



CITY OF HOBOKEN
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
DIVISION OF FIRE
ISO Class 1 Department
HEADQUARTERS
201 Jefferson Street, Hoboken, N.J. 07030



RICHARD BLOHM
CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT

PHONE (201) 420-2258
FAX (201) 420-2224

Date: April 25, 2011

To: Honorable Mayor Zimmer

From: Richard Blohm
Fire Chief

Re: Matrix Draft report

As you know there were discussions between you, me and BA Arch Liston over a period of days regarding the Matrix document. I believe the following carefully crafted strategy utilizing the Matrix report as a "roadmap" while closely monitoring that plan for the next 12 months will determine the viability of the operational restructuring of the Hoboken Fire Department.

Regarding our Fire Alarm Dispatch capabilities I believe that the consensus agreement was to select the option of incorporating a 311 system as part of their duties. While the details still need to be worked out the concept is an excellent one which will increase services provided to the residents and business owners of the community. There of course would be nominal start up costs for any software, training, etc. but those costs are far outweighed by the benefit to the community.

Despite the Matrix data to the contrary I am extremely hesitant to close a fire company and have always advocated that we need seven (7) to insure that enough apparatus will arrive in a timely manner at an emergency scene. This concern is due in large part for the potential of apparatus during an emergency response of getting delayed in traffic congestion in and around the city which is quite a common occurrence.

In our discussions it has been suggested that emergency lights and sirens clears the way for fire apparatus during an alarm even in traffic. While that simple sounding solution may be true in certain instances there are many times on many of our narrower streets that vehicular traffic in front of responding fire apparatus simply can't get out of the way because of the traffic congestion in front of them.

However if one stipulates that the Matrix document regarding response times is accurate it would appear that the closing of one Fire Company will not have a significant impact on the community. While that concern still weighs heavily on my mind I am a pragmatist and tentatively concur with that Matrix recommendation reserving the right to revisit this after closely monitoring the impact on our fire suppression capabilities that this decision may have.

So to that end I have decided that the engine company that I will close will be the one which responds out of Observer Highway. This will insure that in the event of traffic congestion in town it would only impede the progress of one Fire Company getting to the fire scene and not tie up two companies as they will respond from different locations and directions.

This decision is supported in the Matrix document which identifies that slower responses by the Fire Department occur because only one Fire Company can exit the Observer Highway Fire Station at a time causing a slower response through the community. This move will alleviate that challenge on our southern end of town.

Regarding staffing I agree with the Matrix document indicating that each Fire Company should be supervised and am pleased that your administration recognizes the need for this as well. The greatest challenge in this report is the number of firefighters suggested of being adequate for fire response. While I recognize Matrix may have some expertise in their ability to analyze a fire department I also believe that I have a sense of what the community's needs are and how the department should be shaped to meet those challenges.

Again using the Matrix document as guidance I believe a workable solution has been arrived at by all parties prioritizing the life safety of the firefighters and the residents of the community. The "roadmap" and reorganization of the fire department also reflects a significant focus on cost savings for the tax payers of the community.

The other aspects of the Matrix report identifying administrative and engineering benchmarks will always be a work in progress. However remember that the Hoboken Fire Department has achieved for the second time in a decade a Class One rating by the ISO and that is no easy task to attain.

In the end there are approximately 35 fire departments across the United States that has that classification and this speaks volumes for the capabilities of the men and women of the Hoboken Fire Department.

It is my sincere hope that you will fill the suggested vacancies in the Matrix report as soon as possible and I look forward to working with you and your administration regarding the other aspects of the report.

Respectfully,

Richard Blohm
Fire Chief