

VIRGINIA FIRE SERVICES BOARD



A Report of Findings
and
Recommendations:

**Town of Wytheville
Fire & EMS Study**



February 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Virginia Fire Services Board would like to extend thanks to the following organization for their contribution to this study:

Wytheville Fire Department (WFD)

Theme 1: Organizational and Operational Development (Page 10)

1. ***Centralized Authority:*** Establish clear lines of Authority between the following roles; Fire Chief and Director of Public Safety.
 - a. Advisory Board: It would be beneficial to create one cohesive and effective advisory board.
- ***Strategic Planning:*** The Wytheville Town Council and Town Administration should adopt and implement a data-driven strategic plan for its fire services to increase performance levels and achieve lower cost of service delivery.
 - The Town should develop a unified vision and mission statement for the Town of Wytheville Fire System.
 - The strategic plan should further create a system of measurable goals and objectives. The performance measurement's factors will strengthen the strategic plan.
- ***Accountability Practices:*** Town of Wytheville should establish system wide Standard Operating Guidelines in an effort to create guidance and accountability during emergency incidents. This guidance is aimed at ensuring that operations are safe and effective.
 - Utilizing the guidelines outlined in NFPA 1561: Standard on Fire Department Incident Management Systems and Command Safety.¹

Theme 2: Communications (Page 15)

- ***Levels of Interdepartmental Communications:*** The Town should host a strategic communication session with a professional mediator to resolve existing challenges and barriers amongst the following entities; fire departments, Town of Wytheville Administration and its Town Council.

Theme 3: Training (Page 18)

- ***Coordinated Training Program:*** Explore the feasibility of developing a comprehensive training program to be assessed annually and collectively coordinating the application of training program.

Theme 4: Budget and Administration (Page 19)

- ***Financial Accountability:*** A formal accountability plan should be developed for Town of Wytheville. The plan should be communicated to citizens.
 - The Town of Wytheville Town Council should consider using a Grants Writer to assist the organizations with the acquisition and management of grants. This individual should research and consider the availability of all federal, state and private grant programs.

¹ For more information see, [NFPA 1561: Standard on Fire Department Incident Management Systems and Command Safety](#).

- Standardization and Central Purchasing: Town of Wytheville Government should develop and implement a centralized purchasing option to leverage Town purchasing power and reduce operational expenses.

Theme 5: Delivery of Services (Page 21)

- Personnel: Town of Wytheville Government should work with relevant stakeholders to identify needs for additional fire personnel to meet service demands and citizen expectations.
- Recruitment and Retention: Town of Wytheville should adopt a recruitment and retention plan.
- Operations and Staffing: Town of Wytheville should establish minimal staffing standards for apparatus response.

METHODOLOGY

For each task of the work plan, the Study Committee identified objectives, performed specific activities, and delivered project products. The following is an overview of the study process:

PHASE I: INITIATE PROJECT

Objectives: Initiation of Study

To initiate the study, the Study Committee began by gaining a comprehensive understanding of the project's background, goals, and expectations. This was carried out by identifying in detail the specific objectives for the review, and assessing how well the work plan would accomplish the objectives. In addition, the Study Committee set out to establish a mutually agreed project work plan, timeline, deliverables, and monitoring procedures that would support the accomplishment of all project objectives. The final study initiation step consisted of collecting and reviewing existing operational data, information on agreements along with relevant policies and procedures. Many of these review materials are included in the appendix of this study.

As part of Phase I, the Study Committee met with Town of Wytheville leadership to establish working relationships, make logistical arrangements, and determine communication lines. During these meetings, the Study Committee discussed the objectives of the project and identified policy issues and concerns central to the study.

The meetings also allowed the Study Committee to obtain pertinent reports and background materials relevant to the review, such as current and historical staffing data, as well as a description of the current service delivery system and organization.

Based on this course of action, the Study Committee concluded this section of the study with a revised project work plan/timeline deliverable.

PHASE II: OBTAIN STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Objectives: Conduct Leadership Interviews & Capture Input from the Departments

The second phase of the study consisted of leadership interviews and department evaluations. The expectations were as follows:

- Identify expected service levels;
- Identify opinions of department officials concerning the operations and performance of the department;
- Identify issues and concerns of officials regarding services;
- Identify perceived gaps in existing service levels and new priorities in mission; and,
- Identify strengths and weaknesses as perceived by departmental personnel.

Each goal was realized with the support of Town of Wytheville's study project manager and point-of-contact, Town Manager, C. Wayne Sutherland, Jr along with the newly appointed fire chief as of December 2018, Marc Brade. The Town Manager and staff assisted in

The foregoing is a recommendation authorized pursuant to Va. Code 9.1-203.A.4 and is not to be construed as legal advice or as a binding recommendation.

finalizing the interview list and establishing a schedule that was reasonable, but more importantly convenient for the interviewees. All interviews were conducted during an allotted timeframe and a considerable amount of information was collected. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with Town of Wytheville's Fire Department, Town leadership including the aforementioned Town Manager C. Wayne Sutherland, Jr. and Mayor Dr. Beth Taylor.

The Study Committee received descriptions of staffing and deployment responses in meeting service demands at targeted service levels. The discussions also provided a snapshot of personnel management contentions as well as concerns regarding service delivery. It is also important to note that the Study Committee visited the locality's station in an effort to supplement their research of the organizational functioning.

The deliverable for this section of the study work plan consisted of a thorough evaluation of the site visit data and the development of working themes to capture the team's assessment.

PHASE III: PREPARE ANALYSES AND DEVELOP CORE STRATEGIES

Objectives: Evaluate Current Trends and Prepare a Report

The third phase of the study work plan involved further investigation and understanding of the organizational structures, operations, limitations, achievements, and opportunities for improvement within the volunteer and career system. The activities that supported this process consisted of additional requests for information not already obtained in Phase I and II of the work plan. Data requests, made in this phase of the study, attempt to address any issues that emerged from the interviews, and further evaluate implications of the operational issues cited. Data obtained during the study process also assists the Study Committee in identifying issues influencing the current levels of service.

After receiving and critically evaluating information from the interviews and all supporting materials, the Study Committee began identifying the necessary critical action steps to achieve exceptional organizational functioning and uniform service levels throughout Town of Wytheville.

Each action step was selected to identify the changes in policies, facilities, apparatus, and equipment to ensure that the Town would be capable of providing fire- services at the desired level going forward.

The deliverables achieved in Phase III involved drafting a report that evaluated current trends in the services, recommended action steps for improvement, and the assignment of responsibility.

PHASE IV: PREPARE FINAL REPORT

Objectives: Prepare and Present Final Report

The final phase of the study involved documenting the results of all previous tasks into a written report with critical components, such as an executive summary, methodology,

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background, and findings and recommendations. Once completed, a draft report was shared with the Town Manager; C. Wayne Sutherland, Jr. to ensure the content is accurate. Upon receiving corrections, the Study Committee revised the draft report, as needed, to assist in the preparation and issuance of the final report.

The deliverables for the final phase of the work plan consisted of 1) a draft report, and 2) the final report.

TOWN DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Town of Wytheville is located on the county seat of, Wythe County, in western Virginia. Wythe County has two towns, Town of Rural Retreat and Town of Wytheville. U.S. Census Bureau cites during the 2010 census, the Town of Wytheville had 7,998 residents.² The median household income is presently at \$47,273 with a median value of owner-occupied housing between 2013-2017 of \$175,000. The locality is about 75 miles southwest of Roanoke and a similar distance northeast of Bristol; Wythe County is 260 miles southwest of Richmond and about 300 miles southwest of Washington, D.C.³ The three localities' government appears to work together to provide public safety.

According to the 2015 Wythe County Comprehensive Plan - the top areas citizens want to see improvement are increased housing availability in Wytheville, Rural Retreat, and Fort Chiswell along with improvement of public safety – with a focus on fire and rescue services.⁴ Citizens within Wythe County including the towns indicate that they are willing to pay additional taxes to improve or expand services such as the school system, fire protection, police protection, and ambulance service.⁵

In regards to public safety, both the two towns and the county provide police protection. Wythe County has six fire departments Rural Retreat, Barren Springs, Ivanhoe, Max Meadows, Speedwell, and Wytheville. Wytheville has some career staff whereas the remaining fire departments are composed entirely of volunteers. Thus, there are approximately 150 volunteer firefighters available for the county.⁶

Primary services provided by the two Wythe County towns are police protection, fire protection, water and sewer services, garbage collection, and street lighting and maintenance.⁷ The towns have fire departments, and four additional volunteer fire departments are located in the county. The three squads in Wythe County are strategically located throughout the county, and contributions to the operation of these squads are made by all three governments.⁸

² U.S. Census Bureau, Quick Facts on Town of Wytheville, Virginia

³ Wythe County Economic Development Partnership

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Wythe County Comprehensive Plan

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides a summary of the five working themes for this study report. The summary is based on areas of concern that were repeatedly cited in the face-to-face interviews and observed during the site visit. Following this section is an in-depth examination of each theme, to include findings and recommendations.

Theme 1: Organizational and Operational Development (Page 10)

- Centralized Authority
- Strategic Planning
- Accountability Practices

Theme 2: Communications (Page 15)

- Improved Dispatch System
- Levels of Interdepartmental Communications

Theme 3: Training (Page 18)

- Coordinated Training Program

Theme 4: Budget and Administration (Page 19)

- Financial Accountability
- Standardization and Central Purchasing

Theme 5: Delivery of Services (Page 21)

- Personnel
- Recruitment and Retention
- Operations and Staffing

Town of Wytheville's service providers and administration should continue utilizing the national consensus standards. The standards were developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) with the input and support of fire services personnel, businesses, industry and other stakeholders, as guidance documents and resources to address several of the findings identified in this report.⁹

⁹ Visit the [National Fire Protection Association \(NFPA\)](#) website for a complete listing of the national consensus standards.

THEME 1: ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to the Town of Wytheville, Wytheville Fire Department (WFD) was established prior to 1835 and organized in 1849 as a volunteer department.¹⁰ Over the years it has evolved into a combination department with six full-time career firefighters and a roster of 11 volunteers.¹¹ The WFD protects approximately 13,400 citizens in a 110 square mile response area. The WFD provides Fire Prevention Education Programs throughout the year to schools, businesses, churches, civic groups and nursing homes.

The Town is commended for their efforts to participate in the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System, part of the National Fire Incident Reporting System. Every call the WFD answers is entered into the national database where statistics are compiled. According to WFD it answers approximately 350 calls a year at an average response time of 3-7 minutes.

Moreover, the Town is clear about the work conducted by its career firefighters. Based on the study team's conversation, the career firefighters report to the Staff Lieutenant. On a daily basis, they are responsible for maintenance vehicles and equipment along with responding to calls. WFD cites that it utilizes career personnel to conduct the yearly inspections and painting of the 400+ fire hydrants within the Town.

Town Ordinance: According to Chapter 6 Fire Prevention and Protection - Article I¹²;

*"The fire department shall be composed of a **chief** and such number of officers and other personnel as the council may, on the recommendation of the town manager, deem necessary for proper fire prevention and suppression work of the town. The **town manager** shall **appoint** the chief of the fire department, whose term of office shall be at the pleasure of the town manager. The fire chief shall have immediate direction and control of the said fire department, subject, however, to the supervision of the town manager, and to such rules, regulations, and orders as the town manager may prescribe....."*

The Town Ordinance contradicts the structure described during the study's visit in October 2018. According to interviewees and survey questionnaire there is a position titled "Director of Public Safety" which leads the Wytheville Department of Public Safety (WDPS). WDPS includes the Wytheville Police and Fire Departments, Animal Control, and Building Inspections. The Director of Public Safety is supposed to act as the centralized authority.

Furthermore, the Town's website cites the career personnel report to a Staff Lieutenant. During the drafting process and site visit of this report, there appeared to be several obstacles with the coordination of services. The Town exhibited a lack of coordinated Fire System. At the end of November 2018, the study team was advised of the newly hired career fire chief. Lastly, there is also a high level of tension and disagreement between the Town's fire services and those of Wythe County.

¹⁰ Town of Wytheville Fire Department History

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Town of Wytheville Ordinance

Scenario: For example, it was cited that both parties (Town and County) fire chiefs have indicated during a fire scene, one will not take orders from the other. A constituent provided the following excerpt *“At a fire scene during 2018, the County’s fire department Max Meadows Fire Department attempted to do whatever it took to save a property. However, the Town’s Department argued for the safety and accountability of life. The Town believed if a structure is 70% engulfed, it does not seek to risk their firefighter’s life. In this situation, the structure was more than 70% engulfed. There is always confusion.”*

Concern: There is a need for a management structure that articulates goals and creates a path to achieve them. Presently, it appears that there multiple competing interests across town and county fire departments. Management whether explicit articulation of authority for the Fire Chief or another entity has the opportunity to enable Town of Wytheville to set reasonable goals, establish a process to achieve it, and access to continuous evaluation on the progress toward the desired endpoint.

The current disorganization negatively affects the service delivery to the visitors and residents of Town of Wytheville. Additionally, the confusion over the current organizational structure creates liability issues for the Town. In order to improve its level of service, it is recommended that internal organizational development strategies be considered. As an initial step, relevant individuals should utilize the Town’s Code – [Chapter 6 – Fire Prevention and Protection \(Section 6-1 – 6-15\)](#) which provides a comprehensive guidance on the authority of the fire chief and delivery of services. This recommendation will serve to stimulate organizational cohesion, innovation, and effectiveness while guiding the inevitable change that will occur as Town of Wytheville strengthens its fire suppression capabilities.

Recommendation:

2. Utilize the Town’s Code – [Chapter 6 – Fire Prevention and Protection \(Section 6-1 – 6-15\)](#). Article II provides comprehensive guidance on the authority of the fire chief and delivery of services.
3. Establish clear lines of Authority between the following roles; Fire Chief and Director of Public Safety.
4. It would be beneficial to create one cohesive and effective advisory board. This can be referred to Fire and Rescue Association (no specific names). The study team understands that presently there is a Wythe County Fire and EMS Committee in place. However, based on the interviewees – the county’s personnel lead it. There needs to be a collaborative effort from all parties including, the two towns and county so that it ensures all affected stakeholders have the ability to participate.
 - a. **Structure:** Membership should seek participation from one member from each of the volunteer departments and squads, a representative from the paid service, presumably the paid chief, representatives from the Town

Council and the Town Manager's Office, and a provision for one named alternate for each person. The locality has the discretion for the structure of the organization.

5. **System-wide Operational Specifications:** Working with their volunteer membership and relevant stakeholders – Town of Wytheville Fire Chief should adopt a single Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines (SOPs/SOGs) with an accountability system.

Strategic Planning

During the site visit, Town of Wytheville's fire services acknowledged the need for increased coordination. It was often mentioned that Town of Wytheville and Wythe County at times work separately. Such process could be catastrophic during a major emergency. Operationally, this presents several concerns and barriers towards accomplishing a consistent, high quality level of service sought by the region and its residents.

Town of Wytheville must collaboratively work with its stakeholders to pursue the establishment of one Strategic Plan. Although it will not be easy, it is highly encouraged for the entire region to take part in this pursuit. The Strategic Plan will provide a basis for long-term operational planning and will serve as a framework for services.¹³ Due to the current nature of the region, it is imperative that such planning must become institutionalized as an integral part of departments and community resource allocations.¹⁴

The strategic plan will further allow the vested parties the opportunity to create effective policies while attuned to its publics' interests, demands, and expectations. In public administration, decisions only have legitimacy if parties involved work together and are in agreement.¹⁵ The strategic planning process will create public value for Town of Wytheville and its neighboring localities if stakeholders are fairly represented and there is effective use of relevant expertise along with transparency of the deliberations.¹⁶

Recommendations:

1. The Town Council and Town Manager should pursue efforts to adopt and implement a data-driven strategic plan. Such action will increase performance levels and achieve lower cost of service delivery.
 - a. Stakeholders such as career and volunteer personnel along with Town Manager's office must each play an integral part in the development of this strategic plan in order to meet expectations and foster commitment.

¹³ Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments, November 2005

¹⁴ Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service, March 2004

¹⁵ Mark Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*, 1995

¹⁶ Ibid

- b. Parties involved in the strategic planning process should analyze the gap between where the Town is and where it wants to be in the future and identify strategies to close such gap.
 - c. If feasible, it is suggested that a neutral party facilitate this process.
- 2. In developing its strategic plan, the Town should create a unified vision and mission statement for the Fire system.
 - a. The vision statement should emphasize purposes, performance criteria, decision rules and standards that serve the public.¹⁷
 - b. A unified mission statement will foster a habit of focusing discussions and meetings on important issues.¹⁸
- 3. The strategic plan should further create a system of measurable goals and objectives. The performance measurement's factors will strengthen the strategic plan.
 - a. The strategic plan should identify immediate, intermediate and long-term goals with reasonable target deadlines.
 - b. Goals and objectives should be quantifiable, consistent, realistic and achievable.¹⁹
- 4. In developing its strategic plan, Town of Wytheville's fire departments should continue their commitment to using incident analysis and reporting such as the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS).
 - a. Town of Wytheville's commitment to reporting will ensure that they have reliable data to appropriately develop a plan to address operational and capital funding needs, or equipment, apparatus and facility needs.
 - b. The use of data such as VFIRS can be contributing factors to performance measurement and can further enable stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of the strategic plan.

Performance measurements will enable the Town Council to evaluate the performance assigned goals and objectives from the strategic plan.²⁰ The performance measurement will exhibit clear association between performing, planning, spending and results.²¹ Town of Wytheville will have the opportunity to evaluate service delivery through three perspectives: financial accountability, constituent priorities and internal processes.²²

Accountability Practices

¹⁷ John Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, 2004

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ For more information see, [Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments](#), November 2005

²⁰ Gerald Gordon, *Strategic Planning for Local Government*, 2005

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), a standard operating procedure is “an organizational directive that establishes a standard course of action.”²³ Thus, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are written guidelines that explain what is expected and required of fire service personnel in performing their jobs.²⁴ During the site visit, the study team discovered the absence of SOPs. Therefore, it is critical for the Town to implement and follow a system of unified SOPs to coordinate service delivery throughout Town of Wytheville. It is imperative that all members thoroughly understand their responsibilities and expectations. Organizations that lack SOPs are increasingly vulnerable to accidents, lawsuits, preventable costs, personnel problems, and damage to their professional image. The study team was advised of the town’s adoption of at least 30 standard operating guidelines which includes incident command systems. Working with its stakeholders, the Town should expand and develop a single Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines (SOPs/SOGs) with an accountability system.

Recommendations:

1. The Town should enhance Standards Operating Guidelines. Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG’s) designed to provide guidance during emergency incidents.²⁵ This guidance is aimed at ensuring operations are safe and effective. The main purpose of a SOG is to have everyone essentially operating from the same “playbook” at an incident.
 - a. The Town should take advantage of pre-existing resources on the development of Standard Operating Guidelines such as the United States Fire Administration’s guide on developing Standard Operating Procedures, along with other current organizational guidelines.
 - b. Once created, informational and training sessions should be held with all Town of Wytheville fire services members and partners.
 - c. The Table of Contents, or central listing and training, should be included in new members orientation to ensure integration into the organization or service.

2. Utilizing the guidelines outlined in NFPA 1561: Standard on Fire Department Incident Management Systems and Command Safety,²⁶ Town of Wytheville should formally establish, practice and strictly enforce an Incident Management System policy and accountability system.
 - a. Increased structure and coordination to the management of emergency incidents will ensure the safety and health of fire- personnel.
 - b. The Town should adopt an incident management system to manage all emergency incidents and training exercises as well as adopt written plans to anticipate incidents that require standardized procedures.

²³ For more information refer to [Developing Effective Standard Operating Procedures for EMS Departments, December 1999](#)

²⁴ For more information refer to [Developing Effective Standard Operating Procedures for EMS Departments, December 1999](#)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ For more information see, [NFPA 1561: Standard on Fire Department Incident Management Systems and Command Safety.](#)

- c. National and state standards should be used as a guide for the development process.²⁷
- d. It is recommended that these management practices and principles be developed, maintained, and reinforced through an on-going (annual) exercise program to include Table-Top Discussions, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises administered to ensure inter-departmental coordination, integration, and cooperation.

Fire Prevention Activities

The Town is commended for their effort to enact and adopt by ordinance the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) in accordance with § 27-97 of the Code of Virginia. The SFPC is a *“statewide standards to safeguard life and property from the hazards of fire or explosion arising from the improper maintenance of life safety and fire prevention and protection materials, devices, systems and structures and the unsafe storage handling, and use of substances, materials and devices, including fireworks, explosives and blasting agents, wherever located.”*²⁸

Recommendations:

1. Town of Wytheville should continue to do its work as it relates to enforcing the Statewide Fire Prevention Code in accordance with [§27-30](#) and [§27-34.2](#) of the Code of Virginia.

THEME 2: COMMUNICATIONS

In order to develop a cohesive system, the Town Council, service providers and the Town Administration²⁹ must foster positive external communication with the county and the Town of Rural Retreat. The enhanced communication should extend to nearby independent localities such as Smyth County along with members of the general public. Without effective and trusting relationships, the Town will have limited success with the recommendations contained in this report and any other attempts at coordinating and improving the fire services in Wytheville. Before other identified recommendations can be implemented, effective and reliable communication capabilities must be established between the volunteer departments and the Town.

All personnel must have access to reliable and instantaneous communications at all times to effectively coordinate response and recovery operations. Emergency communications is not solely a product of technology, but rather a condition of a locality’s governance, standard operating procedures and training. To achieve an effective and efficient emergency response framework, all areas of emergency communications must collectively work effectively.³⁰ Without reliable communications, the safety and security of Town of Wytheville’s service providers are jeopardized.

²⁷ For more information see [FEMA’s Incident Command System Resource Center](#)

²⁸ See [Statewide Fire Prevention Code \(SFPC\)](#)

²⁹ Town Administration will be interchangeably used as Town Manager’s Office through the report.

³⁰ Successful Response Starts with a Map. (2007). National Academies Press

Recommendation:

1. Town of Wytheville must consider hosting a strategic communication session to resolve challenges between the Town of Wytheville Town Council, the Town Administration and members of the volunteer and career departments.

Improved Dispatch System

The Town's communication system is managed and operated by Wythe County. Wythe County Board of Supervisors has made significant capital investments to improve the County's emergency communications system. In early June 2013, Wythe County transitioned to a consolidated emergency communications structure utilizing a new state-of-the-art facility.³¹ Wythe County's Emergency Communications Center now answers all calls-for-service for law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services throughout the county as well as in the towns of Wytheville and Rural Retreat.³² Additionally, the new center has implemented newly developed response districts, which account for new mapping technologies.

Levels of Interdepartmental Communications

During the site visit, the study committee observed and documented inconsistent communication among service providers and the Town Government. There are continuous uncertainty and frustration issues related to how information is disseminated. The lack of consistent, personal, and professional communications between service providers and its local government has the potential to affect the application of activities in Town of Wytheville. According to one source, *"we would like outsider input on how to achieve the best system possible."* Elected officials have received numerous letters from constituents which essentially indicates their apprehension to have a fire or other emergency needs as one individual cited in their letter "department seems to pick and choose their response levels." Additionally, there is a fear among volunteer and career personnel that making organizational improvement recommendations or expressing concern will result in some level of retaliation.

The burden lies with the Town Administration and the Town Council to resolve any conflicting perception and ensure an open and honest dialogue is established. The Town must identify and resolve the breakdowns in communications and work tirelessly to educate all members.³³ The current obstacles experienced by Town of Wytheville have the potential to divert personnel from their core mission of assisting the residents of Town of Wytheville. The volunteer personnel must understand that communications is a two-way process, therefore, all relevant parties must work together to provide the highest quality level of service for the Town.

³¹ Wythe County, Virginia

³² http://www.tricity.com/swvatoday/news/wytheville/article_c7030ac2-d388-11e2-ba9e-0019bb30f31a.html

³³ For more information, see [Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments, November 2005](#)

Lastly, the Town is commended for their effort of utilizing the Wytheville Fire Department to provide Fire Prevention Education Programs throughout the year to schools, businesses, churches, civic groups and nursing homes.³⁴ The WFD also hosts an annual Fire Prevention Parade which is held the second Saturday in October during Fire Prevention Week.

Recommendations:

1. The Town should host a strategic communication session with a professional mediator to resolve existing challenges and barriers amongst the following entities; service providers, Town of Wytheville Administration, Town Council, Career and Volunteer firefighters and neighboring localities..
 - a. The objective of this work session should be to develop strategies to overcome identified barriers. It should further create and implement an effective communication system involving the fire, Town Government and with the general public.
 - b. The Town must develop an efficient and effective communication model to ensure all stakeholders within the public safety community have input into long-term plans and decisions.
 - c. This communication model must ensure reliable documentation related to public safety strategic planning and development. It must be disseminated and received by all public safety stakeholders.
2. The Town should explore additional ways to communicate citizens. Some options include producing an annual report, developing a quarterly newsletter and utilizing social networking avenues.
3. The Town should continue its effort to strengthen the fire and life-safety communication activities with the residents of Town of Wytheville.
 - a. Increased efforts to promote the positives attributes of the fire services can raise morale and attract more volunteers. Some options include producing an annual report, developing a quarterly newsletter and utilizing social networking avenues.
4. The Town should take advantage of pre-existing fire and life-safety information available through state and federal organizations. Public life-safety education resources are available at the following locations:
 - i. Virginia Department of Fire Programs
 - ii. Virginia Life Safety Coalition
 - iii. The Home Safety Council
 - iv. National Fire Protection Association

³⁴ Wytheville Fire Department

- v. Virginia Department of Forestry (Town of Wytheville Forestry Office)
- vi. Virginia Department of Emergency Management
- vii. Vision 20/20 National Strategies for Fire Loss Prevention

THEME 3: TRAINING

Tactical equality recognizes all positions, from firefighter through senior fire officer and requires minimum training standards to ensure performance level.³⁵ Tactical equality appears to be positive in Town of Wytheville. The Wytheville Fire Department should pursue efforts to enhance training through increased use of performance-based, certifiable training and the opportunity for all volunteer personnel and career within Wythe County to train together. The approach will facilitate the development of personal and professional relationships. Training and continuity of leadership are closely joined because solid basic training will foster strong and consistent cooperation among emergency response.

Moreover, similar to many occupations with high physical demand and hazards, injuries in the fire service are a regular concern for departments and the localities it serves.³⁶ Consequently, there has been increased adoption of Risk Management related policies (RM) within the fire services nationwide. Nationally, the fire services industry is pursuing formal proactive approach to improve occupational safety and health.³⁷

Town of Wytheville's Fire Department appears to be utilizing an informal method of risk management efforts. Members appear to not understand the importance of training safely which makes it difficult for them to provide reasonable service to its customers in a safe and efficient manner. It is highly encouraged through the establishment and adoption of the SOG, both the fire department and the Town Manager's office collaborate in identifying which aspects currently utilized to manage risk within the scope of training is working and which areas could be improved.

Coordinated Training Program

Development of important skills is the basis for safety and improving services received by the citizens. Coordination to provide additional training opportunities is needed with an emphasis of increasing cohesion between organizations and ensuring cost-saving. Such effort must be led by the Town's Government.

Recommendations:

1. Explore the feasibility of developing a comprehensive training program to be assessed annually and collectively coordinating the application of training program.

³⁵ For more information, see [Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments, November 2005](#)

³⁶ For more information see, [Beyond the fire ground: injuries in the fire service. 2012](#)

³⁷ For more information see, [Establishing a proactive safety and health risk management system in the fire service. 2015](#)

- a. **Schedule/Calendar:** Ensure that training opportunities are scheduled to meet the needs of volunteer members. The Town should consider establishing convenient courses schedules for weekends or nights so that offerings are spread across a longer period of time. The consideration must also be extended to specialty training.
2. **Collaboration:** Enhance efforts of collaborative multi-company training opportunities.
3. **Competency:** The Town should work collaboratively with its stakeholders to ensure all service providers are competent, trained and capable to perform assigned duties.
4. **Specialty Training:** The Town must acknowledge the emphasis and importance of specialty training in Town of Wytheville such as extrication.
5. **Training Committee:** The Town Council and its Administration should explore the feasibility of creating a Training Committee to develop and coordinate the application of a training program. This committee should work to increase the number of trainings and collaborative multi-company training opportunities.
 - a. It is important for the Training Committee to ensure that the necessary training is being offered and with appropriate notice to ensure maximum turnout and return on investment.
 - b. Better coordination and increased local training opportunities will also assist with recruitment and retention efforts for Town of Wytheville.
 - c. The Town should explore utilizing both traditional classroom platforms as well as distance learning models. Online training allows greater flexibility in the application of courses to accommodate the schedule of volunteers.
 - d. The Town Council should appropriate all the necessary resources to fulfill the Town's identified training challenges and fully train existing firefighter personnel.

THEME 4: BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION

The Town's FY18 budget cites that there was \$540,760 allocated to the fire department.³⁸ In contrast, the FY19 budget indicates that it has adopted \$757,275 for the fire department, a \$216,515 increase. According to the budget, the aforementioned figures covers salary, line of duty, gas, oil, truck repair etc.³⁹

Financial Accountability

³⁸ Town Adopted Budget – FY18

³⁹ Ibid

Based on the study committee's observation, Town of Wytheville provides adequate funding and also incurs reasonable amount of expenses for its fire department. However, it appears that there is no internal auditing process that would allow an understanding of the process utilized for tracking expenditures and inventory. Strong accounting practices and accountability measures provide leadership the opportunity to demonstrate its financial needs.

Recommendations:

1. **Accountability Plan:** A formal accountability plan should be developed for Town of Wytheville. The plan should be communicated to citizens.
 - a. The Town should promote such accountability process to exhibit the value of financial resources, human capital and time.
2. **CIP:** Town Council should develop a capital improvement plan (CIP) for upgrading its fire equipment. At minimum it should include funding for apparatus replacement, turnout gear and air pack replacement.
 - a. Town Council should establish an equipment replacement policy with an emphasis on rotational equipment replacement based on prioritized needs.
3. **Grants:** The Town of Wytheville Town Council should consider using a Grants Writer to assist the organizations with the acquisition and management of grants. This individual should research and consider the availability of all federal, state and private grant programs, including:
 - a. Virginia Department of Forestry Grants
 - i. Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Grant
 - ii. Firewise Virginia Community Hazard Mitigation Grants
 - iii. The Department of Forestry's Dry Hydrant grant.
 - b. Federal Emergency Management Agency Firefighter Grants: The page contains links to the Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) programs, Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG), Fire Prevention & Safety (FP&S), and Staffing for Adequate Emergency Response (SAFER).
 - c. Virginia Department of Health-Office of Emergency Medical Services' Squad Assistance Fund (RSAF) Grants.
 - d. Virginia Department and Virginia Fire Services Board Grants.
 - e. Various private grant programs.⁴⁰

Standardization and Central Purchasing

⁴⁰ A wide variety of EMS grants can be found on <http://www.grants.gov/> <http://www.firegrantshelp.com/nvfc/> and <http://www.emsgrantshelp.com/>

The Town can potentially have cost-savings if there is standardization of future equipment and apparatus purchases. Standardization and Central is necessary for delivering cost-effective and efficient services. Group purchasing is recommended for the Town of Wytheville.

Recommendation:

1. The Town Administration should develop and implement a centralized purchasing option to leverage purchasing power and reduce operational expenses.
2. The Town Administration after consultation with the stakeholders shall develop specifications for central purchase activity areas. Below are suggested areas/activities for central purchasing:
 - a. Personal Protective Equipment⁴¹ and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus⁴²
Ensure all departments are purchasing compatible equipment that meets National Fire Protection Association standards and are reaping the same cost savings.
 - b. Equipment/Apparatus – The Emergency Services Committee should survey each department to determine if equipment commonalities exist. As previously mentioned, common apparatus specifications should be created and contracted, allowing volunteer organizations to make customizations without overly altering the specs, and reap the benefits of group purchasing for routine maintenance and replacement of aging ambulance and fire apparatus.
3. Establish a basic truck maintenance/service/fueling system within the Town’s in-house capabilities.
4. The Emergency Services Committee should develop specifications for future apparatus purchases (considering the cost-effectiveness of regional contracts), refurbishment and replacement using the following national consensus standards:
 - a. NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus ⁴³
 - b. NFPA 1911 – Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Emergency Vehicles.⁴⁴
 - c. NFPA 1912 – Standard for Fire Apparatus Refurbishing ⁴⁵

THEME 5: DELIVERY OF SERVICES

According to the Town’s Administration, extrication as previously provided by the Wythe County Rescue Squads has been transferred over to the Town of Wytheville’s Fire

⁴¹ See NFPA 1971 Standard on Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting

⁴² See NFPA 1981 Standard on Open-Circuit Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) for Emergency Services

⁴³ See NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus

⁴⁴ See NFPA 1911 – Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Emergency Vehicles

⁴⁵ See NFPA 1912 – Standard for Fire Apparatus Refurbishing

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Department. The change has placed a pressure on the Town. There is a need for additional training, equipment and personnel.

Recommendations:

1. Town of Wytheville Government should work with relevant stakeholders to identify needs for additional fire personnel to meet service demands and citizen expectations.
 - a. The Town Government should reexamine its current system and must find methods to effectively use the human capital that are in the system presently.
2. Similarly, the Town must seek to bring region specific training to allow service providers the opportunity to advance their skills.

Recruitment and Retention

Managing the recruitment and retention of fire service staff is essential to the operation of a fire department and ensures an effective department response. Town of Wytheville falls within the current 48% of Commonwealth localities that has felt the impact of declining numbers of men and women volunteering for departments.⁴⁶ In regards to recruitment, the study team discovered the presence of limited action-oriented recruitment assistance from the Town. It is highly encouraged for Town of Wytheville Government to increase its efforts of helping stations recruit volunteers. With respect to retention, the study team believes the locality should consider decal reimbursement as an option to retain volunteers. The Town must provide increased leadership and participation towards the recruitment of volunteers.

Recommendations:

1. **Personnel:** Town of Wytheville should enhance its recruitment and retention program.
 - a. The recruitment and retention program should take into consideration the needs of current volunteers and identify motivational factors to keep this population engaged and committed to the fire services.
 - b. The Town should set annual recruitment and retention goals and concentrate its efforts and resources to achieving these benchmarks. The plan should be included in the strategic plan.
 - c. Opportunities of partnering with high schools to create training should be explored.
2. The Town Government should find low-cost methods to enhance public-education efforts such as open houses and creating Public Service Announcement (PSAs).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For additional detail see, [Virginia Fire Services 2017 Needs Assessment](#)

⁴⁷ [Fire Service Image Task Force Report: Taking Responsibility for a Positive Public Perception 15](#)

- a. Improve the visibility of the Town of Wytheville fire in the community.
3. Town Council should consider pursuing a local ordinance outlining the standard policies and identification measures for junior firefighters.
 - a. The occupation of firefighting has been declared hazardous. The *Code of Virginia § 40.1-79.1* outlines specific requirements, including a local ordinance, before a local jurisdiction can utilize junior firefighters.
 - b. Without specifically outlining the response role of these individuals, the Town assumes a considerable level of liability should these members become injured.
 - c. A specific and strictly followed set of procedures allows other departments to know the limited response capabilities of these individuals and will improve overall response.
4. Town of Wytheville should take advantage of pre-existing recruitment and retention information. Resources July be downloaded at the following locations:
 - a. Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
 - i. Recruitment & Retention
 - ii. Leadership & Management
 - b. National Volunteer Fire Council
 - c. 2004 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission Report on Review of EMS in Virginia.

Operations and Staffing

The locality should continue its efforts to pay attention to ensure response capabilities are adequate for the potential hazards presented by the economic developments in the Town. The study team observed that over the years, the locality has evolved into a combination department with six full-time career firefighters and a roster of 11 volunteers.⁴⁸ NFPA 1720: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments recommends the following staffing and response times;⁴⁹ a rural area must have at least 6 volunteer members available to respond to an incident within 14 minutes of dispatch.⁵⁰ It appears that the locality works hard to ensure it meets the above standards.

Recommendations:

1. Town of Wytheville must consider establishing minimal staffing standards for apparatus response.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ For more information see, [NFPA 1720 Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments](#)

⁵⁰ Ibid

2. The Town should seek to reduce residents insurance cost by improving Insurance Service Office (ISO) ratings.
 - a. This can be accomplished through improved training records and adding more dry hydrants within the community.
 - b. The Town should continue working with the Department of Forestry (DOF) to obtain additional Dry Hydrants.
 - i. Grants can be obtained through Forestry's Dry Hydrant Grant Program.
3. Town of Wytheville fire services should continue to keep accurate records of incident response times in order to continuously assess response capabilities.
 - a. It is recommended that the Town utilize the NFPA guidance documents as resource documents.
 - b. The 2014 edition of *NFPA 1720: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments* addresses the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and special operations to the public by all volunteer fire departments.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Town of Wytheville Letter of Request – January 2018

APPENDIX 1: TOWN OF WYTHEVILLE LETTER OF REQUEST

TOWN OF WYTHEVILLE
COUNCIL-MANAGER FORM OF GOVERNMENT SINCE 1924

TOWN COUNCIL
MAYOR
TREVIN G. DREW JR.
VICE MAYOR
JACQUELINE K. KING
COUNCIL MEMBERS
THOMAS F. HINDLEY
JOSEPH E. HANDEL JR.
BETH A. TAYLOR



"The Hub of Southwest Virginia"
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TOWN MANAGER
C. WAYNE SUTHERLAND, JR.
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ASSISTANT TOWN MANAGER
STEPHEN A. MOORE, AIA
(276) 223-3352
TOWN TREASURER
MICHAEL G. STEPHENS, MET
(276) 223-3333
CLERK OF COUNCIL
SHARON S. CDRVIN
(276) 223-3349

February 13, 2018

Mr. Mohamed G. Abbamin, MPA
Policy Manager
Virginia Department of Fire Programs
Glen Allen, Virginia 23059

Department of Fire Programs
FEB 20 2018
Administration

RE: Comprehensive Analysis Study of Fire System Request – Town of Wytheville

Dear Mr. Abbamin

This is to request the services of the Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) in conducting a complete and thorough review of the fire system in the Town of Wytheville.

This study has the support of the Wytheville Town Council as shown by the attached resolution adopted at the Town Council meeting held on February 12, 2018.

The requested areas of concentration of this study include:

- Organization
- Budget and Administration
- Personnel
- Delivery of Services
- Fleet Design and Management (Equipment/Apparatus)
- Training/Staff Operations

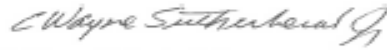
It is the Council's proposal to have a complete and thorough review of the aforementioned areas of concentration and a comprehensive list of recommendations to enhance the delivery of services to the citizens of the Town of Wytheville.

February 13, 2018
Page Two

Your consideration of this request at the next available opportunity would be greatly appreciated. I am available to respond to any questions you may have regarding this request. I can be reached by phone at (276) 223-3350 or by email at waynesutherland@wytheville.org. Also, you may contact Albert L. Newberry, Director of Public Safety, by phone at (276) 223-3340 or by email at aln@wytheville.org for any questions you may have in regard to this request.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely



C. Wayne Sutherland, Jr.
Town Manager

.Attachment

CWSjr/khj

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