

Capital Improvement Research and Functional Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Strategic Plan

In 2002, McLane Fire and Life Safety completed work on a Strategic Plan to guide future decision-making¹. As part of the planning process, current strengths and weakness were analyzed in order to identify areas in which improvements could be realized. It was identified that current fire stations are deficient in critical areas and that to maintain and/or improve service levels, the department must provide the essentials for response personnel; a safe environment with adequate living, sleeping, parking, training and apparatus space.

Formation of the Citizens Advisory Board

In the Strategic Plan the District identified its commitment to work proactively with the community to communicate service delivery capability and provide citizens an opportunity to determine the type and quality of service they would like to be provided.

At the end of 2002, the department began to advertise the formation of a Citizens Advisory Board. Notifications were posted in two department newsletters, on the department web site and through presentations at local community meetings.

On August 28th, 2003, the Citizen Advisory Board held their first meeting. Board members Michel George (The Evergreen State College), Chuck McKenny (Cooper Point), Keith Reiling (Summit Lake) and George Ziesemer (Delphi Valley) met with administrative staff to develop a mission for the group.

The Citizen Advisory Board was tasked with reviewing the department's strategic plan, fiscal and operational capabilities and assisting in the development of a Capital Improvement Plan to address operational improvements in our service delivery system. Due to the wide-range of talents and knowledge of the board members, what was originally envisioned as a two month long process evolved into a multitude of meetings spanning over nine months. This Capital Improvement Plan and functional research program includes the Citizen Advisory Board recommendations and compilation of supportive data utilized during the research and functional programming.

On June 10th, 2004, the District Board of Fire Commissioners formally adopted the recommendations provided by the Citizens Advisory Board.²

¹ McLane Fire and Life Safety Strategic Plan FY 2004

² Citizen Advisory Board Recommendation, 6/3/04 - see page 89.

Process

The development of the Capital Improvement Plan required the careful review and analysis of the various components of the Districts service delivery system.

Organization Overview

McLane Fire and Life Safety provides fire suppression, emergency medical services, special rescue, fire prevention and public education services to approximately 12,000 citizens living within the 72 square mile district located west of Olympia, Washington. The Department utilizes four strategically placed stations to provide timely response to nearly 1500 calls for assistance annually.

The department incorporates a unique blend of volunteer, station resident, part-time and full-time members in our service delivery system. The organization currently has 63 members comprised of 19 volunteers, 36 firefighters from the South Puget Sound Community College Instructional Program, eight full-time response personnel and one full-time administrative assistant / public educator.

Property within the District has an assessed value of \$854,697,787 against which a tax rate of \$1.41 /\$1000 assessed value is levied to support District operations. The District serves a suburban / rural community which borders the City of Olympia on the District's west boundary. The District is primarily residential, with some commercial development. Additionally, the District provides emergency response services to The Evergreen State College, a campus of approximately 3,000 students with on-campus housing.

The department employs eight full-time employees. Uniformed employees include three Firefighters, three Lieutenants, an Assistant Chief of Operations and Fire Chief. Non-uniformed employees include an Administrative Assistant and a part-time receptionist.

Career Lieutenants and Firefighters work 24-hour shifts while providing supervision to a combination of resident, volunteer and student firefighters who stand duty in the stations.

The department currently has a contingent of 19 volunteer personnel. Volunteer firefighters are on duty in the fire stations or respond from home to provide assistance for major emergencies.

McLane Fire and Life Safety contracts with South Puget Sound Community College to operate the Fire Protection Technology program offered through the college. This is a two-year degree program that provides firefighters enrolled in the program with courses leading to an Associate of Technical Arts degree.

An integral part of the program is the fire-related experience component that requires enrolled firefighters to participate in a regular 24-hour shift rotation. This valuable part of the Fire Protection Technology program is unique to the SPSCC/McLane Fire and Life Safety program with no other fire program offering this hands-on experience in the State of Washington. It is this relationship with South Puget Sound Community College that

enables the department to provide the staffing levels and quick response times that are far superior to any other rural fire district in Thurston County.

Fiscal Capabilities

Fiscal Capabilities of the department were analyzed. Projected expense and revenue comparables were reviewed which indicated the department does not have the capability of funding major capital improvements from its normal operating budget. It further highlighted the difficulties imposed by recent citizen initiatives that limit tax revenue growth to 1% annually. This creates a situation in which the district must request voter approval for a levy lid lift every several years to keep pace with rising cost AND also requires voter-approved bonds for the funding of capital improvement projects. It is believed this funding mechanism is confusing to the public and requires a proactive effort on behalf of the department to properly educate the public.

Facility Needs Assessment / Cost Effectiveness

Each of the fire district facilities were evaluated by staff using a process identified in the Fire & Emergency Service Self-Assessment Manual from the Commission of Fire Accreditation International. Using Fire Station Assessments forms, Board members were asked to independently assess all facilities.³

To assist in the assessment process, a profile of each district fire station was developed and distributed.⁴ These profiles contained staff assessments of each facility in accordance with the accreditation, self-assessment model. Findings of the facility assessments are far too lengthy for inclusion here, but are included in the report for your review.

Annual facility operating costs were collected and reviewed based upon a three-year average.⁵ Cost per sq/ft assessments were derived ranging from a low of \$1.04 per sq/ft at Station 91 to a high of \$3.04 per sq/ft at Station 95.

Station Locations and Response Time Assessment

A critical element of a delivery system is the ability to provide adequate resources for fire combat situations. Each fire emergency requires a variable amount of staffing and resources to be effective. Properly trained and equipped fire companies must arrive, be deployed and attack the fire within specific time frames to successfully mitigate the incident. The same holds true for rescue operations, medical emergencies and other situations requiring varying levels of resources.

Response reliability is a critical element of response effectiveness. Response reliability is the probability that the required amount of staffing and apparatus will be available when a fire or emergency call is received. If a call is received for an emergency but the nearest station is unstaffed or the crew is on another call, then apparatus must respond from a greater distance decreasing response effectiveness. Response reliability is of particular importance to Fire District #9 due to the limited number of volunteer firefighters and the

³ Fire Station Facility Assessment - see page 24.

⁴ Facility Profiles - see page 14.

⁵ Current Facility Annual Cost Assessment - see page 40.

existence of resident firefighters in stations such as Summit Lake. Response to these areas when the station is unstaffed diminishes system-wide response effectiveness.

Response time data was collected and analyzed for the years 2002 – 2003.⁶ In addition, six (6) minute response areas were calculated for each station and confirmed through historical data. It was determined that roughly 90% of the fire district resides within 6 minutes of a fire district facility. The remainder of the district resides within an 8-minute response time (Capital Forest excluded).

Station Location / Response Time Findings:

- District 9 enjoys very quick response times with a two-year Response Time Average of 6.1 minutes.
- Station 91 is strategically located.
- Station 92 provides strategic access to The Evergreen State College housing areas and may be necessary in the future for the district to achieve a lower insurance classification rating.⁷
- Though located near the northern tip of Cooper Point, Station 94 is adequately located as long as Station 92 remains operational. If Station 92 were to be closed, then Station 94 would be located too far north and system wide improvements could be realized by moving Station 94 from its current location to an area near the 4600 Block of Cooper Point Rd.
- Station 95 response area has the longest response times due to the following:
 - Poor response reliability (no one at the station to respond)
 - Poor turn-out time due to separate living quarters/apparatus bay.
 - Curves and hills slow response of apparatus to SR 8 which accounts for the majority of Station 95 responses. (SR 8 and ORV Park)

Facility Needs Assessment / Functional Programming

Upon completion of the needs assessment, it was necessary to determine the level of priority of each item assessed in order to determine the pertinence and cost effectiveness of incorporating improvements into existing facilities and/or sites.

As part of our functional programming, we involved input from all members of the department including employees, volunteers, resident firefighters and students. Design surveys were distributed to all personnel with input compiled into a final report.⁸ In addition, project meetings were held with each group to further clarify input where needed.

Facility needs assessment and prioritization items were compiled into a Fire Station Design Survey Matrix which identified priority, existence of the item within the current facility, capability within the current structure/site and external requirements.⁹

⁶ Station location and response time data – see page 9.

⁷ Report on the Impact of closing Station 92 on the Districts Fire Classification Rating - see page 74.

⁸ Fire Station Design Survey – Group Consensus – see page 56.

⁹ Fire Station Design Survey Matrix - see page 42.

Architectural Assessment of Existing Facility and Current Functional Program

In order to determine the cost effectiveness of building a new facility versus a remodel of the existing station, Scherer Associates Architecture and Planning of Olympia, Washington was utilized to conduct an architectural assessment and validation of the current functional program.

The field report provided by the architect concluded the District could not meet its current functional program requirements through a remodel or addition to the existing apparatus facility without triggering inappropriate costs and unacceptable disruptions to the function of the existing facility during construction. Given the same requirements, it was estimated that the cost of remodeling the existing building would exceed the cost of new construction by \$37,200.00.¹⁰

In the Architects professional opinion, the Districts best option would be to fund, design and build a new facility of approximately 16,000 square feet on an adjacent or nearby site. It was recommended that the District should continue to operate out of the existing station until the new facility is completed and ready for occupancy.

Apparatus Needs Assessment

The District established an apparatus committee to assess and identify current and future apparatus needs of the district. The committee analyzed current district apparatus taking into account vehicle mileage, annual maintenance costs, reliability, recommended service life and compliance with existing standards and external requirements.¹¹

Following a thorough review of current and future apparatus needs, the committee arrived at the following conclusions:

Aid Units: The District has an adequate amount of aid units and is able to meet the current needs of the District.

Pumpers: The pumper assets do not meet the current nor future needs of the Fire District. Currently the District has three (3) pumpers, and four (4) fire stations. According to the Washington Survey and Rating Bureau, the District must maintain a Class A pumper at each fire station and shall have one (1) reserve Class A pumper. The District is currently deficient by two (2) pumpers.

Water Tender: The current water tender will not meet the future needs of the District. The District currently maintains one (1) water tender that responds from Station 91. This water tender is now eighteen (18) years old and the District needs to consider placing it in a reserve status or replacing it.

¹⁰ Scherer Architecture and Planning Associates, March 23, 2004 – see page 68.

¹¹ Apparatus Replacement Plan – see page 61.

Findings

- McLane Fire and Life Safety is a training organization. The service level and excellent response times the department provides is directly proportional to the relationship the department has established with the South Puget Sound Community College - Fire Protection Technology Program. Enabling the department to strengthen this program will result in an even higher level of cost effective service for the citizens living within the district.
- The operational effectiveness of the department is dependant upon the quantity and quality of our training program.
- Weaknesses exist within the service delivery system which results in a negative impact to all citizens serviced by the fire district.
- The department is loosing its most valuable and cost effective resource – resident firefighters due to lack of resident housing at district fire stations.
- Current facilities do not provide adequate interior or exterior training space. Personnel are required to train away from the headquarter station resulting in increased response times.
- The Summit Lake area has unacceptable response times due to the response reliability of the station. (no staffing to respond)
- Stations 91 and 95 do not meet current and future needs of the District.
- Station 92 is a marginal station at best but serves a critical role in maintaining and/or improving the Districts Insurance Classification Rating.
- Current apparatus assets do not meet the current and future needs of the District.

Conclusion

In order to implement operational improvements to meet current and future functional needs, the District will seek a voter-approved bond for the following capital improvements:

1. Design and build a new Station 91 of approximately 16,000 square feet on an adjacent or nearby site in order to maintain its strategic location in the District. This will include a small training area and hose tower. The District will operate out of the existing station until the new facility is completed and ready for occupancy.
2. Design and build a new Station 95 of approximately 6,000 square feet on the existing site or nearby site donated by Simpson timber.
3. Acquire the small parcel of land adjacent to Station 94 for expanded parking and future station expansion potential.
4. Purchase one (1) Rescue Brush Unit to replace the current 1985 unit.
5. Purchase two (2) Class A pumpers. Existing pumpers to be retained at Station 92 and as a reserve from Station 91.
6. Purchase one (1) Pumper/Tender. Existing tender to be placed in reserve status.
7. Research the feasibility of establishing a partnership with The Evergreen State College to relocate Station 92 into an existing college facility.

The cost of completing these capital improvements will be \$5,900,000.00. If approved, each household will be assessed \$.35 per thousand for each \$1000.00 of assessed valuation. A \$200,000 home will pay an additional \$70.00 per year.

Given community support, we are confident that these capital improvements will result in system wide improvements that will be beneficial to all residents serviced by Thurston County Fire District No. 9.

We would like to recognize the countless hours provided by members of the Citizens Advisory Board. Throughout this process they have required that we ask ourselves many tough questions. Due to their diligence, we believe this capital improvement plan realistically addresses the operational needs of the District and our ability to serve the community. The department and the citizens we serve will benefit greatly from their unselfish participation in this important planning process.