

Draft Report

# Report on Emergency Services

## Village of Cold Spring

For the Government, Infrastructure and Public Services (GIPS) Working Group of the Village of Cold Spring Comprehensive Plan/Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) Special Board

As updated December 22, 2010

(The Village of Cold Spring has received New York State Hudson River Greenway and New York State Department of State grants.)

# Emergency Services in Cold Spring

## Executive Summary

This report provides an inventory of emergency services in the Village of Cold Spring and identifies opportunities with respect to each service. This report also addresses recent developments and opportunities concerning consolidation of and sharing of services.

There are three core emergency services provided in the Village:

- Police: the Cold Spring Police Department ensures community safety, protects people and property, and enforces the law.
- Fire protection: the Cold Spring Fire Company provides fire safety and rescue services, and secondary emergency service duties.
- Emergency medical service: the Philipstown Volunteer Ambulance Company provides ambulances and paramedics to deal with medical emergencies.

Also, the Village Justice Court, while not itself an “emergency service,” plays a key role in the facilitation of police services, enforcing criminal, traffic and parking laws. Another emergency service is the provision of shelter during weather and disasters.

## 1. Cold Spring Police Department (CSPD)

The CSPD is a professional police force that provides 24-hour protection for the Village. In 2008-09, the Village spent \$320,000 to staff and equip the CSPD, which represents about 18% of the Village’s appropriations for the year. For 2009-10, the Village has budgeted about \$324,000 to staff and equip the CSPD, which again represents about 18% of the Village budget. The Department’s website is <http://coldspringpolice.us/>.

The Village is generally a very safe place. For example, in November 2009, the CSPD responded to 61 calls for service, none of which involved violent crime. In that month, the CSPD made six arrests, most of which involved moving violations. One of the key functions of the CSPD is ensuring traffic safety. In November 2009, for example, the CSPD issued 30 tickets for moving violations and issued 14 parking tickets. There have been a number of burglaries in recent years and an occasional robbery, but these are rare occurrences.



## **Coverage**

The CSPD's main coverage area is within the Village limits. Typically there is one officer on duty at any given time, although more officers may be placed on duty during special events such as parades and waterfront concerts. The CSPD also provides civilian crossing guards for Haldane and employs a parking enforcement officer who patrols on weekends.

All CSPD dispatching is done through Putnam County 911 and the Putnam County Sheriff's Department.<sup>1</sup> In addition to Village coverage, the CSPD may respond to calls in Philipstown outside the Village limits to assist other law enforcement personnel (*e.g.*, the Sheriff's Department and State Police) and to protect Village property outside the Village. Some in the Village have expressed concern about the CSPD officer on duty being called away from village, because the village is then unprotected. Because no data is available on the frequency of call-aways, it would be difficult to quantify the benefit of CSPD coverage to Philipstown.

The CSPD has informal mutual aid agreements with the State Police, the Putnam County Sheriff's Department (PCSD) and the MTA/Metro North Police for backup; there is no reimbursement for mutual aid. Typically the PCSD has one car on duty at all times in Philipstown, and an additional car patrolling the western side of Putnam County. The PCSD also provides — although not on a regular basis — a "Putnam County Stop DWI" car, which has technology that allows police to tell whether the driver of a particular car is operating his or her vehicle with a suspended or revoked license or registration. The Village can request extra PCSD coverage for special events, such as parades and fireworks events. The CSPD also has a written agreement with the PCSD for investigation of violent crime and drug offenses through PCSD's Bureau of Criminal Investigation. For example, in the Fall of 2009, the CSPD worked with the Bureau to solve a robbery that occurred in the Village.

## **Staffing**

The CSPD currently employs 13 part-time officers, all of whom have prior law enforcement experience. Each officer typically works six eight-hour shifts each month. Officers also staff sessions of the Village Justice Court. One officer is the Officer-in-Charge, who in addition to policing, handles administrative duties such as scheduling and preparing a monthly report for the Village Board. In order to hire a full-time officer, the Village would have to comply with civil service rules in the hiring process. The CSPD's written contract with the Village expired in 2008. The officers of the CSPD recently formed a union, the Village of Cold Spring Police Benevolent Association.

---

<sup>1</sup> In 2008, the CSPD received 372 calls from the Putnam County computer-aided dispatch service.

## **Facilities/Equipment**

The CSPD offices occupy the second floor of the Village Hall on Main Street. The offices contain a waiting area, three computer work stations and a holding area. The office also has a state computer that allows officers to access criminal histories. Each service call is logged and categorized by type, *e.g.*, noise complaint, property damage, speeding vehicle. The Officer-in-Charge compiles a monthly report for the Village Board that tabulates types of service calls, arrests, and traffic/parking tickets issued.

The CSPD maintains three patrol cars that are stored at the Village garage when not on patrol or parked outside the Village Hall. Each car is equipped with a laptop computer. Through a state system, officers write e-tickets, which facilitates processing and reduces mistakes. Cars also contain a shotgun in compliance with State law. Officers provide their own pistols, and the Village provides holsters and ammunition, as well as a uniform allowance of \$475/year for each officer. The Village also makes a taser available to the officers, and they are each trained in the use of these devices, which provide audio and video. A dog cage is kept at the Village garage. The County employs an animal control officer, but CSPD officers may be called upon to deal with wild or rabid animals.

## **Training**

The State and County provide a variety of training programs for the officers. Each officer has firearms instruction twice per year, and officers also receive training in taser use, use of force, criminal procedure, radar use, DWI, and in techniques for dealing with emotionally disturbed persons.

## **Opportunities**

1. *Community policing.* In the past, CSPD officers have generally patrolled in their vehicles. In response to community concerns raised after burglaries of businesses and residences, the Department is working to institute more foot patrols on Main Street in an effort to establish a better relationship with merchants and the community in general. Also, the Department is developing strategies to better deal with teenagers, in particular at the waterfront area on summer evenings. Since the completion of condos at the waterfront several years ago, there has been an increase in noise complaints, largely due to teenagers who congregate there. In order to proactively deal with this issue, the CSPD is planning to implement a community policing program. Community policing is, generally speaking, a policing strategy and philosophy based on the notion that community interaction and support can help control crime and reduce fear, with community members helping to identify suspects, detain vandals and bring problems to the attention of police. Under this program, a specific officer would be charged with developing a relationship with teenagers and perhaps interacting with the Haldane School. All officers would continue to be encouraged to communicate with teenagers.

2. *Equipment and physical facility improvements.* The Department's computers, laptops and radios are outdated and will soon need to be replaced. Also, because the offices are on the second floor of the Village Hall, it is difficult to process arrests because suspects must be taken up a long set of stairs and there is no holding cell. Further, processing juveniles raises privacy

issues due to the cramped conditions. Additionally, the current location requires on-duty cars to be temporarily parked on Main Street, which takes up valuable parking space in the middle of Cold Spring's business district. Ideally, the police station would be ADA compliant, at street level, and would have a reception area with safety glass, as well as:

- A records room and separate evidence room.
- Restroom facilities for arrested persons.
- Staff dressing rooms (male and female).
- A garage or adequate parking to accommodate squad cars and vehicles being processed for evidence.
- A meeting/training room large enough for officers to meet and conduct trainings and to host meetings with other police departments/agencies.
- A break area separate from the work area.
- A soft interview room that allows for interviews of children in a setting that provides for interaction.

3. *Shared services/facilities.* The Village should explore co-location of the Department with other emergency services to reduce costs. In particular, if the Cold Spring Fire Company relocates to another site such as Butterfield, that site may enable shared space for equipment rooms, vehicle storage, etc.

4. *Parking enforcement.* CSPD officers are generally charged with parking enforcement and the Village employs a part-time parking enforcement officer, who works Friday-Sunday. Village residents have sometimes had issues with cars parked in certain areas, but the public should recognize that the Village cannot enforce parking laws selectively. In connection with revamping its overall parking policy, the Village should ensure that laws are enforced consistently.

5. *Neighborhood watch.* The Village and/or residents may also wish to explore creation of a neighborhood watch, which, generally speaking, is an organized group of citizens devoted to crime and vandalism prevention within a neighborhood. When suspecting criminal activities, members are encouraged not to intervene but to contact authorities. Neighborhood watch organizations often post signs in prominent areas. If a neighborhood watch were to be created in Cold Spring, however, residents should carefully consider whether such signs would be appropriate within the Village.



## **2. Cold Spring Fire Company**

The Cold Spring Fire Company (the Company) is a volunteer fire department that was established in 1896 and incorporated in 1901. The Company's charter dictates that the Village provide a suitable building and that the Company provide fire protection to the Village. Today, the Company provides fire protection and rescue services to approximately 3,500 people living in Cold Spring, Nelsonville and parts of Philipstown. The Company operates from a firehouse on Main Street that is owned and maintained by the Village, and also utilizes a substation in Nelsonville, primarily for storage. In 2009, the Company answered 115 emergency calls (the same number as the North Highlands Fire Department). The Company's website is <http://coldspringfd.org/>.



The Company is a department of the Village, and its total operating budget for 2009 was \$141,375. For comparison, the budgets of the three other fire companies in Philipstown are as follows: Garrison--approximately \$750,000; North Highlands--approximately \$300,000; and Continental Village--approximately \$750,000. The Village contributes about \$29,000 per year towards the Company's operational costs (including heating), and funds the Firemen's Service Award program (in 2008-09, the Village contributed \$75,000 towards the program; in 2009-10, \$56,000 is budgeted for the program). According to the 2008-09 Village budget, \$93,000 was spent on fire-related items,

including \$40,000 for Philipstown (presumably representing the Town's contribution, which goes to the Company) and \$3,700 for the fire inspector (although the fire inspector is not a part of the Fire Company). For 2009-10, \$116,000 is budgeted for fire-related items, including the \$40,000 for Philipstown, a \$19,000 energy grant, and \$3,700 for the fire inspector. The Company owns all of its own firefighting equipment, including the fire trucks, and raises funds to purchase equipment through fundraising events and donations from members of the community. The Company receives, pursuant to Village contracts with those municipalities, approximately \$40,000 per year for providing parts of Philipstown with fire service, and approximately \$34,000 per year for providing Nelsonville with fire service. Residents of the Village do not see a line item on their tax bill for fire protection, unlike other communities in Putnam County.

Each summer, in conjunction with the Town of Philipstown Recreation Department, the Company runs a Junior Firefighter Academy for elementary school and middle school students.

### **Coverage Area**

The Company's service area includes the Village of Cold Spring, the Village of Nelsonville, the Route 9D corridor north of the Village to the county line, the Route 9D corridor south of the Village to Indian Brook Road, and the Route 301 corridor east of Nelsonville to Lane Gate Road. Calls from outside the Village make up approximately one third of all calls. The contract with Nelsonville was established in 2002 when the Nelsonville Fire Department disbanded. Nelsonville's contractual payment is calculated based on assessed value, but because Nelsonville



previously had paid its own company a flat rate (which rate was reflected in the contract), the rate Nelsonville has paid the Village has been only gradually increasing from an artificially low baseline.

The Company is part of county and state mutual aid agreements whereby it can request assistance from other fire departments and other departments can request assistance from the Company. Because there are only dry fire hydrants outside the Village, which draw water from streams, ponds and pools, when the Company answers calls outside the village, it typically must request help. Because, as noted in Philipstown Build-Out Study, growth is anticipated in other parts of Philipstown more than in the Village, there is likely to be an increased need for fire protection in Company coverage areas outside the village.



The 2009 Christmas Eve house fire on the Cold Spring/Nelsonville line illustrates the key role that the Company and mutual aid agreements play in protecting the Village. More than 100 firefighters from the Cold Spring, North Highlands, Garrison, Continental Village, Fishkill, Rombout, Hughsonville, and Beacon departments battled the fire for many hours, preventing damage to adjacent structures.

### **Staffing**

The Company has approximately 100 members on its rolls, including 30 active firefighters. Members must work or live in Philipstown. Any active member is eligible for the Firemen's Service Award, which, according to State guidelines, is payable at age 62, in an amount of up to approximately \$400/month, to firefighters who accrue the required number of credits. Whether the service award has helped recruitment and improved retention within the Company should be studied. The County provides many training courses to Company members and pays for them. Volunteer firefighters are required by State regulations to complete several hundred hours of training during their first three years.

## **Facility/Equipment**

The firehouse has been located on Main and Church Streets since 1974. The Company considers the existing firehouse to be inadequate for its needs, due to the size (5,200 square feet) and structure of the building. Because the building is not large enough to accommodate all of the Company's equipment, a truck and the marine rescue boat are stored in Nelsonville and a trailer is stored at the wastewater treatment facility on Fair Street. A standard ladder truck won't fit through the bay doors in the existing building, and customizing equipment (e.g., by lowering the ladder so that it will fit in the building) takes away from functionality elsewhere on the equipment. Moreover, the firehouse has numerous maintenance and possible safety issues.

The Company owns two multi-purpose pumper/rescue trucks, including a 2001 Smeal Pumper/tanker with a 1,000 gallon capacity and a 2009 multi-purpose Smeal Pumper/tanker with a 2,500 gallon capacity. The Company also has a boat and several other smaller vehicles, including a brush truck, a 4 x 4 Polaris, and a Chief's truck.

## **Opportunities**

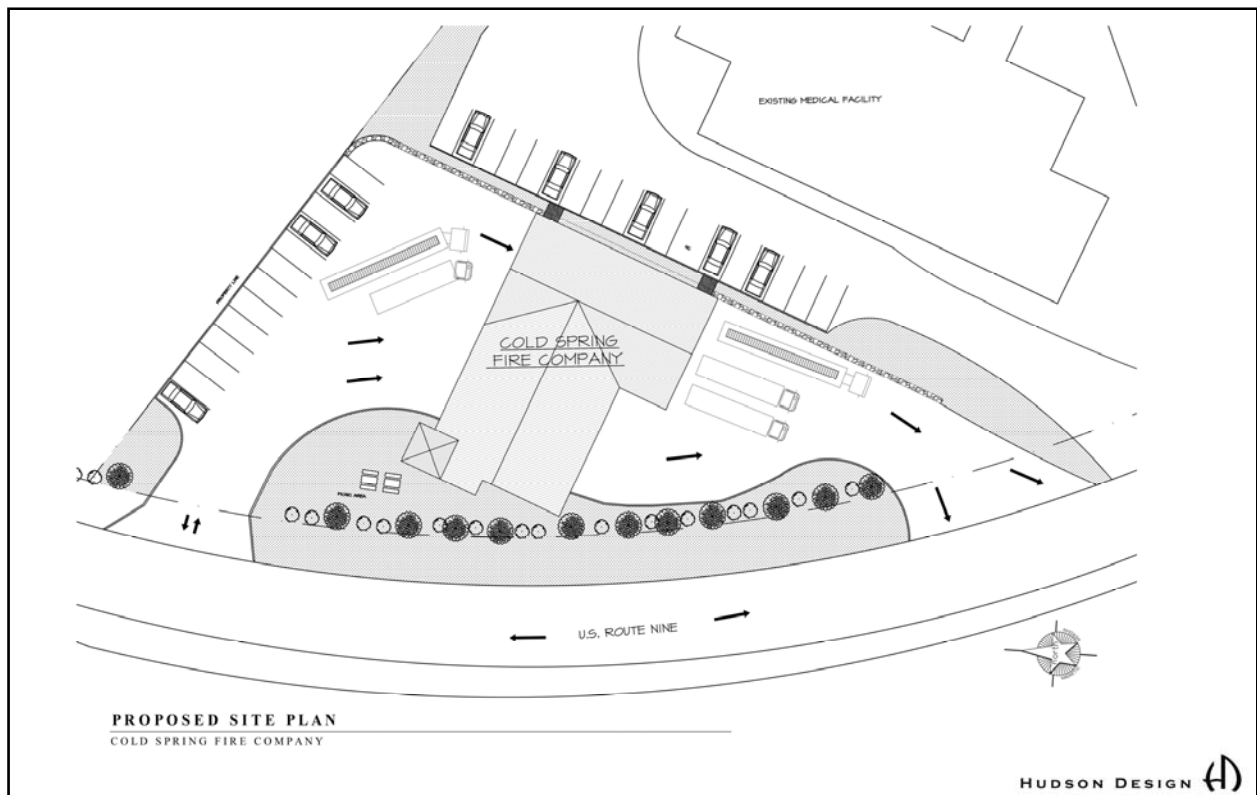
1. *New Building.* A new building, which would allow storage of all Company equipment in one location, would ideally be a LEED-certified building that meets criteria for sustainable building design and minimizes environmental impact. After evaluating a number of potential sites (see Firehouse Study), it appears that the only two practical sites for the firehouse are the current site and Butterfield. The County has been in negotiations with Paul Guillaro, President of Unicorn Contracting Corp., the owner of the Butterfield site, to purchase the former hospital building, with the intention to use the 44,000 square foot building as a firehouse, senior center, and town and county offices. In the past, Mr. Guillaro had indicated that he would be willing to make a gift to the Village of part of the remaining Butterfield property for purposes of building a new firehouse.

In most villages of similar size in New York, the Fire Company is a central fixture of the community, often at the entry into the village or in a central, visible location. This seems to be especially true with "historic" fire departments (i.e., more than 100 years old). The current location of the Cold Spring Fire Department is excellent as a visible fixture of our community but poor in terms of its size, its ability to support the most basic needs of the department, and its egress onto the street (lack of maneuverability of large vehicles). Relocating the Company to the Butterfield site would allow the Company to be located at the entry way into the village as one of the first welcoming sights to visitors and residents. A new firehouse should provide 3-4 bays for easy entry and exit of primary support vehicles, parking to support volunteer cars, and would adhere to basic guidelines for the construction and support of modern fire department facilities.

Because construction of a new firehouse would likely cost several million dollars, the Village has considered applying for funding from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and it is also possible that the Village could issue a bond. In 2009, James Copeland of Hudson Design in Garrison (and President of the Garrison Fire Company) provided pro bono to the Village conceptual drawings of a new firehouse on the Butterfield Hospital site. The concept involves a drive-through design that would comply with State Department of Transportation guidelines that



prohibit trucks from backing up on state roads such as Route 9D. Below are a conceptual drawing and site plan for a new firehouse at the Butterfield site, courtesy of Hudson Design:



IMAGES COURTESY OF JAMES COPELAND, HUDSON DESIGN

It is important to recognize that these renderings are simply conceptual and that any new firehouse built at the Butterfield site — or elsewhere — must take into account infrastructural, environmental, and aesthetic considerations.

2. *Creation of a fire district.* Philipstown's four fire companies to some extent duplicate services, and the manner in which the Cold Spring Fire Company is funded means that residents of various areas do not necessarily pay the same rates for fire protection. Currently, the Village must negotiate with Nelsonville and Philipstown regarding rates and contributions to the firemen's service award. One way to increase efficiency and make funding more equitable would be to create a fire district; the current Company service area could become a fire district, or the Philipstown's four fire companies could be combined into a single district.

A fire district is a public corporation established for the purpose of providing fire protection and responding to certain other emergencies. Generally, fire district taxes are levied by the county and collected by the town or towns where the district exists. A fire district is almost a completely autonomous political entity; it typically has its own elected governing body of commissioners, its own administrative officers, and it must observe its own expenditure limitations. (In rare cases fire commissioners are appointed, but this means the municipality would retain the obligation and liability for fire protection.) Towns and villages may establish joint town-village fire districts.

A town board may establish a fire district on its own motion or upon receipt of a petition from owners of at least 50 percent of the resident-owned taxable assessed valuation in the proposed district. Whichever method is used, the town board must hold a public hearing and determine that all properties in the proposed district will benefit, all properties that will benefit have been included, and the creation of the district is in the public interest. If the town board decides to establish a district and proposes to finance an expenditure for the district by the issuance of obligations, it must request approval from the State Comptroller, who must first determine that the public interest will be served by the creation of the district and that the cost of the district will not be an undue burden on property in the district. If such approval is not required, a certified copy of the notice of hearing must be filed with the State Comptroller. After a fire district has been established, the town board appoints the first temporary board of five fire commissioners and the first fire district treasurer. At the first election, assuming the municipality has opted to not appoint the commissioners, five commissioners are elected for staggered terms of one to five years so that one term expires each year. After establishment and initial appointments by the town board, the fire district becomes virtually autonomous from the town in its day-to-day operations. The powers granted to a fire district board are extremely specific and narrowly limited.

The Company voted in 2010 against becoming a separate fire district serving all areas currently covered by it. The Town Board has appointed a panel to study the feasibility of a joint fire district for all four fire companies in the Town. It is possible that the matter might be put before the public for a vote in 2011 or 2012. If the Company converted into a fire district, residents would see a fire tax on their tax bill, but Village appropriations would – in theory – go down as the Village would no longer directly fund fire services. Under a fire district, costs for a new building and new equipment would be borne via taxes by all residents of the fire district (which may mean all residents of Philipstown), but, of course, would have to be approved by them.

State legislation is opening doors to consolidation, and Philipstown, in seeking a Local Government Efficiency grant, has engaged the leaders of the Company, the Philipstown Volunteer Ambulance Company, and other emergency service providers within the Town -- the four fire companies and two ambulance companies have a combined budget of more than \$2 million per year. Consolidation of the ambulance companies presents a special challenge, because third party billings (currently several hundred thousand dollars per year) are not permitted for consolidated districts. Consolidation of companies in the Town into a fire district would likely produce savings on insurance, administrative costs and purchasing of equipment. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that each fire and ambulance company plays a key role in the life of the community and that it is important to many in the community to preserve the identity (and volunteer status) of each company. Additionally, the impact of consolidation on emergency service responsiveness needs to be studied. That said, it might be possible to create a Town fire district and preserve each of the four existing fire companies as semi-autonomous stations within that district, similar to what East Fishkill has done.

3. *Upgrading equipment.* The engines and trucks of the Company are older than most equipment available to peer group village departments. The Company aims to replace a piece of equipment every 10 years, and each piece can cost half a million to a million dollars. The Company has determined that a ladder truck is an essential piece of equipment for providing fire protection within the village because of the school, the strip mall, and the fact that there are more than five buildings over three stories. Main Street is the biggest fire hazard in the village because of building construction and density, and if a fire there isn't stopped immediately it will spread. Ground ladders for rescue don't reach the top floors and are dangerous because of the potential for arcing from the village's outdated overhead wiring. The closest ladder trucks are located Beacon, Fishkill, Peekskill, and Carmel. There is nothing within Philipstown and it is unlikely that another district within the town would share the cost, since the Village of Cold Spring is the only area with building density that would benefit from a ladder truck. Also, the Company does not own a dedicated tanker truck, so when one is needed it requests assistance from another Company (the Company's multi-purpose trucks are capable of dry hydrant suction, useful for areas outside the village).

4. *Fire Safety.* The recent Nelsonville fire highlights the importance of educating the public about fire safety. Response to the Nelsonville fire was hampered by the lack of water volume in hydrants in the upper village. As a long-term solution, the Village should explore the possibility of rebuilding the 150-year old water system, lining pipes to improve flow, and installing additional dry hydrants tied to the Hudson River. Also, because a fire on Main Street could be catastrophic for the Village, the Village should work with residents and property owners to ensure that buildings are compliant with the New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code, consider requiring sprinkler systems on the third floor, and may also wish to explore the possibility of putting utility wires underground, since these impede firefighting. Further, the Village should consider encouraging the Village Building Inspector to work with the Fire Company regarding building and fire safety regulations, and possibly have the Fire Chief review building permits.

5. *Recruiting.* Fire Department members are volunteer only. Recruiting is sometimes difficult due to lack of adequate facilities (i.e., appearance of the department), and generally because housing in the Village and surrounding areas has become more expensive. The Company and

the Village should consider whether it would be appropriate to consider other recruitment initiatives and to create other incentives for volunteers to locate in or near the Village.

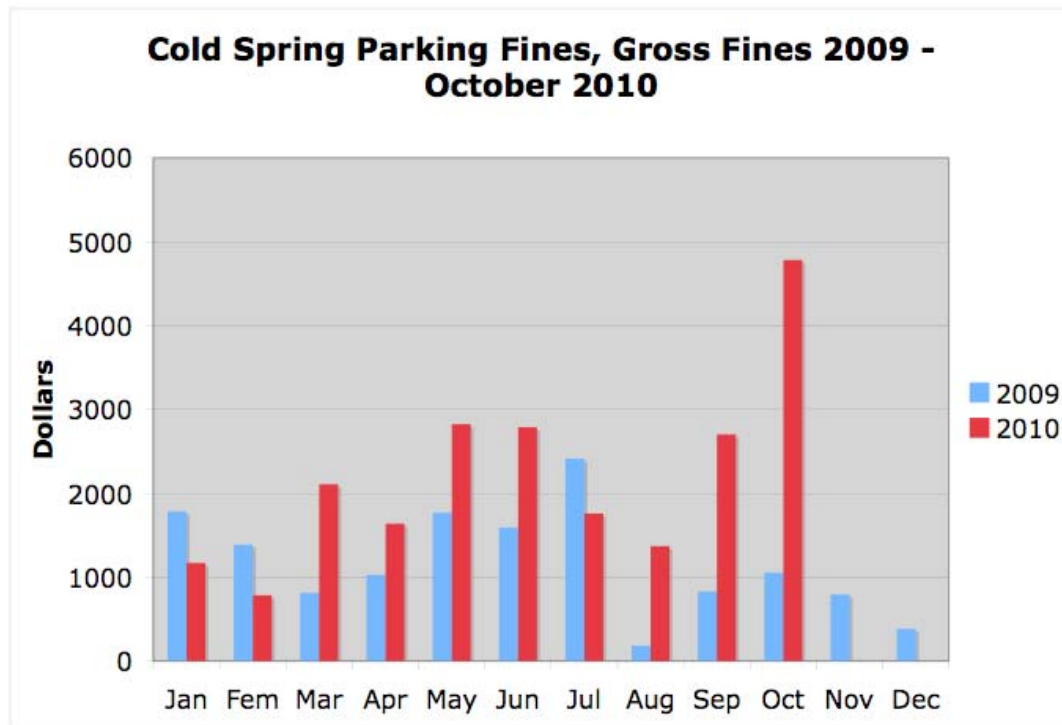
### **3. Philipstown Volunteer Ambulance Company (PVAC)**

The PVAC, which operates from a station on Cedar Street in the Village, is staffed by a professional emergency medical technician and volunteers. There is currently no relationship between the PVAC and either the Cold Spring Police Department or the Fire Company. The PVAC is funded by Philipstown, which in turn receives tax revenues from Cold Spring residents. In 2008, the Town spent \$186,000 on the PVAC, and increased this amount to \$193,000 in 2009. The PVAC responded to 404 emergency alarms in 2009.

### **4. Village Justice Court**

The Village Justice Court is located in the Village Hall on Main Street. The Village Justice, who is an elected Justice of the Peace, is assisted by a court clerk. The Court holds its summons return and trial calendar on Monday evenings and the criminal calendar on Wednesday afternoon. The Court's budget (which largely consists of fees for services provided by the Justice and clerk) is funded by the Village, which appropriated \$50,000 in 2008-09 and has budgeted the same amount for 2009-10. The Court collects fines from vehicle and traffic tickets, and provides monthly reports to the Village Board, listing fines paid into Court and sent to the State Comptroller's office. For example, in December 2009, the Court collected \$6,090 in fines, which included \$1,610 from violations of village ordinances and \$385 from parking tickets. Moving violation ticket fines constitute the majority of fines collected by the Court, and the majority of these fines (as well as mandatory surcharges paid into Court) are kept by the State. The State does permit the Village to keep fines from violations of village ordinances, including parking violations.

In early 2010, the Justice Court implemented a new system for automatic processing of parking tickets. Because parking tickets are written out to license plate numbers, the Court has in the past had difficult getting the names of vehicle owners, and there have been issues with parking tickets going unanswered. If a ticket goes unanswered, an inquiry must be made to the State Department of Motor Vehicles to obtain the vehicle owner's name. That said, under State law, the Court has few remedies for enforcement against scofflaws. If a motorist has three non-appearances for parking violations within 18 months, his license can be taken away, but this rarely happens. The new system permits systematic notice and follow up for tickets, and seems to be effective. A graph showing parking ticket revenue over the past 22 months is shown below:



### **Opportunities**

The recent automation of ticket processing is a promising development, and more avenues for automation should be explored. Although there are relatively few arraignments at the Village Justice Court, an initiative to use closed-circuit arraignments at local justice courts within Putnam County should help save on personnel costs for transporting prisoners. The Town has discussed combining local justice courts but it is unclear whether this would result in large monetary savings.

### **5. Disaster Services**

Disaster services are provided by the County, Town and Village. For example, during the February 2010 snow storm, when emergencies were declared by the County and Town, and within the Village, and most of Philipstown lost electrical power, the Cold Spring firehouse was used as an emergency warming area, as it had heat, electrical service and generator backup. Additionally, Butterfield Library was open on the weekend with heat, electrical power and internet access. Rides were available to the area shelter at the Putnam Valley Senior Center, and the Fishkill Town Hall distributed dry ice. Information was disseminated by email and the Village Garage answering machine, but it was unclear how residents without power or access to cell phones would have received this information.

The Putnam County Bureau of Emergency Services operates the County 911 service and also coordinates plans for evacuation and shelter in Brewster in the event of an emergency at the Indian Point nuclear power plant. The Bureau's website is <http://www.pcbes.org/>.

### **Opportunities**

The Village should consider adopting its own emergency management plan, including provision of shelter, and should make residents aware of Village, Town and County emergency plans.