
Fire Department

General Description

The City of Sunbury has six volunteer fire companies and a fire police unit serving the City and surrounding municipalities. These companies and personnel operate out of seven stations, all owned by the individual organizations. The department provide fire suppression, rescue, medical assistance, water-related rescues, hazardous materials response, fire prevention and public education services. The companies are:

- Sunbury Steam Fire Engine Company No. 1 (Penn St. and Second St.)
- Rescue Hose Company (800 Edison Ave.)
- Americus Hose Company (100 Linden St.)
- Friendship Hose Company (20 South Tenth St.)
- East Sunbury Hose Company (Catawissa Ave. and Race St.)
- Goodwill Hose Company (500 Reagan St.)
- Sunbury Fire Police (Keller St. and McCarty St.)

The Americus Hose Company also provides EMS service in cooperation with the Sunbury Community Hospital.

The City has an Insurance Services Organization (ISO) rating of 5 out of a possible 9.

Governing Legislation

The Sunbury City Fire Department is governed by Chapter 11 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Sunbury, as well as the Third Class City Code¹ of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In addition, numerous state and federal laws, court cases and performance standards affect the operations of the department.

Each entity also has bylaws, articles of incorporation, standard operating procedures and other policies.

¹ Article XXI of the Third Class City Code

Budgetary Description

The City provides financial support to the fire companies and to the Fire Police thru the General Fund. In 2008, the City contributed a flat \$7,500 to each fire company and \$5,500 to the Fire Police.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Fire Protection	\$122,617	\$123,337	\$130,530	\$184,243	\$99,785	\$53,448	\$64,657
Percent of Total	3.5%	3.5%	3.9%	4.3%	2.4%	1.5%	1.6%

The remaining expenditures are for general office costs, salaries and minor expenses. In the past, the City has paid for part of a vehicle loan, which has been repaid. In addition, the City receives approximately \$50,000 per year from the state, which is then transferred to the Fireman's Relief Association. This funding had been previously accounted for within the General Fund budget; it is now a journal entry into the City's financial management system, and no longer appears within the budget.

The individual fire companies are financially self-sufficient, relying upon donations and social club revenues to pay for equipment, supplies, utilities, training and facilities. In addition, the Americus Hose Company operates an EMS unit, and receives insurance payments for services. The cash assets are individually greater than that of the City.

Each fire company is required to file a return to the IRS on an annual basis. The following chart summarizes the financial status of five fire companies as of December 31, 2006.

	<i>Sunbury Steam Fire</i>	<i>Rescue Hose Company</i>	<i>Americus Hose Co.</i>	<i>Goodwill Hose Co.</i>	<i>East Sunbury</i>	<i>Friendship Hose Co.</i>	<i>Sunbury Fire Police</i>
Corporation Type	501c3	501c4	501c4	501c4	501c4	501c4	None
Filing Year	2006	2006	2006	2006	2006	None	None
Total Revenues	\$ 122,731	\$ 210,798	\$ 884,644	\$ 208,597	\$ 135,636	N/A	N/A
Total Expenses	\$ 65,641	\$ 214,727	\$ 738,619	\$ 180,229	\$ 119,656	N/A	N/A
12/31 Net Assets	\$ 267,684	\$ 321,854	\$2,001,344	\$ 373,998	\$ 202,644	N/A	N/A
Total Functional Expenses	\$ 65,641	\$ 214,727	\$ 738,470	\$ 180,229	\$ 130,550	N/A	N/A
Program Service Expenses	\$ 65,641	\$ 188,974	\$ 742,311	\$ -	\$ 119,656	N/A	N/A
12/31 Total Assets	\$ 453,998	\$ 328,049	\$2,058,923	\$ 384,892	\$ 303,658	N/A	N/A
12/31 Total Liabilities	\$ 186,304	\$ 6,195	\$ 57,579	\$ 10,894	\$ 101,014	N/A	N/A
12/31 Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 453,988	\$ 328,049	\$2,058,923	\$ 384,892	\$ 303,650	N/A	N/A

The Friendship Hose Company has not filed a IRS 990 form since 2004, according to the IRS. Failure to file the reports could jeopardize the entity's tax exempt status, and could cause it to lose its liquor license, small games of chance license and sales tax exemption.

Previous Studies

In 2007, a report was prepared by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) detailing the management and operations of the fire companies and Fire Police, and made numerous recommendations, including the following:

- Consolidation of all organizations into one entity, with corresponding changes in bylaws and organizational structure.
- Replacement of certain pieces of apparatus and establishing a replacement and maintenance schedule.
- Joint purchasing of equipment and use of piggyback purchasing programs.
- Improved training requirements and officer qualifications.
- Changes to fundraising and financial management of the various entities.

In discussions with City officials, there has been little to nothing done with the results of the study, other than some public discussions in 2007 about the recommendation to merge the entities.

The Early Intervention Program study did not focus on the provision of fire protection services or the business entities that are the fire companies; instead, we have prepared this report from the perspective of how the City can limit its future costs by assisting the fire companies and by maintaining compliance with legal requirements.

Benchmarks

The Department maintains its records on the FireHouse software, and it is reported to the State. Below is a summary of fire calls from 2004 to 2008:

Incidents	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Average
Fire	74	95	102	105	83	92
Rescue and EMS	80	121	162	163	119	129
Hazardous Conditions	91	47	35	30	34	47
Service Call	55	55	99	99	36	69
Good Intent Cal	16	20	13	10	6	13
False Alarm	54	38	33	35	38	40
Severe Weather/Natural Disaster	4	0	7	4	3	4
Special Incident	4	45	57	34	139	56
Overpressure or Explosion	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	378	421	509	480	458	449
Fire Loss	\$ 1,918,400	\$ 949,850	\$ 639,500	\$ 817,500	\$ 605,200	\$ 986,090

Recommendations

The provision of paid fire services would be over \$1 million annually, a figure that the City cannot afford under current revenue restrictions. Therefore, the City's focus should be on maintaining and improving the current volunteer base of operations. We would recommend the City examine the following items:

- **Revision of City Ordinances:** The organization of the Fire Department was established by an ordinance enacted in 1922. It appears that portions of the ordinance are no longer valid, and could create difficulties in administration in the future. We would recommend that the ordinance be revised to mirror current operations and organizational needs.
- **Fire Company Financial Information:** The fire companies have not provided financial information relating to the use of city contributions as required by Act 8-2008. The law requires the individual fire companies to provide a written statement as to how the funds were used prior to the release of additional funds. Until the information is provided, the City cannot release any money.
- **Friendship Fire Company Financial Statements:** The Friendship Fire Company has not submitted an IRS 990 statement since 2004. As previously discussed, this failure puts the entity at serious financial and operational risk. The City should determine why this has not been done and take appropriate steps to ensure the fire company maintains compliance with state and federal law.
- **Investment Income:** The City should work with the Fire Companies and the Fireman's Relief Fund Board of Directors to monitor the financial status of all of the entities, especially since the financial meltdown starting in September 2008. It is important to know the potential impact of any loss of investment income on the entity, and potentially the City. The City can work with the Fire Companies to enroll them in low-risk financial pools, such as PLGIT and INVEST, that provide well managed investment programs.
- **Open Records Act:** The Pennsylvania Office of Open Records has made a determination that volunteer fire companies and some EMS providers are subject to the requirements of the Right to Know Law² because they are local agencies. This will require the appointment of an Open Records Act Officer by each entity, as well as training and compliance reviews. We have included language from the Office of Open Records website (www.openrecords.state.pa.us) and correspondence on the legal justifications for including them in the Act.

² Act 3 of 2008 (65 P.S. §§67.101-67.3104)

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- **Insurance Coverage:** The City provides workers compensation insurance coverage for the fire companies and the Fire Police as required by the Workers Compensation Act. However, the City should not provide additional insurance coverage for the entities under the City's insurance policies because the City does not control those entities. In addition, the City should review what activities are covered under Workers Compensation and address them by resolution.
 - **GIS System:** The City should integrate the FireHouse Software into any future GIS system in order to be able to better focus code enforcement activities and improve the sharing of information between city departments.
 - **Recruitment and Retention:** The City should work with the fire companies to establish a universal volunteer application and have the information, along with links, on its website. In addition, the City should work with the fire companies to determine retention needs for active volunteers, such as tax credits, recognition programs, training opportunities, and other incentives in order to keep an effective core of firefighters available.

The volunteer fire companies provide a significant value to the City, and have been effective in maintaining their services and their individual organizational structures. However, there are things that the City should do to monitor the capabilities of the fire companies and their operations, and to assist if necessary. It is money well-spent.