



Chester County
EMS Council,
Inc.



Chester County
PENNSYLVANIA

**CHESTER COUNTY
FIRE & EMS
STRATEGIC PLANNING PROJECT**

**Public Workshop Presentations
September 8th & 9th, 2020**



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES, INC. (MRI)



- Completed more than 200 similar projects.
- Includes 3 area projects.
- All team members are practitioners including several active chief fire officers and EMS personnel.
- A unique focus in working with and strengthening on-call and volunteer emergency services delivery systems.

THE CHALLENGES

Increasing call volumes, shrinking revenues, rapidly growing communities, changing demographics, reductions in volunteer staff numbers and availability, changing customer expectations, state and federal mandates, increased training hours, stringent policies and procedures, limited budget resources, are but a few of the increasingly complicated issues that challenge public sector fire and EMS services.



OUR GOAL



To work in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders to create a report and strategic plan that becomes a useful guide and a resource that shapes a vision for the success of the organizations that comprise the Chester County Fire and EMS Services as they approach the challenges and transitions of the future.



PROJECT OVERVIEW



- Organize and deliver a comprehensive report and a series of workshops addressing future county-wide fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) concerns as a planning tool for Fire Chiefs, EMS Chiefs, Municipal Managers and Elected Officials.



Chester
County EMS
Council, Inc

- **Program Vision:**

- ❖ Evaluate how fire and EMS services are currently being provided within Chester County as compared with other geographical areas of similar size and population.
- ❖ Provide guidance to address the future of fire and EMS delivery in Chester County based on emerging trends and best practices in fire protection and EMS.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Work with municipal leaders and the public to define a desired level of service.
- Conduct community risk assessment.
- Conduct organizational SWOT analysis.
- Work in partnership with Chester County responder organizations to develop a toolbox that will guide the fire and EMS organizations and assist with the following:
 - ❖ Increased emergency response efficiency and effectiveness.
 - ❖ Cost reduction and avoidance of duplication.
 - ❖ Identify critical success factors.
 - ❖ Identify a road map to success.



PROJECT METHODOLOGY



PROJECT RECAP

- MRI team members spent 13 days in Chester County over several months.
- More than 100 different project elements.
 - ❖ More than 75 individual interviews.
 - ❖ 18 group meetings for various stakeholders and interested parties.
 - ❖ Conducted virtual public meeting attended by 68 people.
- Analyzed extensive emergency response data and statistics provided by Chester County.



MAJOR PROJECT ELEMENTS

- Reviewed a wide array of documents and data regarding Chester County fire and EMS operations.
- Developed GIS mapping to plot incident locations and response times.
- Toured the county to develop an understanding of Chester County's unique characteristics.



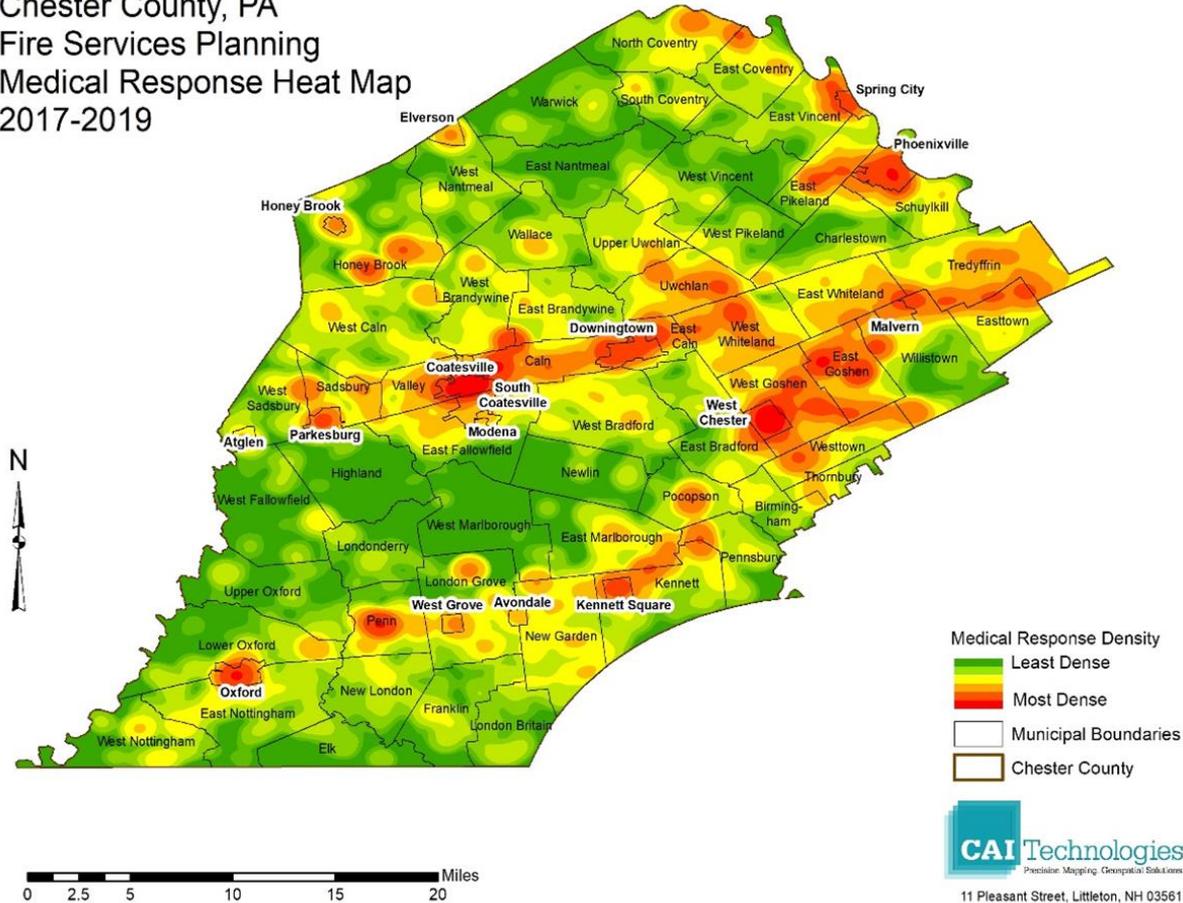
MAJOR PROJECT ELEMENTS

- Developed detailed questionnaires that were distributed to all fire and EMS providers and each municipal government in Chester County.
 - ❖ Fire and EMS response = **100%**
 - ❖ Municipal response = **54.8%** (40 out of 73)
- Developed on-line survey tools for various stakeholders to provide their perspective.
 - ❖ Local Government Officials = **56**
 - ❖ Fire and EMS Providers = **469**
 - ❖ Citizens = **1,142**



GIS MAPPING

Chester County, PA
Fire Services Planning
Medical Response Heat Map
2017-2019



OVERALL ASSESSMENT

- The Chester County fire and EMS service organizations are, for the most part, well-equipped, well-managed, and appear to be well-trained. When they arrive on the scene of an emergency, their personnel perform their duties very well and can be counted upon to complete assignments given to them.
- Most fire companies have a dedicated core group of members who are trying to make their organization one that provides dependable, high quality, emergency services to the municipalities that it serves.

They should be commended for their efforts and given the support they need to continue to try to be successful.



SEVEN MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

- **Rapidly diminishing volunteer pool for fire operations, part of a nationwide trend. The cost associated with addressing this issue will be the biggest challenge ahead for all the stakeholders, both internal and external.**
- **Lack of engagement and investment by many local government officials. In addition, effective communication is lacking between some fire and EMS providers and local government officials.**



SEVEN MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

- **Critical need to develop new ways to fund fire and EMS operations moving forward.**
 - ❖ **Revenue shortfalls from EMS reimbursements are placing multiple organizations in financial difficulty.**
 - ❖ **On the fire side, traditional fundraising efforts by volunteer organizations, and the whole concept that they often self-fund most of their own operations, are no longer economically feasible and viable.**
- **Lack of standardized operational and response procedures.**



SEVEN MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

- Concern over the training and qualifications of some fire and EMS providers.
- Unnecessary duplication of specialized resources such as ladders and rescues that increase the cost of operations.
- Resistance to the necessary exploration of more regional or even county-wide provision of fire and EMS services.

SEVEN MOST IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- The governing bodies of all the county's municipalities MUST become engaged in the provision of fire and EMS services to their respective municipalities. Currently, it is ultimately their responsibility to determine the level of risk and the level of emergency services protection for their communities.
- New sources of funding for both fire and EMS operations MUST be determined and implemented. To bring consistency to the funding levels for stakeholders throughout the county, consideration should be given to legislative action to permit the implementation of taxes at the county level that are dedicated to the fire and EMS service delivery system.



SEVEN MOST IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Innovative ideas – many of which have a cost associated with them – must be implemented to attempt to increase recruitment, and perhaps more importantly retention, of members of the volunteer fire service.
- Working collaboratively the Chester County Fire Chiefs Association, Chester County EMS Council, Inc., the Chester County Fire Police Association, and the Chester County Department of Emergency Services should develop and adopt standardized emergency response assignments utilizing the closest available qualified resources based upon GIS and AVL technology.



SEVEN MOST IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Working collaboratively the Chester County Fire Chiefs Association, Chester County EMS Council, Inc., the Chester County Fire Police Association, and the Chester County Department of Emergency Services should develop and adopt a manual of Standard Operational Procedures or Guidelines (SOPs/SOGs) to guide fire and EMS operations throughout the county.



SEVEN MOST IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Working collaboratively the Chester County Fire Chiefs Association and the Chester County Department of Emergency Services should develop minimum training requirements for fire service personnel to be considered “qualified” for inclusion in the overall county response system.
- The Chester County Fire Chiefs Association, Chester County EMS Council, Inc., and Chester County Fire Police Association, with support from the Chester County Department of Emergency Services should work with their respective stakeholders to explore new regional opportunities for collaboration for the delivery of fire and EMS services in various areas of Chester County.



IMPLICATIONS OF NOT TAKING ACTION

“Fire and EMS are in a crisis – right now. Simply put, EMS is woefully lacking in funding – and the number of volunteer firefighters has fallen dramatically over the decades.”

- There is a crisis that is slowly building, and has been for a considerable period of time.
- The reason that many stakeholders, municipal leaders, and the general public do not see “evidence” of a crisis, is the long standing tradition in both the fire and EMS services of “getting the job done”.



IMPLICATIONS OF NOT TAKING ACTION

- The implications of not taking action will be quite simple:
 - ❖ Service levels will begin to diminish.
 - ❖ Some companies and EMS agencies may fold under financial pressures.
 - ❖ Fewer and fewer most likely aging volunteer members will be trying to respond to an ever-increasing number of requests for service.

“If we lose our volunteer fire and EMS companies and volunteers, the taxpayers will face a very steep price tag.”



STRATEGIC PLAN PARTNERS

- Chester County Fire Chiefs Association
- Chester County EMS Council, Inc.
- Chester County Fire Police Association
- Chester County Municipal Managers Consortium
- Chester County Association of Township Officials



LEGISLATIVE ACTION

- Legislature has prepared multiple reports on this issue:
 - ❖ SR 60 in 2004
 - ❖ HR 148 in 2005
 - ❖ SR 6 in 2018
- Some recommendations found in SR 60 are made again in SR 6.
- Legislative action is needed for key recommendations to be implemented.
- The time to act is now!



LEGISLATIVE ACTION

➤ Legislative action needed:

- ❖ To expand the permissible role of county government in the delivery of fire and EMS services.
- ❖ To address the EMS issues that were identified in SR 6.
- ❖ To get House Bill 1786, which would forgive up to \$16,000.00 in student loan debt for qualifying volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel, passed and enacted into law.
- ❖ To be the pilot for a County-wide requirement that all new one- and two-family dwellings be equipped with a residential automatic fire suppression (sprinkler) system.



LEGISLATIVE ACTION

- Legislative action needed:
 - ❖ To implement Recommendation 6 of SR 6: “Simplify Process to Regionalize Fire & EMS Services”.
 - ❖ Allow the ability to enact assessments or develop other sources of revenue to fund fire and EMS operations.
- Further discussions should be commenced regarding the feasibility and potential benefits to seeking the introduction of legislation that would allow the creation of Regional Public Safety Authorities.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

- It will be imperative that all stakeholders speak with a unified voice when lobbying local legislators to introduce or support enabling legislation that will be necessary for multiple recommendations to be implemented.

MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT

- The governing bodies of ALL Chester County's municipalities MUST become engaged in the provision of fire and EMS services to their respective municipalities. By law it is ultimately their responsibility to determine the level of risk and the level of emergency services protection for their communities.
- Need to develop a compelling education program including videos and in-person workshops to educate local officials, governing bodies, and citizens on the operations of the fire and EMS services, the challenges they are facing, and the need for increased funding.



MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT

- The Chief of every fire and EMS agency in Chester County should provide regular briefings and reports.
- The Manager/Administrator and/or governing body of each municipality should take an active role in setting appropriate goals and a vision for the fire and EMS providers that serve them.
- Offering building tours and ride-a-longs to the members of their local governing bodies and other municipal officials to further familiarize them with fire and EMS operations.



OPERATIONS

- **Standardized responses for various types of incidents, and standardized run cards county-wide.**
- **Development of a county-wide procedure of dispatching the closest available station(s) with necessary apparatus/resources and qualified personnel as determined by automatic vehicle location (AVL) or GPS, rather than permitting the selection of specific companies which may have longer travel distance and response times.**



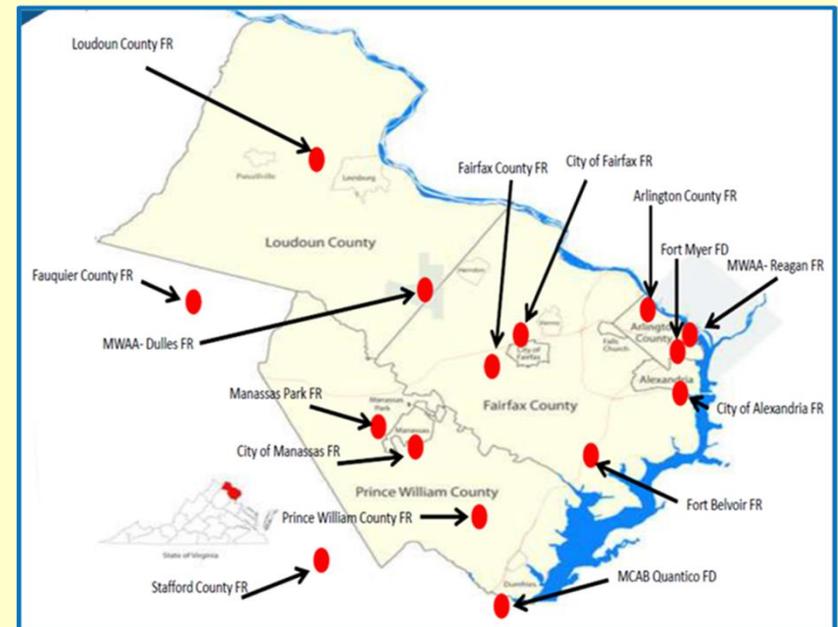
OPERATIONS

- Deploy several daytime quick response units; fire apparatus staffed with an officer and three firefighters.
- Long term, work toward having Chester County begin to hire full-time career firefighters to be assigned to fire stations throughout Chester County that wish to utilize them.
- Encourage fire companies to utilize volunteer personnel to provide in-station staffing, whenever possible, but primarily between 6:00 PM and 6:00 AM daily, and all-day on the weekends.



OPERATIONS

- Begin development of a comprehensive county-wide Standard Operational Procedures/Guidelines (SOP/SOG) manual utilizing existing SOPs/SOGs as a starting point.
- Consider the development of a county-wide operational manual based upon the Northern Virginia Regional Fire Services manuals.



OPERATIONS

- Establish fire and EMS demand zones throughout the County, based upon the urban, suburban, and rural components of the diverse emergency service coverage area.
- Develop a Standard of Response Cover based upon the recommendations contained in NFPA 1720 for fire response.
- Develop a Standard of Cover (SOC) based upon the recommendations contained in NFPA 1710 and/or the CAAS standards for EMS responses.
- SOC adopted should attempt to have benchmark achievement rates of 90% for urban and suburban areas and 80% for rural and remote areas.



OPERATIONS

- Explore the feasibility of developing a pilot program to implement a County based Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) response.
- Once enabling legislation is adopted explore the feasibility of, and interest in, the establishment of a county-wide EMS system.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- Wide range of possibilities, large and small.
- Encourage borough and township employees to perform “dual roles”.
- Give priority attention for hiring to selected borough and township positions, such as public works, to personnel who are currently serving as active volunteer firefighters.
- Consider the development of a program that would provide active responders with the opportunity to obtain health insurance.



RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- The municipality could pay a graduated percentage of this program based upon participation levels and a minimum number of hours of training is completed.

PERCENTAGE OF TRAINING AND INCIDENT RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE OF HEALTH CARE EXPENSE PAID BY THE TOWN
90% or greater participation	50%
70% - 89% participation	40%
50% – 69% participation	30%
33% – 49% participation	25%
25% - 33% participation	Eligible to enroll at the employee's cost
Under 25% participation	Not eligible to enroll

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- Hire a full-time volunteer Recruitment and Retention Coordinator to coordinate and organize efforts throughout the County.
- Develop a “Welcome Wagon” program that can be used county-wide by the fire and EMS providers to welcome new residents to their area and provide information on, and recruiting information for, the volunteer fire and EMS delivery system.



APPARATUS AND EQUIPMENT

- Work collaboratively to attempt to obtain funding to assist with the installation of automatic fire alarm and carbon monoxide detection systems in all fire and EMS stations where personnel may sleep.
 - ❖ Vehicle exhaust systems
 - ❖ Emergency backup generators
- Develop several vendor contracts for County-wide inspection and testing services for the all the fire companies and EMS agencies for the apparatus components and equipment.
- Explore the feasibility of advertising a County-wide bid specification annually, for units such as engines, rescue engines, ambulances, and command vehicles where the economy often provided by purchasing multiple very similar units can result in significant cost savings.



APPARATUS AND EQUIPMENT

- The overall size of the fire apparatus and vehicle fleet in Chester County, particularly high cost specialty vehicles such as aerial ladders and rescues, should be right-sized to make it appropriate for the community, as well as, provide increased efficiency in operations.

	CHESTER COUNTY, PA	LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA	PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY, VA	ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, MD
POPULATION	522,000	413,000	470,000	579,000
APPARATUS TYPE				
LADDERS/TRUCKS	23	12	6	9
TANKERS	25	14	6	6
RESCUES	29	6	6	9



TRAINING

- Develop minimum training standards for all “active” members of Chester County fire companies who have PPE and respond to emergencies.
- Formalize the requirements for remaining an active “qualified” Firefighter, EMS care provider, or Fire Police Officer of the company, including response percentages and training requirements.
- Implement a policy regarding the minimum number of weekly drills/training sessions/hours each member must participate in to remain an active member permitted to respond to emergency incidents.



TRAINING

- **Develop a policy for minimum officer training and certification requirements that personnel should possess to be recognized as a fire officer County-wide.**
 - ❖ **Lieutenant and Captain – Fire Instructor I, Fire Officer I, ICS-300, and Managing Company Tactical Operations (or similar tactics class)**
 - ❖ **Chief Officer – Fire Instructor II, Fire Officer II, ICS-400, and Incident Safety Officer**

FUNDING

- Increased funding levels will be critical to the continued success of every fire and EMS organization.
- Explore the feasibility of developing and implementing more equitable funding formulas to better balance overall funding between municipalities.
 - ❖ Assessed value, population, and call volume.
 - ❖ Per capita cost.
- Grant opportunities.
- Tax levies and assessments.
- Public/private partnerships.



REGIONALIZATION

- Identify potential partners, and then attempt to enter in discussions on more regional approaches, including shared services, to the provision of fire and EMS services.
- The potential formation of any regional fire and/or EMS delivery system in Chester County, even eventually a possible county-wide configuration, should allow the individual fire companies and EMS agencies to maintain their own unique identities as part of the overall system.

REGIONALIZATION

- Once permitted by legislation, begin the development of a longer-range strategic plan that provides for the County to assume a greater role in the provision of fire and emergency medical services such as implementation of a County-wide EMS system and hiring career firefighters to staff the stations of fire companies that need and request them.
- Working collaboratively form a strategic planning task force to bring forth and implement recommendations that have been made throughout this report including elements of Senate Resolution 60 from 2004 and Senate Resolution 6 from 2018.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- There is no “right” amount of fire protection or EMS delivery. It is a constantly changing level based upon the expressed needs of the community.
- Determining the appropriate level of service also involves deciding upon the communities’ fiscal ability, and willingness to pay for the desired level of service.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- The lack of municipal engagement and involvement, regardless of how small the municipality is, is simply unacceptable.
- In part, the catalyst for the MRI study team's recommendations throughout this report are that the County should gradually become the lead agency for the provision of fire and EMS services in Chester County.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- It is the MRI study team's belief that at the present time, it is ultimately each municipality's responsibility to provide for, and ADEQUATELY fund the emergency services that protect its residents.
- Fundraising is a time-consuming effort that in our opinion, does not make effective use of the valuable time of volunteer personnel.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- The continuing trend of declining volunteerism will create simultaneous challenges that will stretch the provision of emergency services in many communities even farther. This will of necessity require a serious and objective look at the benefits that can be realized by consolidations or mergers of companies that are struggling into a new, stronger organization.
- Looking ahead, planned growth of the fire and EMS delivery system throughout Chester County is essential to provide a consistent service level to the diverse communities that make up the County, while keeping pace with increased demands for service caused by continued development.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- Changes to the way fire and EMS services are delivered in Chester County is inevitable.
- Most of the stakeholders agree that the need for a different model is quickly approaching.
- It is our sincere hope that this report and the accompanying strategic plan and “toolbox” will be used as a road map for improving the delivery of fire and EMS services throughout Chester County.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The citizens of Chester County should feel confident that the fire and EMS organizations that proudly and faithfully serve the county are professional public safety organizations that are continuing to try their best to provide a high quality level of service to the community 24/7/365.

We continue to be impressed with the dedication and commitment of the members of the Chester County fire and EMS services.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- We believe Chester County can be a model for the success of the carefully planned out transition of multiple organizations into a more unified, possibly county-wide, delivery system; from being fully volunteer to combination, designed to improve the levels of service available, and do so both effectively and economically.
- We believe it has the potential to become a national model for not only developing that type of system but doing so in the northeast.



STRATEGIC PLAN

- Should be viewed as a roadmap for the future direction of the fire and rescue services over the next decade.
- Includes a SWOT analysis.
- Identifies task groups, timelines, critical tasks, and potential barriers to implementation.
- Living document that needs to be evaluated in an ongoing manner and updated as necessary.



STRATEGIC PLAN

<p>Recommendation IV-2</p>	<p>The Chester County Commissioners working collaboratively with the Chester County Fire Chiefs Association, Chester County EMS Council, Inc., the Chester County Fire Police Association, the Chester County Municipal Managers Consortium, and the Chester County Association of Township Officials should work with members of the Chester County legislative delegation to introduce and enact legislation as recommended in SR 6 and which will serve to expand the permissible role of County Government in the delivery of fire and EMS services.</p>
<p>Task Group(s)</p>	<p>Legislative; Municipal Liaison</p>
<p>Timeline</p>	<p>2021-2022 Legislative session (optimistic) 2023-2024 Legislative session (realistic)</p>
<p>Potential Barriers to Implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of engagement on the municipal level ➤ Inability to develop stakeholder consensus ➤ Inconsistent messaging ➤ Shifting legislative priorities ➤ Lack of legislative action ➤ Concern relative to enhancing the County role in the delivery of emergency services ➤ Concern relative to a loss of local control
<p>Critical Tasks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Joint meetings to identify action items and priorities ➤ Buy-in of all stakeholders ➤ Educating and obtaining support from the local legislative delegation ➤ Internal communication (clear and frequent) ➤ Delivering a consistent message ➤ Management of Change



TIMELINE

**Operational
Changes
1 to 3 Years**

**Organizational
Changes
5 to 10 Years**



**Legislative
Changes
2 to 4 Years**

**County-
Centric
Delivery
System
10 to 15 Years**



THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

- Making the transition in service delivery from “old” Chester County to “new” Chester County.
- Transitioning from a volunteer system to a more combination one.
- Begin long-range planning for the integration of independent entities into regional, and eventually a singular, more County-centric and cohesive organization.
- Steadily increasing requests for service in a rapidly growing community.
- Long-term development of the consolidated service delivery system, its Firefighters, Paramedics and EMTs.



FINAL THOUGHTS

- Each of the 139 recommendations should be given careful consideration.
- View each recommendation as a goal.
- Approach the recommendations strategically and systematically to develop short- and long-term goals.
- Recognize each accomplishment.



Thank You



MUNICIPAL RESOURCES INC.

Services for Effective Government

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