

# **VIRGINIA FIRE SERVICES BOARD**



## **Charles City County Fire and EMS Study Report of Findings and Recommendations**



**MAY 2016**

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Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department

Charles City County Sheriff's Office

Emergency Training Systems Inc.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report documents the findings and recommendations for the Charles City County Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Study. The information contained is not to be construed as legal advice or as binding recommendations. However, this report is intended to provide guidance to the Charles City County Board of Supervisors to confront the challenges with their fire and rescue services and increase operational capabilities. Strategic focus in these areas will enhance the fire-rescue service delivery to residents of Charles City County.

The study was requested by the Charles City County Board of Supervisors in order to analyze several areas of responsibility within the County's fire and rescue services. The Study Committee was comprised of representatives from the Virginia Fire Services Board, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, the Virginia Department of Forestry and the Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services.

The findings and recommendations are organized into three working themes to include:

- Budget and Administration
- Organizational and Operational Development
- Delivery of Services

These working themes provide a central focus for prioritizing the study's recommendations. They serve as a guide for the Study Committee to identify and evaluate measures that ultimately will improve the quality and coordination of fire and rescue services within Charles City County.

Below is a high-level summary of the findings and recommendations, which will be discussed further in the report.

### ***Theme 1: Budget and Administration (Page 10)***

- Recognize An Emergency Exists: The Board of Supervisors should act swiftly to implement the recommendations outlined below.
- Implement a Fire District Tax Levy: It is recommended that the Charles City County Board of Supervisors establish a fire district and implement a tax levy within the County to generate the necessary funding to hire career fire and emergency medical services personnel.
- Funding Accountability: The Charles City County Board of Supervisors should review and renegotiate the contract with Emergency Training Systems Inc. The Board of Supervisors must have more involvement and ownership of these contract personnel.

### ***Theme 2: Organizational and Operational Development (Page 13)***

- Formulization of Fire and Rescue Services: It is critical that the Charles City County Board of Supervisors adopt a local ordinance to formally establish the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department.
- Centralized Authority for Fire and Rescue Services: The Charles City County Board of Supervisors should embrace and codify a career Director of Fire and Rescue services as the centralized position responsible for the supervision and authority for all fire and rescue issues as well as emergency management throughout the County.
- Strategic Planning: The Board of Supervisors should develop a data-driven Strategic Plan with stakeholder input.
- Accountability Practices: Charles City County should adopt a countywide Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines (SOPs/SOGs) with an accountability system.
- Fire Prevention Activities: Charles City County should designate a fire marshal as the individual responsible for the enforcement of fire codes, fire investigations, and to coordinate public fire and life safety education. Additionally, for the purposes of developing the fire prevention functions, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1730 should be considered.

### ***Theme 3: Delivery of Services (Page 19)***

- Increased Human Capital: The Charles City County Administration must work to quantify the need of additional fire and rescue personnel and implement methods to increase the human capital available.
- Recruitment and Retention: Charles City County should adopt a countywide recruitment and retention plan in addition to examining the feasibility of establishing a Recruitment and Retention Position.

## **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 of the review, and assessing how to accomplish those objectives. In addition, the Study Committee established 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 report.

As part of Phase I, the Study Committee met with Charles City 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.

### **PHASE II: OBTAIN STAKEHOLDER INPUT**

#### ***Objectives: Conduct Leadership Interviews & Capture Input from the Departments***

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

- Identify service levels;
- Identify opinions concerning the operations and performance of the department;
- Identify issues and concerns regarding fire and rescue services;
- Identify perceived gaps in existing service levels and new priorities in mission; and,
- Identify strengths and weaknesses perceived by the citizens of Charles City County.

Each objective was realized with the support of Charles City County's County Administrator Zach Trogdon. Mr. Trogdon assisted in finalizing the interview list and establishing a schedule that was reasonable, but more importantly convenient for the interviewees. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with Board of Supervisors Chairman Floyd H. Miles, County Administrator Trogdon, Deputy Fire Chief William McCauley, Sheriff Alan Jones, Sr. as well as

members of the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department, and Emergency Training Systems Inc. Additionally, the study team held a town hall meeting and invited residents of Charles City County to attend. This meeting was well-attended and provided insightful feedback.

The Study Committee heard candid descriptions of Charles City County's operational capacity to address the increasing fire and rescue calls for service. The discussions provided a snapshot of the growing strain on volunteer personnel as well as contentions for more accountability by the Board of Supervisors. The Study Committee toured all three fire stations and evaluated the tangible assets located within the County. The deliverables 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 contract services. 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 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 assisted 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 optimal organizational and operational capacity throughout Charles City County. Each action step was selected to identify the changes to ensure that the County would be capable of providing fire-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 shared with the designated locality project manager, County Administrator Trogon to ensure content accuracy.

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

## **COUNTY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Charles City County is located in Central Virginia and is approximately 30 miles east of the state Capitol in Richmond. Encompassing only 204 square miles, this rural county is bordered by the Chickahominy River to the north and the James River to the south.<sup>1</sup> Charles City County's economic heritage dates back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when agriculture and forestry were the basis for the local economy.<sup>2</sup> Charles City County is one of the oldest governmental units in America and the County courthouse dates back to 1619. Additionally, Charles City County was home to Presidents William Henry Harrison and John Tyler.<sup>3</sup> Charles City County's ties to birth of the United States have lead to its robust tourism industry and numerous historical southern plantations.<sup>4</sup>

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Charles City County is approximately 7,040 and has witnessed a slight decline in recent years.<sup>5</sup> The median age for Charles City County is 48 years old. The limited population growth and high median age presents economic challenges for County leadership and yields a diminishing tax base and workforce.<sup>6</sup> The median household income is \$48,088 and approximately 13 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>7</sup> The major industries operating within the County include the manufacturing, construction and transportation sectors.<sup>8</sup> While the rate has decreased in recent years, the unemployment rate in Charles City County is 5.3 percent and 0.9 percent above the statewide average for the Commonwealth of Virginia.<sup>9</sup>

The fire and rescue services of Charles City County are provided by a dedicated group of volunteers, with supplemental contract personnel from Emergency Training Systems, Inc (ETS). In February 2010, the Charles City County Board of Supervisors approved funding to execute a contact between ETS and the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department for one advanced life support crew (two individuals) to provide coverage 24 hours a day, seven days a week.<sup>10</sup> At that time, a Funding Support Agreement was adopted by the Charles City County Board of Supervisors to guarantee funding each year to ensure continued financial support for the supplemental EMS contract personnel.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Employment Commission: Charles City County Community Profile

<sup>2</sup> Moran, Stahl and Beyer: Economic Development Strategic Plan for Charles City County, VA

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.charlescity.org/history.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Employment Commission: Charles City County Community Profile

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau: Quick Facts

<sup>6</sup> Moran, Stahl and Beyer: Economic Development Strategic Plan for Charles City County, VA

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Employment Commission: Charles City County Community Profile

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Charles City County Board of Supervisors (2.23.210 Meeting Minutes)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

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.



The Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department and ETS are the only two service providers rendering aid to the citizens of Charles City County at the present time. Collectively, these two organizations provide firefighting and emergency medical services (EMS) from three stations strategically located throughout the county. The goal of the fire and rescue service is to prevent or minimize the loss of life, damage to the environment and loss of property from the adverse effects of fire, medical emergencies or exposure to dangerous conditions through fire suppression, rescue, disaster preparedness, fire prevention and community education.<sup>12</sup> During 2015, Charles City County first responders answered 329 fire and EMS calls.<sup>13</sup>

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The *Code of Virginia* mandates every local governing body seek to ensure emergency medical services are maintained throughout their locality.<sup>14</sup> Through our background research and during the site-visit process, the study team identified that the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department does not have sufficient or consistent manpower to mitigate even the simplest of fires without experiencing significant property damage or requiring mutual aid assistance from a neighboring jurisdiction. The Board of Supervisors and County Administrator Trogon are to be commended for their leadership and commitment to confront this issue head-on and take the appropriate steps necessary to improve the level of service in Charles City County.

Charles City County is not unique in these challenges and this is a problem plaguing rural communities across the Commonwealth. While there has been a steady decline in the number of volunteer firefighters and emergency medical service providers in Charles City County, the demand for services only continues to increase. This clash of increasing demand and decreasing volunteer capacity has yielded a local emergency for Charles City County. The group of dedicated volunteers are to be applauded for their professionalism and making the best of a difficult situation. However, the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department simply cannot recruit and retain the number of volunteers needed to respond to the current call volume. As identified in their 2015 Virginia Fire Service Needs Assessment, Charles City County only has an average of four volunteer firefighters available to respond to a call.<sup>15</sup> Because of the nature of the work, fire departments cannot safely operate without a certain number of personnel. The long-standing staffing standards adopted by the National Fire Protection Association recommend a minimum of four personnel for a low-hazard fire call.<sup>16</sup>

The lack of a dependable fire and EMS system operating in Charles City County is significant and unsettling. The Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department requires significantly more personnel to address the current call volume. While records may include 15 volunteer

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<sup>12</sup> Charles County Board of Supervisors (FY2016 Budget Document)

<sup>13</sup> Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS) and Virginia Pre-Hospital Information Bridge Report Summary

<sup>14</sup> Va. Code Ann. § 15.2-955 (2015)

<sup>15</sup> Virginia Department of Fire Programs. *Virginia Fire Service Needs Assessment* (January 2016).

<sup>16</sup> National Fire Protection Association. 1720: Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments (2014).

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members on the roster for the Department, the study team heard there are considerably fewer individuals available to run fire and EMS calls on a consistent basis throughout Charles City County. The study team even repeatedly heard the fire department only consisted of a small handful of dedicated volunteers. Additionally, the contract personnel provided by ETS must be increased to sufficiently address current EMS call volume. In the course of our analysis, the study committee was informed that no EMS calls were run by volunteers in 2016. This extreme shortage of volunteers and contract personnel has generated hazardous conditions and jeopardizes the public safety in Charles City County. It is the professional opinion of the study team that the conditions in Charles City County constitute an emergency. The Board of Supervisors should act swiftly to implement the recommendations outlined below.

This section provides a summary of the three working themes for this 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: Budget and Administration (Page 10)**

- Establish Countywide Fire District and Implement Tax Levy
- Funding Accountability

**Theme 2: Organizational and Operational Development (Page 13)**

- Formalization of Fire and Rescue Services
- Strategic Planning
- Accountability Practices
- Fire Prevention Activities

**Theme 3: Delivery of Services (Page 19)**

- Operations and Staffing
- Recruitment and Retention

These working themes provide a central focus for prioritizing the study's recommendations. They serve as a guide for the Study Committee to identify and evaluate measures that ultimately will improve the quality and coordination of fire and rescue services within Charles City County. Presently, the fire and rescue services provided are dangerously inadequate and require immediate resolution. These problems will not be corrected overnight. Therefore, the Departments of Fire Programs, Forestry and Health along with the Virginia Fire Services Board are willing to return to Charles City County in the coming months to assist County leadership strategically implement the action items and recommendations outlined below. These recommendations provide a central focus to establish a fire and rescue system within Charles City County.

Charles City County's fire and rescue service providers and administration should also consult the national consensus standards for further guidance and recommendations. The standards

were developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) with the input and support of fire and emergency services personnel, businesses, industry and other stakeholders, as guidance documents and resources to address several of the findings identified in this report.<sup>17</sup>

## **THEME 1: BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION**

The Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department receives funding from state, local and federal sources. In FY2016, the Commonwealth of Virginia's Fire Programs Fund allocated \$22,988 to Charles City County.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the County receives approximately \$8,484 from the Office of Emergency Medical Services in Four-for-Life funds.<sup>19</sup> The Charles City County Board of Supervisors appropriated \$566,304 in FY2016 for emergency medical response, with a significant portion of those monies tied to the ETS contract for professional services.<sup>20</sup> Further, the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department receives a \$75,000 appropriation from the Board for operational expense.

### ***Establish Countywide Fire District and Implement Tax Levy***

Presently, the economic conditions in Charles City County do not facilitate the ability for the Board of Supervisors to hire career fire and rescue personnel. However, it is recommended that the Board consider establishing a fire district within the County to generate the necessary funding to hire two additional EMS providers at a minimum. The *Code of Virginia* grants local governing bodies the authority to levy a fire tax on personal and real property to generate funding necessary to implement fire and rescue services.<sup>21</sup> Charles City County should consider the adoption of Fire Tax Districts to help offset the cost of the improvement and delivery of the fire protection system, with the goal being to reduce life and property loss as a result of fire. This small tax investment, if strategically managed, can reduce the county's Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating, thus saving its citizens money on their fire insurance premiums. Additionally, residents have expressed a strong desire to improve the fire and rescue system in Charles City County during recent Board of Supervisors meetings as well as during the town hall meeting hosted as part of this study. It is anticipated that the residents would be supportive on this new fire tax levy as a means to improve overall services.

A fire tax levy is a capable tool for communities similar to Charles City County to produce the revenues necessary to address the demand on fire and rescue services throughout the County. The study team recommends Charles City County establish a single, countywide levy rather than a series of separate districts with individual rates. The amount of monies generated from this fire tax levy shall be kept separate from other monies and shall be applied to no other purpose than maintenance and operation of the fire department.<sup>22</sup> This dedicated funding

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<sup>17</sup> For a complete listing of the national consensus standards developed by the National Fire Prevention Association, visit: [http://www.nfpa.org/aboutthecodes/list\\_of\\_codes\\_and\\_standards.asp](http://www.nfpa.org/aboutthecodes/list_of_codes_and_standards.asp)

<sup>18</sup> Virginia Department of Fire Programs, Aid-to-Localities (FY2016 Allocations)

<sup>19</sup> Virginia Department of Health, Four-for-Life (2015 Allocations).

<sup>20</sup> Charles County Board of Supervisors (FY2016 Budget Document)

<sup>21</sup> Va. Code Ann. §27-23.1(2015)

<sup>22</sup> Va. Code Ann. §27-23.2(2015)

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stream will allow the Board of Supervisors to improve the fire and rescue services as well as facilitate the hiring of career emergency medical services personnel. The utilization of these monies must be done strategically and with the consultation of fire and rescue leadership.

### ***Funding Accountability***

The County provides various levels of financial assistance to the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department without an accountability system in place. The County should be applauded for the amount of support it provides for fire and rescue services. However, such support should not come without an accountability system. Such blanket funding is inefficient. Charles City County should restructure the funding model to better achieve accountability. The Board of Supervisors has been trusted by the citizens of Charles City County to exercise fiscal responsibility and must therefore ensure taxpayers' dollars are spent efficiently. The burden rests with the Charles City County Board of Supervisors to ensure its limited monies are utilized responsibly and appropriately. Strong accounting practices and accountability measures provide fire and rescue leadership the opportunity to demonstrate its financial needs may be greater than the allocated monies. Greater transparency over the budget will eliminate any distrust between the Board of Supervisors and the citizens.

### **Recommendations**

1. Charles City County should review and renegotiate the contract between the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department and ETS.
  - b. It is not recommended that the contracting agent continue to be the Volunteer Fire/EMS Department.
  - c. The Board of Supervisors must have more involvement and ownership with this contract as they provide \$546,000 each year to ETS for these contract personnel.<sup>23</sup>
  - d. It is not in the best interest of the taxpayers to continue the present funding level without oversight of how these monies are being utilized. More accountability and transparency is warranted, especially if a fire tax levy is implemented.
2. Charles City County should explore the feasibility of hiring full-time fire and rescue personnel instead of more contract personnel.
  - a. It is possible that continuing to contract for these services does not provide the most fiscally responsible option.
  - b. The Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department cannot recruit its way out of this situation. There is an immediate need for paid staff in the County to address the current fire and EMS needs.

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<sup>23</sup> Charles County Board of Supervisors (FY2016 Budget Document)

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3. An accountability plan should be developed for all County funds to support fire and rescue services. The plan should be communicated to citizens and members of the fire/EMS department.
  - a. This accountability plan should be developed with leadership from the fire/EMS department and ETS.
  - b. By creating an accountability plan and communicating funding usage, citizen anxiety on the management of limited County funds will be reduced.
  - c. The County should require documentation of all expenditures and annually audit these funds.
4. Charles City County should complete a yearly countywide needs assessment for the delivery of fire and rescue services and develop a base funding allocation system upon the priorities set through the needs assessment and quantitative data.
  - a. It is recommended that the County continuously evaluate whether it is getting the appropriate return on its investments.
5. The Charles City County Board of Supervisors should consider the feasibility of hiring a Grants Coordinator to assist with the acquisition and management of grants for fire and rescue services. This individual should research and consider the availability of all federal, state and private grant monies, including:
  - a. The Department of Forestry's Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grants:  
<http://www.dof.virginia.gov/financing/grants.htm>
  - b. The Department of Forestry's Firewise Virginia Community Hazard Mitigation grants:  
[www.dof.virginia.gov/financing/mitigation.htm](http://www.dof.virginia.gov/financing/mitigation.htm)
  - c. The Department of Forestry's Dry Hydrant grants:  
<http://www.dof.virginia.gov/fire/dryhydrant/index.htm>
  - d. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG):  
<http://www.firegrantsupport.com/content/html/afg/>
  - e. The Staffing for Adequate Fire & Emergency Response Grant  
<http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/101125>
  - f. The Virginia Department of Health-Office of Emergency Medical Services' Rescue Squad Assistance Fund (RSAF) Grants: <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Grants/index.htm>
  - g. The grant programs offered by the Virginia Fire Services Board (VFSB) through the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP).<sup>24</sup>
  - h. Various private grant programs.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A listing of available VFSB is available online, [http://www.vafire.com/grants\\_local\\_aid/index.htm](http://www.vafire.com/grants_local_aid/index.htm)

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## **THEME 2: ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

One of the boundaries faced by Charles City County is the lack of formalization of its fire and rescue services. Presently, there is no coordinated Charles City County Fire-Rescue System, but rather several dedicated volunteers and a few supplement contract personnel working alongside one another. In order to improve Charles City County's level of service, it is recommended that internal organizational development strategies be implemented. This recommendation encourages organizational cohesion, innovation, and effectiveness while guiding the inevitable change that will occur as Charles City County strengthens its fire suppression and rescue capabilities.

### ***Formulization of Fire and Rescue Services***

While the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department has operational by-laws, , the study team determined that the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department has not been formally recognized by the Board of Supervisors through the Municipal Code. This limits the administrative oversight and supervision by the County on the fire and rescue services within their jurisdiction. Without a formal recognition through a local ordinance, the members of the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department are also not eligible to receive line of duty benefits. Before a member of a fire department or emergency medical services agency can be eligible for line of duty coverage under §9.1-400, "the organization must be recognized by an ordinance or a resolution of the governing body as an integral part of the official safety program of jurisdiction." <sup>26</sup> Since there is no ordinance, these selfless volunteers would not be covered in the event they were injured during a fire or EMS call. Continued lack of line of duty coverage because of the Board of Supervisors failure to adopt a local ordinance would be a tremendous disservice to the brave men and women who volunteer in Charles City County. Their dedication should be rewarded accordingly.

### **Recommendations:**

1. It is critical that the Charles City County Board of Supervisors adopt a local ordinance to formally establish the Charles City Volunteer Fire/EMS Department and outline its services within the County.
2. The Charles City County Board of Supervisors should embrace and codify a career Director of Fire and Rescue Services as the centralized position responsible for the supervision and authority for all fire and rescue issues as well as emergency management throughout the County.
  - a. The position should be codified through a local ordinance outlining specific responsibilities and expectations.

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<sup>25</sup> A wide variety of Fire and EMS grants can be found on <http://www.grants.gov/> <http://www.firegrantshelp.com/nvfc/> and <http://www.emsgrantshelp.com/>

<sup>26</sup> Va. Code Ann. §9.1-400 (2015)

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- b. This will provide a unified command structure to effectively utilize and coordinate resources to improve the quality of services rendered.
  - c. It is imperative that this position have both EMS certification and comparable experience at the Fire Chief's level as well as knowledge of volunteer management.
  - d. It is recommended that this individual should also service as the Emergency Services Coordinator for the County.
- 3. The newly formalized Fire/EMS Department must ensure that public safety entities within the County are working as one.
  - a. Collaboration will help to develop ownership in a unified system and create transparency.<sup>27</sup>
  - b. The County should provide senior volunteer leadership with the tools and responsibility to properly manage the administrative activities of their department.

### ***Strategic Planning***

During the site visit, Charles City County fire and EMS personnel acknowledged the need for improved fire and rescue services and advancement. However, the lack of consistent personnel hinders the potential growth opportunities in Charles City County. While the Board of Supervisors works to implement recommendations to increase the available personnel, decisions must be executed strategically to advance both short and long-term goals. The first step is to pursue the establishment of a Fire and EMS Strategic Plan. Planning must become institutionalized as an integral part of emergency services and community resource allocations.

<sup>28</sup> A strategic plan will provide a basis for long-term operational planning and will serve as a framework for future policy decisions.<sup>29</sup> A strategic plan will further allow the vested parties the opportunity to create effective policies while attuned to its public's interests, demands, and expectations. It is imperative to keep in mind that decisions only have legitimacy if parties involved work together and are in agreement.<sup>30</sup> The strategic planning process will create public value for Charles City County if the fire and EMS and other stakeholders are fairly represented and there is effective use of relevant expertise along with transparency of the deliberations.<sup>31</sup> Charles City County should be commended for their current mission, vision along with explicitly identified values. The County's vision and mission statements exhibit the priorities of Charles City County and should therefore be used as a starting point for the strategic plan.

### **Recommendations:**

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<sup>27</sup> Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments, November 2005

<sup>28</sup> Preserving and Improving the Future of the Volunteer Fire Service, March 2004

<sup>29</sup> Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments, November 2005

<sup>30</sup> Mark Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*, 1995

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

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1. Working with new Director of Fire and Rescue Services and volunteer members, the Charles City County Board of Supervisors and County Administration should adopt and implement a strategic plan for its fire and rescue services to increase performance levels.
  - a. Stakeholders, such as fire and rescue personnel, along with county government must each play an integral part in the development of this strategic plan in order to meet the county's expectations and foster commitment.
  - b. Parties involved in the strategic planning process should analyze the gap between where the county is presently and where it wants to be in the future and identify strategies to close such gap.
  - c. The County should seek to reduce residents insurance cost by incorporating methods for improving their Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating into the strategic plan.
  - d. It is suggested that a neutral party facilitate this process.
2. The Charles City County Board of Supervisors should review and update its current Emergency Operations Plan.
  - a. The plan was last updated in January 2015 and may warrant modifications.
  - b. The *Code of Virginia* requires every local jurisdiction to conduct a comprehensive review and revision of its emergency operations plan at minimum of every four years to ensure that the plan remains current.<sup>32</sup>
  - c. Charles City County should hold routine exercises to practice the execution of the emergency operations plan to ensure effectiveness.
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, short and long-term goals with reasonable target deadlines.
  - b. Goals and objectives should be quantifiable, consistent, realistic and achievable.<sup>33</sup>
4. In developing its strategic plan, Charles City County should continue their commitment to using incident analysis and reporting, to include the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS) and the Virginia Pre-Hospital Information Bridge (VPHIB).

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<sup>32</sup> Va. Code Ann. § 44-146.19 (2012).

<sup>33</sup> Leading the Transition in Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments, November 2005

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.



- a. Charles City County's commitment to reporting will ensure that they have reliable data to appropriately develop a plan to address operational and capital funding needs as well as equipment and apparatus needs.
- b. By analyzing fire and rescue incident data and potential community hazards, a plan can be developed to address deployment of resources, placement of sub stations, and the number of personnel needed for response and prevention efforts.
- c. Access to the data collected should be provided to ETS and the fire/EMS department so they are able to get a comprehensive understanding of their performance.
- d. The use of data, such as VFIRS and VPHIB, 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 Board of Supervisors to evaluate the performance of fire and rescue entities tasked with accomplishing the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.<sup>34</sup> The performance measurement will exhibit clear association between performing, planning, spending and results.<sup>35</sup> Charles City County will have the opportunity to evaluate its mission, vision and performance objectives through three perspectives: financial accountability, constituent priorities and internal processes.<sup>36</sup>

### ***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>37</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>38</sup> During the site visit, the study team discovered the absence of SOPs in Charles City County. It is critical for the County to implement and follow a system of countywide SOPs to coordinate service delivery. 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.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Create a countywide SOP with an emphasis on producing an effective accountability system.

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<sup>34</sup> Gerald Gordon, *Strategic Planning for Local Government*, 2005

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Developing Effective Standard Operating Procedures for Fire and EMS Departments, December 1999

<sup>38</sup> Developing Effective Standard Operating Procedures for Fire and EMS Departments, December 1999

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.

- a. Standards Operating Guidelines (SOG's) are designed to provide guidance during emergency incidents.<sup>39</sup> This guidance is aimed at ensuring that operations are safe and effective. The main purpose of a SOG is to have everyone essentially operating from the same "playbook" at an incident.
  - The County should take advantage of pre-existing resources on the development of Standard Operating Guidelines for Fire and EMS organizations such as the United States Fire Administration's guide on developing Standard Operating Procedures, <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-197.pdf>, and current organizational guidelines.
  - Once created, informational and training sessions should be held with all Charles City County fire and rescue members and partners.
  - The Table of Contents, or central listing and training, should be included in new members orientation to ensure integration into the organization or fire and rescue service.
2. Utilizing the guidelines outlined in NFPA 1561: Standard on Fire Department Incident Management Systems, County Government<sup>40</sup> in collaboration with the Association should formally establish, practice and strictly enforce a countywide 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-rescue 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, such as the Incident Command System.<sup>41</sup>
  - d. It is recommended that these management practices and principles be developed, maintained, and reinforced through an on-going (annual) county-wide exercise program to include Table-Top Discussions, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises administered to ensure inter-departmental coordination, integration, and cooperation.
3. Utilizing the guidelines outlined in *NFPA 1561: Standard on Fire Department Incident Management Systems*, Charles City County should formally articulate, practice and enforce a countywide Incident Management System policy and accountability system.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> County Government refers to both Board of Supervisors and County Administration

<sup>41</sup> Incident Command System Overview, Federal Emergency Management Agency.

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Charles City County should further implement policy and protocols consistent with the principles and expectations of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

- a. Increased structure and coordination to the management of emergency incidents will ensure the safety and health of fire and rescue personnel.
  - b. The County should emphasize the importance of incident management system in managing all emergency incidents and training exercises. Charles City County should further emphasize the importance of written plans to anticipate incidents that require standardized procedures.
  - c. The County should explore developing an on-going maintenance of local emergency operations plans for known or potential hazards through the development of the Standard Operations Procedures, Guidelines, or Protocol.
4. After action assessments should be conducted following every incident in Charles City County, especially those emergencies that witness significant property damage.
- a. The first step in observing stress and mental unrest in firefighters and EMS personnel begins when every call and response is discussed thoroughly.
  - b. Conducting an after-action review enables crew members to analyze what happened, why it happened during an incident and what improvements can be made.<sup>42</sup>
  - c. These types of reviews offer the fire service the opportunity to formalize the tradition of informal post-incident conversations into a simple, but systematic, guided process of analyzing, refining, and improving incident response.<sup>43</sup>
  - d. It also provides department leaders suggestions for change, if necessary.
  - e. The key to successfully using the after action review as a tool for culture change in the fire service is that it has to be done after every incident, no matter how small or seemingly routine. Firefighters and members of the general public often die in connection to what are perceived to be a routine call.

### ***Fire Prevention Activities***

While Charles City County has implemented some fire prevention activities, the Charles City County Board of Supervisors has not opted to enact or enforce the Statewide Fire Prevention Code, which are *“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*

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<sup>42</sup> National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, *After Action Review* (2016).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

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*of substances, materials and devices, including fireworks, explosives and blasting agents, wherever located.*<sup>44</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Charles City County should enact and enforce the Statewide Fire Prevention Code. The Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) allows for cost recovery. Utilization of a fee structure would enable the County to generate revenue to help support these activities.
  - a. Strong community-risk reduction and fire prevention activities should reduce the overall call volume in Charles City County and could lead to a long-term costing savings.
2. Charles City County should designate someone who will enforce the Statewide Fire Prevention Code. Below are some possible ways that Board of Supervisors could accomplish this:
  - a. Assign the duties to the designated Fire Official, i.e. Director of Fire and Rescue Service or Building Official;
  - b. Employ a Fire Marshal for the enforcement of fire codes, to conduct fire investigations, and to coordinate public fire and life safety education; or,
  - c. Consider entering into a service agreement with a neighboring jurisdiction to perform the Code inspection and enforcement.

### **THEME 3: DELIVERY OF SERVICES**

Due to its proximity to urban areas with large career fire departments, the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department has fairly decent apparatus and equipment that has been acquired from other jurisdictions. However, the study team observed that the stations were in need of upgrades and most lacked the capabilities for housing personnel overnight. Additionally, the Charles City County Board of Supervisors and County Administrator should critically analyze its current fire and rescue staffing levels, station locations and response capabilities. A thorough review of the current response districts is recommended to ensure call volumes and response times are aligned along with placement of fire and rescue staff is strategic. Development must be a collaborative effort by members of the general public, fire and rescue leadership and the County's administration and Board of Supervisors.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Charles City County Government should work to quantify the additional fire and rescue personnel needed to meet service demands and citizen expectations.

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<sup>44</sup> 2009 Statewide Fire Prevention Code, Preface, page i.

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- a. During the site visit, individuals expressed a need to add additional paid fire and EMS personnel for daytime response, as there is limited volunteer availability during the daytime.
2. The County Government should reexamine its current system and find methods to effectively increase the human capital available in fire and rescue system presently.
3. The new Director of Fire and Rescue Services and the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department should provide scheduled updates to the Board of Supervisors and citizens on the efforts to improve the County's level of service.
4. The Board of Supervisors should develop a capital improvement plan for upgrading its fire and rescue stations and equipment.
  - a. Most facilities do not provide adequate space to house equipment or facilitate overnight personnel.
  - b. The County needs to continue to assess its fire and EMS facilities for improved efficiency of operation and safe quartering of equipment and personnel.
  - c. Board of Supervisors should implement a fire and rescue equipment replacement policy with an emphasis on rotational equipment replacement based on prioritized needs.

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

Recruiting and retaining quality personnel is an essential component to the overall success of a volunteer fire and rescue departments. Like many areas throughout the nation and the Commonwealth of Virginia, Charles City County has felt the impact of declining numbers of men and women volunteering for fire and rescue departments. The current personnel capabilities in Charles City County are critically low and require immediate resolution. Presently, there is limited assistance from the County Administration to help the Fire/EMS Department recruit personnel. The study team encourages the County to take an actionable initiative in assisting with recruitment and retention. In order to relieve the current burden of limited human capital, the County must provide increased leadership and participation towards the recruitment of volunteers.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. As previously mentioned, the Charles City County Board of Supervisors should recruit and hire a career Director of Fire and Rescue Services to provide leadership for all fire and rescue issues throughout the County, including recruitment and retention activities.
2. Charles City County should create a countywide recruitment and retention program.

- a. The recruitment and retention program must take into consideration the needs of current volunteers and identify motivational factors to keep this population engaged and committed to the fire and rescue service.
  - b. The County is encouraged to expand its current systems of incentives (i.e. tax breaks) for volunteers.
  - c. 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.
3. The County should establish a Recruitment and Retention Officer position to serve all countywide recruitment efforts.
4. The County government and fire department should collaboratively find low-cost methods to enhance public-education efforts such as open houses and creating PSAs.<sup>45</sup>
  - a. Improve the visibility of the Charles City County fire and rescue services in the community.
  - b. Word-of-mouth recruiting is effective; therefore, each volunteer should be encouraged to inform their respective community network about Charles City County fire and rescue services' training and educational opportunities.
5. In addition, Charles City County's fire and rescue organizations should take advantage of pre-existing recruitment and retention information. Resources may be downloaded at the following locations:
  - a. Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
    - i. <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/OEMS/Agency/Recruitment/index.htm>
    - ii. [http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Files\\_page/Locality\\_Resources/EMSWorkbook\\_0405.pdf](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Files_page/Locality_Resources/EMSWorkbook_0405.pdf)
    - iii. [http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Files\\_page/Locality\\_Resources/EMSWorkbook3.pdf](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/OEMS/Files_page/Locality_Resources/EMSWorkbook3.pdf)
  - b. BecomeEMS.org - <http://www.becomeems.org/>
  - c. Fire/Volunteer (Guide) - <http://www.nvfc.org/resources/rr/retention-recruitment-guide/>
  - d. Fire/Volunteer (Video) - <http://www.nvfc.org/files/documents/Retention-and-Recruitment-Volunteer-Fire-Emergency-Services.wmv>.
  - e. 2004 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission Report. "Review of EMS in Virginia" Part III of the report; *Recruitment, Retention and Training of EMS Providers* (Page 55) – <http://leg2.state.va.us/dls/h&sdocs.nsf/4d54200d7e28716385256ec1004f3130/87c75ac37063994d85256ec500553c41?OpenDocument>

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<sup>45</sup> *Fire Service Image Task Force Report: Taking Responsibility for a Positive Public Perception*, 15

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## **APPENDIXES**

**Appendix 1:** Charles City County Letter of Request – November 2015

**Appendix 2:** Charles City County - Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System Report Summary

**Appendix 3:** Charles City County – Virginia Pre-Hospital Information Bridge Report Summary

**Appendix 4:** Charles City County 2015 Needs Assessment Summary Statistics

**Appendix 5:** Charles City County FY2015 Aid-to-Localities Allocation Report

## APPENDIX 1: CHARLES CITY COUNTY LETTER OF REQUEST



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
COUNTY of CHARLES CITY  
P.O. BOX 128  
CHARLES CITY, VIRGINIA 23030

### **BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

GILBERT A. SMITH, CHAIRMAN  
FLOYD H. MILES, SR., VICE-CHAIRMAN  
WILLIAM G. COADA, MEMBER

### **COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR**

ZACH TROGDON

October 5, 2015

Walter Bailey, Chairman  
Virginia Fire Services Board  
1005 Technology Park Drive  
Glen Allen, Virginia 23059

Re: Fire and EMS Study

Chairman Bailey:

The Board of Supervisors resolved at its meeting of August 25, 2015 to request of the Virginia Fire Services Board (VSFB) a study of the Fire and EMS system of Charles City County. It is the County's hope that this item could be considered at the November meeting to the VSFB.

The County is currently served by a combination of volunteer and contract personnel, both administered by Charles City Volunteer Fire/EMS, Inc. It is the desire of the County and its service partners to complete a comprehensive review of the Fire and EMS system to include:

- Organization
- Staffing
- Facilities
- Equipment
- Training
- Service Levels

It is the County's further desire that the study will result in recommendations to enhance these services to our citizens.

Signed,

Gilbert A. Smith  
Chairman

## **APPENDIX 2: CHARLES CITY COUNTY – VIRGINIA FIRE INCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM REPORT**

The Virginia Department of Fire Programs manages the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System (VFIRS). VFIRS is the statewide system for tracking all emergency responses with fire departments in Virginia. By reporting their incidents to VFIRS, fire departments document the details of their incidents for legal purposes and documenting the overall activities of their fire department.

### **Incident Type Summary, Charles City County, Virginia 2011 -2015**

<b>Incident Type</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Fires	38	40	30	44	29	181
EMS/Rescue	73	485	540	613	241	1,952
Hazardous Condition	22	12	5	5	4	48
Service Calls	9	19	16	11	6	61
Good Intent	21	44	41	47	23	176
False Alarm	18	19	6	10	3	56
Other	0	2	3	0	0	5
<b>Total Incidents</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>730</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>2,479</b>
Aid Given	8	3	10	47	2	70
Exposures	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>777</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>2,545</b>

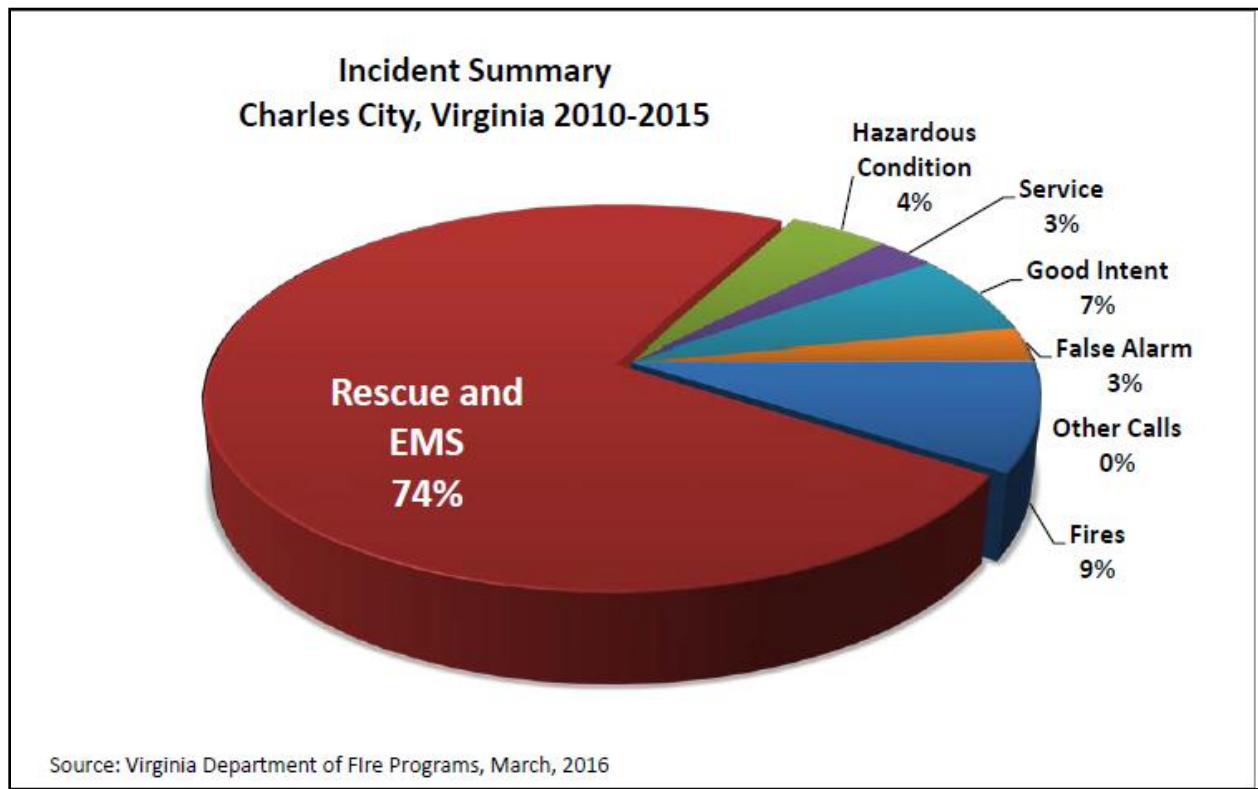
### **Fire Dollar Loss Summary, Charles City County, Virginia 2011-2015**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Dollar Loss	\$1,471,400	\$813,800	\$793,100	\$708,280	\$625,700	\$4,412,280

### **Casualty Loss Summary, Rockingham County, Virginia 2011-2015**

<b>Incident Type</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Total</b>
Civilian Fire Injuries	0	0	0	0	0	0
Civilian Fire Deaths	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fire Service Injuries	0	1	0	0	0	1
Fire Service Deaths	0	0	0	0	0	0

**APPENDIX 2: CHARLES CITY COUNTY – VIRGINIA FIRE INCIDENT REPORTING SYSTEM REPORT**



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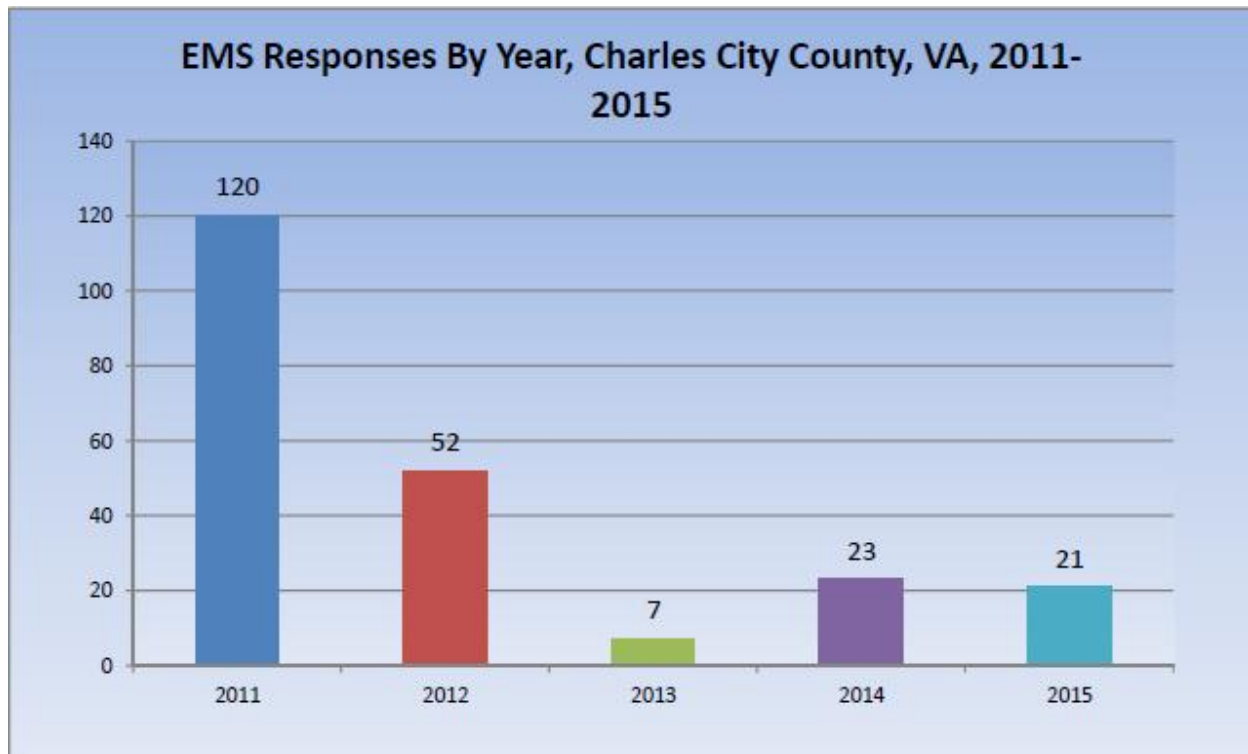
### **APPENDIX 3: CHARLES CITY COUNTY – VIRGINIA PRE-HOSPITAL INFORMATION BRIDGE REPORT**

#### **SUMMARY**

The Virginia Department of Health’s Office of Emergency Medical Service manages the Virginia Pre-Hospital Information Bridge (VPHIB). VPHIB is the statewide system for tracking all emergency medical services (EMS) responses with EMS organizations in Virginia. In accordance with the *Code of Virginia*, the Department of Health is responsible for “maintaining a comprehensive emergency medical services patient care data collection and performance improvement system (32.1-111.3).”

#### **EMS Emergency Responses by Month, Charles City County, 2011-2015**

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Grand Total
2011	6	6	17	20	19	7	7	9	11	8	2	8	120
2012	5	8	8	8	2	(NRS)	6	2	3	7	2	1	52
2013	(NRS)	(NRS)	2	1	(NRS)	(NRS)	(NRS)	1	(NRS)	2	(NRS)	1	7
2014	(NRS)	(NRS)	(NRS)	(NRS)	2	1	(NRS)	4	7	4	2	3	23
2015	(NRS)	(NRS)	3	0	2	3	1	1	6	1	4	0	21
	11	14	30	29	25	11	14	17	27	22	10	13	223



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#### **APPENDIX 4: CHARLES CITY COUNTY – 2015 NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY STATISTICS**

The Fire Service Needs Assessment is an annual survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. Fire departments complete a survey questionnaire designed to identify their critical needs. Results are compiled and published in a comprehensive report available each January. The Department of Fire Programs received a response from the Charles City County Volunteer Fire/EMS Department.

<b>Fire Department Personnel</b>	<b>Current*</b>	<b>Need Reported**</b>
Career Firefighters	0	10
Volunteer Firefighters	15	20
Paid-Per-Call	0	0
Total Firefighters	15	30
Average Firefighters on Duty/Available	3	
Civilian-Paid	0	0
Civilian-Volunteer	0	5
Total Civilian Personnel	0	0

<b>Apparatus Owned</b>	<b>Current*</b>	<b>Need Reported **</b>
Aerial Apparatus	0	0
Ambulance/Other Patient Transport	0	0
Command Support Unit	3	0
Command Vehicle (SUV)	1	1
Engine/Pumper	5	0
Fire/Rescue Boat	0	0
Hazardous Materials Vehicle	0	0
Heavy Technical Rescue Vehicle	0	0
Logistical Support Apparatus	0	0
Mobile Air Utility	1	0
Rehab Unit	0	0
Quint Combination Vehicle	0	0
Tanker	2	2
Wildland Brush Truck	2	2
Other Apparatus	1	0

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.



**APPENDIX 4: CHARLES CITY COUNTY – 2015 NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY STATISTICS CONT.**

<b>Equipment Owned</b>	<b>Current*</b>	<b>Need Reported **</b>
<b>4-Gas Monitors</b>	1	1
<b>Map Coordinate System – GPS</b>	3	5
<b>Mobile Data Terminals</b>	3	3
<b>Personal Alert Safety Systems</b>	5	0
<b>Personal Protective Equipment</b>	20	0
<b>Radios with Emergency Alert Button</b>	0	0
<b>Radios without Emergency Alert Button</b>	15	15
<b>Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (without integrated PASS)</b>	5	0
<b>Self-Contained Breathing (with integrated PASS)</b>	18	20
<b>Thermal Imaging Cameras</b>	1	2
<b>Other Equipment</b>	0	0

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.

**APPENDIX 5: CHARLES CITY COUNTY FY2016 AID-TO-LOCALITIES ALLOCATION REPORT**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Population (2010 Census)</b>	<b>FY2015 Allocation</b>
Charles City County	7,256	\$22,997
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,256</b>	<b>\$22,997</b>

*\*\* Virginia Fire Programs Fund Allocation Report, June 29, 2015.*