

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR  
**Responsible**  
 GOVERNMENT

Pottstown's best bargain: fire protection

The city of Scranton was recently ordered by a state court to increase the pay of its firemen every six months from November 2008 through July 2014, totaling 44 percent over the six-year period. The firemen had been granted the pay increases, and generous health insurance benefits, by an arbitrator.

The city, which has been financially distressed under state Act 47 since 1992, had unsuccessfully appealed the arbitrator's award.

Hamstrung by state law and union rules, Scranton actually pays more for fire protection than it does for police.

While other Pennsylvania cities don't pay as much as Scranton, virtually all of them pay far more for fire protection, as a percentage of total public safety expenses, than Pottstown.

That's because Pottstown is protected by four independent volunteer fire companies: Goodwill, Phillies, Empire, and North End.

Each company has three well-trained,

paid drivers who work 24-hour shifts, assuring that four drivers are always on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

But the drivers are not employees of Pottstown Borough. They work for their fire company. In turn, the borough employs a full-time fire chief and donates \$185,000 annually to each fire company.

It's a terrific bargain for Pottstown taxpayers. A glance at the chart below tells the tale. In most Pennsylvania cities, fire protection costs anywhere from half to two-thirds of the cost of police protection.

In Pottstown, fire protection costs less than a quarter of police protection.

If Pottstown were to create one centralized department, as some have suggested, and hire the current paid drivers as borough employees, costs would skyrocket.

The current flexible system would be replaced by one hamstrung by union rules, grievances, and arbitrators.

Our current system works superbly.



Commentary by  
 Thomas Hylton

**Summary**

- In most cities, firemen are unionized municipal employees.
- Thanks to its four independent volunteer fire companies, Pottstown enjoys outstanding fire and emergency services at far less cost than similar municipalities.

Cost of fire protection in relation to cost of police protection, 2010*	
City	Fire budget as percentage of police budget
Scranton	104%
Bethlehem	64%
Reading	60%
York	56%
Harrisburg	52%
Lancaster	48%
Pottstown	23%



Goodwill Fire Co., above, is one of Pottstown's four independent volunteer fire companies. Photo by Tom Kelly III.

\*Figure for Allentown not available

