

## Littleton Fire Department, Master Plan (2002)

Fire protection, fire prevention, fire safety awareness, rescue operations and emergency medical services are all functions of the Littleton Fire Department. Recent years have seen bids to change the department name to highlight its rescue operations as well as its fire services, that were met with resistance which was grounded in tradition. Regardless of the name, the community should be made aware of the range of vital services that are effectively provided by this department. The citizenry should also be aware that they have the ability, through their tax dollars, to determine the degree to which they are protected.

The Littleton Fire Department provides comprehensive safety inspection and educational services as well as round-the-clock emergency services to the community. This is achieved through a combination of three full-time staff (weekdays 7AM to 6PM) supplemented by an additional staff of 45 on-call persons, who respond on an as needed basis. The Fire Department works closely with the Police and control center personnel to provide quick and appropriate response to 911 calls.

Requests for emergency medical service represent about one-half of the calls received by the department. In response to emergency calls, Fire Department based, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) teams can normally be at the scene in 7 to 11 minutes, with hospital based advanced life support (ALS) on site within 15 minutes. Town paid EMT's are at the second tier of four levels of emergency response. EMT's cannot administer drugs or most forms of advanced life support. As the community grows and roadway traffic increases, response times will become greater. In time, the community will need to consider increasing the qualifications of its response teams at expectedly greater expense.

With fire fighting and related public safety protection, the tactics vary with the nature of the task. The most predominant protection of life and property, involves residential service. Single-family dwellings are the most common structure in town and the department is best equipped to meet this need. Tracts of undeveloped and forested land in town require the ability to fight brush and forest fires. The department has a 4x4 truck outfitted for brush duty as well as a full-sized pumper-truck prepared to provide assistance. Since two major limited-access state highways pass through town, the department also has a truck equipped to handle highway emergencies. The department also maintains a boat for water related calls as well as a hazardous materials containment trailer. The department can also expect mutual aid help as needed, from surrounding communities for service calls of any kind.

At the present time, the department's greatest weakness is the unavailability of volunteer or call firefighters. This shortage has become critical during the day and, at times, can cause delays in service. It is evident to Fire Officials that the rise in property values and the construction of larger homes has changed the local demographic to a point where most local residents have high paying jobs outside of town, which precludes them from participation as a call firefighter. Individuals who work as call firefighters and EMT's tend to live in homes smaller than those recently built in town, and are required to work and live in the community. As housing costs rise, the pool of available potential participants becomes smaller. An interview revealed that 10 call firefighters would comprise a good crew for a working fire, but the average call response in Littleton is often about seven persons. This situation is exacerbated when a second call comes in while full-time and volunteer personnel are still working at the first scene. This occurs with 10-14% of all calls received. The Chief can recall several examples where lack of manpower has resulted in greater property loss.

Skillful management of the current resources available to the Fire Department has resulted in an outstanding return on community investment in the department. However, ongoing community growth will continue to ask more of the service that is already operating at, and perhaps beyond

maximum capacity. While increases in full-time, more costly, personnel may be part of the solution, Fire Officials seem certain that call firefighters must remain as part of the force. The community has already stated a goal of maintaining a diversity of housing stock, and here is one excellent example of why this goal should be upheld.

The execution of non-emergency services and fire prevention awareness programs are also a critical function of the Department. Active involvement with the Student Awareness in Fire Education (SAFE) program enlightens school-aged children as to fire safety practices. Free blood pressure checks and CPR training is offered to the general public. Departmental promotion of these services is believed to reduce the severity and frequency of emergencies through increased awareness of fire prevention and safety practices. Fire safety inspection of business and municipal structures are a key part of fire safety. Overall, in the past 10 years, significant fires have decreased by 50%, with the exception of 1999 where there was a slight increase from the previous year. However, the trend of a decrease in structure fires called in is generally expected to continue due to increased safety awareness.

#### ❖ Fire Department Facilities and Equipment

The Fire Department is located next to the Police Station at 20 Foster Street. The facility originally opened in the 1940's, as the Old Town House, which was home to all town offices. While all equipment is currently housed, a number of problems with the facility exist. The main apparatus floor is overcrowded with trucks and equipment in close proximity, which presents a safety hazard during quick preparation times necessary for emergency calls. Garage doors of the main building are not wide enough to accommodate newer trucks.

An ancillary 3-bay building, in the rear, holds all newer equipment and its doors are also a tight fit for the wider, taller apparatus. Questions regarding the structural stability of this concrete-block, truss-roof structure has been questioned in the unlikely, but possible event of a catastrophic earthquake, where service from the towns best emergency equipment would surely be needed. No room exists in either building, for new equipment that will soon be needed. Environmental issues including floor drain wastewater and air handling will eventually need to be addressed.

Office space in the building has undergone some renovation to make it somewhat more functional for administrative purposes. This effort has solved most office, training, exercise, and some storage problems. However, the building is electrically inadequate, not compliant with the American Disabilities Act, as is required by law, and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) describes a minimum equipment storage requirement area for such a department at nearly twice the current size. Fire Officials urge that a study be conducted to examine the feasibility of expanding the current facility and/or dedicating a satellite station to make space for new equipment as well as shorten response times to more remote areas of town.

The Fire Department equipment roster includes three pumpers, two ambulances, one ladder, a brush truck, a special operations/rescue support vehicle, two pick-up trucks, a hazmat containment trailer, and an inflatable boat. Newer equipment selected by the Chief and supporting committees, is of high quality and can be expected to provide years of service. The department operates exactly at the ISO requirement for apparatus and maintains no spare equipment. Within the next 5 years, it will become necessary to acquire a new truck in addition to the current maintenance and replacement program for existing apparatus. The matter of sufficient garage space will need to be addressed before new equipment is purchased.

#### ❖ Future Vision

As the community grows, the Fire Department will also need to grow in reflection of the population increase. As this occurs several issues will need to be addressed by the department

and the community. Short response times and sufficient manpower are the primary factors in shaping the department. Enhancements of both would come to the community at greater cost.

As part of this master planning process, the citizen task group, working closely with the Fire Department, have conducted an informal survey of fire departments in demographically similar towns to ascertain characteristics of those departments. These findings, while not statistically valid, do serve as a general indicator by which Littleton Fire Department resources can be compared. Survey questions are listed below and responses from fire departments interviewed follow.

#### Figure 7 -1 Fire Department Survey

##### Fire Department Survey Questions:

1. Your department provides which of the following services;

Fire(F) Rescue(R) Ambulance(A)

2. Number of emergency responses in 1998?

2a. If your department provides ambulance service, what percent was medical?

3. How many on duty personnel man the station?

3a. What are their hours?

4. Excluding the Chief, how many full-time emergency personnel do you employ?

5. Is the Chief full-time?

6. How many on-call or volunteer emergency personnel are on staff?

7. Is there non-emergency staff to help ease the workload for emergency staff?

8. How many on-call/volunteer staff is available/likely to respond on weekdays?

8a. Do you consider this adequate?

9. How many on-call/volunteer staff is available/likely to respond on nights or weekends?

9a. Do you consider this adequate?

10. Do on-call/volunteers receive benefits or incentives to entice participation?

11. Assuming the department was at one time all volunteer and is now some combination full-time/volunteer:

11a. Was the transition smooth?

12. Does the current combination format operate smoothly?

Are there now any staffing issues?

#### Table 7 -1 Fire Department Survey Results

##### Fire Department Survey Results

The survey also encourages respondents to give details on any response that warranted further explanation. The purpose of these findings is merely to demonstrate that similar communities have addressed similar issues and that a more rigorous study should be conducted to find the ideal solution for the Town of Littleton. This survey also does not take into account the fact that Littleton also provides coverage for two major state highways which can require extra emergency staff and specialized rescue equipment.

In the near future, it will become necessary for the department to hire one more full-time professional to cover the station, while others are on a call, and to help offset the decrease in numbers of volunteers. The development of a greater full-time, 24 hour, staff is one solution to meet increased community need, but such modifications to the current department and supporting facilities, would be significant. Another solution is through the use of non-emergency volunteers to assist with equipment and managerial requirements, thereby freeing time for those ready for emergency calls. The department also will need to address the possible upgrade of in-house emergency responders from EMT's to higher levels of qualification as population density increases.

The next anticipated new equipment acquisition is a rescue type vehicle capable of carrying rescue, fire fighting and hazardous materials spill control equipment, but the current facilities cannot provide accommodations. Issues surrounding the construction of a satellite station and/or expansion of existing facilities, as well as new equipment needs, should be studied and addressed, perhaps concurrently with further study of staffing issues.

The Littleton Fire Department, in conjunction with the Police Department, is currently exploring enhancements to the 911 System, already in place, as well as other computer improvements within the department.

The department and the community also need to address obstacles to retaining valuable volunteers. It is expected that volunteer firefighters will play a significant role in public safety for years to come. Affordable housing as well as investment in new technologies that afford greater safety to firefighters in hazardous situations where optimal levels of staff are not available are all issues for consideration.