

August 30, 2019

Mr. Kip Padgett, Town Manager
Town of Wake Forest
301 South Brooks Street
Wake Forest, North Carolina. 27587

Dear Mr. Padgett,

Thank you for allowing EnviroSafe the honor to work with you, your staff and the Wake Forest Fire Department staff over the past six months to conduct an analysis of the Wake Forest Fire Department for purposes of gathering data and information to empower decision makers with the Town of Wake Forest and the Wake Forest Fire Department to be able to reach responsible conclusions regarding the potential unification of the fire department into Town Government.

We are pleased to present a DRAFT comprehensive, written report to you on our findings thus far. We hereby present the DRAFT report until such time as the Town and fire department staff have had a reasonable opportunity to review the DRAFT and define any errors or omissions. At a designated time in the near future, we will issue the final report to the Town.

Attached to this memo, you will find two excerpts from the report. First, please see the Executive Summary of the report. Second, you will find a summary of the recommendations contained within the full report.

We look forward to presenting an overview of the analysis in a joint presentation to the Wake Forest Town Board and the Wake Forest Fire Department Board on Tuesday, September 3, 2019 at 17:00 at the Wake Forest Town Hall. Please let us know if you should need any additional information between now and then.

Thank you again for the exceptional cooperation, support and professionalism that we have experienced in working on this important initiative. We are proud to have served the Town of Wake Forest in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



Gregory H. Grayson
Vice-President of Operations

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Wake Forest, like many North Carolina municipalities, is experiencing transition and growth in service demand, which is increasing complexity of providing core local government functions, such as fire and rescue services. When dynamics change, so must the infrastructure and systems that enable and support those basic functions. These “growing pains” are a natural progression of the maturation of a unit of local government, and are not unique to Wake Forest. However, with the progressive request of the Board of Directors of the Wake Forest Fire Department, Inc (a private not for profit corporation) the Town of Wake Forest has proactively stepped forward to provide due consideration to the potential of consolidating and unifying the Wake Forest Fire Department into the municipal government corporation of the Town of Wake Forest. Innovatively, the Town of Wake Forest requested specialized assistance from EnviroSafe, a North Carolina management consulting firm that specializes in local government public safety services and serves as the sole fire consulting provider for the North Carolina League of Municipalities to conduct investigative work around several aspects of this potential unification of the Wake Forest Fire Department, Inc. into a department of the Town of Wake Forest.

Report Synopsis:

The Wake Forest Fire Department is a progressive organization and is providing credible service to the people of Wake Forest. However, the current systems are not sustainable long-term as the Town continues with rapid growth and complexity increases. It is the assessment team’s recommendation that in the best interest of the people of Wake Forest, the fire department become part of Wake Forest Town Government. Many Wake Forest residents may not even recognize that their firefighters are not currently part of Town Government. Time is needed to properly transition that unification with a mirage of human resource and operational considerations. Costs to operate the fire department as a part of the Town will be higher in the years ahead. However, provision of fire and rescue services are core, essential elements of local government responsibility. With those additional costs, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability can be strengthened, resulting in improved outcomes over time.

Purpose:

This independent, third-party, comprehensive analysis of the Wake Forest Fire Department is designed to empower the Wake Forest Fire Department Board of Directors and Town of Wake Forest elected officials with information to make responsible, long-term decisions that are in the best interest of protecting and servicing the people of Wake Forest, North Carolina.

The decision of the Town to fully explore this potential was prompted by a request from the Board of Directors of the Wake Forest Fire Department. Key drivers of this decision relate to the scope and scale of operations that the fire department has grown to in recent years, parallel to the growth of the Town of Wake Forest. The fire department has grown to soon over 80 career personnel along with both part-time and volunteer firefighters. The budget of the fire department has grown to over \$7.5 million annually. The Town of Wake Forest is funding approximately 80% of the overall cost of the fire department currently, with Wake County’s fire protection service district comprising the remaining 20% of funding. Key challenges for the fire department include recruiting and retaining personnel. As a private, non-profit corporation fire department, the organization is not allowed to participate in the North Carolina Local Government Employee Retirement System (NCLGERS). This void creates loss of current personnel to nearby municipal fire departments that do participate in the retirement system. In

addition, the lack of participating in NCLGERS detracts some firefighter candidates from applying or accepting employment with the fire department. The percentage turnover in the department in recent years is higher than is typical for similarly sized fire departments that are allowed to participate in NCLGERS.

Process:

To professionally conduct this analysis, EnviroSafe divided the assessment of this situation into five core work focus areas. These include:

- Data Analysis and Stakeholder Input
- Human Resource Related Impacts
- Capital Resource Impacts
- Operational Impacts
- Financial Feasibility Analysis

Distinct teams of subject matter experts in each of these respective areas from across North Carolina have been engaged by EnviroSafe to bring current, relevant and professional observations and recommendations regarding this situation. Collectively, analysis of these areas will enable the essential decision makers in this potential unification to make the most responsible and well-informed decisions possible to move the fire protection service delivery system forward for the Town of Wake Forest.

Data Analysis and Stakeholder Input:

EnviroSafe reached out to several distinct groups in order to gain an accurate understanding of perceptions, priorities and needs related to the potential unification. Individual or small group interviews were held with all members of the Town of Wake Forest Board of Commissioners, the members of the Board of Directors of the Wake Forest Fire Department, Inc. and extended to all of the firefighters – both career and volunteer - of the Wake Forest Fire Department.

Findings from these sessions indicate that the Town Board and the Fire Department Board both recognize that changes are needed in the system/structure of the fire department. There is mutual respect between the Town elected officials and the fire department Board. Both bodies recognize that the experienced leadership of Wake Forest Town Manager Kip Padgett has enabled both bodies to seriously consider this unification for the benefit of the people of the Town.

Both Boards were asked to identify their perspective on the strengths, weaknesses, missed opportunities and perceived threats if the unification did not come to fruition. The high service levels provided by the fire department, demonstrated professionalism, well developed pride within the department and the advancements that have been made under Chief Early's leadership over the past ten years were consistently articulated. Commonly identified as gaps or weaknesses were: lack of being able to participate in NCLGERS resulting in high turnover, lack of dedicated human resource staff within the department, low levels of diversity, sustainability, and depth of staff in other support areas. Concerns about costs to unify the fire department into the Town and the necessary business modifications were also voiced.

Both Boards recognize that this unification is a historic decision and will prompt many changes for the fire department and the Town. However, there was consensus that a deep look into this opportunity

was necessary for sustainability into the future. It was clear from listening to both Boards that some levels of changes were needed in order to move Wake Forest Fire Department away from being a training ground for other fire departments. In addition, participation in NCLGERS was a key factor to making Wake Forest competitive with other municipal fire departments in the region to attract and retain top quality personnel.

Fire Department officers, career line personnel and volunteer firefighters were also consulted to gain an understanding of their perceptions and needs. There was excellent engagement by the firefighter groups and all personnel demonstrated strong commitment to public service and improvement, and the firefighters expressed enthusiasm about the potential unification.

The quality of personnel, family culture within the department, demonstrated pride, the department's strong commitment to training, aggressive firefighting tactics and having the opportunity to provide meaningful input led the list of identified strengths of the department. Again, lack of ability to participate in NCLGERS, recruitment and retention of personnel, apparatus maintenance, internal communication challenges and voids of organizational infrastructure such as human resources and information technology consistently emerged as identified gaps from the firefighter's perspective. Concerns about the potential unification included the process that would be followed. There was recognition that being part of the Town Government would bring with it more requirements and restrictions. However, there was consensus that the benefits would outweigh the negatives and that changes were necessary to sustain the fire department into the future.

Human Resource Related Impacts:

This segment represented a major portion of the work of this project due to relevance and cost of personnel. Providing fire and rescue services is very personnel intensive, and salary and benefits represent well over 85% of most any career fire department budget. Current systems for both the fire department and the Town were assessed and differences were identified and troubleshooted. A complex and comprehensive crosswalk was developed in order to determine impacts for each individual fire department employee. Compensation, health care, benefits and associated costs were assessed.

The fire department currently utilizes a step pay plan, which is considered best practice and very effective for the teamwork that is necessary for firefighters. This method has been proven superior to other types of compensation systems for firefighters. The Federal Government recognizes that firefighter work environments and schedules are different than any other profession and distinguishes firefighters who are part of local governments under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) 7(k) exemption which allows municipal firefighters to work 212 hours in a 28-day period before earning overtime. This FLSA 7(k) provision is NOT allowed or entitled for private, non-profit fire departments and is reserved only for state and local government fire departments.

We believe that the step pay plan system should continue to be utilized. However, the current compensation rates need some adjustment in order to be more equitable with the Wake County and North Carolina market. Should decision makers elect to move forward with the unification, the Town is planning a compensation study in fall, 2019. This is an essential component because compensation compression issues need to be addressed throughout the sworn ranks. It is realistic that it may take a couple budget cycles to fully implement pay compression issues that are anticipated to emerge in the compensation study.

However, the assessment team identified some more immediate needed changes in the starting pay for each rank in order to be comparable with other compensation in the Town, the Wake County area and similar sized fire departments in North Carolina. The team also identified the differences in the fire department policies and Town policies related to benefits and has made recommendations related to modifications in those areas.

Being a part of the NCLGERS system will surely strengthen the fire department's ability to attract and retain talent. NCLGERS is a defined benefit plan as opposed to 401(k) plans which are defined contribution plans. The Wake Forest Fire Department currently provides the 401(k) program as their retirement savings vehicle. Participation in the NCLGERS system will enable Wake Forest to more effectively "compete" for talent with other local governments. Looking into the future, there is clarity that being a part of NCLGERS will strengthen recruitment and retention for the fire department. However, a challenge in the coming years will be with current fire department employees who will most likely not be able to complete full retirement as provided for in NCLGERS. NCLGERS is set up to require a minimum of five years of credible service but is designed for full benefits to be provided at thirty years of credible service. For existing personnel with a number of years working for the private, non-profit fire department, they may not be able to fully recognize all the benefits of being a part of NCLGERS. Personnel will be able to enjoy many of the benefits available to them as NCLGERS participants, including participating in the State of North Carolina 401(k) plan; whereas current fire department employees could choose to roll their current 401(k) funds into the state plan based on individual needs and choices. Subsequently, if chosen, the state 401(k) plan can provide a defined lifetime benefit for persons who desire that model.

Early within this initiative, it was recognized that many of the current fire department personnel did not have a consistent understanding of what NCLGERS was and was not. It was recommended to the Town that an awareness level training class be presented to all fire department personnel so that a higher level of understanding is present. The Town recognized this need and issued a change order to EnviroSafe's contract to provide this training to fire department personnel. This level of commitment to education is to be commended.

Should the decision be made to unify the fire department into the Town, the assessment team recommends maintaining the step pay plan system, conducting the compensation study in the fall, addressing specific differences in employee benefits and incentives and importantly - adopting a special separation allowance model similar to what is mandated for police officers serving in local government in North Carolina. While not mandated by law, local governments can elect to provide parallel programs for firefighters and with the transitional issues for Wake Forest, the team recommends that approach. Other North Carolina municipalities have taken this approach and the team recommends this progressive approach for the Town of Wake Forest.

Capital Resource Impacts:

A significant evaluation of all physical assets of the Wake Forest Fire Department, Inc. was conducted. Each fire apparatus was assessed for mechanical capability and firefighting equipment. Each fire station was assessed by a specialized fire station licensed architect as well as an OSHA specialist for functionality, comparison with fire service industry standards and Americans with Disabilities (ADA) requirements.

Overall, the fire department has well maintained the facilities. Fire Station 1 in Downtown has some modifications that are needed that could be accomplished in one or two budget cycles. Stations 2, 3 and 4 only needed minor modifications.

Station 5 (the former Falls Station) is problematic. The fire department has valiantly strived to improve this facility since it came under the fire department's purview a few years ago. However, essential basic needs and expectations for this station are lacking in comparison to needs for a career fire station. The station currently accommodates part-time, weekday firefighters and volunteer firefighters. The team recommends utilizing Station 5 as a volunteer only station moving forward in the short term. Long term, a different system configuration between Wake County, the Town of Wake Forest and the City of Raleigh would be most beneficial and efficient. This aspect is more fully addressed in the operations section of this report.

Regarding apparatus, thirteen (13) fire apparatus were assessed by the team. The greatest issue with the apparatus is lack of a consistent preventive maintenance system. The Town will need to enhance apparatus maintenance efforts through internal staff or additional service contracts with providers for repairs as well as preventative maintenance. Secondly, some of the apparatus are designed for rural use and Wake Forest is operating as an urban response system. Therefore, the apparatus will have difficulty fulfilling life expectancy due to the call volume and demands for a community with the density and workload of Wake Forest. Moving forward, the Town should purchase urban level fire apparatus for maximum efficiency. Fire apparatus should ideally have a life cycle of approximately ten (10) to twelve (12) years of front-line service and five (5) to seven (7) years of reserve service for a total of less than 20 years of service.

Conditions were declared for the fire apparatus as follows:

- (4) Excellent (30%) - Engine 4, Tanker 4, Brush 1, Brush 5
- (5) Good (39%) - Engine 1, Engine 2, Engine 3, Ladder 1, Tanker 2
- (1) Fair (8%) – Engine 7
- (3) Poor (23%) – Engine 5, Engine 6, Ladder 3
- Not Rated – Squad 5

The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is in place to replace fire apparatus and funding the CIP should be a priority moving forward to ensure that adequately performing fire apparatus is available to serve the people of Wake Forest. Within the existing fire department CIP, commitments have already been made for purchasing a \$1.3 million replacement aerial truck and \$700,000 for expansion of Fire Station 2. At least three replacement fire engines need to be included in the CIP as soon as conditions will allow.

All Capital assets of real estate, buildings, apparatus, equipment and associated materials are envisioned to become true assets of the Town with this unification. The assets are significant and should be considered as an important component of this consolidation and unification effort.

Operational Impacts:

The Wake Forest Fire Department's call volume has been steadily increasing. Between Fiscal Year 13-14 and Fiscal Year 17-18, there was an increase of 38% in call volume. This is significant and reflects the growing Wake Forest community. Approximately 3,800 calls for service are responded to annually, or about 10 calls per day on average. Of the total emergency calls for service, approximately 63% were related to medical emergencies, which is customary in urban environments. Typically, the percentage is even higher.

Based on the data provided, the department was meeting a five (5) minute response time goal (comprised of turn out time and travel time) for first unit arrival on approximately 44% of all calls. It appears that the 90th percentile of response times would be between 7 and 8 minutes. What this realistically means to the Wake Forest resident is that on 90% of emergency responses, their fire department would arrive in 8 minutes or less for a first unit response.

Based upon the data the assessment team has been provided, the stated standard of coverage at this point would be as follows:

“For 90% of all typical residential structure fire incidents, the Wake Forest Fire Department is providing at least one apparatus along with at least four (4) adequately trained firefighters arriving within 8 minutes total response time and is prepared to take immediate action in accordance with department protocols.”

The team reviewed all structure fires occurring over the past five fiscal years. An average of 16 structure fires are occurring annually within the complete district. Of these structure fires, approximately 60% are reported to be contained to the room of origin. This is admirable performance and in alignment with urban levels of service.

Additional attention to minimum staffing levels is needed within the fire department. Adequate staffing at structure fires is very important in providing fire and rescue services. Federal law mandates that a minimum of four firefighters are on scene before making interior entry into a structure fire. This requirement is so that a minimal rescue team can be formed before sending personnel into an immediately dangerous to life and health environment (IDLH). Wake Forest must comply with this requirement as there are very few acceptable exceptions to this mandate. Beyond that requirement, staffing levels are a local decision. However, the national standards for emergency response articulate that a minimum of 17 firefighters are necessary to adequately manage a house fire in a typical residential (<2000 square feet) structure. Data indicates that Wake Forest is placing an average of 17 persons on structure fires. In Wake Forest, 90% of structure fire incidents show a staff count of 22 or less. Moving forward, strengthening on duty staff and exercising all available automatic aid agreements will continue to be important for Wake Forest, especially as Wake Forest develops higher hazard occupancies such as apartments, strip shopping centers and commercial structures. As an example, a minimum of 27 firefighters is needed on scene at a basic garden type apartment fire according to national industry standards. Wake Forest will need to plan for more urban levels of staffing in the future. While four persons on each engine and ladder is not a legal requirement, it should be a goal of the Town to increase firefighter staffing to reach this level of minimum staffing as soon as conditions will allow. The fire department is dependent upon automatic aid now (approximately 200 times per year). As Wake Forest further develops, the Town will need to be able to manage single residential fire

incidents more internally and rely on automatic aid more for secondary incidents occurring simultaneously and higher hazard incidents.

Fire departments measure at the 90th percentile in all cases because of multiple events occurring due to storms, access issues, mechanical failures and other uncontrollable events. The fire department should be reporting all demonstrated performance in response times at the 90th percentile to comply with industry standards and expectations.

EnviroSafe conducted a GIS analysis of performance of the fire department and produced a series of maps depicting travel time, population density and risk. We also evaluated coverage from the Insurance Services Office (ISO) perspective to adequately assess the overall engine and ladder coverage for the Town of Wake Forest. Looking ahead, collaborative efforts are possible with the Town of Rolesville and/or the Rolesville Rural Fire Department related to the area of the Town in the Northwest quadrant. As Rolesville considers placing a fire station in the area of Old Pearce Road and Daniel Road, that fire station could assist the Town of Wake Forest. Conversely, the Town of Rolesville has area near Burlington Road where collaborative opportunities exist with current Wake Forest Fire Station 3. It is typical in North Carolina that local governments enter into Interlocal Agreements for joint use of facilities and or reciprocal agreements, which may be effective in these locations.

Department operating policies were examined by external subject matter experts and potential issues were identified and discussed with the Fire Chief. Some administrative policies would need to yield to Town of Wake Forest policies. However, there were no policies or procedures that presented obstacles that could not be effectively mitigated during the transitional period. Contracts and agreements currently in place with the private, non-profit corporation fire department would need to transfer to the Town of Wake Forest. Examples would be the contract with Wake County Government, automatic aid agreements, service agreements, etc. However, additional improvement measures are also offered within the report.

Substantial additional review was provided related to Fire Station 5. The building is a significant issue to be addressed. The area and insurance district primarily serviced by this station is unique and atypical at best. However, the current utilization of volunteers is excellent and an important, ingenious component for the future. For the foreseeable future, the team recommends that Station 5 transition to a volunteer only station. Wake County would recognize Station 5 as an unstaffed station. However, volunteers could establish duty crews to provide staffing and response from the fire station as best possible. Current part-time personnel should be re-deployed to supplement the fire department's remaining four stations. This move will help support needed career staffing at the other stations and enable Station 5 to continue to serve the approximately seventy structures in Station 5's primary response/insurance district. This plan will also support the department's volunteer program, which is effective and will provide an excellent opportunity for firefighter recruitment and public service. Coordination and collaboration between the Town and Wake County Government will need to occur in order to transition this component.

Financial Feasibility Analysis:

Financial aspects are integral to this assessment. The team evaluated the fire department budget, the Town budget and the associated capital improvement plans (CIP). Particular attention was given to the human resource costs and benefits as well as operating expenses. Transitioning fire service from the

private, non-profit model to the municipal model will be more costly. However, outcomes will improve, certain components such as support functions and systems can be delivered more effectively and efficiently and costs for employee turnover are projected to decrease under the municipal model.

Firefighter turnover is expensive. Reducing firefighter turnover will improve efficiency. It is estimated that the loss of each firefighter to another fire department results in as much as a \$50,000 cost per firefighter. These costs are in recruitment, training and equipment. Beyond direct costs, there are costs to effectiveness and organizational morale, beyond the ability to attract and retain talent.

A high range methodology was utilized in order to predict costs in future years. In the first year, costs could increase as much as a net of \$988,970 based upon projections. Key drivers of this increase include converting the firefighter's pay scale and benefits conversion, a more aggressive apparatus maintenance and CIP replacement program and potential ancillary/support costs. It is important to note that a number of variables can affect the actual amount of increase, especially in the first year (FY 20-21). However, given projected growth in the Town and the assumed growth from the County district, it is fiscally feasible that the Town could assume full responsibility for the fire department for FY 20-21. Continuing work is needed throughout the transitional period to further refine the cost estimates as more variables are defined in preparation for the FY 20-21 budget.

Next Steps:

This assessment captures a "snapshot in time" of the Wake Forest Fire Department and how it could integrate into Wake Forest Town Government. It is designed to provide decision makers with information about the fire department and the fire and rescue service delivery aspects of the fire department as they currently exist.

Collectively, the assessment team has made 39 strategic, professional recommendations, along with ten (10) supplemental recommendations that should be reviewed and evaluated.

Decision makers with the Wake Forest Board of Directors and the Town of Wake Forest Board of Commissioners will need to now decide if they do or do not want to move forward with the unification of the fire department into Town Government. If the joint decision is to move forward, much work will need to occur in the following nine (9) months towards a July 1, 2020 implementation. Timing is of the essence. Many of the issues and needs raised in this report will need to be further vetted and adjustments made. Surely, additional issues will also emerge as all groups work towards a successful outcome. There will need to remain a focused and concentrated effort to this work over the coming nine months in order to ensure a smooth transition. The area needing most attention over the coming months will be the individual transition of each employee into the Town's system and how each employee will fit into the NCLGERS system. This process will be very individualized, but critical to a positive outcome.

A transition team is recommended to be engaged in this transitional effort with representation from the fire department and the Town along with external facilitators to ensure that steady progress is being made and that persons are held accountable in the process for completing deliverables as well as timelines. In addition, a peer review team engagement near the time of transition will be most helpful to the fire department staff as they move into a change in culture and operations.

With a continued commitment to continuous improvement demonstrated by the Town of Wake Forest and the Wake Forest Fire Department throughout this process, the assessment team is confident that the Town can achieve the desired outcomes with implementation of this report's recommendations.

The EnviroSafe Team sincerely appreciates the opportunity to provide this assessment and we are proud to have assisted in efficiently providing this project to improve and strengthen the fire service delivery system within the Town of Wake Forest, North Carolina. We sincerely thank everyone who supported this revolutionary initiative and express our honor to serve in this beneficial capacity of continuous improvement.

APPENDIX B – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS **BY FOCUS AREAS**

STAKEHOLDER INPUT RECOMMENDATIONS (7)

3.1 Apparatus Maintenance

Contract multiple full-time apparatus repair vendors and outline quality and efficiency expectations.

Form a collaborative contract with other Wake County Fire Departments for preventive maintenance programs for fire apparatus.

Develop an aggressive apparatus maintenance program with dedicated weekly, monthly, and quarterly preventive maintenance tasks to extend the life of emergency response apparatus.

3.2 Organizational Structure

Strongly consider adding a Deputy Fire Chief position to assist with span of control issues and succession planning. It is recommended that the three shift Battalion Chiefs report to a Deputy Fire Chief who ensures consistency across the operation of the three shifts. Also, there should be a clear chain of command and authority as to who is in charge when the Fire Chief is not in town or unavailable. It is important that the Fire Chief be able to attend training and vacation and that there is clear direction, command and control in his absence.

3.3 Recruitment and Retention of Employees

Consider developing a new position or assigning the duties of a recruitment officer to a current staff member to assist with recruitment of new employees.

Develop a cross functional recruitment team of department and town representatives to constantly recruit year-round for possible new employees. Recruitment officer can lead the recruitment team and be a liaison to Human Resources.

3.4 Grant Opportunities

Consider developing a grant writing position within the fire department, partnering with the town for a shared position, or adding the responsibility to a current fire department staff member. The Town could be eligible for SAFER grant funding to help strengthen the minimum daily staffing in the fire department. Priority should be given to establishing four person companies at the downtown station.

3.5 Incentive Programs

Strongly consider keeping some form of the current fire department incentive programs to assist with employee retention and morale.

3.6 Training Budget

Encouraged to keep similar funding in place for inside and outside training opportunities. The team recommends designating \$1,000 per firefighter for training annually. For FY 20-21, this would be approximately \$80,000 annually.

3.7 WFFD Board of Directors

Determine post-unification role for the Wake Forest Fire Department Board of Directors. Town elected officials will need to determine the most effective and efficient approach to utilize the experience and expertise of the current Board of Directors post-unification. The Town could benefit from their knowledge, experience and dedicated public service.

HUMAN RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS (7)

4.1 Firefighter Onboarding

Existing fire department personnel should complete a Town employment application and go through the Town's standard review process including background review. The assessment team does not advocate that firefighters currently serving in the fire department be required to interview or go through extensive assessment processes in order to become Town employees as a result of this unification. However, the Town will need to process each individual and ensure that they are properly in the Town's system, including standard drug testing as is the practice for all Town employees. There will need to be employee orientation and the Town's standard benefits package should apply, including a 5% 401(k) contribution. It is further recommended that a letter of offer be prepared for each person who is currently a fire department employee that is slated to become a Town employee. This letter of offer would outline key conditions of employment that both parties agree to such as compensation and benefits. It is also very important that the new Town employee expressly acknowledge a "line in the sand" that the Town will only be responsible for actions post July 1, 2020 and not before. All parties must recognize that there will be a clean break point and issues before that transition date are NOT the responsibility of the Town. These letters of offer should be reviewed by the Town's legal staff and should be notarized.

4.2 Pay Plan Structure

A pay plan structure will need to be in place as soon as possible. The assessment team has proposed a structure with starting pay provided in this report that will need to be reviewed by the Town's compensation consultant. However, the structure should match the fire service industry, recognizing the need and value of teamwork. The assessment team's recommendation is that no current fire department employee would lose compensation with the transition. Ideally, the pay plan structure would be agreed upon in early 2020 for a July 1, 2020 implementation. It must be noted however that pay compression issues exist now and would exist under the recommended pay plan. It is realistic that it could take a few budget cycles in order to address pay compression. However, that issue must be vetted by the Town's compensation analyst and/or consultant and a corrective plan articulated.

Within this pay structure are increases for promotions between ranks as well as maintaining incentive pays that parallel those in the Wake Forest Police Department. Some additional coordination of these incentives will need to occur during the transition period.

4.3 Waiting Periods

It is recommended that current fire department employees become Town employees without a waiting period for benefits, with the exception of health care insurance due to the Town's health care contract requirements – which requires a 30-day waiting period. Due to this fact, there would also not be any probationary increases that would be due to employees at the six-month mark. Employees should immediately come under the Town's health care insurance and NCLGERS contributions.

4.4 Recognition of "Days"

For sick leave and vacation leave, the Town's benefit programs recognize days of work. For shift firefighters working on the FLSA 7(k) schedule, a day is typically considered either 12, 16 or 24 hours and not a typical 8-hour day. Administrative personnel working weekdays would be treated the same as any other Town employee. However, shift personnel should have provisions to adjust the "days" to their work day, consistent with the FLSA. Several options exist for carrying out this duty and there should be a policy addressing personnel who may have assignments that take them to and from shift assignments to keep the earnings equitable. The assessment team would recommend that a day for shift firefighters working 24-hour shifts be recognized as 12 hours. Therefore, shift firefighters would earn twelve days of sick leave per year with each day being 12 hours – or 144 hours total. Using this methodology is efficient when firefighters can work half of a shift due to illness.

4.5 Transfer of Earned Sick Leave

The assessment team recommends that current firefighters becoming Town firefighters on July 1, 2020 be allowed to be credited with sick leave transfer of up to what they would have earned as Town employees. The Town currently allows up to twelve sick leave days per year to accumulate. Therefore, if a current Wake Forest Firefighter came into the Town with four years of service to the Wake Forest Fire Department on July 1, 2020, and their unused sick leave balance at the fire department was equal to or exceeded 48 days, they would be credited with 48 days upon becoming a Town employee. The Town should not accept more credit for the persons coming from the fire department than persons would have earned working full time for the Town to maintain fairness and equity. The Town should not award more sick hours than is on the books as being earned while the employee was part of the non-profit fire department.

4.6 Transfer of Vacation or Annual Leave

In order to ensure that firefighters becoming Town employees are able to take vacation time within the first year of the unification, it is recommended that the Town accept up to twelve (12) days of vacation for incoming employees.

However, responsibility for vacation leave beyond the twelve (12) days at the time of unification should be the responsibility of the Wake Forest Fire Department, Inc. The Town should not assume responsibility for vacation leave earnings that occur prior to July 1, 2020 other than the twelve (12) days.

The fire department should have the responsibility for paying out those debts and not Wake Forest Town Government.

As of July 1, 2020, firefighters would become Town employees and would begin earning vacation leave under the Town's vacation or annual leave schedule as new Town employees.

This methodology is fair to existing Town employees, as well as the incoming firefighters who are becoming new Town employees.

1.6 Continuation of Firefighters and Rescue Squad Worker's Pension Fund

The Town should continue providing the North Carolina benefit for members of the fire department that fully meet all necessary criteria at the \$10 per firefighter per month contribution.

CAPITAL RECOMMENDATIONS (14)

5.1 - Station #1 Recommendations

- future upgrade will require dept to meet HC standard
- update remaining lights to LED
- any renovation on apparatus bay doors should enlarge size to 14' x 14'
- install protection bollards by all apparatus bay doors
- limit citizen parking to one side of building without requiring citizens to cross in front of bays for safety purposes
- redesign of lobby is warranted to have designated monitored entrance for public with restroom on public side and restricted access to remainder of building
- will need repair of all asphalt in 5-10 years, consider replacing with concrete due to weight and stress of apparatus
- all of front ramp repair should be concrete
- Town of WF should consider concreting street directly in front of station
- need to clean (pressure wash) exterior block every 2-3 years and seal with masonry sealer every 5-10 years
- masonry pointing of lentils is needed – 10-year maintenance
- exhaust system should be wired to "Plymovent" and come on together automatically
- gas heating units in bay should be replaced with infra-red tube heater units when conditions allow
- vinyl ceiling tiles will need to be painted/replaced in future renovation
- add laser eyes for movement in bay door thresholds to prevent door/apparatus collisions (nominal cost)
- add red, yellow, green LED lights beside bay doors for door clearance
- move firefighter PPE storage out of apparatus bay into a designated room with ventilation for carcinogen/cancer prevention
- consider adding HVAC to IT room
- in future station design and renovations move functional areas out of apparatus bays

- move PPE extractor & dryer out of living space (cold zone)
- exercise equipment should be re-located to an area outside of bay area for health and safety purposes
- department would benefit from installation of sphere speaker in the center of the bay for radio volume and clarity improvement. Would make ceiling tiles less necessary for echo.
- move lockers out of sleeping rooms that don't have enough egress clearance
- eliminate carpet in sleeping rooms for sanitation and contamination reasons
- water fountain in hallway needs to be in recessed area of hallway
- in front restrooms add grab bar near sink area to meet HC standard
- add fire sprinkler protection

5.2 - Station #2 Recommendations

- consider installing 13R sprinkler protection system during renovation
- will need repair of all asphalt in 5 years, consider replacing with concrete due to weight and stress of apparatus (consider repairing in renovation)
- installation of bollards is recommended at bay doors for safety
- pour concrete or rock around hydrants to prevent erosion
- a patio cover is recommended
- consider fixing small issues like rotten wood and asphalt with renovation
- signage installed on right side drive "no public access"
- clean exterior with pressure washes every 2-3 years and seal brick every 5-10 years with masonry sealer
- department would benefit from installation of sphere speaker in center of the bay for radio volume and clarity improvement. Would make ceiling tiles less necessary for echo.
- move ice machine out of bay area (hot zone) into living area
- move PPE out of bay area, plans are to move into room off of bay with renovation
- move refrigerator into cold zone living space
- move clothes washer/dryer to sleeping areas side of building away from PPE extractors and dryers
- after additional sleep area renovation, firefighter parking should be on right and public access on left of structure
- upgrade lighting throughout station to LED in renovation
- strive to remove all carpet from station for contamination reasons
- change all doors leading from living areas to apparatus area to out swing operation for egress safety and functionality

5.3 - Station #3 Recommendations

- partial roof cover needed for patio area
- back half of lot could be planted with trees for a border/buffer and less yard maintenance
- exterior block walls – pressure wash annually and seal with masonry sealer every 5-10 years
- remove vending machine, table, and all other functional areas out of apparatus bay

- install round globe shaped speaker in apparatus bay area for improved sound quality of radio system
- remove carpet in bedroom areas for sanitary/contamination reasons
- larger restroom stall sizes during next renovation
- restroom door swings in and impedes urinal access, make outswing
- future upgrade will be required to meet HC standard
- rock around fire hydrant to prevent erosion

5.4 - Station #4 Recommendations

- install concrete sidewalk to training prop in right front yard and rock around fire hydrant
- future upgrade will require HC compliance with kitchen sink
- Ice and vending machine should be moved out of bay area

5.5 - Station #5 Recommendations

- sleep rooms should be sprinklered
- does not provide adequate facilities for females
- remove carpet for sanitary and contamination reasons
- remove PPE from bay and store in vented room
- permanently close roll-up door in fitness room
- step down into fitness room should include a landing and 3 risers
- before any additional renovations a hazardous materials study on asbestos and lead based paint should be done

5.6 – Aggressive Replacement Plan

An aggressive replacement Capital Improvement Plan is needed to update the fire engine fleet for the WFFD. It is recommended that 3 fire engines be purchased over the next 5 budget cycles.

The WFFD has 2 aerial apparatus as noted in the above summary. It is recommended that Ladder 3 (1990) which is well past its service life and has major frame issues not be used for front-line emergency response.

5.7 – Replacement of Aerial Truck

The department has plans to purchase a new aerial in the current budget cycle and it is highly recommended to stay on schedule with that purchase.

5.8 – Safety Markings

It is recommended for the safety of WFFD personnel and the citizens of Wake Forest that the WFFD comply with this standard to prevent rear collisions while operating on emergency scenes.

5.9 – Ladders and Tools

It is recommended that all engines and ladders be equipped with the minimum requirements for ladders and tools per the NFPA 1901 standard.

5.10 Maintenance and Service

It is recommended the WFFD contract with new full-time service vendors to provide more efficient long-term repairs.

The apparatus inspections and WFFD staff feedback sessions revealed major issues with the current apparatus maintenance program. The data collected notes a significant amount of mechanical issues with the entire fleet. The current system of bringing in part-time vendors to repair apparatus prolongs the amount of time units are out of service and forces lesser quality older reserves into service for longer periods of time, which causes them to need repair.

5.11 – Station 1 Renovations

It is recommended that renovations to station #1 be planned to address the recommendations in this report in FY2024 at an estimated cost of \$1.5 million. At this time the structure will be 38 years old and 40 years old by the time the renovation is complete.

5.12 – Aggressive CIP Replacement

An aggressive replacement CIP is needed to update the fire engine fleet for the WFFD. It is recommended that 3 fire engines be purchased over the next 5 budget cycles in the following fiscal years (FY21, FY23, FY25).

It is recommended that Ladder 3 (1990 model) which is well past its service life and has major frame issues not be used for front-line emergency response.

5.13 – SCBA Replacement

It is recommended that the department plan to purchase approximately thirty-five (35) SCBA air packs in FY2021 at a projected cost of \$7500 per unit.

5.14 - Insurance Recommendation:

The assessment team recommends that the TOWF conduct an insurance cost comparison and coverage analysis and determine the best approach for both the town and the WFFD, contrasting cost and coverage with multiple providers to determine the best value for the Town. This work will need to be conducted during the transition period.

OPERATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS (11)

6.1 - The department should consider investing in **ESO CAD Monitor** to allow the import of CAD data in Firehouse to start the incident report. This will reduce human error and save data entry time.

6.2 - If the department is using **MCTs**, inquire with the CAD vendor to determine if auto-enroute and auto-arrive feature are available. This will create consistent timestamping for turnout and travel time measures.

6.3 - In the **Firehouse record management system (RMS)** and within the unit report, make the response code field required and limit to three values of 1- Emergency, 2- Non-Emergency and 3- Cancelled for the unit status. This will allow the non-emergency events to be filtered out when evaluating response times.

6.4 – ISO Re-Inspection

Once the unification occurs and systems and processes have been smoothed out, it is recommended that the Town request a re-inspection from the North Carolina Department of Insurance – Office of State Fire Marshal to re-assess the Town’s insurance rating. This rating is projected to have an improvement for the Town, which will result in lower insurance premiums for businesses and commercial properties and potentially for some residential structures as well.

1.5 – Use of Opticom Traffic Signal Management Systems

The Town should invest wherever possible in the installation of Opticom system for the fire apparatus, beginning with intersections that are the most difficult for fire apparatus to navigate and where there is high call volume. These devices enable priority to be given to fire apparatus that is responding to emergency calls for service. Transportation related grant funding may be able to be used to help financially support installation of the Opticom system. Most of the expense in the newer GPS based Opticom traffic management systems is with the transmitting devices on the fire apparatus. Equipment is also needed at key intersections. This would be an excellent item to add to the Town’s CIP program.

1.6 - Staffing Levels

The Town needs to give priority attention to staffing levels within the fire department. Seek to optimize the staffing that is currently provided and work towards adding enough firefighters to ensure that safe levels of Wake Forest firefighters can respond to and mitigate typical residential fires within the Town of Wake Forest. General industry standards would indicate each response company should be allocated approximately 15 firefighters in order to maintain minimum four person staffing on each unit. Given 4 engines and 2 ladders and a Battalion Chief, approximately 93 firefighters would be needed in Wake Forest. SAFER grants can assist with the implementation costs of this expansion. Also noted earlier are utilizing part-time personnel currently assigned to Fire Station 5 at other stations to help minimize this gap.

6.7 - **Administrative guidelines** in section (1) of this document need a detailed overview to coincide with existing town policies of like nature. Revisions will require town, fire department, and/or transition team input to accomplish.

6.8 - **Administrative guidelines** in section (2) of this document require further discussion relating specifically to the topics. Additional revisions/additions are required for all highlighted guidelines in this section.

6.9 - **Operational guideline 200.00 – Fire Ground Operations** needs revisions to make more concise by using more bullet and statement format versus long narratives. Revision will make the guideline easier to read and comprehend.

6.10 - Strongly consider the development of **guidelines** relating to the following areas of response; Rail, Highway, Bomb/Hazmat, Active Threat/Shooter and Confined Space.

6.11 – Emergency Medical Dispatch Protocol

A review should occur for the medical emergencies that the Town is being dispatched to with the Wake County Medical Director and the Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) protocol to ensure that the Wake Forest Fire Department is responding to the types of medical emergencies that are necessary and appropriate to serve the people of Wake Forest within the Wake County Emergency Medical Services delivery system.

APPENDIX C – SUPPLEMENTAL GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The peer review team developed a series of ten (10) additional more general recommendations to be considered by the Town of Wake Forest associated with fire service industry best practices. These recommendations are offered as guidance for the Town and the Fire Chief to help navigate the department forward, with the intention of enhancing and improving the outcomes of the Wake Forest Fire Department (WFFD).

1. The WFFD should collaborate with neighboring fire departments for reciprocal, automatic-aid assistance in order to assemble the necessary firefighters at the scene of typical residential structure fires.
2. Wake Forest needs to establish what is an effective firefighting response force (ERF) within the Town of Wake Forest needs to be.
3. WFFD should firmly develop and drill a second and third alarm dynamic response plan.
4. The Town be divided into fire demand zones, or FDZ units of measurement and applied in the department's records management system.
5. Wake Forest should conduct an insurance cost comparison and coverage analysis and determine the best approach for Wake Forest.
6. Wake Forest should clearly identify within their submitted and adopted budget those identified items that are regulatory in nature.
7. The Town of Wake Forest should officially adopt a standard of coverage or level of service statement for first unit arrival on all calls as well as full complement arrival for structure fire calls to be measured at the 90th percentile.
8. The WFFD should develop a quality of service award program that can recognize crews when the crew performs exceptional work.
9. A priority should be placed on better educating elected and appointed Town officials about the WFFD.
10. The Town of Wake Forest should consider establishing a safety compliance and audit program.