

# Virginia Fire Services Board



## A Report of Findings And Recommendations:

### Southampton County Fire & EMS Study



June 2020

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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:

Southampton Sheriff Dispatch

Courtland Volunteer Fire Department

Courtland Rescue

Capron Fire and Rescue

Dreweryville Fire Department

Greenville Rescue Squad

Branchville Volunteer Fire Department

Boykin Volunteer Fire Department

Newsome Volunteer Fire Department

Franklin City Fire Department

Hunterdale Volunteer Fire Department

Sedley Volunteer Fire Department

Ivor Volunteer Fire Department

Ivor Volunteer Rescue Squad

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### ***Theme 1: Organizational and Operational Development (Page 10)***

- ***Centralized Authority:*** Establish clear lines of Authority between the following roles; County Fire & Rescue Chiefs and a Director of Public Safety.
  - a. **Director of Public Safety:** It would be beneficial to create a Director of Public Safety Position to ensure a cohesive county response organization.
- ***Strategic Planning:*** The Southampton County should adopt and implement a data-driven strategic plan for its fire & rescue services to increase performance levels and achieve lower cost of service delivery.
  - The County should develop a unified vision and mission statement for the Southampton County Fire & Rescue 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:*** Southampton County 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.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Theme 2: Communications (Page 14)***

- ***Levels of Interdepartmental Communications:*** The County should host a strategic communication session with a professional mediator to resolve existing challenges and barriers amongst the following entities; Sheriff's Office, the various fire and rescue departments, and South Hampton County Administration.
- ***Improved Dispatch:*** Improvement of communication between local departments to ensure transparency to provide top emergency services within the county.

### ***Theme 3: Training (Page 16)***

- ***Coordinated Training Program:*** Explore the feasibility of developing a comprehensive training program to be assessed annually and collectively coordinating the application of training program.
- ***Minimum Training Standards:*** The county should develop a minimum training policy for all fire and rescue organizations to ensure their compliance with applicable regulatory requirements.

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

**Theme 4: Budget and Administration** (Page 18)

- Financial Accountability: A formal accountability plan should be developed for Southampton County. The plan should be communicated to citizens.
  - The County of Southampton 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.
  - The County of Southampton should consider requiring all fire and rescue department to have a financial audit of their records to ensure funds are being allocated appropriately.
- Standardization and Central Purchasing: Southampton County Government should develop and implement a centralized purchasing option to leverage the County purchasing power and reduce operational expenses.

**Theme 5: Delivery of Services** (Page 20)

- Personnel: Southampton County Government should work with relevant stakeholders to identify needs for additional fire and rescue personnel to meet service demands and citizen expectations.
- Recruitment and Retention: Southampton County should adopt a recruitment and retention plan.
- Operations and Staffing: Southampton County 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 Southampton County 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 Southampton County's study project manager and point-of-contact, County Administrator, Michael Johnson. The County Administrator and staff assisted in finalizing the interview list and establishing a schedule that was

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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 Southampton County's Fire Departments, City of Franklin Fire Department, and County leadership including the aforementioned County Manager

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 stations 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 County of Southampton.

Each action step was selected to identify the changes in policies, facilities, apparatus, and equipment to ensure that the County would be capable of providing fire and rescue 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, background, and findings and recommendations. Once completed, a draft report was

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shared with the County Administrator; 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.



## **COUNTY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

In 2017, Southampton County, VA had a population of 18.1k people with a median age of 45.8 and a median household income of \$53,681. Between 2016 and 2017 the population of Southampton County, VA declined from 18,291 to 18,089, a -1.1% decrease and its median household income grew from \$51,032 to \$53,681, a 5.19% increase. Southampton County is located in the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, Division 5 on the border of Virginia and North Carolina. It borders Suffolk City, Isle of Wight County, Sussex County, Surry County, and Franklin City.

In regards to public safety, both the town and the county provide police protection. Southampton County has 16 fire/rescue departments that include Courtland Volunteer Fire Department, Courtland Rescue, Capron Fire and Rescue, Dreweryville Fire Department, Greenville Rescue Squad, Branchville Volunteer Fire Department, Boykin Volunteer Fire Department, Newsome Volunteer Fire Department, Franklin City Fire Department, Hunterdale Volunteer Fire Department, Sedley Volunteer Fire Department, Ivor Volunteer Fire Department, and Ivor Volunteer Rescue Squad. Southampton County has some career staff while Franklin City has a combination staffing makeup whereas the remaining fire departments are composed entirely of volunteers.

The rescue squads in Southampton County are strategically located throughout the county and contributions to the operation of these squads are made by the county government.

## **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 14)**

- Improved Dispatch System
- Levels of Interdepartmental Communications

### **Theme 3: Training (Page 16)**

- Coordinated Training Program
- Minimum Training Standards

### **Theme 4: Budget and Administration (Page 18)**

- Financial Accountability
- Standardization and Central Purchasing

### **Theme 5: Delivery of Services (Page 20 )**

- Personnel
- Recruitment and Retention
- Operations and Staffing

Southampton County'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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Visit the [National Fire Protection Association \(NFPA\)](#) website for a complete listing of the national consensus standards.

## **THEME 1: ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The County of Southampton emergency departments have evolved into a different jurisdictional volunteer agencies department with supplemental career full-time career firefighters. The County of Southampton protects approximately 18,089 citizens in a 602 square mile response area. The various departments of Southampton County provide Fire Prevention Education Programs throughout the year to schools, businesses, churches, civic groups and nursing homes.

The County 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 County of Southampton answers is entered into the national database where statistics are compiled. According to County of Southampton it answers approximately 569 calls a year.

### ***Centralized Authority***

Currently the county emergency services discuss issues through the Southampton County Fire/ Rescue Association. This organization consists of the following organizations Boykins Fire, Boykins Rescue, Branchville Fire, Capron Fire, Capron Rescue, Courtland Fire, Courtland Rescue, Hunterdale Fire, Ivor Fire, Ivor Rescue, Drewryville Fire, Sedley Fire, Newsoms Fire, and Franklin Fire & Rescue. They help to collaborate on emergency services in the county by having a Fire Training officer as well as an EMS Training Officer.

### **Recommendation:**

1. It would be beneficial to create one cohesive and effective advisory board. The study team understands that presently there is a Southampton County Fire and EMS Committee in place. However, based on the interviewees – there needs to be a collaborative effort from all parties 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 departments and squads. The locality has the discretion for the structure of the organization.
  - b. **Codification of Association:** This Association should be codified outlining specific responsibilities and expectations to improve the organizational cohesiveness and efficiency. Bylaws and Guidelines should be created and voted upon by the county Board of Supervisors to govern over the process and work of the board. These bylaws and guidelines should be disbursed to all members and emergency services personnel.
  - c. **Role:** The entity would provide valuable contribution on decision-making efforts relating to emergency services operational and administrative procedures to the Board of Supervisors. Furthermore, it must function as a voice for all fire and EMS providers. It is therefore incumbent of all administrators to respect the products that come from the committee.

2. Establish clear lines of Authority between the various responding agencies.
3. **System-wide Operational Specifications:** Working with their volunteer membership and relevant stakeholders – Southampton County should adopt a single Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines (SOPs/SOGs) with an accountability system.

### ***Strategic Planning***

During the site visit, Southampton County’s fire services acknowledged the need for increased coordination. It was often mentioned that Southampton County, Southampton Sheriff’s Office, and Franklin City 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.

The County of Southampton 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. Due to the current nature of the region, it is imperative that such planning become institutionalized as an integral part of the departments and community resource allocations.

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. The strategic planning process will create public value for Southampton County and its neighboring localities if stakeholders are fairly represented and there is effective use of relevant expertise along with transparency of the deliberations.<sup>3</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

1. The County 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 County Manager’s office must each play an integral part in the development of this strategic plan in order to meet expectations and foster commitment.
  - b. Parties involved in the strategic planning process should analyze the gap between where the County 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 County 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.
  - b. A unified mission statement will foster a habit of focusing discussions and meetings on important issues.
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.
4. In developing its strategic plan, the County of Southampton fire and rescue departments should continue their commitment to using incident analysis and reporting such as the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS).
  - a. The county of Southampton'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 County of Southampton to evaluate the performance assigned goals and objectives from the strategic plan. The performance measurement will exhibit clear association between performing, planning, spending and results. Southampton County will have the opportunity to evaluate service delivery through three perspectives: financial accountability, constituent priorities and internal processes.

### ***Accountability Practices***

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), a standard operating procedure is "an organizational directive that establishes a standard course of action."<sup>4</sup> Thus, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are written guidelines that explain what is expected and required of fire service personnel in performing their jobs.<sup>5</sup> During the site visit, the study team discovered the absence of SOPs. Therefore, it is critical for the County to implement and follow a system of unified SOPs to coordinate service delivery throughout Southampton County. It is imperative that all members thoroughly understand

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<sup>4</sup> For more information refer to [Developing Effective Standard Operating Procedures for EMS Departments, December 1999](#)

<sup>5</sup> For more information refer to [Developing Effective Standard Operating Procedures for EMS Departments, December 1999](#)

their responsibilities and expectations. Organizations that lack SOPs are increasingly vulnerable to accidents, lawsuits, preventable costs, personnel problems, and damage to their professional image. Working with its stakeholders, the County should expand and develop a single Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines (SOPs/SOGs) with an accountability system.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The County should enhance Standards Operating Guidelines. Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG's) designed to provide guidance during emergency incidents.<sup>6</sup> 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 County 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 Southampton County 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,<sup>7</sup> Southampton County 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 County 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.
  - c. National and state standards should be used as a guide for the development process.<sup>8</sup>
  - 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.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> For more information see, [NFPA 1561: Standard on Fire Department Incident Management Systems and Command Safety](#).

<sup>8</sup> For more information see [FEMA's Incident Command System Resource Center](#)

## **THEME 2: COMMUNICATIONS**

In order to develop a cohesive system Franklin, County of Southampton, and the Southampton Sheriff's Office must foster positive external communication with the responsible parties. The enhanced communication should extend to members of the general public. Without effective and trusting relationships, the County will have limited success with the recommendations contained in this report and any other attempts at coordinating and improving the fire services in Southampton County. Before other identified recommendations can be implemented, effective and reliable communication capabilities must be established between the listed agencies.

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. Without reliable communications, the safety and security of Southampton County's service providers are jeopardized.

### ***Improved Dispatch System***

The County's communication system is managed and operated by Southampton Sheriff's Department. Southampton County transitioned to an 800 MHz emergency communications structure utilizing the Sheriff's Dispatch Center located at 22336 Main Street Courtland, VA 23837. Southampton County's Emergency Communications Center now answers all calls-for-service for law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services throughout the county.

### **Recommendation:**

1. The County of Southampton County must consider hosting a strategic communication session to resolve challenges between the Southampton County Sheriff's Office, the Town of Franklin and members of the volunteer and career departments.

### ***Levels of Interdepartmental Communications***

During the site visit, the study committee observed and documented inconsistent communication among service providers and the Sheriff's Office. 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 emergency response activities in Southampton County. It was a common complaint that the delay in dispatching fire and rescue personnel severely hampers the response abilities throughout the county. There is a fear among volunteer and career personnel that making organizational

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improvement recommendations or expressing concern will result in some level of retaliation.

The burden lies with the County Administration and the Sheriff's Office to resolve any conflicting perception and ensure an open and honest dialogue is established. The County must identify and resolve the breakdowns in communications and work tirelessly to educate all members. The current obstacles experienced by Southampton County have the potential to delay personnel from their core mission of assisting the residents of Southampton County. 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 County.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The County should host a strategic communication session with a professional mediator to resolve existing challenges and barriers amongst all communications stakeholders.
  - 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.
  - b. The County 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 County should explore additional ways to communicate to citizens. Some options include producing an annual report, developing a quarterly newsletter and utilizing social networking avenues.
3. The County should continue its effort to strengthen the fire and life-safety communication activities with the residents of Southampton County.
  - 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 County 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
- v. Virginia Department of Forestry (Southampton County 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. Tactical equality appears to be positive in Southampton County. The Southampton County Fire Departments should pursue efforts to enhance training through increased use of performance-based, certifiable training and the opportunity for all volunteer personnel and career within Southampton 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. 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.

Southampton County'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 County 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 County Government.

## Recommendations:

1. Explore the feasibility of developing a comprehensive training program to be assessed annually and collectively coordinating the application of training program.
  - a. **Schedule/Calendar:** Ensure that training opportunities are scheduled to meet the needs of volunteer members. The County 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 County should work collaboratively with its stakeholders to ensure all service providers are competent, trained and capable to perform assigned duties. The County should adopt a minimum training qualification of VDFP Fire Fighter I for all fire and EMS personnel who are required to perform interior fire attack operations.
4. **Specialty Training:** The County must acknowledge the emphasis and importance of specialty training in South Hampton County such as extrication, decontamination, Advanced EMT Care, etc.
5. **Training Committee:** The County 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 Southampton County.
  - c. The County 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 County's Administration should appropriate all the necessary resources to fulfill the County's identified training challenges and fully train existing firefighter personnel.

### ***Minimum Training Standards***

The Study committee determined that Southampton County does not currently have SOGs/ SOPs as it relates to minimum training standards for emergency personnel. To ensure that all departments are operating in a safe and competent manner.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Implement minimum Training Standards to ensure the proper response and care to all citizens within the county.
2. Work with the Southampton County Fire/ Rescue Association to help promulgate the minimum standards to encourage stakeholder input.

## **THEME 4: BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION**

The County's FY2019 budget cites that there was \$388,640 allocated to the fire departments, \$1,809,870 for EMS, and \$559,777 for Fire and EMS Capital. According to the budget, the aforementioned figures covers salary, line of duty, gas, oil, truck repair etc.

### ***Financial Accountability***

Based on the study committee's observation, the County of Southampton provides funding and incurs reasonable amount of expenses for its fire departments. 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 the County of Southampton. The plan should be communicated to citizens.
  - a. The County should promote such accountability process to exhibit the value of financial resources, human capital and time.
2. **CIP:** Southampton County 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. Southampton County should establish an equipment replacement policy with an emphasis on rotational equipment replacement based on regulatory requirement prioritized needs.
3. **Grants:** Southampton County Board of Supervisors 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.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Standardization and Central Purchasing***

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

#### **Recommendation:**

1. The County Administration should develop and implement a centralized purchasing option to leverage purchasing power and reduce operational expenses.
2. The County 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 Equipment<sup>10</sup> and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus<sup>11</sup>  
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 Southampton County Fire/Rescue Association 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.

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<sup>9</sup> A wide variety of EMS grants can be found on <http://www.grants.gov/> <http://www.firegrantshelp.com/nvfc/> and <http://www.emsgrantshelp.com/>

<sup>10</sup> See NFPA 1971 Standard on Protective Ensembles for Structural Fire Fighting and Proximity Fire Fighting

<sup>11</sup> See NFPA 1981 Standard on Open-Circuit Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) for Emergency Services

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.

3. Establish a basic truck maintenance/service/fueling system within the County's in-house capabilities.
4. The Southampton County Fire/Rescue Association 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 <sup>12</sup>
  - b. NFPA 1911 – Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Emergency Vehicles.<sup>13</sup>
  - c. NFPA 1912 – Standard for Fire Apparatus Refurbishing <sup>14</sup>

### **THEME 5: DELIVERY OF SERVICES**

According to the County Administration, there is a current contract for supplemental EMS services that will be replaced by a more comprehensive support contract that will be provided by the City of Franklin Fire Department. The change has placed pressure on the Franklin Fire Department to establish the staffing levels needed for the new contract. The new personnel requirements for the Firefighter/EMT staffing will allow for a more comprehensive response program than the previous EMT specific support program.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Southampton County Government should work with relevant stakeholders to identify needs for additional support personnel to meet service demands and citizen expectations.
  - a. The County 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 County must seek to bring region specific training to allow service providers the opportunity to maintain and advance their skills.

### ***Recruitment and Retention***

Ten volunteer fire departments and six volunteer rescue squads provide fire and rescue service in Southampton County. Fire departments are located throughout the County in Boykins, Branchville, Capron, Courtland, Drewryville, Franklin, Ivor, Hunterdale, Newsoms, and Sedley. Rescue squads are located in Boykins, Capron, Courtland, Franklin, Greenville, and Ivor. Medical Transport LLC provides EMT services in Southampton County.

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<sup>12</sup> See [NFPA 1901 - Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus](#)

<sup>13</sup> See [NFPA 1911 – Standard for the Inspection, Maintenance, Testing, and Retirement of In-Service Emergency Vehicles](#)

<sup>14</sup> See [NFPA 1912 – Standard for Fire Apparatus Refurbishing](#)

Managing the recruitment and retention of fire service staff is essential to the operation of a fire department and ensures an effective department response. Southampton County has felt the impact of declining numbers of men and women volunteering for departments. In regards to recruitment, the study team discovered the presence of limited action-oriented recruitment assistance from the County. It is highly encouraged for Southampton County Government to increase its efforts of helping stations recruit volunteers. With respect to retention, the study team believes the locality should consider options to retain volunteers. The County must provide increased leadership and participation towards the recruitment of volunteers.

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Personnel:** Southampton County 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 County 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 and local community college to re-create training opportunities should be explored. This program was implemented in the past but was terminated for different reported reasons.
2. The County Government should find low-cost methods to enhance public-education efforts such as open houses and creating Public Service Announcement (PSAs).<sup>15</sup>
  - a. Improve the visibility of the Southampton County fire & EMS in the community.
3. The County Administration 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 County assumes a considerable level of liability should these members become injured.

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<sup>15</sup> Fire Service Image Task Force Report: Taking Responsibility for a Positive Public Perception 15

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- 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. Southampton County should take advantage of pre-existing recruitment and retention information. Resources can 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 County. The study team observed that over the years, the locality has evolved into partial staffing throughout the county with a wide variety of responders depending on the location of the stations. 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;<sup>16</sup> a rural area must have at least 6 volunteer members available to respond to an incident within 14 minutes of dispatch.<sup>17</sup> It appears that the locality does not meet the above standards outside the staffing of Franklin City Fire Department.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Southampton County must consider establishing minimal staffing standards for apparatus response.
2. The County should seek to reduce resident's 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 County should continue working with the Department of Forestry (DOF) to obtain additional Dry Hydrants.

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<sup>16</sup> 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](#)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

- i. Grants can be obtained through Forestry's Dry Hydrant Grant Program.
- 3. Southampton County 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 County 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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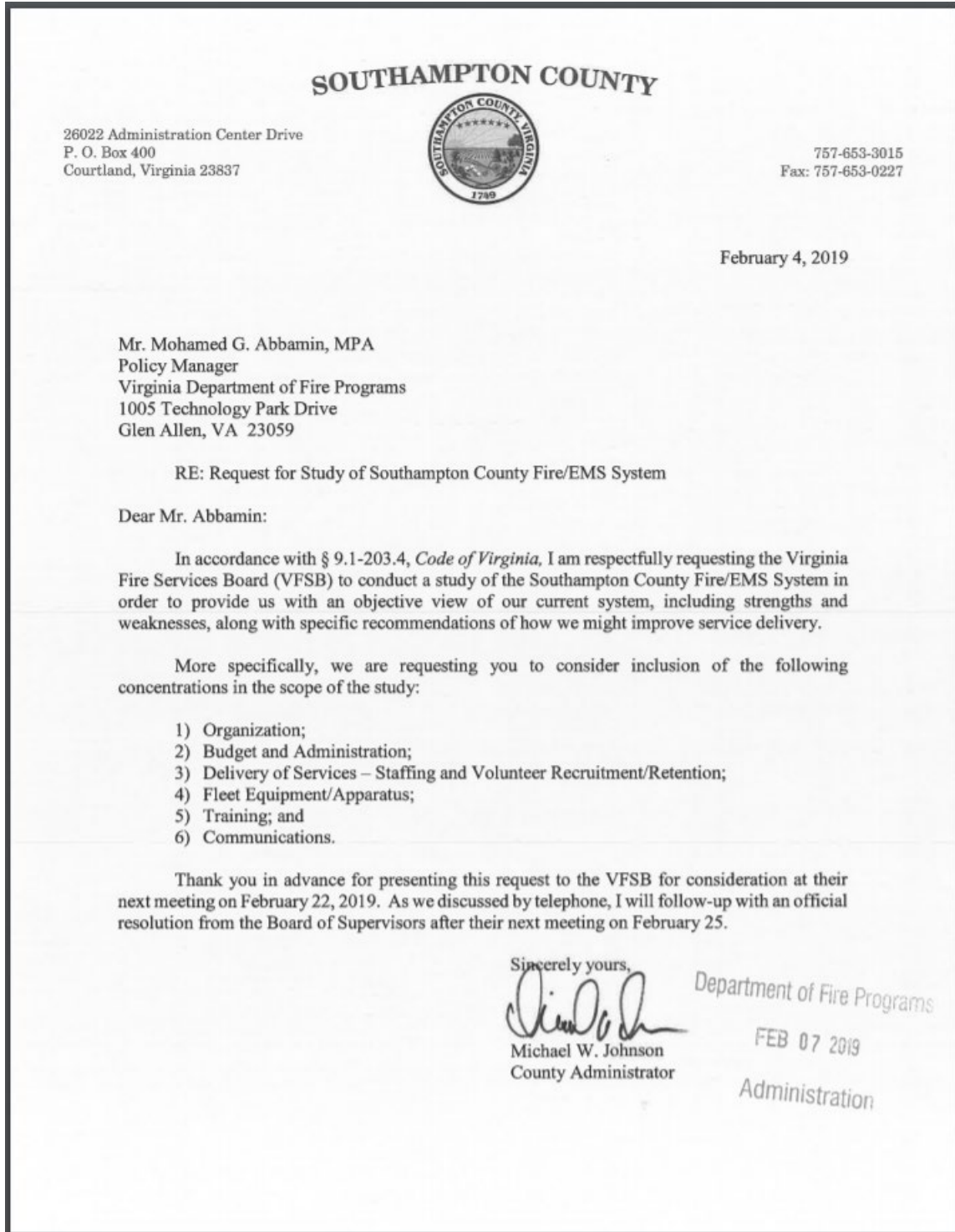
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**APPENDIXES**

**Appendix 1: South Hampton County Letter of Request – February 2019**



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