and Master of Public Administration from SUNY-Brockport.

## **Joseph Stefko, Ph.D., Senior Project Consultant**

*President and Chief Executive Officer*

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Dr. Joseph Stefko is the 10th President and Chief Executive Officer of CGR, the Rochester NY-headquartered consulting research organization founded by George Eastman in 1915. A Buffalo, NY native, Dr. Stefko was named CGR's Director of Public Finance in 2008 and Vice President in February 2012. In those capacities, he directed

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the organization's public finance and government restructuring engagements, working on issues related to consolidation, budgeting, municipal fiscal distress, service delivery and government management. His project work has spanned counties, cities, towns, villages and school districts in New York, New Jersey, Ohio and Massachusetts. Notably, he directed CGR's landmark 2010-11 municipal consolidation engagement for the Township and Borough of Princeton NJ, which resulted in voter approval of that state's largest local government merger in 60 years and, significantly, the first under the state's Local Option Municipal Consolidation law.

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***Most recently in the area of public safety, Dr. Stefko directed CGR's multi-year examination of the emergency ambulance and medical system in North Hempstead, New York; CGR's ongoing analysis of police consolidation options for what would be a first-of-its-kind merger between the City of Jamestown and Chautauqua County, New York; CGR's study of public safety service demands related to industrial park development in Upstate New York; and CGR's work with the City of Yonkers, New York to benchmark resource allocation in its police and fire departments.***

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Dr. Stefko serves on the Government Accounting Standards Advisory Council, the national body that assists the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) in the standard-setting process for financial reporting by public sector entities nationwide. He is appointed to that position by the member organizations of the national Governmental Research Association.

Dr. Stefko rejoined CGR in 2008 after spending nearly 5 years on senior staff to the Buffalo Fiscal Stability Authority (BFSA), the NYS financial control board responsible for monitoring the fiscal condition of the City of Buffalo, the Buffalo Public Schools and other critical city agencies, including the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency and Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority. He served as Principal Analyst and Deputy Director of BFSA before being named Acting Executive Director in 2007. Under the control board's guidance, the City generated more than \$230 million in budgetary savings, experienced a 4-fold increase in fund balance reserves and earned multiple credit rating upgrades from Wall Street.

Dr. Stefko worked at CGR twice earlier in his career, from 1998-00 as a Research Associate and from 2002-03 as a Senior Associate. He was recognized by Buffalo Business First as a "40 Under Forty" rising leader award winner in 2005.

He holds B.A. (Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude), M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Political Science from the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, with doctoral

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concentrations in public policy and subnational / local government. Dr. Stefko has served as an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Public Administration at the State University of New York College at Brockport, as well as the Departments of Political Science and Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo.

## **James Harrington, Expert Sub-consultant in Fire Protection**

*Career Fire Chief for Combination Department in Monroe County, NY*

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James Harrington is currently the first career Fire Chief for the Gates Fire District in suburban Monroe County, NY. For this study, he would be a subject matter expert related to fire service operations. He will make several site visits to the community with CGR staff and will be an integral part in preparing all reports.

He is responsible for commanding, administering, budgeting and planning a \$7.4 million combination fire department in western New York State. The operation consists of 17 line officers, 24 career firefighter, 70 volunteer firefighters and 5 administrative staff positions. The fire department consists of 5 engine companies, 2 ladder companies and 3 rescue companies operating out of 3 fire stations. The department responds to over 3500 calls for service annually, including fire suppression, emergency medical services, hazardous materials and technical rescue type events. The fire chief reports to the Board of Fire Commissioners.

Prior to being appointed Chief, he worked for six years as the Program Coordinator for Fire Protection and Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting at the Monroe Community College Public Safety Training Center. He was responsible for planning, administration, budgeting and development of a new \$12 million fire training center. This position also required course and program development to meet the needs of various fire service agencies and the Fire Protection Technology degree program. The educational programs include fire academy management and delivery, Industrial Fire Fighter training programs, Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) training and curriculum development, Incident Command System and Hazardous Materials programs.

He also worked as the Senior Field Representative for Insurance Services Office for eighteen years. In that role he consulted with municipal officials to conduct detailed analyses of fire suppression, fire communications systems and municipal water systems as they relate to the fire insurance classification for communities throughout the northeast United States, and provide recommendations for improvements. While working for ISO, Mr. Harrington worked with fire departments in a variety of areas and also helped administer the National Flood Insurance Program through FEMA.

He has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Fire Service Administration from Empire State College.

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## Fire Service Experience

CGR has an established reputation for conducting reviews of local governments' public safety systems and developing practical, achievable recommendations for improving their overall operations and cost-effectiveness. We have worked with municipalities and fire departments to examine the feasibility of potential consolidation options; address changing demands for services; plan for long-term service needs; and respond to fiscal pressures to keep taxes as low as possible without compromising essential service quality. Our recent work on fire service efficiency and operations includes the following:

### Town of Victor Public Safety Evaluation and Planning

Project Description: In 2016, the town of Victor (NY) contracted with CGR to conduct a comprehensive evaluation and planning process for their growing suburban community. The analysis included reviewing the operations of two fire departments, an independent ambulance company, the sheriff's office and state police and then identifying options for operation changes for the future. As part of the planning process, CGR conducted a community survey to identify priorities and concerns. This project is in the final stages and will be completed in early 2017.

Reference: Tina Kolaczyk, Director of Human Resources and Special Projects, 585-742-5028, [tmkolaczyk@town-victor-ny.us](mailto:tmkolaczyk@town-victor-ny.us)

### North East Joint Fire District Evaluation of Operations

Project Description: In 2015, officials for the Northeast Joint Fire District in Webster and Penfield, NY contracted with CGR to conduct an analysis of their district and two associated fire departments regarding the quality of operations, fiscal planning and opportunities for efficiency. As a result of the study, the board of fire commissioners has chosen to pursue adjusting their service contracts to use only a single fire department and implement performance improvement measures.

Reference: Steve Small, Executive Director, (585)872-9526, [nejfdadmin@rochester.rr.com](mailto:nejfdadmin@rochester.rr.com)

### Greene County, New York EMS Resource Deployment Study

Project Description: In 2014, CGR completed a project for the Greene County (NY) EMS Task Force that focused on enabling county EMS providers to plan to modify their system based on demands for service, existing resource availability and geographic constraints. The study created three different options for resource deployment that allowed leadership to determine the appropriate level and location of EMS resources



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to meet the needs of the community. The work of the Task Force is ongoing with potential changes still being considered.

Reference: George June, Task Force Chair, Town of Catskill Ambulance Director, 518-943-1580, [gjune@townofcatskillny.gov](mailto:gjune@townofcatskillny.gov)

## **Village of Sands Point Evaluation of Fire and EMS Operations**

Project Description: In 2014, the Village of Sands Point contracted with CGR to analyze the fire and EMS service that they received from the Port Washington Fire Department. The Village has had an annual contract, without performance standards, with the fire department for many decades. They have recently become dissatisfied with the service and were seeking options to compare their service against national standards and community expectations. CGR worked with the Village's police department and the Port Washington Fire Department (PWFD) to develop a comprehensive evaluation of the PWFD. CGR then developed six different scenarios for the village board to consider improving their community's level of service. The recommendations ranged from expanding the role of the police department in EMS to the development of their own fire department with a paramedic transport ambulance. For each scenario, projected start up and ongoing operating costs were developed. The village board accepted the report in October 2015 and is considering their alternatives.

Reference: Marc Silbert, Village Trustee, (516) 883-3044, [marcsilb@me.com](mailto:marcsilb@me.com), Incorporated Village of Sands Point, P.O. Box 188, Port Washington, NY 11050-0109

## **Town of Byron, New York Future of Fire Study**

Project Description: In 2014, CGR completed a project identifying the options for the future of fire service and EMS response in the Town of Byron (NY). The town receives fire protection from two independent volunteer fire departments including one that operates a basic life support ambulance. The study evaluated several options for the departments including expanded collaboration and merging of the two departments. Several key findings were identified for immediate implementation and others for longer term consideration.

Reference: Paul Boylan, Town of Byron Attorney, 585-768-8148, [pboylan@boylanlawoffice.com](mailto:pboylan@boylanlawoffice.com)

## **Fire District Merger for Hamlin, Walker and Morton Fire Districts, Monroe County, NY**

Project Description: CGR completed a consolidation study for the Fire Districts of Hamlin, Morton and Walker in 2012. The districts are located primarily in the



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northwest quadrant of Monroe County NY, largely covering the Town of Hamlin. The districts jointly agreed to study the operational and tax impacts associated with consolidation to address the increasing challenges of finding volunteers, training them to higher standards, and meeting the demands of fire and emergency services under NY's new property tax cap. Working with district representatives, CGR concluded consolidation could lower costs by 5%, result in better long-term capital purchase power and planning, and streamline the governance structure to promote better cooperation among the fire companies. Commissioners of the 3 districts subsequently voted unanimously to consolidate. The new district began operations in 2013.

Reference: Gregory Speer, Chairman of Consolidation Committee & Member of the Walker Fire Department, 585-314-2207, [gtspeer@rochester.rr.com](mailto:gtspeer@rochester.rr.com)

## Proposed Project Components

Considering the merger of several distinct fire service agencies requires the study of operational factors, public opinion and community impacts. During the project, it will be imperative to engage the numerous stakeholders in each community including elected officials, district commissioners, village trustees, department leadership, volunteer firefighters and the general public.

The methodology is described below in a series of distinct tasks, many of which will necessarily overlap as the project progresses. Throughout the project, CGR will communicate with a leadership committee on the status of the project and will provide regular updates. While it would be the town's responsibility to develop the leadership committee, CGR would encourage representatives to include elected officials, department/district leadership and the general public. During our projects, CGR endeavors to balance the need for information with the burden on department staff to provide the information. As much as possible, existing reports and information are used to inform the study.

This project plan has been developed based on the involvement of the following entities:

- Town of Schodack
- Castleton Fire Company (Village Department)
- East Schodack Fire District
- Nassau Fire District
- Schodack Landing Fire District
- Schodack Valley Fire District

- South Schodack Fire District

## Phase 1: Project Initiation

Members of the project team will meet with the leadership committee as soon as practical following receipt of a signed contract. At this kickoff meeting, we will:

- Discuss the context of the current fire district study effort, in terms of current community and regional issues;
- Review the scope of the project and collaborate on a final approved project design identifying project scope, milestones, communication standards, deliverables, timeline and resource requirements;
- Clarify the role of the leadership committee members and, to the extent necessary, any subcommittee structure;
- Agree on a protocol for conveying information to the leadership committee, and identify individual(s) who will act as liaison to the project team and the leadership committee;
- Identify key stakeholders who should be interviewed as part of the Baseline Review;
- Identify data and information resources required by the project team in the immediate term;
- Review content of the project specific website; and
- Develop a plan for public engagement related to the review of fire services and potential changes.

Subsequent to this meeting, the project team will submit a final project work plan with anticipated timeline to the leadership committee.

## Phase 2: Baseline Review

As soon as practical after the project initiation meeting, CGR will begin the process of completing primary data collection for the Baseline Review. The project team will make a combination of site visits and information requests to the fire departments and other related organizations; interview a series of the relevant elected officials / key operations staff and stakeholders; tour key operational sites; review budgets and other operating records; and collect electronic or hard paper copies of key documents.

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The Baseline Report will serve as a shared information base for the remainder of the study and provide a fact-based framework for identifying options and assessing their impact.

The Baseline Review will include the following tasks for each department/ district:

- Interview departmental leadership and key staff members of each department to identify departmental successes and challenges;
- Summarize demand for fire department services for the previous three years and evaluate staffing sufficiency using common industry guidelines;
- Identify geographic and temporal patterns in the demands for fire services using a series of tables and maps;
- Describe the operations of the departments including existing staff levels, schedules, and job descriptions for employees/volunteers;
- Review departmental budgets including payroll expenses (if any), equipment, length of service awards program (LOSAP), facility upkeep, and capital expenses;
- Summarize the operational budgets for the last three years including lists of relevant fund balances, outstanding debt, capital plans, LOSAP and departmental fundraising;
- Review existing operational buildings and workspaces for functionality and capacity;
- Review the most recent Insurance Service Organization (ISO) Public Protection Classification report;
- Engage with community leadership (school officials, business groups, neighborhood associations and similar) to evaluate fire service expectations and current level of service; and
- Present the findings of the Baseline Report on the project website.

The Baseline Report will be presented to the leadership committee and will serve as the basis for the discussion of options.

### **Phase 3: Options for Collaboration and Merger**

Our project team will work with the leadership committee to develop a series of options for collaboration and merger based on the Baseline Report. Each option will include a brief discussion of steps that might be undertaken to help the departments and the costs that would be involved. The project team will also work with the leadership committee and elected officials to identify criteria that can be used to

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evaluate the different options for appropriateness of adoption based on the feasibility and practicality of the possible changes including the short and long term fiscal implications.

The Options Report combined with the Baseline Report will empower the leadership committee to consider which strategies are most likely to be supported by the community. The Options Report will be delivered to the leadership committee in a draft form to allow for review and revision prior to it being shared with a broader audience. CGR will work with the leadership committee to present the Options Report at two public forums to discuss potential options and their impact, and to gauge community support through a participant survey. The project website will also be used to engage the community in the process.

## Phase 4: Final Report

CGR will evaluate each of the options based on the criteria developed by the leadership committee and elected officials to identify the preferred option(s) that best align with the expressed needs of the community. The preferred options will include estimations of costs, fiscal impacts (including on residential property, fire, and hazard insurance) and operational changes that might occur with a transition to the new operational environment. CGR will present the leadership committee with a written Final Report that includes the Baseline Section and Options Section. The Final Report will also be posted on the project website with an opportunity for the public to respond to the recommendations. CGR will work with the leadership committee to present the Final Report at two public forums in community to allow the community and elected leaders to provide input on the proposed plans. CGR will compile the comments from the presentation and those received from the website to be shared with the leadership committee.

## Project Timeline

The proposed timeline for the project is shown below. The final timeline will be formalized with the leadership committee based on any specific time requirements. Throughout the project, CGR will make use of a project website to engage interested parties by publishing reports, meeting minutes and other appropriate documents.

	March	April	May	June	July
Project Initiation					
Site Visits and Data Gathering					
		Baseline Report			

March	April	May	June	July
	Committee Review and Initial Options			
	Develop Options Report			
		Options Report to Committee		
			Public Meetings on Options Report	
			Develop Final Report	
			Final Report to Committee	
				Public Meetings on Final Report
				Project Closeout

## Proposed Project Cost

CGR is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) consulting firm, and as such we use a bundled rate approach to project budgeting. Bundled rates are set for each position title and include direct expense (salary and benefits) as well as other than personal services (rent, insurance, etc.) and administrative and overhead charges (organizational and fiscal oversight).

Based on our understanding of the work requested and the project outlined herein CGR proposes to complete the tasks outlined in the proposal for a fixed fee, not to exceed price of \$50,000. Additional meetings and public presentations not outlined in the project plan can be added at an additional cost. If another fire district wishes to join the study, the scope of the project will naturally expand and there will be an additional cost.