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May 27, 2015

Mayor Thomas M. Roach  
Members of the Common Council  
City of White Plains  
255 Main Street  
White Plains, New York 10601

Report Number: S9-14-41

Dear Mayor Roach and Members of the Common Council:

The Office of the State Comptroller works to help city officials manage their resources efficiently and effectively and, by so doing, provide accountability for tax dollars spent to support city operations. The Comptroller oversees the fiscal affairs of local governments statewide, as well as compliance with relevant statutes and observance of good business practices. This fiscal oversight is accomplished, in part, through our audits, which identify opportunities for improving operations and City Council governance. Audits also can identify strategies to reduce costs and to strengthen controls intended to safeguard assets.

In accordance with these goals, we conducted an audit of 10 municipalities (seven cities and three villages) throughout New York State. The objective of our audit was to determine if the use of municipal resources resulted in an effective enforcement of the Fire Code<sup>1</sup> (i.e., fire safety of buildings). We included the City of White Plains (City) in this audit. Within the scope of this audit, we examined the City's process for evaluating fire safety plans and procedures for the period January 1 through December 31, 2013. Following is a report of our audit of the City. This audit was conducted pursuant to Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article 3 of the General Municipal Law.

This report of examination letter contains our findings and recommendations specific to the City. We discussed the findings and recommendations with City officials and considered their comments, which appear in Appendix A, in preparing this report. City officials agreed with our recommendations and indicated they are taking corrective action. At the completion of our audit of the 10 municipalities, we prepared a global report that summarizes the significant issues we identified at all the municipalities audited.

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<sup>1</sup> 2010 Fire Code of New York State

## **Summary of Findings**

We found that the City could improve its controls for evaluating fire safety plans and evacuation plans and confirming evacuation drills are performed for buildings in its jurisdiction. The City does not maintain any records to support that its Fire Department reviews and approves fire safety plans and evacuation plans, as required. The Department also lacked support that it confirms buildings conduct the required number of evacuation drills each year.

We sampled 19 buildings to determine if the fire safety plans and evacuation plans on file were complete and in conformance with the 2010 Fire Code of New York State (Fire Code). We found that 14, or 74 percent, of the fire safety plans and two, or 11 percent, of the evacuation plans did not address required elements of the Fire Code. In addition, eight, or 42 percent, of the buildings did not conduct the required number of evacuation drills.

The City also did not submit its 2013 Uniform Code Administration and Enforcement Report to the Department of State (DOS), as required.

## **Background and Methodology**

The City has a population of approximately 57,000 residents and is governed by a seven-member Common Council (Council), comprising a mayor and six council members. The City's 2013 budget totaled \$157.8 million, which includes the Fire Department's (Department) budget of \$25.1 million. The Department is responsible for monitoring fire safety for 1,460 buildings located in the City.

The Fire Chief oversees the general management of the Department and Fire Code<sup>2</sup> enforcement. In an effort to monitor fire safety within the City, the Department's budget includes funding for a Fire Prevention Unit that is responsible for reviewing and approving fire safety plans and evacuation plans, as well as verifying the number of evacuation drills (drills) exercised at the buildings within its jurisdiction.

The Fire Code<sup>3</sup> establishes the minimum requirements for providing a reasonable level of life safety and property protection from the hazards of fire, explosion or dangerous conditions in new and existing buildings, structures and premises. It also provides safety to firefighters and emergency responders during emergency operations.

The Fire Code requires an approved fire safety plan (fire plan) and evacuation plan to be prepared and maintained for most buildings. The plans must be reviewed or updated at least once a year, or as necessitated by changes in staff assignments, occupancy or building layout. The plans must be available in the workplace for reference and review by employees, and copies must be provided to the code enforcement official upon request.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2010 Fire Code of New York State is the most up-to-date version available (see also 19 NYCRR 1225.1 [c], which amends section 610 of the Fire Code). The Fire Code is part of the New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code.

<sup>3</sup> 2010 Fire Code of New York State Chapter 1 Section 101.3

The Executive Law<sup>4</sup> and New York State Codes, Rules and Regulations (NYCRR)<sup>5</sup> generally provide that cities, counties, towns and villages are responsible for enforcing the New York State Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code<sup>6</sup> (Uniform Code). However, the State Education Department is responsible for Uniform Code enforcement with respect to school districts' and boards of cooperative education services' buildings.

Administration and enforcement of the Uniform Code generally are made through local law, ordinance or other appropriate regulation. However, a local government has the option to decline that responsibility; when this occurs, the responsibility passes to the respective county. Counties are afforded a similar option. If a local government and a county each exercise their option not to enforce the Uniform Code, the statute provides that the Secretary of State shall, directly or by contract, administer and enforce the Uniform Code.

The Uniform Code requires every city, county, town and village charged with enforcing the Uniform Code to maintain a system of records that supports its code enforcement activities. Buildings that contain an area of public assembly must be inspected each year, while all other buildings requiring a fire safety plan and an evacuation plan must have a fire safety inspection at least every three years. It also requires local governments to annually submit to the Secretary of State a report of their activities relative to administration and enforcement of the Uniform Code.<sup>7</sup>

We conducted our audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). Such standards require that we plan and conduct our audit to adequately assess those operations within our audit scope. Further, those standards require that we understand the management controls and those laws, rules and regulations that are relevant to the operations included in our scope. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in this report. More information on such standards and the methodology used in performing this audit is included in Appendix C of this report.

## **Audit Results**

Fire Safety Plan – Local governments must evaluate compliance with the Fire Code. Therefore, the City must verify that certain buildings in its jurisdiction have fire plans that comply with the Fire Code. The Fire Code establishes the seven basic requirements each fire plan must contain. For example, the fire plan must include a procedure for reporting a fire or other emergency. The fire plan also must have a list of major fire hazards associated with the normal use and occupancy of the premise, including maintenance and housekeeping procedures. Appendix B details the seven fire plan requirements.

A properly developed fire plan can help ensure that responsible parties notify building occupants of an emergency and that evacuations will occur when necessary. It can also ensure that responsible parties promptly notify the Department of an emergency and convey relevant information, such as identification of hazardous material. The Department's Fire Prevention Unit is responsible for ensuring that each building requiring a fire plan has one that complies with the Fire Code. Furthermore, the NYCRR requires the City to keep records relating to the fire safety and property maintenance inspections it conducts.

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<sup>4</sup> Section 381 (2)

<sup>5</sup> 19 NYCRR Part 1203

<sup>6</sup> See 19 NYCRR 1225.1

<sup>7</sup> See 19 NYCRR 1203.4

To determine if the Fire Prevention Unit reviews and approves fire plans as required by law, we visited 19 buildings<sup>8</sup> and obtained the fire plans on file. We looked for evidence that the Fire Prevention Unit reviewed and approved each fire plan within the NYCRR timeframe. We also reviewed the fire plans for completeness with the Fire Code requirements. We found that 14 of the 19 buildings (74 percent) had fire plans that were incomplete and did not comply with the Fire Code. These buildings comprised one adult care facility, one preschool, two private schools, four hospitals, one hotel, two malls and three office buildings. The missing fire safety plan components for each of these buildings are detailed in Figure 1. The remaining five buildings had fire plans that complied with the Fire Code.

**Figure 1: Missing Building Fire Safety Plan Component(s)<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Building</b>	<b>Fire and Emergency Reporting</b>	<b>Life Safety Strategy</b>	<b>Site Plans</b>	<b>Floor Plans</b>	<b>Fire Hazards</b>	<b>Fire Prevention and Control System</b>	<b>Fuel Hazard Sources</b>
Adult Care Facility					✓	✓	✓
Business Office					✓	✓	✓
Business Office					✓	✓	✓
Business Office					✓	✓	✓
Hospital							✓
Hospital						✓	✓
Hospital							✓
Hospital							✓
Hotel					✓	✓	✓
Mall					✓	✓	✓
Mall					✓	✓	✓
Preschool		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Private School					✓	✓	✓
Private School					✓	✓	✓

<sup>a</sup> See Appendix B for the specific fire safety plan requirements.

We found no written evidence that the Fire Prevention Unit reviewed and approved any of the plans within the statutory timeframe because it no longer keeps any documentation to support its review or approval of fire plans. However, we found that the Fire Prevention Unit did stamp, date and sign two of the five fire plans that complied with the Fire Code; however, it performed these reviews in 2009. Officials informed us that, while they conduct reviews annually, they have not had sufficient staff since 2009 to maintain documentation to support their fire plan reviews.

The Fire Code states that it was established, among other things, to ensure the protection of human life and property.<sup>9</sup> Our review found that, while each building we visited had a fire plan, most of the plans were incomplete and did not comply with the Fire Code. Incomplete fire plans may lead to an increased chance of a loss of life or property damage.

<sup>8</sup> We judgmentally chose a sample of 19 buildings for our audit testing. We selected buildings that are occupied by children or elderly individuals or which have a high number of daily occupants or visitors.

<sup>9</sup> 2010 Fire Code of New York State Chapter 1 Section 101.3

Evacuation Plan – Buildings requiring a fire plan must also maintain an evacuation plan. The Fire Code establishes the eight basic requirements each evacuation plan must contain. For example, an evacuation plan must include emergency egress or escape routes and whether evacuation of the building is to be complete or, where approved, by selected floors or areas only. The evacuation plan also must include procedures for accounting for employees and occupants after an evacuation has been completed. Appendix B details the eight evacuation plan requirements. The Fire Prevention Unit is also responsible for ensuring that each building requiring an evacuation plan has one that complies with the Fire Code. Furthermore, the NYCRR requires the City to keep records relating to the fire safety and property maintenance inspections it conducts.

To determine if the Fire Prevention Unit reviews and approves evacuation plans as required by law, we also obtained the evacuation plans on file for the 19 buildings previously discussed. We looked for evidence that the Fire Prevention Unit reviewed and approved each plan within the statutory timeframe. We also reviewed the evacuation plans for completeness with Fire Code requirements.

We found that two of the 19 buildings' evacuation plans (11 percent) did not meet Fire Code requirements. Two preschools had deficient evacuation plans. One preschool's plan did not have procedures for employees who must remain to operate critical equipment before evacuating. The other preschool's plan lacked five of the eight required components. Specifically, the plan lacked:

- The identification and assignment of personnel responsible for rescue or emergency medical aid.
- The preferred and any alternative means of notifying occupants of a fire or emergency.
- The preferred and any alternative means of reporting fires and other emergencies to the fire department or designated emergency response organization.
- Identification and assignment of personnel who can be contacted for further information or explanation of duties under the plan.
- A description of the emergency voice/alarm communication system alert tone and preprogrammed voice messages, where provided.

Like the fire plans, we found that the Fire Prevention Unit documented its review of the two evacuation plans reviewed in 2009. However, since documenting these reviews in 2009, the Fire Prevention Unit has not kept any documentation to support its review or approval of the plans. As a result, the City has no assurance that each City building requiring an evacuation plan has one that meets minimum Fire Code requirements. In addition, building occupants may not be prepared to react to an emergency evacuation.

Evacuation Drills – The Fire Code also requires buildings to have a specified number of emergency evacuation drills (drills) conducted each year. Drills help ensure that building occupants are prepared to respond to an emergency evacuation, and the drills can identify improvement opportunities. The number of drills required is based on how a building is used. For example, a private school is required to conduct 12 drills each year while an office building must conduct two. Appendix B details the building types and drill requirements. The City must verify that the required numbers of drills are being conducted each year and the Fire Prevention Unit is responsible for

verifying that the drills have been performed. Furthermore, the NYCRR requires the City to keep records relating to the fire safety and property maintenance inspections it conducts.

We also obtained evidence to determine whether the required drills were conducted annually at the 19 buildings previously discussed. We found that, in calendar year 2013, eight buildings (45 percent) did not conduct the required numbers of drills. The eight deficient buildings included four business offices, two preschools and two hotels. Figure 2 compares the drill requirements to the numbers of drills performed at each building.

<b>Figure 2: Fire Code Evacuation Drill Requirements Compared to Drills Performed</b>			
<b>Building Type</b>	<b>Annual Evacuation Drill Requirement<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Drills performed</b>	<b>Variance</b>
Business Office	2	0	(2)
Business Office	2	1	(1)
Business Office	2	1	(1)
Business Office	2	1	(1)
Hotel	12	0	(12)
Hotel	12	4	(8)
Preschool	12	8	(4)
Preschool	12	11	(1)
<sup>a</sup> See Appendix B			

We did not find evidence that the Fire Prevention Unit confirmed that the required numbers of drills were conducted at the buildings. The Fire Prevention Unit also does not maintain any documentation to support its reviews. As a result, the City has no assurance that drills are being performed at each building as required. When the required numbers of drills are not performed, building occupants are likely less prepared to conduct an emergency evacuation, which could affect an evacuation outcome.

Uniform Code Administration and Enforcement Report – The NYCRR<sup>10</sup> requires every local government charged with administration and enforcement of the Uniform Code to annually submit to the Secretary of State a report of its activities relative to administration and enforcement of the Uniform Code (report).

City officials assigned the responsibility of filing the report with the DOS to the Department of Buildings. However, the Department of Buildings did not complete or submit a report detailing its 2013 enforcement activities to the DOS. Therefore, the City did not comply with the NYCRR.

## **Recommendations**

The Fire Prevention Unit should:

1. Keep documented evidence detailing when fire plans and evacuation plans were reviewed and approved.

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<sup>10</sup> 19 NYCRR 1203.4.

2. Determine whether the required number of drills are conducted in accordance with the Fire Code and maintain documented evidence of these reviews.
3. Ensure that buildings requiring a fire plan and an evacuation plan have plans that meet the minimum Fire Code requirements.

The City Department of Buildings should:

4. File the Uniform Code Administration and Enforcement Report each year, as required.

The Council has the responsibility to initiate corrective action. A written corrective action plan (CAP) that addresses the findings and recommendations in this report should be prepared and forwarded to our office within 90 days, pursuant to Section 35 of the General Municipal Law. For more information on preparing and filing your CAP, please refer to our brochure, *Responding to an OSC Audit Report*, which you received with the draft audit report. The Council should make the CAP available for public review in the Clerk's office.

We thank City officials and staff for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this audit.

Sincerely,

Gabriel F. Deyo  
Deputy Comptroller

## **APPENDIX A**

### **RESPONSE FROM CITY OFFICIALS**

The City officials' response to this audit can be found on the following pages.





"THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK"

**OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**

THOMAS M. ROACH  
MAYOR

December 22, 2014

t: 914.422.1411  
f: 914.422.1395

Ann C. Singer, Chief Examiner  
State Office Building, Suite 1702  
44 Hawley Street  
Binghamton, NY 13901-4417

RE: White Plains Fire Department  
Audit Report Title: Fire Safety Plans and Procedures  
Audit Report Number: S9-14-41

Dear Ms. Singer:

This letter constitutes the response of the City of White Plains to the above-referenced audit.

**Audit Recommendations:**

Keep documented evidence detailing when fire plans and evacuation plans were reviewed and approved.

**Implementation Plan of Action:**

Fire safety and evacuation plans are currently being collected for review and approval. A new software program is being utilized to document this process. This software will be used to complete fire code inspections for all occupancies, input data (including evacuation plans), tracking inspection scheduling and open fire code violations. As evacuation plans are obtained and accepted they will be entered into the program and reviewed for accuracy during each annual inspection. The review of evacuation plans will be documented through the violation checklist used for each inspection.

**Implementation Date:**

October 30, 2014

**Person Responsible for Implementation:**

Lieutenant Anthony Decarlo, Fire Prevention Division

**Audit Recommendation:**

Determine whether the required number of drills are conducted in accordance with the fire code. Maintain documented evidence of these reviews.

**Implementation Plan of Action:**

The training division is conducting in-service training for our Code Enforcement Officers and fire companies performing inspections to ensure that the correct inspection procedures are being utilized. The software program uses a checklist that requires a response and automatically issues a violation of the fire code if not in compliance. This will help ensure that information such as completion of required fire drills is checked and verified on initial contact with the building owner or representative.

**Implementation Date:**

October 30, 2014

**Person Responsible for Implementation:**

Lieutenant Anthony Decarlo, Fire Prevention Division

**Audit Recommendations:**

Ensure that buildings requiring a fire plan and evacuation plan have plans that meet the minimum fire code requirements.

**Implementation Plan of Action:**

Buildings that require a fire safety and evacuation plan are now designated in our electronic inspection program. This requires the inspector to respond to the requirement to complete the inspection. Upon receipt of any plans, they are forwarded to our Plan Review Officer for evaluation to determine if they meet the fire code requirements. Once the plans have been accepted they are entered into the inspection software for continued evaluation.

**Implementation Date:**

October 30, 2014

Ann C. Singer, Chief Examiner

December 22, 2014

- page 3 -

**Person Responsible for Implementation:**

Lieutenant James Vanloan and Lieutenant and Anthony Decarlo, Fire Prevention Division

Sincerely,

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Thomas M. Roach  
Mayor

## APPENDIX B

### FIRE SAFETY PLANS, FIRE EVACUATION PLANS AND EMERGENCY EVACUATION DRILLS<sup>11</sup>

#### **Fire Safety Plans Must Include:**

1. The procedure for reporting a fire or other emergency.
2. The life safety strategy and procedures for notifying, relocating or evacuating occupants.
3. Site plans indicating the following:
  - 3.1 The occupancy assembly point
  - 3.2 The location of fire hydrants
  - 3.3 The normal routes of fire department vehicle access
4. Floor plans identifying the locations of the following:
  - 4.1 Exits
  - 4.2 Primary evacuation routes
  - 4.3 Secondary evacuation routes
  - 4.4 Accessible egress routes
  - 4.5 Areas of refuge
  - 4.6 Manual fire alarm boxes
  - 4.7 Portable fire extinguishers
  - 4.8. Occupant-use hose stations
  - 4.9 Fire alarm annunciators and controls
5. A list of major fire hazards associated with the normal use and occupancy of the premises, including maintenance and housekeeping procedures.
6. Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for maintenance of systems and equipment installed to prevent or control fires.
7. Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for maintenance, housekeeping and controlling fuel hazard sources.

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<sup>11</sup> We obtained the requirements for the Fire Safety Plans, Fire Evacuation Plans and Emergency Evacuation Drills from the 2010 Fire Code of New York State.

## **Fire Evacuation Plans Must Include:**

1. Emergency egress or escape routes and whether evacuation of the building is to be complete or, where approved, by selected floors or areas only.
2. Procedures for employees who must remain to operate critical equipment before evacuating.
3. Procedures for accounting for employees and occupants after evacuation has been completed.
4. Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for rescue or emergency medical aid.
5. The preferred and any alternative means of notifying occupants of a fire or emergency.
6. The preferred and any alternative means of reporting fires and other emergencies to the fire department or designated emergency response organization.
7. Identification and assignment of personnel who can be contacted for further information or explanation of duties under the plan.
8. A description of the emergency voice/alarm communication system alert tone and preprogrammed voice messages, where provided.

<b>Figure 3: Fire and Evacuation Drill Frequency and Participation Requirements</b>		
<b>Group or Occupancy</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Participation</b>
Group A	Quarterly	Employees
Group A <sup>a</sup>	Three Annually	All occupants
Group B <sup>b</sup>	Two Annually	All occupants
Group B <sup>a</sup>	Three Annually	All occupants
Group E	Monthly <sup>c</sup>	All occupants
Group I	Quarterly on each shift	Employees <sup>d</sup>
Group R-1	Quarterly on each shift	Employees
Group R-2 <sup>a</sup>	Four Annually	All Occupants
Group R-4	Quarterly on each shift	Employees <sup>d</sup>
High-rise buildings	Annually	Employees
<sup>a</sup> Applicable to college and university buildings in accordance with Fire Code Section 408.3 <sup>b</sup> Group B buildings having an occupant load of 500 or more persons, or more than 100 persons above or below the lowest level of exit discharge <sup>c</sup> The frequency shall be allowed to be modified in accordance with Fire Code Section 408.3.2. <sup>d</sup> Fire and evacuation drills in residential care assisted living facilities shall include complete evacuation of the premises in accordance with Fire Code Section 408.10.5. Where occupants receive habilitation or rehabilitation training, fire prevention and fire safety practices shall be included as part of the training program.		

**Definitions of Each Group or Occupancy From the 2010 Fire Code of New York State With Examples:**

Group A: Assembly Group A occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building for the gathering of persons for purposes such as civic, social or religious functions; recreation, food or drink consumption; or awaiting transportation. Examples include movie theatres, restaurants and arenas.

Group B: Business Group B occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building for office, professional or service-type transactions, including storage of records and accounts. Examples include banks, civic administration and outpatient clinics.

Group E: Educational Group E occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building by six or more people at any one time for educational purposes through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This group also includes day cares with more than five children who are older than two-and-a-half years of age.

Group I: Institutional Group I occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building in which people are cared for or living in a supervised environment. Such occupants have physical limitations because of health or age; are harbored for medical treatment or other care or treatment; or are detained for penal or correctional purposes or other purposes in which their liberty is restricted. Examples include hospitals, nursing homes and jails.

Group R: Residential Group R includes, among others, the use of a building for sleeping purposes.

R-1: Residential occupancies containing sleeping units where the occupants are primarily transient in nature, including boarding houses (transient), hotels (transient) and motels (transient).

R-2: Residential occupancies containing sleeping units or more than two dwelling units where the occupants are primarily permanent in nature, including apartment houses, boarding houses (nontransient), convents, dormitories, fraternities and sororities, hotels (nontransient), monasteries, motels (nontransient) and vacation timeshare properties.

R-4: Residential occupancies shall include buildings arranged for occupancy as residential care/assisted living facilities including more than five but not more than 16 occupants, excluding staff.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **AUDIT METHODOLOGY AND STANDARDS**

To complete our objective, we interviewed City and Department officials and reviewed procedures used to monitor drill logs, fire safety plans and evacuation plans to determine whether the City is effectively enforcing the Fire Code. We also reviewed the City's policies and procedures for approving/reviewing fire safety and evacuation plans.

We selected a judgmental sample of 19 buildings for the audit period by selecting buildings that are occupied by children or elderly individuals or have a large number of daily occupants or visitors. We obtained and reviewed each building's drill logs, fire safety plan and evacuation plan. We compared each building's fire safety and evacuation plan to the Fire Code to determine if the plans contained all required components. We also examined each plan to determine if the Department reviewed and approved each plan. In addition, we compared the number of drills each building owner conducted to the Fire Code to confirm the building owner conducted the required numbers of drills. We also interviewed officials to learn if they filed a report of the City's activities relative to administration and enforcement of the Uniform Code.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with GAGAS. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.