

XI. EMERGENCY SERVICES

The City of Cortland has paid Police and Fire Departments. In addition to its career firefighters, the City of Cortland also has volunteers. The City does not contract for ambulance services. There are significant financial challenges in covering the cost of these departments, including their needed programs and equipment. In addition, the facilities for both departments are inadequate. The cost projections for new municipal buildings that would address both the Police and Fire Departments' space needs, and those of City Hall, is upwards of \$8M.

Cortland County, the City of Cortland, the Town of Cortlandville, and local police and fire departments are well aware of the burdens of average taxpayers in economically distressed counties such as Cortland County. There have been discussions of consolidation among fire and police departments. It is highly likely that given the financial status of these communities, and the need to still protect its citizens, that consolidation of the fire department is probable. It is also likely that the Cortland Police Department will eventually provide coverage outside of the City and/or partner with the County Sheriff's Department more than it does presently. Additional issues related to each department are detailed below.



POLICE DEPARTMENT

The City of Cortland's Police Department (CPD) is certified for 43 officers, a level it has been at for many years. Contracted time off, injuries, and disability typically result in an active roster of less than 43 officers at any given time. The Police Department is mainly housed in the basement of City Hall, except for their records, which are located on the second floor. The City's Police Department operates in cramped quarters. A space utilization was completed for City Hall and the main Fire Station in 2003 and 2004 by C&S Engineers and Ashley McGraw Architects. The most significant shortcomings of the Police Department facilities, as reported, and that still exist, are noted below:

- The method of securing prisoners is archaic and exposes the City to potential liability issues.
- The female officers' locker room is inadequate and not equivalent to the space afforded for male officers.



- The holding cells do not meet industry standards and the City has been cited for that violation.
- With the expansion of services provided by the department, the City has a number of specialists who have greater space needs than in the past. For example, an expanded detective unit.
- The location of the Records unit on a different floor is not an efficient use of staff time when it comes to filing and retrieval.
- The lunchroom serves as the department's only conference room.

The CPD does a good job in seeking alternative funding sources to supplement its budget. It also works with other entities to reduce costs and duplications in service. It has partnered with the County Sheriff on a number of grants and cost saving measures. A few examples include a consolidated dispatch program and a cooperative records keeping system. It has worked with the Cortland Youth Bureau on grants that increase the police presence in different areas of the City, such as the South End Neighborhood.

The City works closely with the Cortland School District in an attempt to avert crime before it happens. The School Resource Officer, and other police outreach, are well received in the community. The School and City have partnered on the cost of this officer, with the School District presently paying approximately \$80,000 for those months when school is in session. Traffic control in and around the City is also an important part of the School/Police relationship. A recently approved Secure Our Schools grant, when completed, will allow the police to monitor school buildings from within the police station.

New York State is encouraging the consolidation of municipal services where possible. Police agencies throughout the County have been discussing ways to continue to work together on cost savings, or for one department to absorb another. As one of the largest police departments in the County, and with a high-density population service area, it is likely that the City's Police Department will remain intact. It is possible that, over time, the Department may provide services to neighboring communities.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The City of Cortland's Fire Department (CFD) is a combined career and volunteer department. It is not a fire district, but rather a City-owned department. Currently there are 35 paid firefighters and approximately 45 active volunteers. There are approximately 15 volunteers who are trained to do interior firefighting. Twenty-five years ago, there were 46 career fighters and 100 volunteers. To reduce costs, the City has systematically reduced the number of paid firefighters over the years. The City requires that all firefighters must also be certified code officers to assist with multi-unit and building code fire inspections.



Mandates (training and equipment) for both paid and volunteer members, and increases in salaries and benefits have been significant forces in budget increases. The cost of fire vehicles has also risen substantially in recent years (for example, a new ladder truck can cost up to \$1M).

Citing the same space utilization studies by C & S Engineers and Ashley McGraw Architects noted above, the CFD's historic main fire station is woefully inadequate. Some of the more glaring building deficiencies noted in the report are as follows:

- The main fire station was built in 1914 and is individually listed as a historic structure on the local, State, and National Registers of Historic Places. Its construction does not accommodate the needs of modern firefighting. Any alterations to the building will need to be reviewed by the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.
- The apparatus bays are too narrow and not deep enough resulting in accidents and operational difficulties.
- Because of the space restriction imposed by the current main fire station, the City cannot purchase vehicles with standard widths; therefore, increasing the costs associated with made-to-order vehicles.
- The bunkroom and toilet/shower facilities do not meet current standards, and do not address the fact that there are female firefighters.
- The building is not handicap accessible, except for the apparatus floor.

Another issue facing the CFD is that firefighting volunteerism is down across the State. All local departments in Cortland County provide mutual aide, which means that they are ready to provide services to a neighboring municipality when called upon. Typically there is a shortage of volunteers during the daytime when most people are working. As a career department, the City is often the first responder. This increases the number of calls the Department responds to, many times outside the City's boundaries. The City also responds to a number of calls from SUNY Cortland. By law, the College is not required to provide additional funding for fire service calls.

There have been ongoing discussions to consolidate fire departments such as the City, Village/Town of Homer, and Town of Cortlandville.

AMBULANCE

The City of Cortland is covered by TLC for ambulance services but has opted not to execute a contract for ambulance services. Therefore, individuals needing an ambulance pay a fee for services and are billed directly. The City needs to ensure that quality medical emergency services remain available to City residents.



GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

GOAL 53: Provide/contract for emergency services for its citizens so that they can live peaceably, healthfully, and safely in the community.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Assist emergency services entities in searching and applying for grant funds when opportunities become available.
- B) City Planning and Zoning Boards will consider the impact of any new development on emergency services and the potential need to expand fire and police.
- C) Ensure that all City emergency preparedness plans address risks associated with natural gas extraction processes and facilities, and that all emergency service entities are appropriately equipped and trained to deal with such risks including, but not limited to, fire, explosions, leaks, spills, and injuries.

GOAL 54: Provide emergency services in a cost effective manner while ensuring adequate and timely coverage.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Continue to fund police and fire services while incorporating cost savings measures such as sharing services/consolidation with nearby municipalities.
- B) Equip fire and police personnel with the equipment and technology to effectively do their job and to protect paid and volunteer personnel as the need arises and its budget allows.
- C) House its emergency services in adequate facilities and continue to seek funding for a new municipal buildings to address its space needs.
- D) Work toward consolidation and/or reorganization of the police and fire departments in order to ensure the highest level of services are delivered in the most cost effective manner.
- E) Investigate creative and cost-effective solutions to providing services, such as auxiliary police for traffic control or special events.



GOAL 55: Ensure that all municipal buildings have the proper security equipment and procedures, to ensure that employees, and elected and appointed personnel are adequately protected.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Continue to install up-to-date security equipment in municipal buildings as needed and as affordable.

GOAL 56: Ensure adequate ambulance services for City residents.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Facilitate public outreach so that the citizens and property owners of the City are aware of ambulance services.

