



Bedford County

DEPARTMENT OF FIRE & RESCUE



October 13, 2005

To the Citizens and Fire and Rescue Personnel of Bedford County:

I want to thank you for taking the time to review Bedford County's Master Plan for Fire & Rescue service as it was submitted by Public Safety Solutions Inc. This document is the culmination of several years of work by many people representing diverse segments of government, the public safety community, and our citizens.

One principle objective of this study was to obtain an itinerary for the future service delivery needs of our external customers, the people who request fire, emergency medical and emergency management services in their most serious time of need.

Another principle objective was to solicit input from our internal customers, the dedicated men and woman who represent the 24 Fire and Rescue Agencies of the Bedford County Department of Fire & Rescue. These volunteer professionals respond day and night to the needs of friends, neighbors and visitors. Their recommendations, observations, hopes and comments are reflected throughout this document.

Included you will read recommendations based on national trends and standards, state and federal laws and regulations and references to accepted practice in the delivery of both pre-hospital emergency medical care and fire suppression. Additionally, there are references to local practices and culture. All of these ingredients will continue to be instrumental in the growth and development of your county wide fire and rescue system.

The Bedford County Board of Supervisors, County Administrator and myself as Chief of Department recognize that this is a living document consisting of recommendations based on citizen and volunteer input. We will use it as a guide recognizing as the community, state and local budgets and the condition of world affairs change so to will the delivery of these most precious fire and rescue services.

Thank you for your interest in your Fire & Rescue Services,

Be safe and come back often,


Chief Jack Jones, Jr.

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Bedford County



*Celebrating 250 Years
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Fire & Rescue Master Plan



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September 23, 2005**

Executive Summary

Public Safety Solutions submits this report and associated recommendations to assist Bedford County master plan their fire and EMS service delivery system. Some of the recommendations involve major changes in the way services are provided; while others can be implemented quickly and with minor cost. We have provided a master plan that addresses volunteer issues, service delivery, staffing and support services, training, fire prevention, code enforcement and public fire safety education. Other recommendations provide an analysis and review of the communications system and the emergency management functions.

First, the Bedford County Volunteer Fire and Rescue system is not dying. There are a number of well trained, dedicated, motivated men and women providing fire and emergency medical services to the community every day. The system; however, does have a critical need to address volunteer recruitment and retention, improve daytime response for EMS calls, and to move forward with significant changes in the way the volunteer system is supported by Bedford County. The County should fund a Volunteer Recruitment and Retention position dedicated toward assisting the volunteer units in seeking and retaining new members. This position, would serve as a support system to the individual volunteer agencies to market their volunteer opportunities to the community, process the initial application's to the individual agencies, and perform analysis and review of the recruiting and retention efforts. In addition, the position would manage any benefits and incentives programs for the retention of volunteer members. An aggressive marketing plan should be prepared to educate the community on the volunteer service delivery system and its opportunities and challenges.

Second, there is a critical need for Bedford County to move into a larger combination career and volunteer service delivery system. A general policy should be established that when volunteer agencies request career staffing the County will commit to consider it in their total budget request. Career staff is recommended to be funded immediately to provide emergency medical services with cross training as firefighters in the southern half of the County, along with an advanced life support (ALS) transport ambulance. A total of six full time equivalent (FTE's) positions should be hired to staff the unit 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. An additional two FTE's or a sufficient number of part time positions are recommended to provide coverage for full time staff during vacation, sick, or training hours. This unit **would not** replace the volunteer unit; rather it would serve as a safety net in the system to respond to calls for service in a timely fashion. If a volunteer unit of sufficient certification, marks in route, the career unit can be cancelled and return to an in-service status. If appropriate, the volunteer unit can request the career unit continue its response to assist the volunteers in patient care and transport. This unit would replace the

existing Carilion unit serving under the Health Foundation Grant. We are recommending 24 hour coverage to address providing adequate support to the existing volunteer system around the clock. Additional FTE's are recommended to address operational, administrative, logistical, training, and prevention positions. A total of 42 positions are recommended for funding over the next twenty years.

Ultimately Bedford County needs to construct a fire station in the Stewartville Road and Moneta Road area. This station could provide support to the volunteer response system in the Huddleston, Moneta, and Stewartville areas. As an alternative, the station could be located on Falling Creek Road in the area of the fire training center, along with expanded fire administrative headquarters. Career EMS/fire staff should be located in the Montvale area and the Forest substation to provide support to the volunteer response system on the eastern and western sides of the City of Bedford. Their primary focus would be EMS; with cross training to support the volunteer fire system as well. This staffing plan would require the cooperation of the affected volunteer agencies. By year 2015 a new station needs to be constructed in the area of Big Island Highway and Otterville Road to provide coverage north of the City of Bedford.

When the County begins to implement career staffing at the fire stations, the national standard developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) needs to be followed. Currently this standard suggests four person staffing on fire apparatus and two person staffing on EMS units. To reduce staffing below these levels negatively impacts service delivery to the community and places an even greater strain on the volunteer system to make up the staffing deficiencies on a daily basis. However, due to vacations, sick leave, and training assignments it is more realistic to expect to have three person minimum on duty staffing with this Master Plan.

Third, the County needs to improve its funding and support system for the volunteers. Base funding of each company and its satellite stations needs to be increased to address the inflationary impact on volunteer system budgets. The County also needs to move toward providing more materials to the volunteers in lieu of large contribution increases. Examples include the County assumes all utility costs for each station(s), construction of future facilities, purchase of disposable supplies such as EMS supplies, and maintenance of apparatus, radios and pagers. The volunteers, in exchange for this huge financial benefit, agree to have their budget appropriations supply items not covered above and agree to future standardization of small equipment, SCBA, and other items that can be bulk purchased. The County will also need to authorize the logistical position (FTE) that will manage the purchasing and logistical supply system. Sufficient space and vehicle(s) to facilitate delivery and pickup needs to be obtained to properly house bulk supplies purchased under the contract. The funding contract with the City of Bedford needs to be renegotiated to adequately

reflect the value of services received from the City of Bedford as compared to the other stations.

The County needs to budget improvements to the County radio system. There are numerous locations throughout the County where the portable radio does not function properly. This is a critical life safety issue for the responding agencies operating in dangerous fire ground or EMS situations. The system is functioning as originally designed; however that design is no longer valid as the operating standard. Currently, the volunteers rely heavily upon their ability to hear and communicate with other responding units or Bedford County using portable radios inside of structures or moving vehicles. We recommend a minimum performance standard of 95% coverage 95% of the time using a portable radio at hip level in light buildings. This would permit fire and EMS personnel operating inside of a home on a medical emergency to have adequate radio coverage. Any radio system improvements would also have benefit to other radio users such as the Sheriff's Office, School Board, and the general County workforce.

Improvements to the central communications system need to be implemented. These improvements include a centralized records management system that tracks a call from call receipt to call closure with the fire or EMS report. The records management system would improve the ability to analyze call load, projected demands, critical system shortages, and overall performance of the fire and rescue system. If data is not collected in a usable format, it will never be reviewed and analyzed resulting in poor long range planning. The Sheriff's office collects lots of data that provide them excellent tools to perform system analysis. The County should support the purchase of sufficient licenses for the records management software so that every station comes on line at the same time. The Director of Fire and Rescue needs to be appointed to the governing board of the regional radio system to properly represent fire and rescue issues to the policy team. This would also permit the Director to provide the impact of other communications center issues on the delivery of fire and rescue services in the County.

The County needs to be willing to change its delivery standards of basic fire and EMS training. Currently all training is provided at the County training facility on Falling Creek Road. However, to recruit and retain volunteers, a wiser investment would be to offer smaller more frequent classes at locations throughout the County. This would prevent the volunteer having to travel, up to an hour sometimes, just to attend training. Locating classes in each quadrant of the County on an annual or bi-annual basis would reduce travel time for students, but increase the investment per student provided training. If areas of the county clearly are not supporting this effort to bring training to them; then the program should be suspended in their area. Specialty training programs such as farm extrication or officer development courses that best serve the entire county would continue to be offered only at the central training facility.

Bedford County needs to continue to fund improvements to the County fire training center. Currently the center uses recycled trailers as classrooms with limited parking for attendees. The land in this area has been quickly consumed by other public safety programs with a genuine need for space and facilities. In addition to adequate land, there is a lack of quality learning space(s) and support facilities such as restrooms and shower facilities. Practical training props such as the burn building, a four story training tower, and other practical training areas need to be developed. The County should continue to seek grant assistance in the construction of the practical facilities. Practical and academic training of the fire and rescue staff contributes to the retention of volunteers and maintains their skill levels to meet ever expanding workload demands.

The County needs to begin transition from an Association of Fire and Rescue companies to a more formal chain of command and division of labor among the expansive county. The Director should be appointed as Fire Chief by the Board of Supervisors and incorporate the independent volunteer fire and rescue companies under that umbrella. While each independent volunteer fire and rescue company can continue to have their own set of officers and directors; they will be recognized in the County organizational chart as District Chiefs or District Rescue Captains. This transition will permit the County as a whole to receive overall direction from one person appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The Chief would be a direct report to the County Administrator's office. This will improve organizational discipline, permit the volunteer officers and directors to take full advantage of the County resources, such as personnel management, policy development, and organizational structure. It is not the intention of this recommendation to take away the political power of the independent volunteer fire companies. Even in this organizational structure, if they are unable to obtain satisfactory service from the County Fire Chief, they can present their case to the Board of Supervisors for resolution. Each company would have the same officers and job descriptions for each position. In companies with low volunteer memberships, there is no reason multiple positions could not be held by the same person i.e the recruitment officer could also be an operational lieutenant.

Volunteer officers should be encouraged to serve as Battalion Chiefs in the County operational response system to assist in the management of the total fire and rescue system. The county should be broken down into four fire and EMS battalions for proper division of labor among the supervisors.

The Director (County Fire Chief) also serves as the County Emergency Services Coordinator. This position manages the day to day activities related to emergency management including emergency plan development and maintenance. The position is also responsible for the coordination and management of the Counties response to any manmade or natural disaster. Following the events of September 11, the duties and responsibilities of this office have greatly increased. New requirements by the State of Virginia have

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added significant workload to the Director over the past several years. It is recommended the County authorize a Deputy Emergency Management coordinator. While a full time position is desirable, it could start out as a part-time position. This position would be responsible for the day to day emergency management functions to include vulnerability assessment, emergency plan writing and maintenance, and coordination of State and Federal requirements related to this office. The position would also be responsible for the management of Homeland Defense and Virginia Department of Emergency Management grants awarded to the County.

It is recommended Bedford County adopt the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) and appoint the Director as the County Fire Marshal. This position would serve as the chief fire prevention code enforcement officer for the County. The fire prevention division will be responsible for plans review of new development, code enforcement of the Fire Prevention Code, and investigation of fires occurring in the County. The day to day duties of fire prevention code and fire investigation efforts should be provided by a Deputy Fire Marshal. Initially, the office would provide origin and cause determination moving to certification as a Fire Investigator with police powers as authorized by the Code of Virginia.

Our recommendations will assist Bedford County and the volunteer fire and rescue companies deliver its vital and valuable services to the more than 63,000 residents of the County. A well planned and time expansion of the career/volunteer partnerships, investments into the volunteer agencies, and the involvement of the members of the Board of Supervisors will provide the communities a first class fire and Emergency Medical Services delivery system.