



FORT SMITH FIRE DEPARTMENT

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Phil Christensen
Fire Chief

Memo

To: John Cooley, Chairman - Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee
From: Phil Christensen, Fire Chief
RE: Comprehensive Plan Update for Fort Smith Fire Dept.
Date: July 26, 2019

On behalf of the 153 dedicated professionals of the Fort Smith Fire Department, it is my pleasure to present you our 2019 Comprehensive Plan Update report.

This report presents a re-evaluation of the Fort Smith Fire Department Comprehensive Plan. It is intended to promote public health, safety, morals, prosperity and general welfare of the Fort Smith community, all while setting a template for decision making and direction that will be used to manage future growth and change.

As the Fire Chief of the Fort Smith Fire Department, it is my goal to not only maintain what our department has to offer the citizens for public safety, but enhance the measures we perform at in emergency response times, training, emergency medical response, hazard mitigation, fire loss, and public education. With the financial and budget constraints carried forward from the past few years, Fire Department staff has reviewed the city's comprehensive plan to help in determining where cuts could be made, without jeopardizing public safety and welfare, while maintaining the vision of the plan.

It is the goal of the Fort Smith Fire Department to fulfill the elements of the "Mission Statement" in a manner consistent with the "Statement of Organizational Values."

"The mission of the Fort Smith Fire Department is to serve the community by protecting lives, property and the environment in a safe, efficient and professional manner."

Statement of Organizational Values:

Accountability

We will recognize at all times our collective and individual accountability and responsibility to our community, our profession, our organization and members.

Service

We will deliver high quality service to our community based on timeliness, effectiveness and customer needs.

Performance

We will base our standard performance on effectiveness, efficiency and competence, with emphasis on maintaining state of the art skill levels through ongoing continuing education, training and personal development.

Behavior

We will demonstrate, through our behavior, collectively and individually, respect and dignity toward each other and the citizens we serve.

Values

We will strive to individually reflect a feeling of positive, open and honest interaction with each other, based on flexible, progressive and team-focused style.

Communications

We will seek to improve communication in an effort to achieve cooperation, respect, and understanding while maintaining that participation and partnership must guide our interaction with each other and the citizens we serve.

Organizational Process

We will strive to make policies and decisions prioritized by placing the citizens first, the organization second and ourselves third. Organizational and individual goal setting must place emphasis on measurement of outcomes and results and conservation of resources.

The Fort Smith Fire Department (FSFD) provides a number of services to the city including firefighting and emergency medical, natural disaster, technical rescue, Hazmat, improvised explosive device handling, and other emergency response. 153 personnel are employed by the FSFD in eleven fire stations across the city, including 149 sworn uniformed members, and four civilian positions.

Effective March 1, 2017, the National Insurance Services Office (ISO) gave the FSFD a Class 1 Public Protection Classification rating on a scale of 1-10, with 1 meaning highest response and protection, 10 meaning no protection available. ISO plays an important role in the underwriting process at insurance companies. Most U.S. insurers use ISO information as part of their decision making when deciding what business to write, coverages to offer, or prices to charge for personal or commercial property insurance.

Utilizing the Fort Smith Comprehensive Plan and keeping a vision for the future, the Fire Department will maintain a set of continual goals:

Fire apparatus and equipment replacement

- Identify costs associated with apparatus repairs to determine when/what apparatus to replace
- In 2018 the Fire Department had several equipment updates:
 - Replaced two aging pumper fire apparatus complete with all new fire hose and tools
 - Replaced a 1997 aerial apparatus with the latest in aerial technology, resulting in a ladder truck that can reach a higher building with less Gross Vehicle Weight and improved fuel efficiency.
- Have designed and ordered one pumper fire apparatus to be delivered in late 2019
- Ordered and received new thermal imaging cameras to fully outfit all front-line emergency response vehicles with the life-saving rescue technology.

Continued examinations of all fire department operations for efficiency and cost-effectiveness

- Review all department functions on a cost-benefit, efficiency-based platform.
- Identify areas open to revision and redistribution of resources.
- Identify components available for implemented cost-saving strategies.
- Continually monitor department functions for increased efficiencies.
- Continue weekly reviews of department budget to maintain a high level of fiscal responsibility.

Continually explore revenue enhancement opportunities

- Identify and apply for all appropriate individual, regional based, and federal grant opportunities. In 2018, the FSFD applied for and received:
 - \$207,000 in FEMA-State Homeland Security grants for our Bomb Squad and Hazardous Materials Response teams.
 - \$111,881 from Arkansas Department of Emergency Management, to purchase thermal imaging cameras and additional training props to complement our training tower facility.

Continually develop firefighters through additional training, acknowledgments, and peer teaching, assessing, & counseling

- Conducted 53,762 hours of Fire and EMS training in 2018
- Presented 11 awards to firefighters for service of excellence in 2018
- Graduated 12 new firefighters from the Fire Academy, with two taking top honors

Continually identify target hazards for firefighter and citizen safety

- Fire Department works with the city’s GIS Department in creating incident maps of emergency related incidents across the city. This data provides a visual showing in the neighborhoods of concern as it relates to fire safety. The Fire Department can actively campaign in these target areas for fire safety and smoke detector effectiveness. Data will also be used for current and future fire apparatus deployment.
- Performed 496 Fire Code Plan Reviews in 2018
- 5036 businesses were surveyed for pre-incident hazardous identifiers in 2018

During the development of the City of Fort Smith Comprehensive Plan, there were certain key components outlined for the Fire Department in six different categories:

Future Land Use			
FLU-1	Achieve a successful and market-driven balance of future land uses consistent with the Preferred Future		
	FLU-1.3	Coordinate and plan future development with neighboring jurisdictions and the City of Fort Smith	
		FLU-1.3.2	Ensure that the subdivision of land within the allowable Planning Area will comply with City subdivision and infrastructure requirements, as amended, to address rural and estate development

1) Future Land Use

As the city continues to grow to the south, the Fire Department will need to conduct further analysis of data for additional fire station(s) to ensure proper emergency response for its citizens. The Fire Department was able to acquire land several years ago near the Williamson Place subdivision in the Rye Hill area for a future fire station.

Results of the Alternative Futures Open House survey conducted during the Comprehensive Plan update, the growth trend, and Preferred Future alternatives provided focus on where the citizens want future growth. This, along with current Fire Station locations, current emergency response times, existing Land Use Map, and data of reoccurring fire and EMS incidents within any portions of the city will continue to be the steering guidelines as we conduct our fire station location analysis.

Economic Development			
ED-4	Develop a partnership to coordinate City economic development policies with the Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce		
	ED-4.1	Ensure that planning processes reflect how businesses plan for future expansion/growth	
		ED-4.1.1	Establish a framework to keep the business community fully engaged in the city's ongoing planning and budgeting efforts, maintain an open and consistent dialogue to equip businesses with the information they need to plan for future growth and expansion.

2) Economic Development

In 2010, the Fire Department conducted an in-house study on fire station locations, fire apparatus needs, and personnel. Many efforts were made to educate the city and its citizens that spending tax dollars on the right firefighting priorities could have a direct financial benefit for the citizens. The citizens listened and passed a tax bond issue in 2012, resulting in the new Fire Station 11 at Chaffee Crossing, six new fire apparatus, and additional personnel on the Ladder Trucks.

In late 2016, the Fire Department was under an Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification (PPC) review. ISO collected and evaluated information from different city departments with focus on the capabilities of the Fire Department in structural fire suppression. The data was analyzed by ISO using their Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS), end result was a better PPC grade of 01/1X assigned to the community. The City of Fort Smith and the Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce can use this as an incentive in economic development for new business attraction. This would not have been possible without the support of the citizens, and the vision of the City of Fort Smith. With an ISO Class 1 rating, this puts the Fort Smith Fire Department among the top 1% of all Fire Departments nationwide.

During 2018, the FSFD responded to 151 structure fires where significant fire damage occurred. The total property value of those structures was valued at \$148.6M, with a total fire loss of only \$4.235M. That equates to a 97.15% or \$144 Million savings! That's just on the building values alone, the trickle-down effect of a business not having to close its doors due to a total-loss fire is even greater. With an ISO PPC grade of 1, the FSFD has again proven we can be an Economic Development tool for years to come.

One technology that has proven valuable to lesson property damage during fire extinguishment is the use of compressed air foam systems (CAFS). CAFS is a precise mixture of water, specialized foam wetting agent, and air. Combating interior structure fires where room and contents are involved, CAFS firefighting techniques allow for a quick extinguishment and little water damage to the structural components and surroundings.

The FSFD started adding CAFS for the fire apparatus specifications in 2003, when Pumper 6 was designed and built. Since then, nine new fire apparatus have been purchased bringing us to 100% front-line CAFS equipped pumpers.

Housing & Neighborhoods			
HN-1	Preserve, protect, and revitalize Fort Smith's neighborhoods		
	HN-1.2	Limit high costs associated with building new infrastructure.	
		HN-1.2.1	Use a cost/benefit analysis to guide decisions when conducting development approvals.
HN-2	Encourage a diverse range of housing options		
	HN-2.2	Maintain housing opportunities in urban areas.	
		HN-2.2.1	Support the renovation and revitalization of existing housing and promote infill development of vacant land within the corporate limits.
HN-3	Foster regional housing strategies to benefit Fort Smith and surrounding communities		
	HN-2.3	Promote the development of a mix of housing types, including single family detached, single family attached, accessory apartments, and multi-family units.	
		HN-2.3.1	Review and revise regulations that create unintended impediments to new or innovative types of desirable housing.
HN-4	Identify potential redevelopment areas/sites that could provide a mix of housing and other uses		
	HN-3.2	Utilize the City's zoning and subdivision regulations to promote the construction of a variety of housing sizes and types.	
	HN-4.1	Evaluate potential areas within the City for redevelopment.	
		HN-4.1.1	Establish criteria for redevelopment potential (e.g., property value, availability of infrastructure, utilization, tax base, etc.).
	HN-4.2	Explore potential partnerships with non-profit and private sector developers to redevelop sites for mixed-use.	

3) Housing and Neighborhoods

With Fort Smith being a city of neighborhoods, the fire stations located in these residential neighborhoods must continue to coexist with its customers i.e. the citizens of Fort Smith. Many times throughout the year, neighborhoods invite the members of their local fire station to participate in block parties, church services, cookouts, etc. All fire stations, in every effort to promote transparency and community friendliness, allow the citizens to just drop by and visit with the firefighters, see the fire station, fire truck and its equipment.

The Fire Department routinely works with the Fort Smith Housing Authority in utilizing dilapidated houses to be used for fire ground training evolutions. This partnership allows for the firefighters to engage in firefighting training activities as close to real life, and in a controlled atmosphere. While there is no actual "fire" involved, the structures are used for forcible-entry, ventilation, and search & rescue techniques. This also allows the citizens of that particular neighborhood see first-hand our firefighters in action. Once the training is completed, the structure is razed and land is ready for redevelopment.

Vacant structures are periodically pre-planned by fire personnel to help minimize the dangers of affected exposure fires. This also proves positive with the neighbors of such buildings, seeing their Fire Department being proactive.

Transportation & Infrastructure			
TI-1	Improve access and connectivity through enhancements to all modes of transportation		
	TI-1.4	Protect residential neighborhoods from excessive through traffic.	
		TI-1.4.1	Consider traffic calming techniques (roadway narrowing, chicanes, bump-out curbs, raised intersections, etc) in residential neighborhoods impacted by through-traffic.
TI-5	Incorporate the Future Land Use Map in the strategic planning of future utility and infrastructure expansions		
	TI-5.2	Ensure that utility and infrastructure systems can meet the city's long-term needs.	
		TI-5.2.1	Coordinate land use planning and capital programming to ensure infrastructure improvements and extensions are phased to support the future land use pattern.

4) Transportation & Infrastructure

Speeding vehicles and excessive traffic traveling through residential neighborhoods in an attempt to find ways around congested arterial roadways is a major public safety issue. While traffic calming techniques are a necessity for residential neighborhoods, certain types require special attention so as to not impede emergency response vehicles during times of need. As neighborhoods in the community request for traffic calming techniques, the Fire Department will work other city departments to ensure the procedures used are in the best interest of public safety.

Public Facilities & Services			
PFS-1	Promote a business-friendly and citizen-friendly government		
	PFS-1.1	Maintain fair and transparent codes and regulations.	
		PFS-1.1.1	Work with groups in authority (Chamber, City Board, CBID, Chaffee Crossing, County, etc) to improve communication and coordination.
		PFS-1.1.2	Revise development regulations to improve user friendliness (e.g., create an interactive on-line code).
PFS-2	Build consistency and trust with the public		
	PFS-2.1	Ensure that the City's planning and implementation process is transparent.	
	PFS-2.2	Maintain a clear line of communication between the City, the business community, and residents that establishes expectations and allows the progress of the City's commitments to be measured and evaluated.	
		PFS-2.2.1	Set up ongoing communication with other groups in the City (CBID, School Board, Chaffee Crossing, Planning Commission, CEO Group, Chamber, etc) to ensure that all organizations maintain consistent goals and objectives with each group focusing on the responsibilities best suited for them.
PFS-4	Prevent wasteful use of public resources and services		
	PFS-4.1	Seek opportunities to co-locate future community facilities to maximize efficiencies in service provision and reduce capital and operating costs.	

5) Public Facilities & Services

With an ongoing effort to promote and maintain dialog with businesses, the Fire Department engages all commercial building owners, tenants, or managers in dialog regarding building safety, fire and hazard mitigation; and conducts life-safety code inspections and pre-incident plans for the safety of the business owners and/or tenants, its patrons, and the firefighters.

Natural & Cultural Resources				
NCR-2	Protect natural resources and reduce their waste and overuse			
		NCR-2.3 Improve air quality.		
			NCR-2.3.2	Minimize growth in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) as the City grows through a variety of locational and programmatic measures.

6) Natural & Cultural Resources

As compressed natural gas (CNG) continues in growth as an alternative fuel to gasoline and diesel, the Fire Department has invested in two CNG bi-fuel vehicles for our command vehicle fleet. Efforts will continue to be made in researching return-on-investments concerning alternative fuel vehicles during future purchases.

With the continued improvements in lithium-ion battery technologies, so many commonly “corded” items are now being introduced as “cordless”. The fire department has done extensive research in many areas of this growing technology and has continued with purchasing battery operated hydraulic rescue tools and lighting equipment to replace the older gasoline-fueled electric/hydraulic-driven equipment.

In addition to battery operated equipment, we are keeping an eye on total electric vehicles such as the new Rivian R1T and their partnership with Ford Motor Company. If developed as advertised, this type of specific-use vehicle can have a place in the fire service as a rapid-response emergency rescue vehicle while having the ability to utilize on-board electric for power tools.