



FORSYTH COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT **2024-2029** STRATEGIC PLAN





Introduction

As the Forsyth County Fire Department embarks on a new strategic journey, it is imperative to ground our vision and goals in a comprehensive understanding of the community we serve. Forsyth County, Georgia, stands as a vibrant and dynamic community, characterized by its diverse population, economic vitality, and commitment to safety and well-being. The Forsyth County Fire Department has served our community as it has grown from a small, predominantly rural community into a county bustling with new and diverse citizens, large and small businesses, and industrial complexes.

With a population steadily on the rise, currently surpassing 270,000 citizens according to U.S. Census estimates, Forsyth County presents both opportunities and challenges for our fire department. Our strategic plan for the next five years will serve as a roadmap, guiding our efforts to adapt, innovate, and enhance our services to meet the evolving needs of our residents, stakeholders, and visitors.

Drawing upon demographic insights, we recognize the shifting landscape of our community, marked by increased demographic diversity, economic development, and infrastructural expansion. By leveraging these insights, we aim to proactively address emerging trends, mitigate potential risks, and foster stronger partnerships with local agencies, businesses, and residents. This strategic plan will not only prioritize the safety and well-being of our community members but also underscore our commitment to excellence, professionalism, and continuous improvement.

Through strategic initiatives, resource optimization, and community engagement, we aspire to elevate the standard of fire services in Forsyth County, ensuring a safer and more resilient future for our citizens. In collaboration with our dedicated personnel, community leaders, and stakeholders, the Forsyth County Fire Department is poised to embark on this strategic journey, driven by a shared vision of service, innovation, and excellence. Together, we will navigate the challenges ahead, seize the opportunities that arise, and uphold our mission to protect and serve with integrity and dedication.





An Overview and History of FCFD

After many years of local, unorganized firefighting efforts, in November of 1972, a meeting was held with local residents and community leaders during which paperwork was set in motion to incorporate the Forsyth County Volunteer Fire Department.

On January 16, 1973, then Georgia Secretary of State Ben Fortson signed the incorporation documents making the date of incorporation of the Forsyth County Volunteer Fire Department effective as of January 2, 1972. The Forsyth County Volunteer Fire Department remained an all-volunteer department until 1998.

In 1998, the first 30 “career firefighters” were hired and the Forsyth County Fire Department was placed under the administrative authority of a county Public Safety Director. On April 16, 2001, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners held a meeting during which they passed a motion to discontinue the position of Public Safety Director and restore a level of autonomy back to the Fire Chief.

From the humble beginnings of the original volunteer fire department and the first 30 career firefighters hired in 1998, the Forsyth County Fire Department has grown to employ 242 men and women. These employees are split between administrative roles located at the Public Safety Complex in the Fire Department Headquarters and Training Facility, and suppression personnel who currently operate out of 14 fire stations.

As the population has grown, so has the demand placed on the resources of the fire department. In 2023, the department answered a total of 17,592 calls to the 911 center ranging from structure fires, medical emergencies, and vehicle accidents to non-emergent citizen calls for assistance. Our Fire Marshal’s office conducts over 2,000 new plan reviews, 8,000 county building inspections, and 2,000 city building inspections per year. Additionally, our Community Risk Reduction Unit coordinates over 1,000 interfaces with the public per year covering various safety practices and procedures with every level of the community.

CORE VALUES

Mission Statement

"To protect lives, property and the environment from all hazards through preparedness, prevention, mitigation and response."

Vision Statement

"To be an internationally recognized agency providing superior all-hazards service that exceeds the community's expectations."

Teamwork

Teamwork is indispensable as it involves all members, regardless of their roles, collaborating seamlessly towards a shared objective. It encompasses selfless dedication, leveraging diverse skills, and unified efforts to mitigate challenges and provide superior service to citizens, ensuring the department's success and the fulfillment of its potential.

Integrity

Integrity means consistently choosing to do what's right, even when no one is monitoring your actions. It involves upholding ethical standards, fulfilling promises, and making principled decisions regardless of external influences. This commitment to honesty and moral behavior not only builds trust within teams and organizations but also contributes to personal and professional credibility.

Excellence

Excellence entails surpassing perceived expectations and establishing a benchmark of superior performance for oneself and others. It involves a continuous pursuit of improvement, striving to operate at the highest level possible through dedication, training, and a commitment to surpassing average standards. This relentless pursuit of excellence drives individuals and organizations to constantly evolve and exceed stakeholder expectations, fostering continuous growth and development.

Service

Our primary duty is to serve the public by embodying a commitment to selflessness and putting the needs of others first, citizens and visitors. This dedication extends beyond mere obligation, driving us to continuously meet and exceed industry standards and ensuring that every individual receives the highest level of care and assistance possible.

In addition to serving the public, each member of the Forsyth County Fire Department is committed to the same value of selflessness interpersonally within our Department. The success of our ability to provide service to the community is founded upon our ability to serve each other.



Citizens of Forsyth County

Board of Commissioners

County Manager

Chief of Department

Division Chief Technical Services

Division Chief Fire Marshal/ Safety

Division Chief Field Operations

Division Chief Training

Administration Manager

Logistics

Fire Investigation

Special Operations Coordinator

Training Instructors

Finance & Administration

Accreditation Manager

Deputy Fire Marshal

Battalion 1

EMS Coordinator

Fire Fleet Services

Fire Inspection & Plan Review

Fire Stations 1,2,6,10,11,14,15

Health & Safety Officer

Fire IT

Community Risk Reduction

Battalion 2

Communications Coordinator

Fire Stations 3,4,5,7,8,9,12

Organizational Chart



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Strategic Planning Process

This strategic plan is the result of the countless hours of effort put forth by our Strategic Planning Team. The team consists of chief officers, administrative staff, as well as field officers and personnel. Additionally, the planning team sought and received input from all members and levels of the department. This input was integral to the planning process by providing insights on our community, our department's current operational environment, and our future needs and goals.

The driving focus of our strategic planning process and the resulting plan was to identify and commit to goals that will allow the Forsyth County Fire Department to provide the highest level of emergency services to the residents of Forsyth County in the most professional and efficient manner possible.

An initial planning meeting was held on December 7, 2023, among senior department staff. At this time, the initial timelines and core functions were established, along with the process to obtain representation from all divisions. A recruitment email was sent to all members of the Forsyth County Fire Department soliciting volunteers to serve as members of the Strategic Planning Team. Members were chosen by senior staff in attempt to obtain representation from all ranks and levels of experience within the Department.

Strategic Planning Team Members

The final Strategic Planning Team comprised of the following personnel under the direction of Chief Barry Head:

Ron Fagan, Division Chief

Jason Shivers, Division Chief

Jason Stover, Division Chief

Keith Pertschi, Division Chief

Zach MacTavish, Administration Manager

John Cannady, Accreditation Manager

Steve Baker, Deputy Fire Marshall

Justin Suggs, Battalion Chief

Brian DeStefano, Captain

Justin Rogers, Lieutenant

James Damico, FAO

Russell Transue, FF

Kevin Lindsey, FF

Erin Long, Sr. Fire Prevention Training Officer

Ed Fuller, Chaplain

Team members were organized into small teams focused on specific areas of the department, and were encouraged to seek input from department members not assigned to the Planning Team. The focus teams were divided to cover:

- SWOT Analysis
- Core Values, Mission, and Vision
- Situation Analysis (This team formed and met after input was received from remaining teams.)
- Emergency Medical Services
- Community Risk Reduction
- Domestic Preparedness
- Fire Suppression
- Human Resources, Health and Safety, Training

While all teams were encouraged to seek input from other department members, both the SWOT Analysis team and the Core Values, Mission, and Vision team conducted department-wide surveys. The Core Values, Mission, and Vision team surveyed the department members in an effort to define and/or adjust the current mission/vision statements and core values of the department. The results of the team's work can be seen in the stated mission and vision statements and defined core values in this document.

S.W.O.T. Analysis

S.W.O.T. is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. By definition, strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) are considered to be internal factors over which you have some measure of control. Also, by definition, opportunities (O) and threats (T) are considered to be external factors over which you have no control. The S.W.O.T. analysis is a well-known tool for audit and analysis of the overall strategic position of a business or organization and its environment. Its key purpose is to identify the strategies that will create a service delivery model aligning an organization's resources and capabilities to the requirements of the environment around it. In studying the environment surrounding the organization, there is better forecasting of changing trends that influence the decision-making process.

In conducting our internal S.W.O.T. analysis, all Forsyth County Fire Department members, including headquarters and administrative staff, were sent questionnaires and asked to respond. Field suppression personnel were given the opportunity to submit a response either as a crew and/or individually. In order to encourage honest, thoughtful and forthcoming participation, all responses were anonymous with questionnaires consisting of open-ended questions. All results were tabulated and collated in order to identify common themes and responses with responses being numerous and varied. While every response was reviewed, valued and discussed, not all were deemed relevant to creating strategic objectives, and there were numerous responses containing views not shared by large numbers of the department.



S.W.O.T. : Identified Strengths

- 1. High quality personnel with in-depth skills and motivation.**
- 2. Superior pay and benefits in comparison to other departments.**
- 3. Mostly up-to-date facilities and stations with active programs underway to replace outdated stations.**
- 4. Demonstration of care and concern for personnel, professionally and personally.**
- 5. Excellent and comprehensive training operations.**

S.W.O.T. : Identified Weaknesses

- 1. The breadth, uniformity and consistency of communication from Headquarters.**

There was a broad consensus that an improvement in the quantity and quality of department-wide communications from command staff would have a positive impact on department performance and retention of personnel. A strategic objective has been developed to address this issue and should be incorporated in the 5-year strategic plan.

- 2. Frequent rotations of personnel between shifts and stations.**

The department is currently understaffed, and those shortages require both overtime and rotating personnel to staff apparatus at minimal levels.

3. Career development for promoted positions.

4. Rapid population growth outpacing department growth.

5. Personnel management systems.

Responses to the S.W.O.T. questionnaires point to insufficient human resource management programs that address performance, fitness and nutrition standards, accountability for staffing levels, uniformity of standards, hiring and retention, and programs to improve performance. There appears to be a lack of centralized focus on the complex HR issues facing the department, and the overlap with detached county-level participation and authority is confusing. Current responsibility for HR functions seem to be split among operating divisions where functions become an “add on” to daily operating responsibilities.

6. Borderline Fire Suppression and Fire Safety Division staffing levels.

Staffing issues could negatively impact services to the community, and many of the initiatives and tasks in this strategic plan are ineffective without proper staffing levels.

Also, rapid growth in construction of single family & multiple family residences, commercial establishments, and industrial facilities has strained the Fire Safety Division staff. Annual inspections and other critical functions are at risk.

The department currently meets NFPA 1710 staffing standards at incidents by dispatching multiple crewed apparatus. This results in dilution of resources throughout the remainder of the department during the incident.

S.W.O.T. : Identified Opportunities

1. Ongoing and future construction of large elderly care facilities.

Opportunities exist to better understand the needs of assisted care and other forms of elderly care facilities and the human dynamics of their residents.



2. Building on existing working relationships and activities with multi-service partners.

While identified as a significant strength of FCFD, the excellence in inter-departmental cooperation with organizations such as mutual aid fire departments and law enforcement provides an opportunity to enhance and expand the work through leadership in training and technology.

S.W.O.T. : Identified Threats



1. Electric Vehicles

Electric vehicles, and lithium battery power packs in general, have presented new and unforeseen dangers to the fire service. While technology in fire suppression is advancing rapidly, the proliferation of lithium battery powered vehicles and devices is far outpacing suppression technology. It is believed the use of such battery powered products will grow exponentially over the period covered in this strategic plan.

2. Traffic Congestion

Traffic congestion on main thoroughfares in the county has increased to the point of becoming difficult at certain times of the day to respond efficiently to incident scenes.

Road construction and traffic control devices are outside the purview of FCFD. It is generally believed that current and planned road construction will not alleviate the situation. Creative approaches including type of apparatus dispatched and location of apparatus might be required if response times are negatively impacted by traffic.

Situational Analysis

The situational analysis process began by holding a full Strategic Planning Team meeting where each individual team presented the results of their group's documented opportunities and concerns. The Situational Analysis team, consisting of senior administration members, then met to review each of the concerns and opportunities voiced. Those items were analyzed using the following guidelines:

- What is meant by the expressed issue?
- What is the exact issue?
- What evidence exists showing the issue is a concern that must be addressed?
- Can the issue be segmented into its component parts?
- What actions are required to address the issue?
- Are the actions required to address the issue within current or future capabilities of the department?
- Are the issues expressed operational or strategic issues?
- Do the actions required to address the issue align with the department's mission and values?

After answering all of the questions listed above for each concern and opportunity brought to the Strategic Planning Team, the final list of strategic initiatives was finalized and is presented on the following pages.





Initiative 1: Achieve Department Accreditation

Issue Addressed:

Possess formal accreditation from The Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) through the Center for Public Safety Excellence program, ensuring continual process improvement, service delivery specific to the needs of the community, and a safe, professional work environment for members of the department.

Strategy:

Establish goals and objectives consistent with the Fire and Emergency Services Self-Assessment Model.

Tactics:

- 1** Develop, institute, and manage formal department policies as required and ensure adequate staffing needed to institute and manage adopted policies.
- 2** Complete Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover.
- 3** Institute programs to improve data quality, collection, and analysis.

Timeline:

Achieve CPSE accreditation within 4-5 years.



Initiative 2: Improve Internal Communications

Issue Addressed:

The breadth, uniformity and consistency of internal communications identified as a weakness in the S.W.O.T. analysis.

Strategy:

Ensure effective internal communication of policies and activities.

Tactics:

- 1** Utilizing available technologies, develop timely, predictable, and consistent 360-degree communication methods within the department.

Timeline:

New programs to be initiated by the first quarter of 2025.



Initiative 3: Address Impacts of Rapid Population Growth

Issue Addressed:

Rapid population growth and related new residential construction along with industrial/commercial development is outpacing department resources in fire suppression and community risk reduction.

Strategy:

Establish formal plan to address current and projected demands for department staffing, number and location of stations, and apparatus.

Tactics:

- 1** Retain services of a consulting agency to identify current and future requirements consistent with regulatory mandates and established standards.
- 2** Prepare formal recommendations with justification and budgetary projections based on consulting agency findings.

Timeline:

Consulting agency to be identified and retained during FY 2025. Study will be completed with recommendations by the end of 2026.



Initiative 4: Timely Replacement of Aging Apparatus

Issue Addressed:

Replacement of aging apparatus behind schedule at present and impacted by significant external influences including supply chain issues leading to production completion of 3 to 5 years for engines, evolving federal government regulations, and costs rising significantly beyond inflation rates.

Strategy:

Enhance apparatus review program to assess operational age of apparatus and evaluate supply chain issues on a regularly scheduled basis.

Tactics:

- 1** Review current apparatus replacement plan and update as necessary.
- 2** Identify fire apparatus industry lead times and cost parameters. Develop mitigation plan to offset any negative impact on FCFD.
- 3** Study and report on alternative sources of supply.
- 4** Study and report on alternative apparatus to enhance overall response.

Timeline:

Committee to be formed by Dec. 2024. Purchasing recommendations will be included in FY 2026 budget process.



Initiative 5: Improve Human Resources Capabilities

Issue Addressed:

Internal Human Resource functions are currently split among operating divisions where personnel lack training and expertise with complex issues. Overlap with detached county-level participation and authority is often confusing.

Strategy:

Enhance current HR functions by improving level of expertise and consolidating responsibility.

Tactics:

- 1** Develop operational plan to staff an internal HR function to administer programs, oversee regulatory compliance, focus on employee welfare, and manage recruitment and retention initiatives.

Timeline:

Recommendations for staffing will be based on findings from the consulting agency study referenced in Initiative 3 and completed by the end of FY 2026.



Initiative 6: Improve Community Risk Reduction Capabilities

Issue Addressed:

Staffing levels in the Fire Safety Division and explosive community business development do not allow for compliance with Forsyth County Ordinances in regard to external inspections.

Strategy:

Undertake study to define staffing requirements and evaluate available technologies to offset lower than acceptable staffing levels.

Tactics:

1

Document and publish current metrics.

2

Explore current and proposed technology opportunities to enhance interface with builder/developers in the permit process. Develop appropriate proposals.

3

Explore technology alternatives to “in person” annual inspections.

Timeline:

Implementation of new inspection/permit process technologies will be during FY 2025. Recommendations for staffing will be based on findings from the consulting agency study referenced in Initiative 3 and completed by the end of FY 2026.



Initiative 7: Improve Fire Safety Program Facilities

Issue Addressed:
Current Community Risk Reduction physical facilities are not adequate for successful community interface and education.

Strategy:

1. Explore the potential modification of existing facilities.
2. Engage with community stakeholders to develop a plan for creation of a Community Risk Reduction Complex.

Tactics:

- 1** Assess opportunity to convert portion of old station 12 for car seat installation training.
- 2** Identify property and develop a facility for a CRR complex.

Timeline:

Determining the feasibility of converting old station 12 will be by the end of 2024. Completion of a CRR complex by the end of 2029 will be impacted by budget and funding.



Initiative 8: Career Development Programs for Employees³

Issue Addressed:

Career development for leadership is not completely effective and has gaps in training and support programs. This results in fewer than acceptable numbers of applications for promotable positions, and applicants sometimes lacking the necessary skills and experience needed to be successful in their new positions.

Strategy:

Conduct appropriate survey of department members related to career aspirations.

Tactics:

1

Determine why the level of applications is lower than required and develop plan to overcome obstacles.

2

Establish development and mentorship programs for all department positions.

Timeline:

Education and mentorship programs will be developed and initiated during calendar year 2025. Feedback and program improvement will be on-going.



Initiative 9: Develop/Integrate Continuity of Operations Plan

Issue Addressed:

FCFD does not currently have a formal Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) to ensure essential operations are maintained.

Strategy:

Develop and publish COOP.

Tactics:

- 1** Assemble the information necessary to create a plan.
- 2** Using an existing COOP as a template, create a COOP specific to the needs of the organization.
- 3** Engage with Forsyth County EMA to ensure COOP is integrated into a County-wide COOP and comprehensive All-Hazard Response Plan.

Timeline:

COOP to be completed by first quarter 2025. Review and updates will be ongoing.



Initiative 10: Development/Construction of a New Training Academy

Issue Addressed:

The current fire department training facilities have become outdated and do not have the space, equipment, or updated facilities needed to meet the multi-disciplinary training needs of new and current personnel. Land has been procured for a new training facility; however, a significant percentage of funding is dependent upon voter approved SPLOST programs.

Strategy:

Engage with County Administration to ensure the Fire Training Facility is completed in a timely manner and funded in such a way that current and future needs of the department are met.

Tactics:

- 1** Review current facility plans and time to ensure current planning meets the training and administrative needs of the department.
- 2** Engage with County Administration to ensure budgetary needs are addressed and secured in the event that SPLOST funds are not approved.

Timeline:

Plans and timelines are ongoing and dependent on funding including the result of the community's vote on Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) 9 at the end of 2024. Completion of the new training facility is targeted for the end of 2029.

References

- National Fire Protection Agency 1710: Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, EMS and Special Operations in Career Fire Departments, 2020 Edition.
- Wallace, M. (2021). The Value of Organizational Change. In *Fire Department Strategic Planning – Creating Future Excellence* (3rd Edition)
- Center For Public Safety Excellence, Inc. (2020) *Quality Improvement for the Fire and Emergency Services*.
- Center For Public Safety Excellence, Inc. (2023) *Fire and Emergency Services Self-Assessment Manual* (10th Edition).
- Forsyth County Code of Ordinances, (Ord. No. 79-F, § 4, 11-7-2013) Sec. 38-35. Bureau of Fire Prevention

