

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE MORRISVILLE,
NORTH CAROLINA FIRE DEPARTMENT

Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management

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Strategic Planning for Morrisville Fire Department 2

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and the appropriate credit given where I used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

ABSTRACT

The problem was the Morrisville Fire Department (MFD) had never developed a strategic plan from which to identify the current and future needs as it relates to services provided.

Consequently the department's planning often was reactionary in nature.

The purpose of the research was to identify what strategic planning for the Morrisville Fire Department would include and how to develop a comprehensive strategic plan.

Descriptive research was used to answer four questions:

1. What elements should the department address in a strategic plan?
2. Who should be involved in the strategic planning process?
3. How should the strategic plan be implemented?
4. How often should the strategic plan be revised?

Procedures included a comprehensive literature review, review of historical documents of the Town of Morrisville and the Morrisville Fire Department. There were 6 procedures used in this research project: identify pertinent elements to the plan; identify who should be involved; survey the department membership to evaluate the internal interest in strategic planning; contact the publisher of the surveys for permission to use; determine how to implement strategic planning; and finally, identification of how often the plan should be revised.

Results of the literature reviewed and the survey conducted identified the compelling justification for the Morrisville Fire Department to create and implement a strategic plan. A strategic plan would provide direction for the future of the organization. Recommendations from the research were utilized as a basis to develop the strategic planning process for the Morrisville Fire Department. The strategic plan should span a period of 20 years. Stakeholders that should be part of the planning process include 14 members: 7 external stakeholders and 7 internal

members. External stakeholders would represent neighborhoods, elected officials, partnering city departments, and the business community. Internal members would consist of a diverse representation of all ranks, all shifts and all divisions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Background and Significance.....	7
Literature Review.....	10
Procedures.....	17
Results.....	19
Discussion.....	25
Recommendations.....	29
References.....	32
Appendix A: Survey Permission Letter.....	35
Appendix B: Survey Instrument.....	36
Appendix C: Interview.....	40

INTRODUCTION

A strategic plan is critical to the success of any fire department. A formalized process from which to identify changes or new opportunities is required; otherwise, an organization becomes susceptible to only meeting the status quo or failing to provide essential services in an acceptable manner (Buford, 2004). A strategic plan will identify the strengths and weaknesses of an organization. The plan has to be supported with the department's budget to be successful (Compton, 2004).

In today's fire service the demand for quality services are on the increase. A simplistic definition of quality is "conformance to standards." To different people, quality means many different things (Janing and Sachs, 2003, p.1). A strategic plan defines what the agreed upon outcome will be and how it will be implemented.

The problem is the Morrisville Fire Department has not established a strategic plan to guide the services provided to the Morrisville Fire District and consequently the department's planning often is reactionary to pressing needs as they develop.

The purpose of the research was to identify what strategic planning for the Morrisville Fire Department would include and how to develop a comprehensive strategic plan.

Descriptive research was used to answer four questions:

1. What elements should the department address in a strategic plan?
2. Who should be involved in the strategic planning process?
3. How should the strategic plan be implemented?
4. How often should the strategic plan be revised?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Town of Morrisville is located in Wake County North Carolina and is often referred to as the heart of the Triangle for its central location in a dynamic region. Morrisville has grown from a small rural town into a thriving town with a population of approximately 14,000. The Morrisville Fire Department services the corporate limits and surrounding unincorporated area in Wake County. Morrisville has experienced a 12 % annually growth since 2003 (Town of Morrisville, 2007, p. 33).

Travelers, visitors, and newcomers to the region that arrive by plane through Raleigh-Durham International (RDU) Airport land on the front steps of the community which is adjacent to both RDU airport and Research Triangle Park, one of the world's most renowned centers for research and development.

The department is organized with a Fire Chief, a Support Services Coordinator, 3 Battalion Chiefs, 3 Captains, 6 Lieutenants, 9 Engineers, 9 Master Firefighters, 12 Firefighters, a Fire Marshal, a Deputy Fire Marshal, a Fire Chaplain and 10 Volunteer Firefighters. Services provided to the community include: public fire education, fire prevention, plans review, code enforcement, fire suppression, technical rescue, emergency medical services (EMS) and hazardous materials. Fire suppression includes both structural and wildland. Technical rescue services include high and low angle rope rescue, extrication, and confined space. EMS is provided at a First Responder level. The department contracts with a local EMS provider for advanced life support and patient transport. All department members perform public education activities in a variety of subjects such as injury prevention, safe use of portable fire extinguishers, home safety with the mobile fire safety house, CPR, first aid, fire safety and fire

station tours. The department is a member of the North Carolina Task Force IV Regional Urban Search and Rescue Team.

The department responded to over 1500 emergency calls in 2006, averaging an increase of 17.5% per year for the last 2 years. With the current and future plans for development it is anticipated the department will continue to experience more than a 10% annual increase in call volumes for the next decade.

The Town of Morrisville operates under the Council/Manger form of government. The Town Manager is responsible for the operation of the town on a day-to-day basis. Three Senior Directors report to the Town Manager and supervise specific department heads. The Fire Chief reports to the Senior Director over the Department of Community Services. Fire Department units are dispatched by the Raleigh Wake 911 Emergency Communications Center.

Morrisville Fire Department was formed in 1955 as a strictly volunteer fire agency. Funding sources included contracts from Wake County, Town of Morrisville and fund raisers in the form of barbeque and chicken dinners. In 1988 the department hired 6 part-time firefighters to off set the increased demands for service and the decrease in volunteerism. In 1994 the Morrisville Fire Department Board of Directors turned over all assets and liabilities to the Town of Morrisville. In this same year the department hired its first full time Fire Chief. Over the next 6 years the fire department continued to hire more part-time firefighters as the volunteerism continued to decline. In 1999 all part-time positions were converted to fulltime career positions. In 2003 all the remaining original volunteers retired.

Working out of three fire stations the fire department operates 3 engines, 1 aerial, and 1 rescue. The tanker and brush truck are operated with split crews at station 2 and 3. Station 1 was constructed in 1955 and has seen major remodeling 3 times. The fire station is currently

located at the busiest intersection in town beside a set of railroad tracks. The station does not provide private quarters for sleeping. Station 2 was built in 1999 consisting of 8400 square feet with a 2 bay drive through design. The station is capable of sleeping 8 people. The Station 3 crews currently co-locate with Cary Fire Station 7, a neighboring fire department in a newly constructed fire station that is 17,500 square feet with a 3 apparatus drive through bay design.

The fire department has outgrown station 1 and to improve the strategic location the station needs to be relocated at an estimated cost of 3 million dollars. Current staffing of 13 people on duty each day does not facilitate enough personnel to effectively operate 3 engines, 1 aerial, and 1 rescue company. Minimum staffing on engines is 3 personnel, the aerial, and rescue is 2 personnel. Consequently the aerial and rescue companies remain out of service more than 50% of the time due to low staffing. The lack of planning has made it difficult to provide day-to-day services with existing staffing and station locations. For organizations to be successful in the competitive world today, constant evaluation of activities and goals should be assessed to most effectively adapt to customers needs. An organization can not accept mediocrity in order to maintain superior performance (Leibried & McNair, 1992).

This applied research project was undertaken to determine what elements are involved in strategic planning for MFD, who should be involved in the planning process, how should the plan be implemented and how often should it be revised. This applied research project is related to the National Fire Academy's (NFA) Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management course by enhancing the skills needed for an Executive Fire Officer to analyze their department's level of preparedness. (NFA, 2006, P. SM 1-1). This research project also relates to and supports one of the U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA) operational objectives, which is to "respond appropriately in a timely manner to emerging

issues,” (U.S. Fire Administration, 2001, p. II-2). The results of this research will be utilized to create the strategic planning process for Morrisville Fire Department. This experience will contribute to a more efficiently planned and operated department.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review consisted of a review of various materials from the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center, the Wake County Public Library, the North Carolina Institute of Government, and the internet. Publications reviewed included journal articles, reports, books, and Executive Officer Applied Research Projects. This section will identify insightful information in the areas of:

1. What elements should the department address in a strategic plan?
2. Who should be involved in the strategic planning process?
3. How should the strategic plan be implemented?
4. How often should the strategic plan be revised?

One important aspect of this applied research project was to identify the purpose of strategic planning. Its purpose is to establish goals, objectives, and a process that will accomplish the mission (ICMA, August 2002, P. 3). Strategic planning determines where an organization is going over a specified period of time and how it's going to get there. The focus of a strategic plan is usually on the entire organization (McNarmara, 2007). *Merriam-Webster's Desk Dictionary* (1995) defines a strategy as, “the science or art of planning and directing large-scale military movements and operations” (p. 446). Peter Drucker defined strategic planning as “the continuous process of making present entrepreneurial (risk-taking) decisions systematically and with the greatest knowledge of the futurity; organizing the efforts needed to carry out these decisions, and measuring the results of these decisions against the expectations through system

feedback (Wallace, 1998, p. 1).” A form of strategic planning in non-military organizations started emerging in the 1930’s in what Luther Gulick describes as the management cycle. The management cycle functions include planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting (Favreau, 1969, p. 16). By the 1950’s the use of SWOT started emerging as a tool to improve organizational effectiveness. SWOT analysis evaluates an organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats which can be used as a planning tool. A future concept included total quality management. The Federal Government has recognized the need for strategic planning. Through the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), government is encouraged to operate in a more businesslike manner, every major federal agency must now address these basic questions (Wood, 2004, p. 221):

1. What is our mission?
2. What are our goals and how will we achieve them?
3. How can we measure our performance?
4. How will we use that information to make improvements?

Relative information was found on the elements of a strategic plan. According to Kouwe, (2007) planning should focus on three simple questions (p.42):

1. Where are we now?
2. Where will we need to be in the future?
3. How do we get there?

Kouwe points out facilities, apparatus, and staff are the three big areas of focus with planning in most fire departments. He suggests the best way to understand the level of services being provided today is to follow the five point analysis laid out in the standards of coverage process identified in the fire service accreditation program. These five points

are demand analysis, distribution analysis, concentration analysis, reliability analysis, and performance analysis.

Strategic planning elements also include developing long-term and short-term organizational objectives, ways to achieve those objectives, and methods to measure their effectiveness. Organizations should develop compliance level (expected outcome) standards to measure how well it is performing. The following are examples of compliance level standards (Janing & Sachs, 2003, p. 35-40):

- The incident Command System is followed at all incidents.
- The two-in, two-out requirement is followed in all IDLH situations.
- Rehabilitation procedures follow department SOP 90% of the time.
- All department apparatus meet standards set by NPFA 100% of the time.

Boiling Springs Fire District identified the elements of planning for future needs to include areas of manpower, station facilities, and physical equipment. Analyses were made to review the department history, current situation, and future needs. As part of the future needs, costs were projected as it related to the increase services for planning purposes. Once the analysis was complete a budget plan was developed to support the new plan. The final phase involved selling the community on the plan (Forrester, 1978, p. 40-42).

In summary, the literature review identifies a comprehensive range of elements that could be considered in a strategic plan. It is important for a department wanting to develop a strategic plan to identify the areas of importance. Some of the common areas of focus in many fire departments include staff, stations and equipment.

The level of involvement for the strategic planning process varied from one author to the next. In the interview with Bill Rivenbark; Associate Professor of Outstanding Faculty

Achievement at the North Carolina Institute of Government, he pointed out the level of input for strategic planning ranged from only selected fire department members to government administration, elected officials and community members. The level of strategic planning was determined by the complexity of the plan and community needs.

The Shreveport Fire Department learned that external customer input and budget support was key elements for implementing a strategic plan. For years the department went before city administrators to request additional funding for projects not submitted in the annual budget. Requests were often reactionary to a significant event such as a mechanical failure on an apparatus. This approach to meeting service demands became increasingly less effective over time. Initially the department developed a strategic plan with the use of internal personnel only. The Shreveport's membership understood what their needs were and what it would take to address those needs. Unfortunately, it wasn't until they sought input from external customers to include elected officials that they were able to effectively promote the strategic plan and get budget support from the elected officials. The lesson learned by Shreveport Fire Department was for a strategic plan to be implemented effectively it had to have external customer input and be supported by the budget process to include the annual operating budget and the capital improvement plan (Cochran & Crawford, 2005, p. 76-80).

Stakeholder representation is important in the planning process. "One significant stakeholder to the strategic plan is the Mayor, as the chief elected official for the department's jurisdiction (Barlow, 2005, p. 44)." The value of the Mayor's involvement as the chief elected official is that they are typically involved in the plan approval, implementation, and funding. By

having elected officials on the planning committee it will make it easier to sell the plan once it is finalized.

Having the planning department represented in the strategic planning would be beneficial. The planning official can provide data on current and future land use. The land use information is normally outside the realm of the fire service. Understanding the distribution of occupancies is an important component of the planning process. “This is no different than a doctor understanding basic anatomy in order to perform medical diagnosis (Coleman, 2000, p.37).”

One-way to legitimize the strategic planning group is the adoption of a resolution by the governing board. This will provide formal authority for the group to proceed and create a department-wide ownership in the process that may not have existed otherwise (Wallace, 1998). The planning group should be guided by a time line to accomplish specific tasks. This will help keep the strategic plan development and implementation on schedule.

In summary, the strategic planning committee should be a good representation of the organization and the community. Internal department planning committee members should include representation of all ranks and positions. External planning committee members should include representation from the elected officials, citizens, and the business community. Developing a strategic planning committee that well represents the organization and the community is a key element in the planning process.

In the third phase of the strategic planning process the *Fire Protection Handbook* identifies the following steps that will help implement the plan (Cote, 2003):

1. Focus on short and long-range goals.

2. A review of the department's budget, operating and capital plans must be conducted to determine adequate funding sources for the plan.
3. The department and jurisdiction may need to alter its codes and ordinances to accomplish the plan.

If the strategic plan is not supported in the budget process, both in the operating budget and capital improvement plans, the plan is doomed to fail from the beginning.

Effective strategic plans will focus on specific goals. Every planning committee member should have input in identifying the major organizational goals. The effectiveness of the plan will influence the future of the organization. With a thorough strategic plan, a department can become proactive in problem solving instead of reactionary. The effect of not taking actions recommended in the plan should be identified prior to approval of the strategic plan (Cote, 2003).

In summary, the most well planned strategic plan will not be successful unless it is supported in the organization's budget process. A well planned strategic plan without budget support is simply a form of lip service. Actions in the form of budget support are needed in order for an organization to be successful in its strategic planning efforts.

The information researched on how often a strategic plan should be revised varied from author to author. If you consider it took Thomas Edison 147 tries to create a functioning light bulb and it took the Wright Brothers 805 tries to achieve powered flight, the need for strategic planning review is paramount. Neither Thomas Edison nor the Wright brothers would have been successful in their inventions if each had failed to improve their plans. Despite the obstacles and setbacks, they kept their objectives in mind, held their visions of the future, and refocused their strategies until they were successful. No one can tell how many adjustments will be required

before an organization is considered to have achieved excellence. Albert Einstein once said, “The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them (Wallace, 1998).”

The question of how often a strategic plan should be revised should be answered based on the needs of the local jurisdiction. A thorough analysis should be conducted to consider the historical, current, and future needs of the organization. Planning can be divided into two phases; short-range planning and long-range planning (Favreau, 1969). Short-range planning would focus on today up to 5 years. Long-range planning would include 5 to 10 years in the future. In this scenario the short and long-range plans would be adjusted on an annual basis as needed. The short-range plan should be reflected in the annual operating budget.

The Iowa City Fire Department Strategic (ICFD) Plan covers a period of 10 years. In concert with the vision of the Iowa City Fire Department 18 goals were identified to be accomplished over the 10 year period. The 18 goals were tied to 3 budget periods spanning from fiscal years 2003-2005, 2006-2008, and 2009-2012. The ICFD administration realized public fire protection was not an inexpensive service. A 10 year strategic plan was essential in enabling ICFD to continuing meeting service demands. The plan eliminates any surprises in the budget process (Rocca, 2002, p. 3-6).

In the interview with Rivenbark, he suggested a strategic plan span a period of 5 years. He believes anything beyond 5 years is a guessing game. The strategic plan should be reviewed every year as part of the budget development process with needed changes made each time. Rivenbark believes the plan should be completely overhauled every 4 years. The purpose for the 4 year overhaul is to account for the fact that most mayoral positions are voted on every 4 years. He suggests the strategic plan overhaul be coordinated with the 4 year mayoral election.

In summary, the literature review reveals that strategic planning is a process that identifies where you are at today, where you want to go in the future and how you will get there. Many fire departments and authors agree it pays to get both internal and external involvement in the development of the strategic plan. The period of time a strategic plan should address varies from author to author. The recommended ranges strategic plans should cover spread from 5-20 years. The strategic plan is a continuous process that should be reviewed each year on an annual basis with some guidelines on how often it should be completely overhauled. Every fire department that is not happy with the status quo should embark on developing a strategic plan.

PROCEDURES

The descriptive research method was used for this paper to identify the elements in a strategic plan, who should be involved in the planning process, how should the plan be implemented, and how often should a strategic plan for the MFD be revised.

This applied research project began with literature review and data collection performed at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center, the Wake County Public Library in Cary, North Carolina and the World Wide Web. The Town of Morrisville's Human Resource Library was also used to learn specific information about this project. Books, journal articles, reports, an interview, 2 Executive Fire Officer Applied Research Projects, and a survey were utilized as the basis for research on this applied research project.

A 6 step process was used to complete the research to answer the 4 questions. First, identification of elements involved in the strategic planning process for the MFD was examined. This procedure involved literature review of books, various publications, and the World Wide Web to determine which elements worked best for the MFD.

The second was to identify who should be involved during the planning process. This procedure included literature review and the third procedural step which involved the interview of William C. Rivenbark, Associate Professor of Outstanding Faculty Achievement with the North Carolina Institute of Government. William has many years of experience working in local government before going to the Institute of Government. William proved to be very helpful in providing insightful information about who should be involved in the strategic planning process. Developing a survey was the fourth step. The survey questions were discovered during the literature review. The survey was designed for fire service strategic planning purposes. It proved to be a valuable tool in the research project. One question was added to the survey to assess the internal interest level in the strategic planning development. The fifth step was to contact the publisher of the text, *Fire Department Strategic Planning: Creating Future Excellence* by Mark Wallace, which is where the survey was taken to ask permission to use for the strategic planning analysis process for the MFD. The sixth step was to survey (Appendix B) the members of the MFD. An online format at <http://freeonlinesurveys.com> was used to process the survey. The survey was anonymous by design so as to encourage participants to be open with their responses. The entire membership consisting of a total 43 people were invited to answer the online survey. The survey was analyzed to help determine the focal points and level of interest in developing the strategic plan for the MFD.

Assumptions and Limitations

The research had limitations of scope because only internal stakeholders were considered in the survey to help determine the strategic planning focal points. Every MFD member was asked to complete the survey. A total of 34 of the 47 MFD members completed the survey. This accounts for a 72 % participation rate. The limited number of members completing the survey

could limit the accuracy of the results. Interviewing external customers would have provided more insight into the community values which would facilitate a more comprehensive strategic plan.

RESULTS

The results of this applied research project have been compiled from extensive literature review, an interview, and survey information. The following results are provided to answer each of the four research questions.

What elements should the department address in a strategic plan? The research revealed numerous elements departments should address in the strategic planning process. The literature review indicated that fire departments must evaluate elements applicable to their own jurisdiction in order to create a viable strategic plan.

The book titled *Fire Department Strategic Planning; Creating Future Excellence* by Mark Wallace suggested the following 12 elements be considered when developing a strategic plan (2006):

1. Identifying the department values
2. Planning to plan strategically
3. Selecting and recommending a strategic planning process
4. Identifying the department's mandates
5. Developing the mission of the department
6. Creating a philosophy of operations
7. Assessing the opportunities and threats of the external environment
8. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment
9. Identifying the strategic issues of the department

10. Creating strategies for strategic issues
11. Creating the department's ideal future through proactive futuring
12. Operational planning from a strategic perspective

A second model to consider is the Bryson's model found in the book titled *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations* (2004). The model consist of an 8 step process including: (1) initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process, (2) identifying organizational mandates, (3) clarifying the organization's mission and values, (4) assessing the opportunities and threats of the external environment, (5) assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment, (6) identifying the strategic issues facing the organization, (7) formulating strategies to manage the issues, and (8) establishing an effective organizational vision for the future.

The *Fire Protection Handbook* identifies four phases that can be used as a guide for MFD in the strategic planning process (Cote, 2003):

Phase I

1. The jurisdiction must identify problems within its fire service.
2. The jurisdiction must identify its current capabilities and its future needs and determine the best combination of resources to manage the department's problems.
3. Feasible alternatives that consider costs and benefits must not be overlooked.
4. The process of establishing goals and objectives must include as many of the department's personnel as possible and include programs and estimated cost required to accomplish the plan.

Phase II

1. Identify external organizations that will be required for the department's strategic planning process and develop the roles of these organizations.
2. Present the plan to the jurisdiction's executive or executive committee for review.
3. Obtain the approval of the plan by the fire department's governing body and have it made a part of the jurisdiction's general plan.

Phase III

1. Focus on short and long-range goals.
2. A review of the department's operating budget and capital improvement plans must be conducted to determine adequate funding sources for the plan.
3. The department and jurisdiction may need to alter its codes and ordinances to accomplish the plan.

Phase IV

1. The department's strategic plan must be continually reviewed and modified to accommodate changes to the jurisdiction's overall budget, changes in the jurisdiction's capital improvement plans, and revisions in its codes and ordinance.
2. The department's strategic plan should be reviewed to determine if the parameters originally set during the development of the plan are sufficient to accomplish the plan or if they should be modified.

Who should be involved in the strategic planning process? In an interview with William C. Rivenbark, he indicated the planning team will vary based on the department's size, complexity of operations, and needs. In any case the planning team should well represent the

organization's internal and external customers. Wallace identifies the importance of including elected officials and other key stakeholders (2006).

Survey instruments were administered to all employees to assess the receptiveness to strategic planning in the department. All of the department's 47 members were invited to participate in the 36 question survey. Seventy-two percent of the members completed the survey. In the question about the interest level to participate in the strategic planning process, 17.6 % of the members expressed an extreme interest, 52.9 % were very interested, 5.9 were moderately interested, 8.8 % were slightly interested, and 14.7 % were not interested. The results indicate that 29 or 85.2 % of the department's members to some degree would be interested in participating in the strategic planning process.

A team approach is suggested that will consist of permanent members or one formed for a specific purpose. The team should have a facilitator. The team should consist of internal and external customers (Janing & Sachs, 2003).

How should the strategic plan be implemented? The survey instruments provided insightful information on how people felt about fire department issues. This information is very helpful in identifying how the strategic plan should be implemented. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents agreed the department goals are clearly stated. In the question about the flexibility of the division of labor 70.6 % responded favorably or neutral. Eighty-eight percent felt favorable on both questions about supervisor support and efforts to create a harmonious work environment. Eighty-two percent of the respondents feel the job offers an opportunity for growth as a person. Eighty-eight percent of the responding staff members agreed supervisors are helpful to them and the shift.

Strategic Planning for Morrisville Fire Department 23

Ninety-one percent of the responding members agreed with the stated department goals. With this many members supporting the stated department goals there should be a lot of harmony on the strategic planning committee. This will facilitate going through each process in a timely manner.

Seventy-one percent of the responding members believed the division of labor in the department is conducive to reaching its goals. Inadequate division of labor is an area that can cause significant morale issues. Sixty-five percent of the responding members felt the leadership norms of the department help its progress. Sixty-eight percent of the responding members agreed they could talk with someone at work if they have a work-related problem. Ninety-seven percent of the responding staff agreed the pay scale and benefits are equitable for each employee. Seventy-seven percent of the responding members agreed they had the information needed to do an excellent job. Ninety one percent of the responding members agree the department introduces enough new polices and procedures. All this data indicates the employees understand that the organization places its highest value in the employees.

Ninety-four percent of the responding membership agrees they understand the mission of the department. Seventy-six percent of the responding members agree work tasks are divided logically. Fifty-six percent of the responding membership believes the department's leadership efforts result in the fulfillment of its mission. Ninety-one percent of the responding members felt their relationships with the members of their shift are friendly as well as professional. Sixty-eight percent of the responding members felt opportunity for promotion from within exists in this organization. Sixty-eight percent of responding membership believes the department has adequate mechanisms for binding itself together. Seventy-seven percent of the responding members believe they understand the priorities of the department. Seventy-nine percent of the

responding members think the structure of their shift is well designed. This data suggest that most employees are overall satisfied with their jobs.

Eighty-eight percent of the responding members think it is clear to them whenever their shift's officer is attempting to guide their work efforts. Eighty-eight percent of the responding members feel like they have established the relationships that are needed to do their job properly. Ninety-four percent of the responding employees agree their salary is commensurate with the job they perform. Pay is generally considered not to be one of the most important values of a job. The author has discovered this statement mostly to be true when pay issues are not an organizational problem. However, organizations with pay that is considered to be too low have a higher number of employees that are unhappy with their job as a result of low pay. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents believe other members of the department are helpful to them whenever assistance is requested. This data suggests there is a significant level of cooperation throughout the organization. Ninety-one percent of the respondents agree occasionally they would like to change things about their job. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents believe they have enough input in deciding their shift's non-emergency goals. Eighty-two percent of the respondents agree the division of labor in this department help it to reach its goals. Eighty-five percent of the respondents understand their officer's efforts to influence them and the other members of their shift. Only forty-four percent of the respondents believe all tasks to be accomplished are associated with incentives. One component to improve employees' perception on incentives is to better explain the incentive programs. Another consideration is for the organization to reevaluate the incentive program to determine if it can be enhanced to better meet the employee needs. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents agree this department's planning and control efforts are helpful to its growth and development.

Based on the responses to questions that impact change it appears department members would embrace the changes strategic planning would offer. For example, 62% of the responding members felt like the department is not resistant to change. Seventy-one percent of the responding members agree the department favors change. Only thirty-three percent of the respondents believe there is no evidence of unresolved conflict in this department. Finally, it is encouraging that 88% of the respondents believe the department has the ability to change.

The strategic plan should be implemented incrementally as parts are approved and as soon as possible after the plans have been approved for items that do require funding (Wallace, 2006). Parts of the strategic plan that require funding to implement will need to be coordinated through the budget process (Cochran & Crawford, 2005, P.77).

How often should the strategic plan be revised? In the interview with William C. Rivenbark, he suggested the strategic plan should be reviewed annually with complete revision to be conducted every 4 years. The complete revision should coincide with the change of new elected officials. Other literature review indicated annual review was desirable with a complete overhaul every few years. Based on the data indicating a desire for constant review, the Morrisville Fire Department will conduct an annual review with the budget cycle and a complete overhaul every four years.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research clearly identify the need for Morrisville Fire Department to develop the processes necessary to create, implement, and maintain a strategic plan. The purpose of the research was to identify what a strategic plan for the Morrisville Fire Department would include, who should be involved in the process, how the plan should be implemented, and how often should the plan be revised.

It was important to identify what strategic planning means. Strategic planning is a process of investigation, learning, and implementation in a collaborative environment so that the entire organization progresses and evolves (ICMA, 2002). According to Janing and Sachs strategic planning is the process of developing both long and short-term organizational objectives, ways to achieve those objectives, and methods to measure their effectiveness (2003).

The researcher found that previous strategic planning was limited to planning conducted by the former fire chief only. The plan covered a 5 year span with implementation attempted through the annual budget process. The plan had limited success mainly because there was no opportunity for buy-in and ownership into the plan. The plan was not made available to all members which further limited its effectiveness.

Consistent information was found on what should be included in a strategic plan. One of the first steps in the process should include the identification of organizational values and the development of a mission statement (Bryson, 2004). Compton (2002) corroborates the importance of developing a mission statement as the foundation for strategic planning.

A strategic planning model is an important tool that minimizes the risk of missing pertinent processes by providing a structure for the planning effort. Wallace identifies a 12 step process in what should be included in the strategic planning process (2006):

1. Identifying the department values
2. Planning to plan strategically
3. Selecting and recommending a strategic planning process
4. Identifying the department's mandates
5. Developing the mission of the department

6. Creating a philosophy of operations
7. Assessing the opportunities and threats of the external environment
8. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment
9. Identifying the strategic issues of the department
10. Creating strategies for strategic issues
11. Creating the department's ideal future through proactive futuring
12. Operational planning from a strategic perspective

Determining who should be on the planning committee is an important component in the strategic planning process. In an interview with Bill Rivenbark from the North Carolina Institute of Government, he suggested the planning committee be well representative of the organization. Elected officials and community members should be represented on the planning committee. The community participation should consist of citizens and business people. "The selection of the right people is paramount in the development of an effective strategic plan for an organization," according to Rivenbark. The Morrisville Fire Department representation should be obtainable since 88% responded favorably on the internal survey regarding interest on helping with the strategic plan development. Rivenbark believed having the correct number of people on the committee was an important component in the process. He recommended a minimum of 7 and no more than 15 people make up the committee membership. The exact number of people will depend on the complexity of the organization and the diversification of the community.

The total planning group for MFD should consist of 14 people with some alternates available. This is consistent with Wallace as he recommends selecting a group of 5-12 individuals for the initial planning team (1998).

How should a strategic plan for Morrisville Fire Department be implemented?

Depending on the urgency of establishing a strategic plan it can take up to 2 years to develop. In situations like this Wallace suggest parts of the plan be implemented as approved. Items that don't have any budget impact are components that can be considered for immediate implementation once approved. Department values and the mission statement are two examples of components that can be implemented once approved by the planning committee and fire chief. Implementing parts of the plan can be encouraging to the planning committee members (2006) .

Once the strategic plan is implemented it must be maintained. The research found most authors suggest revising the strategic plan every few years with a complete overhaul every 5 years. In part the revision process should coincide with the local election process. Rivenbark said, "often new elected officials will want to make some modifications to strategic plans when they first come to office." This philosophy on the revision schedule is consistent with recommendations that the process should be reviewed annually with major revisions every 5 years (Wallace, 1998).

The researcher found that strategic planning has evolved over the years in both the private and public sector. In the competitive world we live in today with consideration that public sector officials are increasingly held to higher accountability standards, fire departments across the country must consider the need to strategically plan. The biggest disadvantage is the time it will take to organize and develop the plan. Research indicates going through the strategic planning process will have as many benefits to the organization as the resulting plan (Smith, 2007 p. 34).

The conclusion of this research has determined that fire departments can better serve their community with the use of strategic planning (Parr, 2006). Strategic planning will create an opportunity for change in an organization. The internal survey revealed 88% of the respondents agree the organization had the ability to change. Ninety-one percent of the respondents stated they would like to see occasional change in the organization. Seventy-one percent of the respondents agree the department favors change. Finally, 62% of the respondents believe the department is not resistant to change. The responses clearly indicate the majority of the respondents embrace the possibilities of positive changes in the organization as it relates to the strategic planning process. The results from this research project will help lay a foundation for the development of a strategic planning process for the Morrisville Fire Department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based upon the problem and purpose statement of this research project and resulting research. As previously stated, the problem for the Morrisville Fire Department is that it has not established a strategic plan to guide the services provided and consequently the department's planning often is reactionary to pressing needs as they develop. The purpose of the research was to identify what a strategic plan for the Morrisville Fire Department would include and how to develop a comprehensive strategic plan.

The literature review and survey results have defined strategic planning, benefits of strategic planning, and how it can be implemented. The result of this research clearly demonstrates the need for MFD to develop a strategic planning process. In order to effectively address the problem it is recommended MFD needs to first obtain the support of the Morrisville Fire Department Town Manager and Board of Commissioners for the implementation of the department's strategic planning process. Once approval is received the department must select

team members for the strategic planning process. The team members should be selected based on capabilities and skills to ensure they have the attributes to accomplish the planning process. The team will consist of 14 members; 7 members from the organization and 7 external members. The external members will include representation from the planning department, elected officials, citizens, and local business personnel. The department members will be represented by all ranks and positions in the organization.

The author of this research project will recommend the planning committee follow the 12 step strategic planning model identified by Wallace (2006):

1. Identifying the department values
2. Planning to plan strategically
3. Selecting and recommending a strategic planning process
4. Identifying the department's mandates
5. Developing the mission of the department
6. Creating a philosophy of operations
7. Assessing the opportunities and threats of the external environment
8. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment
9. Identifying the strategic issues of the department
10. Creating strategies for strategic issues
11. Creating the department's ideal future through proactive futuring
12. Operational planning from a strategic perspective

As the strategic plan is developed components should be implemented as soon as practical. Components that require funding will need to go through the budget approval process before implementing.

The approved strategic plan should be reviewed each year in as part of the annual budget process. A complete overall should be conducted every 4 years in conjunction with the local election process.

A recommendation to future readers of this Applied Research Project is to further research the return on the investment when evaluating the need for strategic planning. Strategic planning may not be effective for every department. It is important to objectively evaluate the benefits of strategic planning. The level of strategic planning will be specific for each department. To expand this research, a study on the correlations between departments that strategically plan as compared to departments that do not strategically plan in relations to their ability to meet performance measures would be insightful.

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Appendix A

Permission Request

To: Headquarters@PennWell.comm
From: Todd Wright
Date: July 25, 2007
Subject: Request permission for duplication

To whom it may concern:

I am currently enrolled in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy and recently attended the “Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management” course. I am completing my applied research project related to strategic planning.

Our fire department purchased the book published by Penn Well titled: Fire Department Strategic Planning: Creating Future Excellence by Mark Wallace. In the appendix material of that text, there are a number of forms and surveys provided. As part of the requirements for this project, I respectfully request permission to use the appendix forms for duplication and distribution solely for our department and its stakeholders.

This work is for the benefit of our fire department’s strategic planning process and will also be incorporated as a component of my applied research project for the National Fire Academy’s Executive Officer Program.

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter. Please contact me at twright@ci.morrisville.nc.us or call me at 919-463-6321. if you need further information or have any questions.

Sincerely,

Todd Wright

Fire Chief

Morrisville Fire Department

Strategic Planning for Morrisville Fire Department 36

Appendix B

Department Survey

Instructions:

Do not put your name anywhere on this questionnaire. Please answer all 36 questions. Be open and honest with your answers. Circle only one response for each statement.

1 Agree strongly	2 Agree	3 Agree Slightly	4 Neutral	5 Disagree Slightly	6 Disagree	7 Disagree strongly
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1. The goals of the department are clearly stated.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. The division of labor in the department is flexible.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. My immediate supervisor is supportive of my efforts.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. My relationship with my supervisor is harmonious.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My job offers me the opportunity to grow as a person.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. My immediate supervisor has ideas that are helpful to me and my shift.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. The department is not resistant to change.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I am personally in agreement with the stated goals of the department.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. The division of labor in the department is conducive to reaching its goals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. The leadership norms of the department help its progress.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I can always talk with someone at work if I have a work-related problem.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. The pay scale and benefits are equitable for each employee.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I have the information that I need to do an excellent job.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. The department introduces enough new policies and procedures.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. I understand the mission of the department.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. The manner in which work tasks are divided is logical.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. The department's leadership efforts result in the fulfillment of its mission.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. My relationships with the members of my shift are friendly as well as professional.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. The opportunity for promotion form within exists in this organization.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. This department has adequate mechanisms for binding itself together.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. The department favors change.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. The priorities of the department are understood by its employees.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. The structure of my shift is well designed.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. It is clear to me whenever my shift's officer is attempting to guide my work efforts.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I have established the relationships that I need to do my job properly.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. The salary that I receive is commensurate with the job that I perform.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. Other members of the department are helpful to me whenever assistance is requested.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. Occasionally, I like to change things about my job.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29. I have enough input in deciding my shift's non-emergency goals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. The division of labor of this department helps it to reach its goals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. I understand my officer's efforts to influence me and the other members of the shift.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

32. There is no evidence of unresolved conflict in this department.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

33. All tasks to be accomplished are associated with incentives.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34. This department's planning and control efforts are helpful to its growth and development.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

35. The department has the ability to change.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

36. My interest level in actively participating in a strategic planning group for the department is:

Extremely Interested	Very Interested	Moderately Interested	Slightly Interested	Not Interested
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Thank you.

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Appendix C

Interview

William C. Rivenbark

Albert and Gladys Hall Coates Associate Professor of Outstanding Faculty Achievement
North Carolina Institute of Government

Interviewed: August 20, 2007

Interview time: 20 minutes

Question 1. What is the history of strategic planning?

Answer: I am not completely familiar with the evolution of strategic planning. SWOT analysis was popular in the 1950's. TQM saw some popularity in the 1970's. In 1992 there was a push to reinvent government. The book titled Reinventing Government lead the efforts.

Question 2. Is there a specific model or process that works for most organizations?

Answer: There is no specific model or process that fits any organization. Some processes are abbreviated with meetings occurring on one day with elected officials and management resulting in a final product. Other organizations invite citizens, elected officials, staff and management to participate in the process which can take up to 6 months to 1 year to produce the final product.

Question 3. How should the strategic plan be implemented?

Answer: There are several keys factors with program implementation that needs to be considered. First, the plan must be supported in the budget process. If the plan is not supported in the budget process there is no chance for success. Second, all members need to be informed and educated on the strategic plan. This will not be a one time event. The education process should be ongoing on an annual basis.

Question 4. How long of a time span should the strategic plan cover and how often should it be reviewed?

Answer: The strategic plan should cover about 5 years. Any plan that addresses issues further than that is really a guessing game. The plan should be reviewed annually with a complete overhaul every 4 years.

Question 5. Who should be included in the strategic planning process?

Answer: The planning group should well represent the organization with members from various ranks. Elected officials should be included as team members. The community should also be represented in the planning process. The community representation should include citizens and members from local businesses.