



# Washington Township Fire Department

## 2005-2015 Strategic Plan

February 1, 2005



### Strategic Planning Committee

Peter Marsch, Fire Commissioner  
Committee Chair

Kevin Brink, Fire Chief  
Robert Hutchinson, Jr., Fire Commissioner  
Steven Schnaudt, Fire Fighter  
Donald Snedeker, Fire Fighter



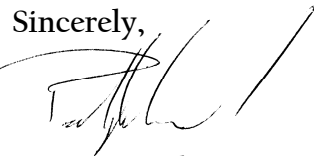
## Washington Township Fire Department 2005-2015 Strategic Plan

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February 1, 2005

On behalf of the Strategic Planning Committee, I would like to thank the career and volunteer members of the Washington Township Fire Department for taking part in the development of the 2005-2015 Strategic Plan. Without their assistance and input, we would not have been able to complete this plan in a manner which would benefit the department now and in the years to come.

I would also like to personally thank Commissioner Robert Hutchinson, Chief Kevin Brink, and Fire Fighters Steve Schnaudt and Don Snedeker for volunteering their time in the completion of this report.

Sincerely,  


Peter Marsch  
Chair, Strategic Planning Committee



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## Washington Township Fire Department 2005-2015 Strategic Plan

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### INTRODUCTION

The Washington Township Fire Department 2005-2015 Strategic Plan provides an analysis of the fire suppression, fire prevention, community education and emergency medical services needs of Washington Township and the capabilities of the Washington Township Fire Department in insuring those needs are met in a professional and responsible manner. It identifies broad goals with specific recommendations to attain those goals and it provides department leadership with a road map to meet the emergency services needs of the Township and surrounding communities.

As a first step in preparing the Strategic Plan, the planning committee identified the specific mission of the Washington Township Fire Department and clearly identified the services it provides to the residents and visitors of Washington Township. The Mission Statement, as developed by the Strategic Planning Committee, was officially adopted by the Board of Fire Commissioners at its July 14, 2004 meeting (*the Mission Statement may be found on Page 7*).

The committee next looked at the community and the impact its rapid growth has had on the department's ability to provide emergency services as outlined in the Mission Statement. Fire District leadership has been able to continue to meet the needs of Washington Township, but the rapid growth has put the Fire Department in a situation of being reactive instead of proactively planning for the current and future needs of Washington Township.

To meet the changing needs of Washington Township, the Fire Department has grown rapidly over the last 5 years, more than doubling in size from 12 full-time employees in 2000 to 25 full-time employees by the end of 2004. Current staffing includes a career fire chief, the primary engine being staffed with four fire fighter/EMTs and a primary ambulance being staffed by two fire fighter/EMTs. In addition to the needs of a changing community, a primary reason for these staff increases is the addition of emergency medical services.

In January 2002 the Washington Township Fire District accepted the responsibility of providing emergency medical services. Prior to 2002, Washington Township relied on the Allentown First Aid Squad for those services. The increasing call volume in Washington Township, however, put a large burden on the all volunteer Allentown unit which led to the Fire District adding two ambulances and eight full-time career members to the staff. These costs have been partially offset through the use of a third party billing service, however EMS delivery in Washington Township is not a profitable operation. This planning committee believes that the delivery of ambulance service is a local issue and the residents of this community are best served by the emergency medical services remaining with the Fire Department.



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After looking at the needs of the community and the abilities of the department, the Strategic Planning Committee concluded that:

- The changing needs and rapid growth of Washington Township and the surrounding communities has placed significant demands on the department, its staff and, especially, its apparatus.
- The call volume of the department is still manageable, but it has increased at an average rate of 24%. The addition of new businesses and new housing developments will only mean higher call volumes and at some point, in the not too distant future, this will become an issue that needs to be addressed with the addition of new personnel and new apparatus. The department is fortunate to have neighboring fire stations in close proximity to Washington Township's population centers, and for the time being mutual aid is an effective option. As Washington Township grows, however, and neighboring communities continue to grow, the fire department may not have the luxury of always relying on mutual aid from fire stations such as Nottingham and Groveville in Hamilton Township, Hightstown Fire Department and the East Windsor and West Windsor volunteer fire companies.
- Realizing that the call volume continues to increase, and the potential future need to add additional full-time staff, the single firehouse located on Route 130 may no longer be adequate.

The Strategic Planning Committee next identified the internal concerns, needs and challenges facing the department. We based our findings on questionnaires completed by career and volunteer fire fighters, personal interviews with fire fighters, discussions with members of the community and discussions with the leadership of other fire departments. The concerns and needs identified were wide-ranging. However, the Strategic Planning Committee identified the top concerns and challenges facing the department:

- The Department's primary engine needs to be replaced immediately, and the primary ambulance will need to be replaced within two years. Each piece of apparatus is being used much more often than originally anticipated and they are not adequate for the amount and type of equipment required by the department;
- Equipment purchases and maintenance needs have been postponed to balance the Fire District budget with little or no increase in the tax rate;
- The lack of foresight and planning by departmental leadership has led to administrative problems and little guidance for the career Fire Chief;



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- The current living and working space is not adequate for the number of fire fighters working on a normal shift. During an emergency, the sleeping quarters are completely inadequate for increased staffing of either volunteer or career fire fighters who may be required to remain at the station overnight;
- Continuing operational conflicts between members of the department and Fire District leadership has played a role in low morale;
- The level and frequency of training with both career fire fighters and volunteers is not adequate;
- There are significant communication problems among and between all parties in the department;
- There is a lack of consistency of procedures and expectations throughout the department;
- There is a lack of basic information regarding job descriptions, the contract with the union, the pension plan and health benefits for current and new employees.

It is the hope of the Strategic Planning Committee that the recommendations found within this plan will address the identified concerns and needs, and create a Fire Department that can more effectively and efficiently provide emergency services to the residents and visitors of Washington Township.



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### MISSION STATEMENT

The Washington Township Fire Department is dedicated to providing the highest level of emergency services to the residents and visitors of our community. The Department protects lives and property from the harmful effects of all disasters, whether natural or man-made, through fire suppression, emergency medical services, fire prevention inspections and our public education efforts.

### Our Vision

The Washington Township Fire Department seeks to be a respected and productive organization in Washington Township, and the surrounding communities in Central New Jersey, by providing quality services in an efficient manner. The Department strives to be considered an “Employer of Choice” by its employees, their peers and other organizations in our community.

### Core Values

The core values of the Washington Township Fire Department are *honor*, *integrity*, *pride*, and *professionalism*.

**HONOR:** Service to the public is a noble and responsible calling. Our members consider it a privilege to serve the citizens and visitors of Washington Township. We carry ourselves with distinction.

**INTEGRITY:** Our customers trust us. We are called to assist people when they are in vulnerable situations and when they are desperate for help. They rely on our prompt response and our expertise. As such, our members steadfastly adhere to the highest of moral and ethical standards of conduct both on and off the job.

**PRIDE:** We treat everyone with respect. In order to respect others we know that we must first respect ourselves, our brother firefighters, and our department. We derive a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction from the work that we do for Washington Township and we are proud to serve the members of the community.

**PROFESSIONALISM:** Our members' conduct will always reflect our core values. Our appearance, attitude, skills, abilities, caring and compassion will inspire those around us and will instill confidence and trust in our community, our neighboring communities and the fire service in general.



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### DEPARTMENT SNAPSHOT

The Washington Township Fire Department was founded in 1963 as the Washington Volunteer Firemen, Inc. In 1988, Fire District No. 1 was created by the residents of Washington Township as a separate government entity to provide fire protection and suppression services to the township. Today, the Washington Township Fire Department is a combination department with both career and volunteer fire fighters.

#### Staffing

The Washington Township Fire Department has grown significantly over a short period of time. In 2000, there were only 12 career employees and career staffing consisted of one Captain, three Lieutenants and eight fire fighters. By January 1, 2005, the Washington Township Fire Department consisted of a career Fire Chief, four career captains, 20 career fire fighters and approximately 10 volunteer fire fighters.

There are four reasons for the rapid growth of career personnel:

1. The growth of Washington Township;
2. The department began providing emergency medical services;
3. A change in the command structure of the department; and
4. A decline of volunteer fire fighters.

#### Command Structure

Since 2000, the department has undergone a significant re-organization of the command structure due to the volunteer fire company eliminating the position of Volunteer Fire Chief. Due to this change in leadership, the Fire District was required to address this void and create the position of career Fire Chief. In November 2003, the Washington Township Fire District promoted Deputy Fire Chief Kevin Brink to the position of Township Fire Chief. Chief Brink was the first employee of the district to be a chief officer, having been promoted to deputy fire chief approximately 12 months earlier.

The position of career Deputy Fire Chief was created to address the administrative needs of the fire district and serve as the day-to-day manager of the career staff. This position was also responsible for the duties of Township Fire Official. At that time, the department had a volunteer Fire Chief, a career Deputy Fire Chief, volunteer Deputy Fire Chief and unfilled volunteer Assistant Fire Chief. With the drastic change in the volunteer command structure, and reduced leadership contribution by volunteer officers, there has been a sudden change in scope and level of responsibility of the career fire chief which has burdened the department and District leadership.



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Currently, the department has a career Fire Chief and a volunteer Deputy Chief, with the positions of career Deputy Chief and volunteer Assistant Chief remaining unfilled. The district does not anticipate filling the career Deputy Chief position in the next three to five years, as the duties of this position have been delegated to the captains and other staff as needed. This is an interim solution which, in the long term, will lead to a loss in productivity and interfere with the ability of a captain to supervise a shift.

### Fleet

The Washington Township Fire Department currently has the following apparatus and vehicles:

- Engine 402 (*primary fire engine*) – a 1996 Pierce Quantum pumper/tanker
- Engine 401 – a 1986 Emergency One pumper
- Rescue 140-10 (*primary ambulance*) – a 2001 Ford/PL Custom ambulance
- Rescue 140-11 – a 1996 Ford/PL Custom ambulance
- Brush 40 – a 1971 Chevrolet 4x4 fire fighting vehicle
- Tanker 40 – a 1990 Ford Aeromax Tanker
- Utility 40 – a 1993 Ford pick-up truck
- Chief 40 (*Fire Chief vehicle*) – a 1997 Ford Expedition command vehicle
- Deputy 40 (*Deputy Fire Chief vehicle*) – a 2004 Ford Explorer command vehicle

The Fire District owns the two engines (401 and 402), the two ambulances (140-10 and 140-11) and the Fire Chief's command vehicle. The remaining vehicles are owned by the volunteer Fire Company and leased to the Fire District. The District is responsible for the maintenance of all vehicles.

### Call Volume

In 2004, the Washington Township Fire Department responded to 635 fire calls and 924 EMS calls for a total of 1,559 calls. This is a 14% increase over the 1,370 calls in 2003. In addition, the department also conducted 270 Uniform Fire Code inspections for local businesses in 2004.

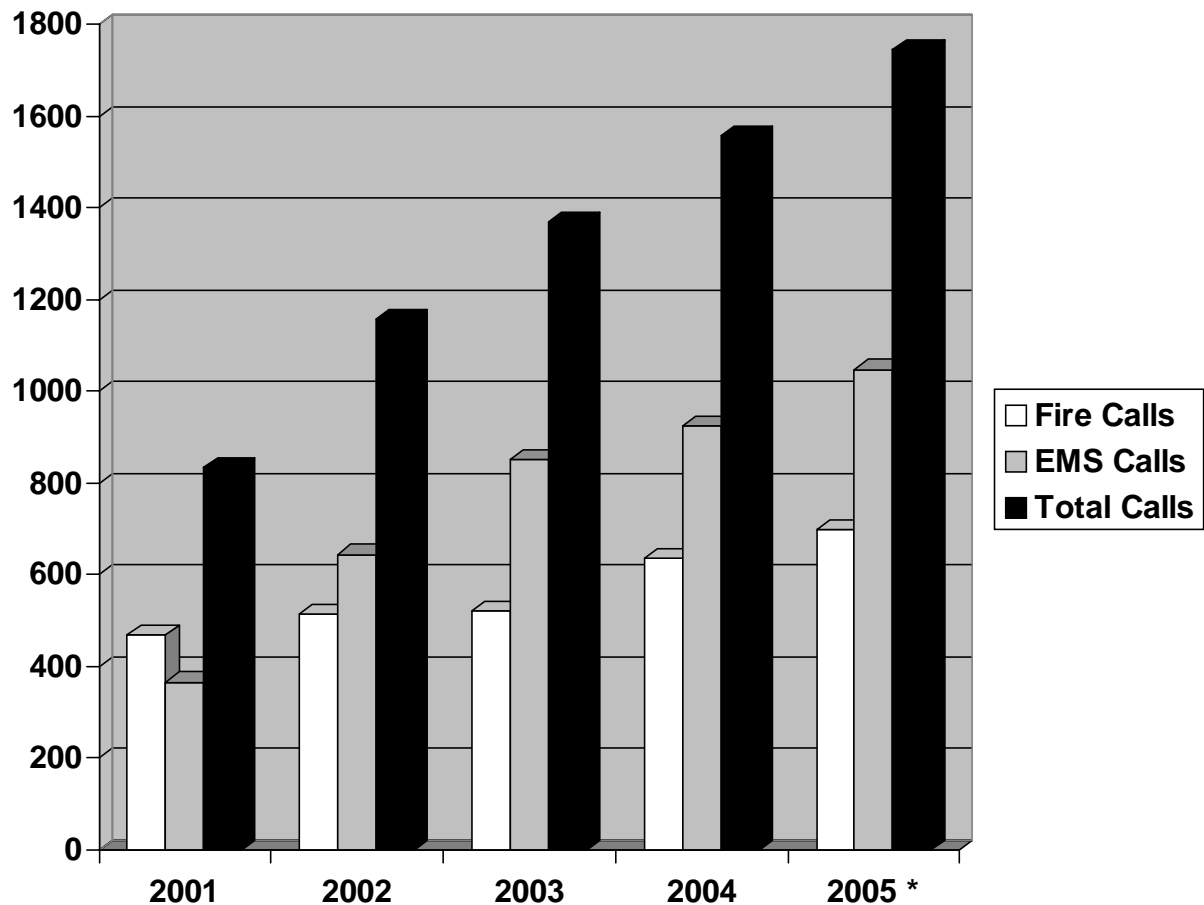


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The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has very stringent standards for fire department staffing and response times. The national standard for response time to fire and emergency medical calls is, “four minutes or less (from dispatch to arrival on scene) 90% of the time.” The Washington Township Fire Department is currently the only full service Fire and EMS agency in Mercer County that meets this strict standard.

All figures in the following chart are exact except for 2005 which is our projection. Based on past trends we expect a 12% increase in call volume with EMS Calls accounting for approximately 60% of all calls.



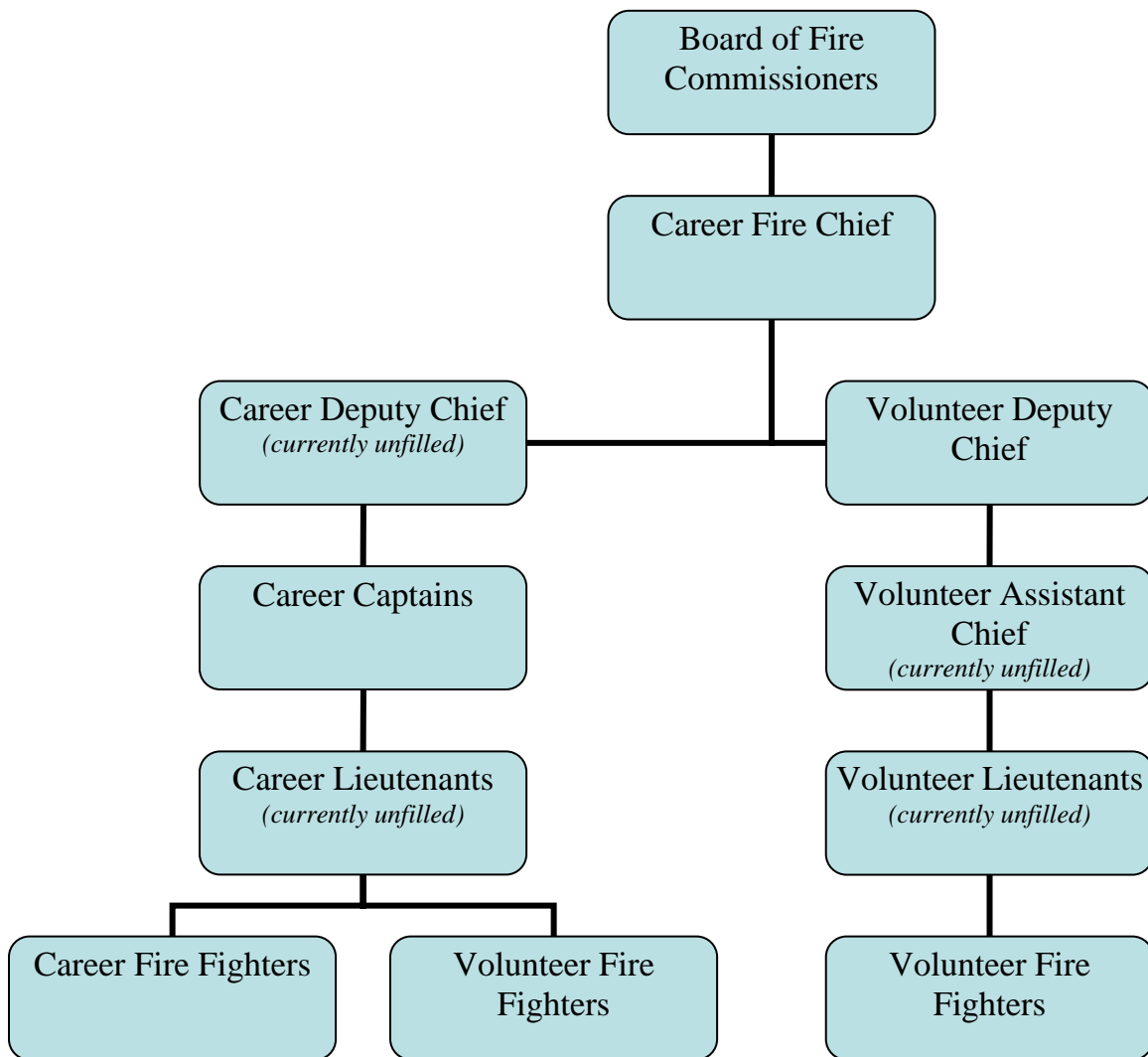


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## Organization

The following chart illustrates the current organizational structure of the Washington Township Fire Department. The chain of command illustrated on this chart is mostly for administrative purposes. For operational chain of command the department has adopted the Incident Command System (ICS) and follows the task driven command structure of the ICS.





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### COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

The Washington Township Fire Department is responsible for approximately 21 square miles of Washington Township. In those 21 square miles there are over 6,000 housing units and almost 300 businesses. In addition, two major highways intersect in Washington Township: the New Jersey Turnpike and Route 195.

According to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Washington Township is projected to have the largest population growth of the 13 municipalities in Mercer County in the next five years. By 2010, the population is estimated to be 13,320, an increase of 30% from 2000. The only other municipality that will come close to that growth is Hopewell Township which is projected to have a population increase of 22% between 2000 and 2010.

The residents of Washington Township are similar to residents of other communities with easy access to multiple transportation options to commercial centers. Residents of these communities tend to be transient due to their full-time employment and are often away from their homes for a large portion of the day due to work hours and extended commute times. Nationwide trends show as rural areas are built up with a mixture of residential, business and industrial development the ability to volunteer in the community declines. This is particularly true in the Northeast where congestion forces longer commutes and higher cost of living encourages two income families. The average resident cannot commit the time required for initial training in order to assist the volunteer fire company. A second factor is that as areas become more heavily populated, the nature of the calls and the volume changes drastically. Washington Township has over 600 fire calls annually and new volunteers often find it difficult to respond to a significant percentage of these calls and make a substantial contribution to their community. All these factors contribute to a decline in volunteer recruitment and retention problem throughout the United States, but perhaps most hardest hit are the communities that share common demographics with Washington Township.

The recent increase of residential units in Washington Township has contributed to an increase in call volume. The most significant impact is from the recent “cluster” housing developments, such as Town Center and multiple dwelling units such as Foxmoor. These neighborhoods bring many challenges into our community and place a much larger burden on the Fire Department than other residential housing types. Due to the larger number of people living in one structure or in close proximity to each other the fire department must commit more resources to reported fires, or other service calls, to insure the life safety of all the residents.



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### SUMMARY OF GOALS AND PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The goals and recommendations found in this document were not developed arbitrarily. They are based on the thorough analysis of the Strategic Planning Committee. The committee accepted the task of providing a way to address the concerns of the community and department, prevent problems from arising in the future and plan for the changing needs of the township and surrounding communities.

The Committee has identified 32 priority recommendations which address the following five goals:

1. Improve Fire Suppression and Rescue Operations
2. Improve the Emergency Medical Services Program
3. Address Personnel Issues
4. Expand Fire Prevention and Community Education Programs
5. Address Administrative and Facilities Shortcomings

The goals were developed based on the mission of the department and the services it provides, as well as a thought for how these recommendations would address the overall needs of the department. Within each goal, we have provided specific recommendations to ensure that the Washington Township Fire Department is meeting the objectives of the mission statement and providing the taxpayers of the township with the high level of public safety they deserve and have come to expect.



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### I. Improve Fire Suppression and Rescue Operations

Of all the recommendations made in this Strategic Plan, no recommendation is more critical than the need to replace the department's primary engine. Overall the fire suppression and rescue operations of the department are strong, but some attention must be paid to standardizing the program and addressing the training and equipment needs of rescue operations. Our priority recommendations for improving the fire suppression and rescue operations are:

- 1.1. *Create a replacement plan for all fire apparatus and replace the primary engine (Engine 402).* The Department's primary engine is not used in the way it was intended, and it no longer fits the mission of the department. There are significant maintenance issues, a lack of storage space for rescue tools and a new engine would insure the department meets all current NFPA standards for fire apparatus. The first step in replacing the primary engine is to hold a referendum in the first half of 2005 requesting voter approval for the purchase of a new engine. It is expected the department would go to bid by the end of the third quarter with an engine being completed and delivered in 2006.

The Department currently has a committee made up of representatives of career staff members, volunteer company members and Fire Commissioners. This committee is led by the Fire Chief and has begun work on specifications for the replacement of Engine 402. The scope of this committee should be expanded to develop replacement plans for all fire fighting apparatus based on current usage, NFPA standards and vehicle life expectancy.

Additionally, this committee should work with the volunteer company fundraising committee and the captain responsible for federal, state and local grant applications to secure alternate funding for the purchase of replacement apparatus.

- 1.2. *Revision and development of Standard Operating Procedures.* Department operations have changed significantly in the past three years. It is important for the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to reflect these changes in support of the department's mission. It is recommended that the Fire Chief identify needed Standard Operation Procedures, prioritize the list of needs, assign appropriate staff to draft proposed SOPs and submit the drafts to the Board of Fire Commissioners for formal adoption. (Note: a similar recommendation appears under Section 2 which addresses EMS-specific SOPs)



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- 1.3. *Assign career staff to work with the Fire Chief in reviewing the Department Box Plans on a yearly basis.* The Washington Township Fire Department utilizes a box system to insure proper emergency response to all areas of the township. The township is divided into sections, or boxes, and these boxes are then pre-planned for building occupancy, construction type, and use. This information is taken into consideration when assigning apparatus and mutual aid which will respond to these boxes. These box plans address local response and multiple alarm assignments (e.g., a second alarm fire). The box plans were recently revised because there has been significant growth in Washington Township in a short amount of time. It should be the Fire Chief's responsibility to assign career staff to review the box plans and suggest changes. The Fire Chief will report any updates to the Box Plan to the Board of Fire Commissioners and Township Council as needed.
  
- 1.4. *Formally adopt the Incident Command System and begin work on an Incident Management System compatible with the newly adopted National Incident Management System (NIMS).* The Washington Township Fire Department currently uses the Incident Command System (ICS) and has trained its personnel as required by the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety. The United States Department of Homeland Security, through Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HS-PD5), requires all emergency responders to use the ICS in coordination with NIMS. Compliance with HS-PD5 is required for local emergency responders to be eligible for federal funding and grants. The Washington Township Board of Fire Commissioners adopted a resolution formally adopting the ICS for use at all incidents and a similar resolution was subsequently adopted by the Washington Township Committee. The Fire Chief should work with the Washington Township Emergency Management Committee to insure that the Fire Department remains in compliance with federal requirements related to ICS and NIMS.
  
- 1.5. *Revision of training program to include more volunteers, more live fire drills and driver education.* The Washington Township Fire Department is fortunate to have a well-trained career staff, however, there has been little effort in bringing the volunteer fire fighters to this same level. On an annual basis, the Board of Fire Commissioners, with the recommendation of the Fire Chief will appoint one of the career officers as Training Officer. The Training Officer will have the responsibility of notifying the volunteers of training opportunities, creating written lesson plans/training outlines, and addressing any concerns related to training. The Training Officer will be a New Jersey Division of Fire Safety certified Fire Instructor.



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The Training Officer and Fire Chief should work with the volunteer company leadership to develop training standards and competencies for all qualified apparatus operators. These competencies will be used by each captain to evaluate the skill and ability of any per diem or new staff member, on their shift prior to allowing them to operate apparatus in an emergency situation. These competencies should include the ability to drive the vehicle and maneuver it through traffic in an emergency as well as the ability to operate the fire pump and any specialized equipment on the vehicle.

1.6. *Work with the Township Committee and business leaders to create a Knox Box program for new and existing businesses.* A Knox Box is a lock box located at the front of a commercial building, which is secured and only able to be opened by emergency responders with proper authorization. This benefits the business community by allowing easier access in an emergency without the need for a forced entry or time delay in having a business representative facilitate entry. The Fire District needs to work with Township leaders to create an ordinance requiring new businesses to install a Knox Box, and encouraging existing businesses to also install Knox Boxes.

1.7. *Create a standing committee to assess the needs for a second fire station.* The current size of the department and placement of fire station is adequate to meet the current call volume and anticipated needs of Washington Township in 2005. As the township and adjacent communities continue to grow, serious thought must be given to adding a second fire station, or sub-station, which could house a second engine, a ladder company and/or an additional ambulance. This committee should be made up of representatives of the career staff, volunteer members, District leadership and interested community groups.

In evaluating the need for a new station, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Changes in the traffic pattern/level of congestion on Routes 130, 33 and 195.
- Development of new residential areas
- Historical call volume and patterns
- Demographic changes
- Response times to population centers
- New construction which have an increased life safety load (e.g., hotels, apartments/residential dwellings over four-stories)



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- 1.8. *Develop a plan which will enhance the Department's rescue operations and identify equipment and training needs.* This plan should identify the common rescue incidents in Washington Township through a risk analysis and review of historical call data. The Department will then be able to plan for the purchase of appropriate rescue equipment in order to properly respond to these incidents at the level at which the community has come to expect.



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### 2. Improve the Emergency Medical Services Program

Emergency Medical Services now account for the majority of the emergency calls. Fortunately, the department has a dedicated individual who has helped the EMS program develop into the professional and high quality program it is today. There are still needs to be met to ensure that the Department is able to continue to deliver a high level of competence and service to the community. Our priority recommendations for Emergency Medical Services are:

- 2.1. *Create an ambulance replacement plan and replace the Department's primary ambulance.* As more demands have been placed on the EMS program, wear and tear and storage space have become significant issues. It is recommended that in late 2005 or early 2006 a referendum be held requesting a new ambulance, it is possible that this question could be posed to the voters at the same time as the question on the purchase of the replacement fire engine. It is anticipated that the department replace its main ambulance no later than the first quarter of 2007.
- 2.2. *Create an EMS Apparatus and Equipment committee to develop a list of needs and specifications for purchases.* Under the direction of the Fire Chief and EMS Coordinator, a committee should be formed to plan for the replacement of the department's ambulances, and submit recommended major EMS equipment purchases. In planning for the replacement of the Department's ambulances, consideration should be given to replacing both aging ambulances at the same time with identical ambulances. This would allow the department to rotate the use of the vehicles to save on future wear and tear and eliminate a backup ambulance which may not meet the current needs of the department.
- 2.3. *Revise the EMS Standard Operating Procedures.* The current EMS Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are too generic to meet the needs of the Washington Township Fire Department. It is recommended that the paramedics of the department be given the responsibility of revising the EMS SOPs to address the specific needs of the Washington Township Fire Department. It is recommended that the EMS Coordinator identify needed EMS SOPs, prioritize the list of needs, work with appropriate staff to draft proposed SOPs and submit the drafts to the Fire Chief and Board of Fire Commissioners for formal adoption.



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- 2.4. *Create a formal EMS training plan and schedule.* It is critical that all certified Emergency Medical Technicians, whether career, volunteer or per diem, receive necessary EMS training to meet the department's mission and stay current with their certification. The EMS Coordinator should be responsible for notifying appropriate individuals of training opportunities, insuring there are written lesson plans/training outlines, and addressing any concerns related to EMS training and certification.
  
- 2.5. *Develop a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) plan and develop proper training.* With the New Jersey Turnpike, Route 195, Trenton-Robbinsville Airport and major industrial facilities located in Washington Township, there is an increased risk of a mass casualty incident. The department currently lacks a plan to address such an incident. A plan should be completed in the next 18 months and all career staff should be properly trained. The EMS Coordinator should work with appropriate staff to develop a MCI plan and submit the plan to the Fire Chief and Board of Fire Commissioners for formal adoption.
  
- 2.6. *Develop a full-time EMS Coordinator position.* The EMS Coordinator will be responsible for the administration of the EMS program; including insurance billing issues, Hospital Insurance Portability Accountability Act (HIPAA), New Jersey State Department of Health regulations, community CPR and EMS training and EMS staff coordination. A fire fighter was recently appointed EMS Coordinator. Although it is anticipated that a minimal amount of overtime will be accrued to complete his responsibilities, the assigned tasks are mostly in addition to his regular duties. As EMS call volume increases and regulatory requirement become more stringent, it is anticipated that the position of EMS Coordinator will become a full-time responsibility. Once this occurs the Department will need to address working hours and shift coverage.
  
- 2.7. *The department should seek accreditation.* The Washington Township Fire Department is licensed as a Basic Life Support (BLS) provider by the New Jersey State Department of Health to provide ambulance service. As an added assurance to the community, the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services will insure that the service provided by the Department has met the Commission's high standards for quality patient care after a careful scrutiny by an independent review process. It is recommended that the EMS Coordinator work with the Fire Chief and District leadership to have the Department meet the standards and seek accreditation.



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### 3. Address Personnel Issues

The Department is fortunate to have a strong base of well-trained career staff. This has allowed the Strategic Planning Committee to primarily focus on apparatus, equipment and training needs, and those issues which may directly impact on the public safety of Washington Township residents. There are, however, specific personnel needs to be addressed. These needs are mostly administrative and internal, and therefore have virtually no impact on the delivery of emergency services to the Township. Our priority recommendations to address personnel needs are:

- 3.1. *Create a detailed department organizational chart and develop and/or revise the job descriptions for all current and future personnel.* It is crucial for the department to have an updated organizational chart which not only shows current staffing, but allows for future additions such as the EMS Coordinator. Job descriptions need to be revised to meet the needs of the department and its full-time personnel. The Fire Chief should work with District leadership in creating this chart and updating the job descriptions.
- 3.2. *Completely revise the Policies and Procedures Manual.* In the last year there have been several questions of interpretation of parts of the *Policies and Procedures Manual*. It is time for the entire Manual to be rewritten to clarify any question and address current needs. The Fire Commissioner responsible for personnel issues should work with the Fire Chief and representatives of the Washington Township Professional Fire Fighters Local 3786 to prepare a draft of a revised version of the *Policies and Procedures Manual*. This revised manual should be presented to the entire Board of Fire Commissioners for approval and adoption.
- 3.3. *Develop a formal Employee Handbook and implement a new employee orientation program.* New employees, whether full-time or per-diem, receive little or no information on joining the department. A handbook should be developed, and an orientation program created, to address issues such as benefits, the pension and general expectations of the department. The Fire Commissioner responsible for personnel issues should work with the Fire Chief and representatives of the Washington Township Professional Fire Fighters Local 3786 to prepare a draft of an employee handbook. This document should be presented to the entire Board of Fire Commissioners for approval and adoption.



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- 3.4. *Schedule an annual department meeting which includes all career staff, volunteers and Commissioners.* To insure that all staff, career and volunteer, understand the Fire District budget and to address any concerns, the department should hold an annual meeting in the first quarter of every year.
- 3.5. *Evaluate and implement a personnel notification/recall system.* Currently the department relies on the Mercer County Fire Communications Center for the notification of personnel recalled to work during a major incident. Due to the size of the department and the proximity of the employees this system has been effective. However, there are no provisions for the notification of Commissioners, other township departments or township-wide elected officials of major emergencies. Commercial products are available that allow for mass notification via multiple contact paths such as cell phones, home phones, pagers, etc. The District should consider purchasing such a service for the purpose of notification of District and township leaders or major incidents and the recall of career staff for second alarm and greater incidents.
- 3.6. *Develop an accident prevention program, including the establishment of an accident review board.* The department is fortunate to have not had employees suffer significant injuries while performing duties. A review board should be established to review any incident which resulted in a lost-time injury, all motor vehicle accidents involving department vehicles or apparatus, and any injuries or exposures (e.g., needle sticks or body fluid contamination) resulting in medical care. This membership of this review board should be adopted annually by resolution and be made up of at least five members consisting of one commissioner, the Fire Chief, the Deputy Fire Chief and two career fire fighters.
- 3.7. *Encourage attendance at National Fire Academy Courses.* The National Fire Academy (NFA) offers many excellent training and education opportunities for fire service professionals. These courses are free of charge and are often accredited by The American Council on Education for three college credits each. The total financial expense to the Fire District will be shift coverage and meal expenses. Courses are offered in fire department leadership, command and control of emergencies, fire prevention and emergency medical services. The Fire Commissioner responsible for Personnel and the Fire Chief should work with the other officers to prepare a list of suggested courses. This list should be advertised to all members during the semi-annual application period for the NFA.



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- 3.8. *Encourage supervisory personnel to acquire a job-related training or college degree.* Current and future career supervisors (Fire Chief, Deputy Chief, Captains, Lieutenants, etc.) should be encouraged to acquire a job-related college degree. As staffing levels grow it is imperative that all supervisors be offered the ability to gain the tools required to adequately supervise other employees. These programs are often offered as certificate programs at local colleges and universities. The Fire Commissioner responsible for Personnel and Commissioner responsible for Administration should work together to explore courses offered at Mercer County Community College and Rutgers University. Once acceptable programs are identified they should be advertised to the leadership of the department. Consideration by the Board of Fire Commissioners should be given to requiring certain courses for specific job titles.



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### 4. Expand Fire Prevention and Community Education Efforts

The Washington Township Fire Department is a well respected organization in the community, but there is still a need to increase its community education and outreach programs. The positive message and public relations benefits are desperately needed. Activities such as Safety Camp, CPR classes, home inspections, etc., should be continued, promoted and expanded where possible. Our priority recommendations for Fire Prevention and Community Education are:

- 4.1. *Appoint a Fire Prevention Coordinator.* This position is similar to the EMS Coordinator, with responsibility for the department's fire prevention program and community education and outreach programs. At first a fire fighter should be appointed to this position with the responsibilities and tasks added to his current duties. Eventually, it is expected that this position would become a full-time position.
- 4.2. *The Fire Prevention Coordinator should work with officers and District leadership to plan community activities such as Washington Township Day, Safety Camp, Fire Prevention Week, etc.* Throughout the year the department has many opportunities to work with residents of Washington Township and provide fire and safety education. Under the direction of the Fire Chief and Fire Prevention Coordinator, one or two fire fighters should be responsible for each community activity to insure a consistent approach to community education and fire prevention.



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### 5. Address Administrative and Facilities Shortcomings

There are many challenges in addressing the administrative and facilities needs of the Washington Township Fire Department. District leadership is faced with a fire station which does not provide adequate living or working space and there is little administrative support or experience for department leadership to rely upon. Our priority recommendations to address the administrative and facilities needs are:

- 5.1. *Hire a part-time Administrative Assistant for the Fire Chief and the Board of Fire Commissioners.* The Fire Chief is overburdened with administrative tasks, and the District leadership continues to ask more of the Chief. For this reason, an administrative assistant should be hired in the first half of 2005. At first, it is expected this individual would work 20 hours per week. This position would eventually become full-time and the individual hired for this position would be responsible for the duties of Fire District Clerk and handle bookkeeping tasks (under the supervision of the Treasurer). The Fire Commissioner responsible for Personnel and Commissioner responsible for Administration should work together to develop a position description, advertise this position and work with the Fire Chief to interview and hire an assistant.
- 5.2. *Reorganization/renovation of office space.* As new administrative positions are added (Executive Assistant, EMS Coordinator, Fire Prevention Coordinator), the district will need to reorganize or renovate the existing office space. It is recommended that the District work with the Union Building Committee and representatives of the volunteers to insure the office space is used in the most effective manner.
- 5.3. *Reorganization/renovation of living space.* The career staff is out of space. When the original building renovation was planned, there appears to have been little thought to the department reaching six full-time employees on 24 hour shifts. The District needs to work with the Union Building Committee and representatives of the volunteers to address the needs of the living space and potential of finding a new space for the bunk room or day room.
- 5.4. *Renovation of parking lot.* In the next five years the condition of the parking lot will need to be addressed. It is recommended that the size of the lot be significantly reduced to include the area just along the side of the building with a single access lane circling around the back. The remainder of the back lot could be turned to gravel or grass.



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- 5.5. *Develop a computer training program for new and current personnel.* All employees should be trained to use the Firehouse software and other reporting programs which may be purchased. The Commissioner in charge of Administration and Captain with the responsibility of maintaining the computer system need to work together to develop a plan to address this need.
- 5.6. *Develop an Annual Report with background and departmental highlights.* There is very little promotion in support of the Fire Department at District election time. To promote the positive aspects of the department, an Annual Report highlighting the Department's accomplishments should be mailed to residents and made available throughout the township.
- 5.7. *Create a reference library of vital District documents (contracts, manuals, etc.) and address the long-term document storage needs.* Vital contracts and agreements are scattered in various locations throughout the fire station. The Commissioners and Chief need to work together to find a common location for all documents vital to the operation of the District and options for long-term storage of all documents, reports, contracts, etc. should be researched and addressed as soon as possible.



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### CONCLUSION

What we have learned in completing this Strategic Plan is that the Washington Township Fire Department has the capability to be a top fire department in Mercer County and the surrounding counties in central New Jersey. There are significant needs, but with the proper leadership, planning and community support, these needs can be met and the department can continue to provide the highest level of service to the residents and visitors of Washington Township.

One final note: this document should be considered complete. However, the Strategic Planning Committee recognizes that planning is an ongoing process and the needs and goals of the Washington Township Fire Department can and will change. For that reason, the Strategic Planning Committee will meet on a regular basis to evaluate the success of this plan and report any changes or additions to its recommendations to the Board of Fire Commissioners.



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### DATA COLLECTION/SOURCES

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*2005 Washington Township Fire Department Annual Meeting, January 26, 2005*

*NFPA 1710 Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments*

*NFPA 1500 Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program*

*NFPA 1915 Standard for Fire Apparatus Preventive Maintenance Program*

*NFPA 1901 Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus*

*NFPA 1002 Standard for Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator Professional Qualifications*

*NFPA 1001 Standard for Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications*