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Evaluation of Public Safety in the Town and Village of Victor

Final Report with Baseline Review, Options and Possible Actions for EMS, Fire and Law Enforcement Services

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Town of Victor

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Summary

Introduction

The Town of Victor has grown substantially in the last three decades and is projected to grow for the next three decades. This growth has brought many changes to the community including new infrastructure and an expanded school system. While Victor has experienced significant growth in the last few decades, the framework of public safety services has remained essentially the same. The town does not directly provide public safety services (emergency medical services, fire service and law enforcement) but does ensure that the services are provided through agreements and general oversight. The town engaged CGR to conduct a review of the public safety services provided by the Victor-Farmington Volunteer Ambulance, Mercy Flight Central, Fishers Fire District, the Village of Victor Fire Department, the Ontario County Sheriff's Office (including 911 service) and the New York State Police.

The Town of Victor is the largest town in Ontario County and is located in the northwest corner of the county. In 2014, the population was estimated at 14,400 in 35.9 square miles. The Village of Victor is located entirely inside the Town. It has a population of about 2,800 in 1.4 square miles. It is anticipated that development will continue in the Town for about two more decades before it will be fully developed and the population could reach 21,000 at full build out.

Survey

As part of the study, a survey of village residents was conducted using an internet tool. The survey had responses from 400 residents. The survey shows that the public has a very positive opinion of all the public safety agencies in Victor with 35% rating them favorably and 42% rating them very favorable. Only a very small percentage rated the services unfavorably. The majority of respondents (82%) feel safe in their homes and believe they'd get help quickly if it was needed.

The majority of respondents (72%) felt that it is important to help the Victor Fire Department remain fully volunteer. Along a parallel track, the majority of respondents (57 %) expressed opposition to having their fire taxes theoretically increase 50% to add paid staff to the fire department. However, 25% were neutral and 15% agreed with the concept. The respondents were divided on whether a single fire department should be created to serve the entire town with the plurality (28%) taking a neutral stance on this question and essentially equal support and opposition. There was little support for the idea of the Town creating its own townwide police department with 58%disagreeing with that idea and only 11% agreeing with the concept.

Service Providers

Victor-Farmington Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Inc. (VFVA) is a private not-for-profit organization that is a state certified paramedic ambulance service. VFVA is the primary responder to all medical emergencies that occur in Victor and the neighboring town of Farmington (population 12,500 in 39.4 square miles). The total resident population is about 26,900 in 75.3 square miles.

VFVA has eight paid full time staff members and about 25 paid part time staff members. All of the paid staff members are certified as either an EMT or paramedic. There are also about 20 volunteer members of the organization. In 2015, VFVA had revenue of approximately \$1.25 million and expenses of \$1.19 million. More than 90% of the revenue came from patient billings. The Towns of Victor and Farmington contributed a total of \$21,840 in 2015 representing less than two percent of the revenue. VFVA operates four ambulances and two emergency ambulance service vehicles (flycars). VFVA has had an average of 2176 calls per year over the last decade, with five of the last six years being above average. About 56 percent of calls occur in Victor over the last decade, although in the last five years that share has been declining.

The **Fishers Fire District** (FFD) is located in the western portion of Victor and is about 20.8 square miles. The fire district is independent from the town and is responsible for ensuring the appropriate fire protection inside its district. The fire district is responsible for establishing a budget, entering into contracts, providing stations, apparatus and equipment for firefighting, organizing volunteer fire companies, and hiring staff to assist in fire protection duties. The fire district also governs the membership of the fire company and approves the line officers of the fire company.

FFD operates out of two stations and has two front line rescue pumpers, a quint, a heavy rescue truck, and a multipurpose light rescue truck. FFD is undergoing a substantial change in its staffing from a volunteer department with some paid career staff support to a career staff department with some volunteer support. At the start of 2015, there were two full time firefighters on duty at all times and by the end of 2016, there will be four full time firefighters on duty at all times. The number of active volunteers has declined from a recent peak of 33 in 2010 to 9 in July of 2016. The Fishers Fire District has seen a steady increase in calls for service over the past decade. In 2015, they answered 686 calls for service.

The district has a revenue budget of \$3.7 million in 2016, with 70% coming from property tax and the remainder from the use of reserve funds. The expense budget includes 39% for personnel expenses, 31 % for the purchase of a new quint and 14% for a reserve fund for future capital needs. In 2016, the district increased its tax rate 52%

to 2.077 per thousand dollars. The previous year, it increased the tax rate 28% after many years of holding it level.

The Victor Fire Department (VFD) is a village department of the Village of Victor (1.4 square miles) and is contracted to provide fire protection to the eastern portion of the Town of Victor through the Victor Fire Protection District (13.7 square miles). The fire department is governed by the Village Board. The trustees approve the budget, establish the contract for services with the Town, purchase equipment, approve new members, confirm department officers and borrow as necessary. The chief and department officers retain all operational control of the department and are empowered to purchase certain items under Village procedures.

VFD is a fully volunteer department that operates out of single station near the center of the Village. 55 volunteers responded to calls in 2015. The department has a front line rescue pumper, a front line pumper tanker, a quint, a heavy rescue truck, multi-purpose squad, a brush truck, and an all-terrain vehicle. VFD operates out of a single station at 34 Maple Street in Victor. VFD responded to an average of 358 calls per year over the previous 4 years.

The VFD has a total budget in 2016-17 of \$660,775. 42% is for operating, 35% is debt service for the fire station renovations, 23 % for a fire apparatus reserve fund. The largest operating expenses are for equipment (20%), gas and electric (11%), pension (11%) and insurance (8%). The Victor Fire Protection District and the Village property tax share for the fire department is \$0.912 per thousand, essentially unchanged for the last four years.

The **Ontario County Sheriff's Office (OCSO)** is a department of the county government. It is responsible for providing law enforcement to much of the county, including the Town and Village of Victor, and all emergency dispatching in the county (except the City of Geneva). The law enforcement division employs people 77 full time, 67 of whom are sworn law enforcement officers. The OCSO divides the county into six zones with one officer usually on patrol in each zone. The Town of Victor is one of the six zones. In addition, three full time officers are assigned to Eastview Mall and one deputy works as a school resource officer in the Victor Schools.

The OCSO law enforcement operations budget in 2016 is \$11.9 million with 91% being allocated toward personal services and benefits. A separate budget of \$0.5 million is set aside for equipment in a capital improvement plan. The public safety communications operations budget in 2016 is \$4.2 million with 84% being allocated toward personal services and benefits. Residents of Victor pay for these services through their property tax bill and county sales tax. There is not a specific tax or contract for law enforcement services in Victor.

The OCSO is the primary law enforcement entity in the Town and investigates the majority of the crimes that occur in the Town. Victor accounts for about 13% of the population in the county, but 28% of the serious (Part I) crimes reported in the county. In particular, over the last three years more than 30% of the robberies and larcenies in the county have occurred in Victor. However, the proportion of lesser crimes, including DWIs fall much closer to the town's share of the population in the county. The pattern of a higher rate of larcenies and robberies than the rest of the county is to be expected because of the high volume of commerce in the Town.

The New York State Police (NYSP) that patrol in Victor are assigned to Ontario County from Troop E, which is headquartered in the town of Canandaigua. There are 19 troopers and two sergeants that are assigned to patrol in Ontario County. The minimum strength on patrol is two, but it is more typically four during peak hours. The troopers work 12 hour shifts that are scheduled based on anticipated need with the most on patrol between noon and eight pm. Troopers work two to a car on overnight shifts.

The troopers on duty in the county and Victor are assigned to calls by the Ontario County Communications center. They are assigned based on a closest unit concept. It is a frequent occurrence for a trooper to work side by side with an OCSO deputy on a call as back up.

Service Demand

The data analyzed was for the time period of January 1, 2012 to June 14, 2016. The data included all calls for service in the Town recorded by the dispatch center. During that time, there were 55,019 dispatches for public safety services or about 34 dispatches per day.

Calls by Year and Type					
	Police	EMS	Fire	Unknown	Total
2012	9,647	1,259	544	27	11,477
2013	10,063	1,126	510	35	11,734
2014	10,783	1,195	534	34	12,546
2015	11,357	1,126	505	41	13,029
2016 (thru June 14)	5,423	524	271	15	6,233
Total	47,273	5,230	2,364	152	55,019

EMS Analysis

VFVA responds to a little more than 3 calls per day in Victor. The busiest times are between 8:00 am and 7:59 pm. Older residents are much more likely to need ambulance transport than other residents. Residents between 65 and 84 are nearly twice as likely and those 85 and older nearly 10 times more likely to be transported by ambulance than those under 65. VFVA responded to 50% of high priority calls in under eight minutes. In the Fishers Fire District, the met that goal 31% of the time and in Victor 72 %. (FFD provides EMS first response to help ensure a prompt response and when their times are included a provider is on scene 82% of the time in less than 480 seconds.) Response times on overnight shifts were slower than during the day.

Fire Analysis

Fishers averaged 27 calls and Victor 17 calls per month. The whole town averaged 44 calls per month or just under 1.5 fire calls per day. In addition to the fire calls, both departments respond to EMS calls. Fishers call volume doubles when EMS calls are included and VFD's increases 25%. 44% of Victor's and Fishers calls occurred between 8:00 am and 3:59 pm. The two departments are using mutual aid and automatic aid with each other on a more frequent basis. FFD responded to 80% of calls in less than eight minutes and VFD responded to 83% in that same time window. However, that response was often a fire chief and not a piece of firefighting equipment. 90% of fire calls occur within 2.5 road miles of a fire station.

Law Enforcement Analysis

The OCSO responds to about 21 calls per day in the Town, while the NYSP responds to about 9 calls. Nearly 30% of events are stopping vehicles for traffic infractions. Other than traffic events, common call types include alarms, property checks, suspicious conditions, assist the ambulance and larcenies. 58% of law enforcement calls are responded to in less than eight minutes and 76 % in less than 12 minutes. The quickest response times are during overnight hours.

Key Findings

- The public is generally satisfied with their public safety system, but they see room for improvement
- Fire tax rate in FFD is going up and remaining level in rest of Victor.
- Taxable assessed value is growing, particularly in FFD.
- Declining volunteerism at FFD and VFVA has led to increase in paid staff.
- VFD has been able to maintain constant level of volunteers.
- Fire protection is well rated by Insurance Service Organization

- Serious property crime in Victor is relatively high compared to Ontario County, but Victor has little violent crime.
- An EMS resource responds to high priority events in eight minutes or less 78% of the time. The VFVA responds to high priority events in eight minutes or less 72% of the time in the Victor Fire service area and 31 % of the time in the Fishers Fire service area.
- Older residents use the ambulance more frequently than the general population.
- Both fire departments are able to get a resource on the scene of calls in eight minutes or less 81% of the time.
- The call records kept by the OCSO only record the first fire unit that arrives on scene. This prevents an analysis of when adequate resources, such as engines or ladder trucks, for fire suppression arrive on the scene.
- The location of the fire stations is good for the majority of events in Victor.
- The fire departments and VFVA have adequate funding and an appropriate plan to maintain the necessary equipment to perform their tasks.
- Substantial law enforcement resources patrol Victor and provide a prompt response.

Options for Future Public Safety Delivery

The following are presented in a bulleted list as a range of possibilities that could be pursued, more detailed descriptions follow later in the report. As part of the study process, the options that are most appropriate for the community will be identified by the Project Steering Committee, based on their knowledge and input from the community. No value judgement is placed on the options to identify one option as better than another. In some cases, a high level analysis of costs and benefits is presented in the body of the report to help the community consider the potential scope. The goal of the options process is to help refine the options and identify the areas where a consensus can be reached for action. It is also appropriate to identify possibilities that are unlikely to have support today, but might be a change in a longer term environment.

Immediate Actions for Consideration

These immediate actions are objectives that should be addressed by the public safety community in Victor regardless of the other options that are pursued and may not need substantial changes to be made to have a positive impact on the community.

- Improve Record Keeping for Fire Events
- Consider Joint Fire Service Capital Plan

- Expand Training Opportunities for the Fire Service
- Develop a Volunteer Incentive Package with items such as educating about the NYS Income Tax Credit, a local real estate tax exemption, accessing the FASNY HELP program for college tuition, financial incentives and community support programs.

Emergency Medical Services Options

Four options were presented to the committee and public for consideration including:

- Maintain the status quo
- Victor contracts for service with VFVA with performance measures
- Consider the creation of a special ambulance district to support VFVA
- Create a town ambulance service to replace coverage from VFVA

Fire Service Options

There were six options identified for change related to the fire service and several of those options had variations that were also considered.

- Maintain the status quo
- The town expands its role in fire service provision through one or more of the following:
 - Provide administrative support to the departments
 - Active coordination of public safety efforts
 - Adjust the contract for the Victor Fire Protection District
 - Town and village of Victor contract with Fishers Fire District for services
- Creation of a Joint Fire District for Victor Fire Department
- Creation of a townwide Joint Fire District for Victor
- Undertake a Regional Approach to Fire Protection
- Victor Fire Department addresses reduced volunteer availability by either hiring its own firefighting staff or contracting with Fishers Fire District for coverage during certain hours

Law Enforcement Option

Five options for changing law enforcement coverage in Victor were considered by the committee:

- Status quo of remaining a part of the Ontario County Sheriff's Office (OCSO)
- Work with OCSO to develop and report on metrics of performance in the town
- Contract with OCSO for additional services such as traffic enforcement
- Consider enhanced traffic safety measures such as radar speed signs or red light cameras
- Create a town police department to replace the services received by OCSO

Committee Recommendations

The options that are outlined in this report were presented to the Town of Victor at a public meeting on October 12, 2016.¹ The Victor Public Safety Review committee met on December 1, 2016 to consider the options related to each of the public safety disciplines. During a workshop, the merits of each of the options in the report and the immediate actions for consideration were discussed. Although a formal vote was not conducted, a clear consensus developed around several options as well as immediate actions for consideration. In addition to the communal expertise on the committee, perspectives from the public meetings and other interest groups were considered when developing the recommended options.

The recommended options for immediate action and each of the disciplines are:

Improve Recordkeeping for Fire Service Events

- A task force was developed including representatives from each department to meet with the Ontario County Sheriff's Office 911 Center to discuss alternatives that could be explored to improve the recordkeeping for fire events. The task force had its first meeting with the 911 Center on January 9, 2017. This action will be pursued without specific support of the project consultant.

Contract with the Ontario County Sheriff's Office for Traffic Patrols

- The Town of Victor chose to contract with the OCSO for 15 hour per week of extra traffic enforcement beginning in 2017. The contract will include reporting of the specific times spent on traffic enforcement and the activities that were performed such as number of stops and tickets issued.

Support Additional Funding for VFVA

- The committee endorsed the need for the town to provide additional funding to the Victor Farmington Volunteer Ambulance and that the additional funding should be raised through a special ambulance district established by each town. The

¹ Slides from the presentation are attached to this report as an appendix.

discussion focused on the upcoming capital needs for VFVA and the current uncertainty in the EMS transport reimbursement arena. The agreement for additional funding is an arrangement directly between the town and VFVA. There was consideration that both Farmington and Victor should participate in the discussion with VFVA. This recommendation will be pursued outside of the committee activities and without the direct involvement of CGR.

Undertake a Regional Approach to the Fire Service

- The discussion around the future of the fire service was the clear focus of the committee and the consensus was a recommendation to move toward a regional fire service for the whole town of Victor and possibly the town of Farmington should be considered. The consensus developed around a goal to ensure that the fire service in the community could meet NFPA Standard 1720 to be able to assemble a staff of 10 interior qualified firefighters on scene in ten minutes 80 percent of the time. It was felt that this goal is not always met with today's operations and would be reasonable and objective target for the community to strive to attain.
- CGR was asked to develop a model that would consider the different pathways that the fire service could take to become a regional fire service provider. Key characteristics to consider would be the retention of the identity of each department involved, potential intermediate steps and projected tax impacts. To help inform the models, CGR was also asked to gather information about the Farmington Volunteer Fireman's Association and the town of Farmington.

Options for Fire Service Change

- **Change in Governance to Create a Victor Joint Fire District (JFD)** - In this option, there is essentially no change in fire department operations. However, there is a substantial change in governance in the department with the creation of a commission that would remove the responsibility from the village board and place it in the hands of the commission. The commission could be either elected by the residents of the JFD or appointed by the two boards as established during the formation of the district. It would be possible for the newly established JFD to merge with Fishers Fire District and/or with the consent of the Farmington Town Board, expand into that town to cover the area handled by the FVFA. There would be no immediate fiscal impact on the residents under this option.
- **Consolidated Victor Fire Service** - The creation of a single JFD across Victor would prepare the fire service in the whole town to better address its needs for the next generation. The community would be served by a single department that draws its volunteers from the existing companies and deploys its resources,

including paid firefighters, under a single operational plan. The new JFD would have lower capital costs in the long term as it would be able to reduce some portions of its fleet, yet still meet operational guidelines and insurance recommendations. The JFD leadership would likely represent each community and have an interest in the fire service that should lead to successful long term management of the fire service. There would also be a more equitable distribution of costs across the town that matches the existing distribution of resources.

- **Comprehensive Restructuring** - The creation of a single JFD across Victor and substantial portions of Farmington would prepare the fire service in those areas to address the challenges they will face in the coming generation. The community would be served by a single department that draws its volunteers from the existing companies and deploys its resources under a single operational plan. The new JFD would have lower capital costs in the long term as it would be able to reduce some portions of its fleet, yet still meet operational guidelines and insurance recommendations. The JFD leadership would likely represent each community and have an interest in the fire service that should lead to successful long term management of the fire service.

Future Steps

All three of the pathways to a regional approach for the fire service will require a concerted effort by the elected officials and the members of the fire departments of the organizations involved to educate the public and their other constituents. There will also be the need for expert legal advice to ensure that actions taken meet the requirements outlined in state law. There will be opportunity for the public and the community leaders to evaluate the changes in costs and the expected benefits to ensure that the changes are in the best interest of the residents of Victor. This is a great opportunity for the community leaders to support change in governance and operations that will improve the service to the residents of Victor for the both the near term and the next generation.